

“The surprising involvement of the outsider”: An Examination of Pessimism
and Schopenhauerian Ethics in J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and
Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*.

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Abstract

When the Swedish Academy lauded J. M. Coetzee for portraying situations in which “the distinction between right and wrong, while crystal clear, can be seen to serve no end” (“PR” para. 3), it presented an interpretation of his texts that considers ethics to be legislative and imperative (see Cartwright, *NS* 255). The Swedish Academy’s assertions are worth exploring, given that this highly respected body’s statements are indicative of the critical debates generated by Coetzee’s work. It identified a common metaphysical malaise between Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*, and offered pessimism as a dubious explanation for this apparent lack of value in choosing between right and wrong action. This thesis takes exception to the logical inconsistencies of this opinion and offers a sustained and systematic counterargument with the aim of suggesting an alternative interpretation of the value of ethical action in the two works. My counterargument uses interpretive and methodological models that draw on the works of Gabriele Helms, cultural narratology and Bakhtinian theory in order to investigate the texts, using the philosophy of one of the foremost German pessimists, Arthur Schopenhauer, as an ideological point of reference. The affinity between Schopenhauerian philosophy and Eastern religions (particularly Brahmanism and Buddhism) suggests, contrary to the implications of the Swedish Academy’s statements, that there is value in ethical and moral choices in systems other than those that posit Judeo-Christian rewards and punishments in an afterlife, and that pessimism cannot legitimately be used to nullify this value. Rather, *UWE* and *WB* present an alternative set of ethics – one that is voluntary and virtue-based, valuing acts of compassion above all else. But basing my arguments on the novels’ textual affinities with Schopenhauerian ethics, I maintain that neither Conrad nor Coetzee offers strictly uncomplicated presentations of the value of compassion. Yet the sustained thematic and authorial considerations of compassionate deeds suggest that there is indeed value in deciding between morally right and morally wrong action – even if the ‘rewards’ are not guaranteed and may only – at best – be temporary.

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Introduction: The Problem

John Maxwell Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003 (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 1).¹ The Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy at the time, Horace Engdahl, told the *Guardian Unlimited* that the selection committee’s decision had been unanimous. In addition to a cheque to the value of £780 000 (roughly R9 071 400 based on 2003 exchange rates), this accolade also promised a boost to Coetzee’s sales figures, fortuitously coinciding with the publication of *Elizabeth Costello* (*Mail & Guardian* [M&G], “CN” para. 22).² The eponymous character in that novel states that she “should have asked them to forget the ceremony and send the cheque in the mail” (Coetzee, *EC* 3), fictionalising the intense and heavily guarded privacy for which Coetzee had already earned a reputation.³ Whether Coetzee would travel to Stockholm to receive the prize in person was the subject of wide speculation (Kannemeyer 560; M&G, “CN” para. 22) – although not one of great interest to most South Africans.⁴

Craig MacKenzie speaks of a “double sting” which may have contributed to this apparent lack of interest: in rapid succession, Coetzee had published one of the most controversial novels of the decade and had relocated to Australia – in 2002, the year before the Nobel Prize award (para. 14).⁵ The insult, MacKenzie suggests in his discussion of the next significant failure of the South African cultural authorities (namely their inability to prevent the sale of most of Coetzee’s work to the Harry Ransom Centre at the University of Texas), is that the “honour of having one of our finest writers acknowledged in this way was somewhat sullied by the sense that he was no longer one of us, whatever that means” (MacKenzie para. 14). But this sentiment, recorded in 2011, seems to have romanticised the value South African readers had placed on Coetzee’s books. While *Waiting for the Barbarians* had won Coetzee an international audience, generating interest in his earlier novels, it was not until *Disgrace* – which sold 100 000 copies in its publication year in South Africa – that there had been any significant local interest in his work. Renowned Coetzee scholar David Attwell, a professor at the University of Witwatersrand in 2003, went on

¹ Please refer to the Works Cited section for a comprehensive list of the abbreviations of titles used.

² The *Mail & Guardian* is a weekly South African tabloid newspaper.

³ The character, an Australian writer, has arrived in the USA to be recognized by Altona College when she expresses this sentiment to her son John.

⁴ SABC (South African Broadcast Corporation) news bulletins on the day of the announcement were primarily led by stories on car sales (cf. M&G, “CN” para. 26).

⁵ *Disgrace* was published in 1999.

record as saying: “I don’t think the majority of South Africans know who he is. [...] We have a very small readership” (qtd. in *M&G*, “CN” para. 27). It also seems a matter of convenience that later commentators have apparently glossed over what one staff reporter described as Coetzee’s “*self-imposed exile* after a bruising clash with the ruling African National Congress [ANC] over his novel *Disgrace*” (*M&G*, “CN” para. 15; emphasis added).

Disgrace, unlike Coetzee’s other fiction, is explicitly set in post-apartheid South Africa. The scandal associated with the novel originates in the representation of the rape of the central character’s daughter by three black men, and her subsequent decision not to prosecute them, partly as a result of her sense of colonial guilt. ANC cabinet ministers called the text racist and vilified it. Party representatives reportedly claimed that “[i]n the novel [...] it is suggested that our white compatriots should emigrate because to be in post-apartheid South Africa is to be in ‘their territory’, as a consequence of which the whites will lose [...] their dignity” (qtd. in *M&G*, “AP” para. 4). The April 2000 submission to the Human Rights Commission’s Hearings on Racism in the Media further described *Disgrace* as an expression of the bigoted white “perception of the post-apartheid black man” (Kannemeyer 529-32, 559; *M&G*, “AP” para. 2; *M&G*, “CN” para. 17). However, when Coetzee became the second South African winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, and the fourth recipient from Africa, the author not only earned salutations from the ruling party, but was apparently welcomed back into the South African fold, as exemplified by his receipt of the National Order of Mapungubwe (Gold) in 2005 (Kannemeyer 553, 559, 576-77).⁶ Refusing requests by the opposition party to recant its earlier branding of the writer as an ideologue of racism, then-spokesman Smuts Ngonyama said that the ANC saw no contradiction between its earlier statements and its congratulations on the award (559; *M&G*, “AP” para. 3).

It is tempting to agree with critic Shaun De Waal’s assessment that the ANC had “misread” *Disgrace* (qtd. in *M&G*, “CN” para. 29) or, as another reporter argued, that the ANC’s readers had been “baffled” because they were “less sophisticated” readers (*M&G*, “NS” para. 12), but that would be unfair considering De Waal’s own later admission that Coetzee’s work is “hard” to read — especially in “a culture in which the arts are expected to be a glorified version of a hamburger, instantly consumable and understandable” (De Waal para. 14). The ANC’s apparent inability to decide on its stance toward the ideas expressed in Coetzee’s work is by no means unique, and may rather simply register the difficulties

⁶ Other African recipients were Nigerian Wole Soyinka (1986), Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz (1988), and South African Nadine Gordimer (1991).

inherent in trying to assign definitive interpretations to his work – as well as indicate the dangers of attributing viewpoints deciphered in a text to its author.⁷

Characteristically, the Nobel Committee is seen to award the literary prize for quasi-ideological reasons: Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn won when it was necessary to highlight oppression in (what was at the time) the Soviet Union, and Nadine Gordimer's award in 1991 was seen by many as an endorsement of democratic forces in South Africa (*M&G*, "NS" para. 10). In his 2003 presentation speech, Per Wästberg of the Swedish Academy addressed Coetzee, after stating that the author "defends the ethical value of poetry, literature and imagination," saying:

You are a Truth and Reconciliation Commission on your own, starting with the basic words for our deepest concerns. Unsettling and surprising us, you have dug deeply into the ground of the human condition with its cruelty and loneliness. You have given a voice to those outside the hierarchies of the mighty. With intellectual honesty and density of feeling, in a prose of icy precision, you have unveiled the masks of our civilization and uncovered the topography of evil.

(Swedish Academy, "PN" para. 12)

Wästberg's sentiments are echoed in the commentary published in the early October 2003 edition of the *Mail & Guardian*, which Kannemeyer (559) hails as the most insightful published at the time:

[N]ot since Samuel Beckett [...] got the prize in 1969 has it gone to an author so unattached to any cause, so pessimistic about the possibility of redemption, so sceptical about humanity's progress and its capacity for ethical action. [...] Coetzee's relentless deconstruction of our self-delusions, including our pretensions to knowledge and mastery, rediscovers the fundamentals of our humanity in the quality of empathy.

(*M&G*, "NS" para. 13)

In the press release for Coetzee's prize, the Swedish Academy recognises the "great wealth of variety" in Coetzee's books (Swedish Academy, "PR" para. 10). It also argues that, while none of his works "follow the same recipe," there is a recurring pattern of a "downward spiralling" journey in which the "protagonists are overwhelmed by the urge to sink but paradoxically derive strength from being stripped of all external dignity" (Swedish Academy,

⁷ The plurality of potential interpretations is one of the factors that has given rise to what is essentially a critical industry centred on Coetzee's work.

“PR” para. 10). Coetzee’s work critiques the “cruel rationalism and cosmetic morality of western civilization” as, “in innumerable guises,” his novels portray “the surprising involvement of the outsider” (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 1-2).⁸ While these remarks are appropriate, issuing from the respected and literarily astute Nobel Committee, it is baffling to find that they are riddled with inconsistencies. Earlier in the same press release, Coetzee is lauded for portraying situations in which “the distinction between right and wrong, while crystal clear, can be seen to serve no end,” and that it is through examining weakness and defeat that Coetzee “captures the divine spark in man” (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 3). But surely an appeal to any form of divinity – be it a metaphysical deity of some sort or a dim internal spark – necessarily adds a degree of importance to ethical choices? Does “external dignity” not imply some form of qualitative, quantifiable – or, at least, meaningful – relationship with other individuals? If the distinction between right and wrong is “crystal clear” then how can “the involvement of the outsider” be at all *surprising*? As a result of these logical inconsistencies, I take exception to the allegations that Coetzee’s novels do not posit some form of transcendental value in choosing between morally right and wrong action, even though the Swedish Academy’s statements echo recurring debates in the critical reception of his work.

Stanley Fish argues that polemicists and intellectuals regularly lambaste each other for “promoting relativism and its attendant bad practices,” pointing to the recurrent triumph of:

any idea no matter how outlandish so long as some constituency is attached to it, trashing received wisdom by impugning the motives of those who have established it, setting aside evidence that is inconvenient and putting in its place grand theories supported by nothing but the partisan beliefs and desires of the theorizers.

(Fish, *SW* 131)

The relativism Fish warns of is of the same sort that leads one commentator to make the condescending claim that, despite its lack of sophisticated reading, the ANC “at least” discusses *Disgrace* with reference to what it understands of the text (*M&G*, “NS” para. 12). It is the absurd notion that all claims are legitimate “not because they have [been] proven out in the competition of ideas but simply because someone is asserting them” (Fish, *SW* 131).

⁸ This statement serves as the title of my thesis due to its highly problematic logical implications when considered within the broader context of the proclamations released by the Swedish Academy related to its awarding of the Nobel Prize.

Perhaps it could be argued that the problem at the centre of my thesis was identified as a result of this same relativism: errors in judgement or misreadings and inconsistent interpretations expressed by the ANC should be entertained, while similar views are unacceptable when uttered by an organisation with the reputation of the Swedish Academy. But this would rely on the character of the organisation making the questionable statements as a measure for their validity, rather than on the validity of the statements themselves. Instead of contributing to “scrupulous scholarship” (Fish, *SW* 131), studies of this nature would be nothing more than extended and poorly disguised *ad hominem* attacks.

In order to avoid criticism of this sort (although it would seem self-defeating to deny that a relative consideration of this kind was in fact germane to the study that follows), this study will adopt Fish’s strategy of “academicizing”. This stricture ensures that potentially explosive issues are converted into subjects of intellectual inquiry by detaching them from their real world contexts, and inserting them into contexts of academic urgency, “*where there is an account to be offered or an analysis to be performed*” (27; emphasis in original). Academicizing ensures that issues and questions themselves become objects of study – political urgency is replaced by the need for the understanding of a phenomenon (27-28).

In response to the central problem identified above, the current study proposes the following: the Swedish Academy’s public statements that choices between morally right and wrong actions are crystal clear but serve no end in the works of J. M. Coetzee are misleading at best, and patently absurd at worst. At this point it would probably be wise to explain how I intend to test the validity of my hypothesis.

Chapter One presents a rationale for adopting a comparative study in which J. M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* [*WB*] (1980) is read through Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes* [*UWE*] (1911). The choice of primary texts is explained with reference to statements made by the Swedish Academy, most specifically its identification of the novels’ shared metaphysical malaise and pessimistic worldview (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 6). After presenting synopses of both novels, the chapter outlines my objections to the Academy’s statements and describes a theoretical paradigm and methodology based on the hybridisation of cultural narratology with Bakhtinian theory already tested by Canadian narratologist Gabriele Helms in 2003. It also argues that it is imperative to have an understanding of the philosophical pessimism propounded by Schopenhauer as an ideological framework, given that the Swedish Academy attributes its claims of a metaphysical malaise and the unimportance of ethics to what it identifies as an overwhelming sense of pessimism. But the chapter shows ways in which Schopenhauerian pessimism argues that ethical

behaviour is of importance, even though the Judeo-Christian concept of transcendental salvation is replaced by the less appealing promise of annihilation. These considerations form the theoretical paradigm underpinning the study.

In order to dispel the notion that “the distinction between right and wrong” is “crystal clear” (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 3), Chapter Two examines ways in which *UWE*’s Peter Ivanovitch and *WB*’s Colonel Joll – the first a hypocritical misogynist who masquerades as a feminist and calls for the extirpation of entire classes in Russia; the second a state functionary who seems to delight in the physical mutilation and torture of others – behave appallingly but not unethically according to Schopenhauerian ethical criteria. Rather, as both figures remain true to their natures, their behaviour is morally and ethically neutral, thus countering the Swedish Academy’s claim.

Chapter Three then considers where ethical behaviour – as defined by the ideology described in Chapter One – may be found. To this end, the teacher of languages (*UWE*) and the magistrate (*WB*) are considered as textual rehearsals of Schopenhauerian ethical agents. Both figures and their capacity for compassion are closely examined. The argument is made that the characters reveal a thematic consideration of the importance and value of behaving ethically.

But these chapters create the impression that the Swedish Academy’s reading overlooks something obvious – which is not the case. Rather, there is one element to both Conrad and Coetzee’s fiction that complicates the counter-reading my thesis proposes: neither Conrad nor Coetzee’s characters ever achieve any form of comfort for having acted ethically. Instead, both works appear to contemplate the *failure* of ethics. To address this elephant in the room, the fourth and final chapter considers ways in which the texts interrogate ethics, not so much through the actions of the characters they present, but through the creation of a link between the aesthetics of writing and ethics, best demonstrated by Razumov’s construction of himself through the act of writing (*UWE*) and the magistrate’s inability to record the history of the outpost of Empire (*WB*). While neither example appears to represent ethically successful activities, both authors’ sustained consideration thereof suggests that such actions are nonetheless significant and indicates, as will be elucidated in the Conclusion, that both novels tentatively suggest an alternative set of values to that to which the Swedish Academy alludes in the original problematic statements.

Chapter One: A Theoretical Model

Section One – The Primary Texts

Given that the problem I wish to address is fully expressed by utterances issuing from the Swedish Academy, it is perhaps only fair that I use two texts mentioned in their 2003 press release (“PR” para. 6) to support my central counter-argument: namely, that it is misleading, if not completely wrong, to allege that in Coetzee’s fiction the distinction between morally right and morally wrong action serves no end.

The Academy alludes to a common metaphysical malaise expressed in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Under Western Eyes*, characterising both novels as “political thriller[s]” in which “the idealist’s naivety opens the gates to horror” (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 6). Similarities between the two novels are easier to identify when considering summaries of each, without taking the allegorical nature or indeterminable physical and temporal settings of Coetzee’s work into account.⁹

WB is narrated in the first person by an anonymous “magistrate” of a small colonial outpost along the territorial frontier of a political interest identified only as “the Empire”. The Empire has declared a state of emergency due to rumours that the indigenous peoples of the area, known to them only as “barbarians”, might be preparing to attack the settlement. Special Forces (known as the Third Bureau) are deployed to the town, abruptly ending the magistrate’s formerly peaceful existence. The Third Bureau, under the command of Colonel Joll, conducts a pre-emptive expedition into the land beyond the Empire’s frontier. Joll’s incursion party returns with a number of captive barbarians, who are secretly tortured – and some killed – before Joll and his troops leave the outpost for the capital to prepare for a larger campaign.

In the meantime, the magistrate nurses a barbarian girl whom torturers from the Third Bureau have left crippled and partially blinded. His experiences with the girl lead him to question the legitimacy of imperialism, although, despite intimate encounters, their relationship remains uncertain. Eventually the magistrate decides to take her back to her people. Enlisting the aid of three men, the magistrate and the girl embark on a life-threatening journey across the barren land, during which time they have sex. When he succeeds in returning her, he unsuccessfully asks her to stay with him before he goes home. Colonel Joll

⁹ Minutiae of *WB* and *UWE* will be provided as required for the close readings to follow in the study below. For now, only a basic understanding of the plot of each work is sufficient.

and a contingent of Third Bureau soldiers have arrived from the capital while the magistrate was absent, and arrest him for deserting his post and consorting with “the enemy”. As the state of emergency delays the possibility of a trial, the magistrate is locked in a cellar for an indefinite period, experiencing a near-complete lack of the basic freedoms he has taken for granted. Although he acquires a key and is able to leave his makeshift cell, he realises that there is no place to which he could escape, and so spends his time outside of the prison scavenging for scraps of food.

Colonel Joll returns from the wilderness with several barbarian captives and makes a show of their torture. He encourages the gathered crowd – including a child – to participate in their beatings, but the magistrate attempts to stop the spectacle. He is quickly and violently subdued and is subjected to the strappado, culminating in his understanding of imperial violence.¹⁰ The magistrate’s spirit is clearly crushed, and the soldiers, knowing that he has nowhere to go and no longer poses a threat to their mission, allow him to roam freely through the town. When winter approaches and their campaign against the barbarians collapses, the garrison deserts the outpost. Colonel Joll refuses to speak to the magistrate, who confronts him on his final return from the wilderness, and hastily abandons the town with the last of the soldiers.

Although the predominant belief amongst the few remaining townsfolk is that a barbarian invasion is imminent, the magistrate tries to encourage them to continue their lives and to prepare for the winter. By the time of the season’s first snowfall, and the end of the narrative, there is no sign of the barbarians.

The political intrigue of *Under Western Eyes* is perhaps more readily recognized than that of *WB* as, unlike Coetzee’s work, there is no sense of allegorical intent in the narrative: the events, settings and characters can readily be seen as fictional accounts of historically and biographically real ones (as detailed in Keith Carabine’s *The Life and the Art*). The novel is divided into four sections and narrated by an unidentified English teacher of languages who lives in Geneva and (as will be explored in detail later) is a typically unreliable Conradian narrator.

Part First is ostensibly an account of the personal record of Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov, a philosophy student at the University of St. Petersburg in the early 1910s. He is

¹⁰ The strappado is a form of torture in which prisoners’ hands are tied behind their backs before they are hoisted and suspended in the air by their wrists. This results in intense pain, permanent nerve damage and, frequently, the dislocation of both arms. It is a variant of the “Judas’ Cradle” technique, which employs counterweights (Rejali 355). The Jewish fur merchant, Señor Hirsch, is tortured in the same way before being shot to death in Conrad’s 1904 novel *Nostromo* (448-50).

acutely aware of not having a family (his parents are unknown to him) and appears happy with the status quo, hoping to gain entry into a state administrative job by submitting a prize essay. As he is a reserved and quiet individual, his fellow students – many of whom hold revolutionary views – consider him inherently trustworthy, much to his chagrin. Early in the narrative the brutal Minister of State, Mr. de P—, is assassinated by a team of two revolutionaries in a bombing that also claims the lives of his footman, one of the assassins, and a number of innocent bystanders.¹¹ Returning to his apartment after a day of lectures, Razumov finds Victor Haldin, another student, waiting for him. Haldin confesses to murdering de P— but admits that he and his accomplice had failed to plan their escape thoroughly. He insists that Razumov is the only person whom he can trust and requests aid. Razumov agrees to help, as he wants Haldin out of his flat. He is tasked with finding Ziemianitch, a notorious and widely utilized getaway driver.

Haldin's request leads Razumov to introspection, and he fears that his life will be destroyed by the authorities simply as a result of his apparent association with the assassin. His speculations lead to a crisis of conscience in which he becomes intensely aware of his social isolation.

Finding Ziemianitch in a drunken stupor, a furious Razumov beats him up before deciding to betray Haldin in a bid to preserve his own life. He turns to his university sponsor, an aristocrat known only as Prince K— (who, it is strongly implied, may be Razumov's biological father). Together they meet with General T— and set a trap for the unsuspecting Haldin.

Razumov returns to his apartment, where he explains his predicament to Haldin without revealing his betrayal. The assassin leaves and is taken into custody later that night. Razumov is distressed by the episode for days, and finally receives a summons to meet Privy Councillor Mikulin. During their tense meeting, it becomes clear that Razumov thinks that Mikulin suspects him of being a revolutionary. However, Mikulin reveals that Haldin was interrogated, sentenced and hanged shortly after his capture without having implicated Razumov. Later Razumov learns that Mikulin had supervised a search of his apartment and, when he confronts the Privy Councillor, he also discovers that Mikulin has a keen interest in his plans for the future.

¹¹ The assassination of Conrad's Mr. de P— closely resembles the 1904 assassination of the Tsar's Minister of the Interior, Viacheslav von Plehve, a statesman who actively participated in the suppression of revolutionary and liberal movements in Russia (Abramowicz 342). He was assassinated after allegedly ensuring the execution of Hirsh Lekert by insisting that he be tried under wartime laws (141). There are speculations that Russian secret agents deliberately withheld intelligence that could have prevented the assassination.

The narrative of Part Second shifts the focus to Haldin's sister, Natalia – the narrator's student in Geneva – and their mother. The Swiss city has a vibrant Russian community and the family awaits Victor's arrival (as he had persuaded them to sell their home and to leave Russia). By this point, the narrator and Natalia have been friendly for some time, although the teacher of languages still struggles to understand the Russian temperament as a result of his being a Westerner.

One day the narrator chances upon an English newspaper's account of Haldin's arrest and execution and informs the family of his demise. While Natalia's response is stoic, her mother is deeply distressed.

A leader in the revolutionary movement, Peter Ivanovitch, learns of the execution and attempts to recruit Natalia to his cause, but she is sceptical and noncommittal. He also tells her that Razumov is expected to arrive in Geneva, which excites her, as her brother had written highly of him in his letters. She believes that Razumov may bring news of Victor's last hours that may ease the family's belief that his death has been in vain.

Natalia is invited to Château Borel, the neglected house of Madame de S—, another leader in the movement, where she meets Tekla, the abused companion of Madame de S— and Ivanovitch's secretary. Tekla recounts her life story. Afterwards, the two ladies come across Ivanovitch and Razumov. Natalia introduces herself when Ivanovitch and Tekla leave.

Part Third shifts temporally to a few weeks earlier and describes Razumov's arrival in Geneva, after having spent three days in Zurich with Peter Ivanovitch's closest collaborator, Sophia Antonovna. After their first meeting (returning to the temporal setting of Part Second), Razumov avoids Ivanovitch, preferring to take long walks with Natalia, who takes him into her confidence and tries to learn about her brother's last hours. Razumov gives no definite answer. He meets and is abrasive toward the narrator, who detects Razumov's distress, and is not fooled by his outer demeanour. Since Razumov is believed to be Haldin's most trusted collaborator, Ivanovitch and Madame de S— receive him on friendly terms at the Château Borel.

Razumov's taciturnity and reserve are interpreted (at least according to the account provided by the narrator) by each character in his or her own way. The revolutionaries reveal some of their plans to Razumov and issue him with his first assignment: to bring Natalia Haldin to Peter Ivanovitch so that he may turn her into one of his disciples. Outside the Château, he unexpectedly meets Sophia Antonovna and two revolutionaries notorious for killing (including the obese Nikita Necator, a brutal assassin). Antonovna tells Razumov that

Ziemianitch, the getaway driver, had hanged himself shortly after Haldin's execution, confirming the revolutionaries' suspicions that he had betrayed the assassin.

Part Fourth returns *in medias res* to the interview between Mikulin and Razumov interrupted by the closing of Part First. The Privy Councillor admits to having read Razumov's private notes, but reassures him that there are no suspicions of his allegiances. Razumov is dismissed. During the weeks that follow, he gradually succumbs to a state of malaise and alienates himself from his fellow students and professors. In the meantime Mikulin is promoted, and he eventually summons Razumov to further interviews. With the blessing of Prince K—, Mikulin successfully recruits Razumov as a Tsarist agent.

With Razumov's allegiances no longer subject to doubt, the narrative returns to Geneva, where Razumov composes his first report to Mikulin. He passes the narrator as he heads to the post office, but does not respond when the teacher of languages calls to him. At Natalia's home, the narrator learns that she urgently needs to find Razumov and bring him to her dying mother. He and Natalia go to the Château Borel to ask Ivanovitch for Razumov's address, unwittingly interrupting the revolutionaries as they plan an insurgency in the Baltic provinces. The two return to the Haldin residence, where Razumov unexpectedly calls upon Natalia. Razumov is cryptic and obscure during the long exchange that follows, but implies that he is the one who had betrayed Victor.

Having made the first of three confessions, Razumov retires to his quarters, where he writes the record that ostensibly informs the narrative of the novel. He explains to Natalia that he has fallen in love with her – a second confession in which he acknowledges an emotion entirely alien to him – and that he considers his betrayal of Victor a betrayal of himself. He posts the record to Natalia before attending a social gathering of revolutionaries at the home of Julius Laspara. Here he declares to the crowd that Ziemianitch had been innocent of their charges against him. Although he only explains his motives partially, he makes a third and final confession of his guilt. Nikita Necator, whom Razumov begins to insinuate is in fact also a Tsarist operative, attacks him, and, along with a band of accomplices, smashes his eardrums. Deafened, Razumov stumbles from the scene, is hit by a tramcar and crippled as he crosses the street. Tekla finds him and stays by his side at the hospital.

The narrative shifts a few months ahead. Mrs Haldin has died. Natalia has returned to Russia, where she is devoted to charity work. Tekla remains devoted to Razumov, and has moved to the Russian countryside, where she intends to take care of him for the short while that the doctors expect him to survive. At the end of the novel, in the most pronounced temporal shift, the narrator and Sophia Antonovna meet in Geneva two years later.

Antonovna learns of the existence of Razumov's record and becomes intensely interested in seeing the document, while the narrator learns of Razumov's confession at the Laspara household, casting doubt on his assessment of Razumov's character. The novel closes with the revolutionist's declaration: "Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man" (Conrad, *UWE* 289).

Section Two – A Methodology for the Comparison

While the qualities of the "political" (Swedish Academy, "PR" para. 6) are apparent in the above summaries, the Swedish Academy's allusion to a "common metaphysical malaise" invites a much closer reading of both texts. The Academy identifies an "idealist" characterized by a "naivety" that somehow reveals a "horror" that is occluded by his or her environs in both novels (para. 6) – unless one is to assume that the comparison was drawn, and forgotten, on the spur of the moment. The horror referred to, I wish to contend, is closely related to the repetitive downward spiralling journey in which characters are "stripped of all external dignity" in Coetzee's work (para.10), as well as to the despair of the late Victorian world-view expressed in Conrad's artistic vision: it is the horror of realising that suffering is perhaps the best situation for which humanity can hope. It would seem, however, that a comparison between the two novels could lead to the same absurd relativism Fish convincingly condemns (*SW* 131). Perhaps worse, my argument could potentially be accused of following Charles Peirce's theory of unlimited semiosis – the notion that the possible interpretation of and the construction of any sign are endless (Mladenov 441) – or of committing what Umberto Eco calls the "critical heresy" according to which it is acceptable to read into a literary work "whatever our most uncontrolled impulses dictate to us" (*OL* 3). Eco's work is helpful in that it provides methodological guidelines for the interpretation of literary works without reference to any interpretative frameworks – describing how to go about making meaning from a text, rather than dictating how the meanings made should be interpreted or evaluated.

In 1990 Eco presented a series of Tanner Lectures and Seminars at Cambridge University which corresponded with his publication of *The Limits of Interpretation*. During the lectures, he commented that "human beings think [...] in terms of identity and similarity" (*IO* 48). This is one of the reasons he provides to explain why once the "mechanism of analogy has been set in motion there is no guarantee it will stop" (47), fuelling the practice of a hermeneutics of suspicion. Textual clues are considered to be of far greater importance than what they are, due to the fallacious belief that every element of a text is open to unlimited

and, as previously mentioned, relative interpretations (50-57). But Eco argues that, while it is “very difficult to determine whether a given interpretation is a good one, it is, however, always possible to decide whether it is a bad one” (*LI* 42).

As my assertion is that the Swedish Academy’s interpretation of the value ascribed to ethics in Coetzee’s work is a bad – if not an entirely inappropriate – one, I wish to adapt a model Eco describes at length (see *OL* 56-58) as the methodological approach for assessing the validity of my claim. If two documents (B and C) are similar to each other in terms of content, form and themes, and C was produced after B, it is not false to assume that B may have informed C’s production. This relationship depends on analogical comparisons between the two (i.e. C is like B, because of their expression of x). In the current study, the Swedish Academy has asserted that *WB* is analogous to *UWE* because of the common “downward spiralling” journey of “naïve” protagonists who learn of the horrors of this world (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 6; para. 10), which the Academy uses to justify its generalization that in Coetzee’s work the distinction between right and wrong “can be seen to serve no end” (para. 3). While I accept the claim that the two novels – as political thrillers – can be considered similar, I believe that the ethical assessments could only be made by referring to a third thematically relevant text, which places a limitation on the degree of analogy acceptable between *WB* and *UWE*.

What Eco suggests is that an interpreter could hypothesise an “archetypal text” (text A) that may be useful to explain analogies between two documents (in this case, *WB* and *UWE*) which cannot be examined more economically (i.e. by using fewer additional texts) (*IO* 56). Bakhtin’s notion that every text – “printed, written, or orally recorded” – necessarily includes an “extratextual context” makes it possible for interpreters – casual and critical readers alike – to reveal implicit intonations in every text studied (*SG* 166). The ethical choices Coetzee’s characters face tend to be expressed implicitly rather than explicitly. After all, had they been obviously expressed, there would be little point to showing a “downward spiralling journey” (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 6) from a first-person narrative perspective. The third text – or rather set of texts better described as an ideological body of work – I wish to introduce is that of the pessimist German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, whose influence on the ethics and worldviews expressed in Conrad’s works has become a critical commonplace. Schopenhauer’s pessimistic ideologies – and his notions of character and ethics – not only provide insights into the extratextual thematic dimensions of Conrad’s works, but can also legitimately be used to interpret the ethical implications in both *WB* and

UWE, as it deals with these concerns explicitly while describing the downward spiralling journey of life.

The methodology I propose, therefore, is to show analogous relationships between both primary texts and the ideological and ethical concerns expressed in true philosophical pessimism. Before providing a more comprehensive description of how this will be achieved (and how it will be combined with an interpretative – as opposed to methodological – model already tested by Canadian narratologist Gabriele Helms in 2003), it is imperative to have an understanding of the ideological model propounded by Schopenhauer.

Section Three – Pessimism and Schopenhauerian Pessimism

It is not accurate to describe the pessimism in which I am interested as having been defined or founded by Schopenhauer, as, throughout his work, the philosopher is well aware of and draws attention to his debts to earlier thoughts, and to the works of other writers (Dienstag 84-85) – especially Immanuel Kant. It is equally inaccurate to assume that Schopenhauer's is the only formulation of pessimism. What may be asserted, though, is that Schopenhauer popularised pessimistic notions by providing them with a philosophical and metaphysical grounding (85), and by presenting his ideas in enjoyable prose that was stylistically beautiful and easy to understand (Gryzanovski 73). While there were few, if any, adherents to his complete philosophy, and it would be inaccurate to state that he founded a school of thought, Schopenhauer's influence on future generations of thinkers and artists, from Wagner and Wittgenstein to Freud and Nietzsche, has been far reaching (Janaway, *SI* 1). But before explaining the view of the world espoused throughout Schopenhauer's career, it is important to consider the implications of and the differences between the terms "pessimism" and "Schopenhauerian pessimism" as I shall be using them.

Generally the term "pessimism" refers to "an inclination toward discouragement" (Goodale 243) resulting from contemplation of the value of life (241) and the seriously posed consideration of whether life is worth living (242). There were several causes for despair in nineteenth-century Europe which gave rise to a sense of disillusionment (241; 246). Reason had progressed and become valued to such an extent that individuals accepted the responsibility of defining the purpose of life for themselves (246). This was undertaken without recourse to religious dogma, as the analytical methods of mathematics and science only considered logical arguments valid (246). Christianity had, until then, accepted pessimism in all of its forms, offered a blissful heaven as relief from the misery of earthly

life, and granted refuge in a mystic set of values and a divinity whose beneficence extended infinitely beyond the meddling of trivial, mortal intellect (246). But the supremacy of logic and reason had been used to discredit the religious authority of the church and the Bible, leaving thinkers with no customary retreat from pessimism when they failed to find an empirical purpose to life, and making them prey to pure relativity (246). Nonetheless, this despair, while prevalent, tended to be light and transitory, betrayed by the energy with which it was *resisted* (246). The pain of placing value in something which proves illusory (e.g. the church or God) is compounded by the pain of disappointment, but the resulting despair and attempts to find new ideas on which to tack future hopes impels important movement in any era's thought (245-46). While the mood of this pessimism is clearly identical to that characterizing Schopenhauerian philosophy, it seldom darkens into absolute pessimism. Unlike general pessimism, in the sense described above, Schopenhauer's pessimism articulated, through the appearance of five of his articles in translation between 1871 and 1875, a settled belief that life is not worth the effort (243):

Death is the great reprimand [...] and it can be conceived as a punishment for our existence.¹² Death is the painful untying of the knot that generation with sensual pleasure had tied; it is the violent destruction, bursting in from outside, of the fundamental error of our true nature, the great disillusionment. At bottom, we are something that ought not to be; therefore we cease to be.¹³
(Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 507)

His thoughts revolve around two equally unpleasant, interrelated theses: for each individual, it would have been better not to have been born, and that this is the worst of all possible worlds (Janaway, *SI* 116).

As an atheist, Schopenhauer questions the value of human existence without recourse to a god, positing life as nothing more than purposeless, painful striving under the relentless

¹² In the footnote to this passage, Schopenhauer explains that "Death says: You are the product of an act that ought not to have taken place; therefore, to wipe it out, you must die" (*WWR2* 507).

¹³ According to Singh this passage is frequently misrepresented, given Schopenhauer's affinity with eastern thought, especially Brahmanism and Buddhism (28). The idea that humanity ought not to be "deeply penetrates the entire system, both ontologically and ethically" (28). In Deussen's 1906 study of Indology, he shows how the mystical text, the *Yājñavalkya*, anticipates Schopenhauer's definition of immortality, which he explains as "indestructibility without continued existence" (qtd. in Deussen 350). What ceases to be is not our essence (or "inner core") but our individuality, which more "naïve accounts of immortality" seem to assert continue *post mortem* (Singh 31-32). While this idea will be explained more fully when discussing Schopenhauerian ethics, it is important to note that the quoted passage should be understood as claiming that individuality does not continue after death, although the essential self is immortal and does not cease to exist, in order to avoid a seeming contradiction later in the argument. It is the illusion of individualism and the concomitant misperception of independence as designated by "we" that end.

control of an unconscious force (which he called “the will”) and claiming that death is the muse of philosophy (Janaway, *SI* 1; Singh 23). Most human action is futile and ironic; freedom is illusory; and redemption can only be found by seeking an escape from the “human condition” (Dienstag 85). That there is scope for redemption – although even a more marginal chance than is implied in the previous statement – is crucial to my argument and will be addressed in detail toward the end of this section.

Very few thinkers position themselves as antagonistically to the views of their times as Schopenhauer. He scorned sentiments of universal emancipation prevalent throughout Europe and constantly disparaged the official philosophy of the day (Gray 39). “It is common enough among professional men to feel a certain contempt for wealthy amateurs,” Gryzanovski argues, “[b]ut few of the latter have ever reciprocated the feeling as fully as Schopenhauer” (40).¹⁴ Hegel, Europe’s most widely esteemed philosopher at the time, was, Schopenhauer frequently opined, little more than an apologist for state power (Gray 39) and moreover Schopenhauer dismissed Hegel’s philosophy, along with that of Fichte, Schelling and Jacobi, as “nonsense” (Schopenhauer, “CR” 65). The only legitimate roles of the state, according to Schopenhauer, are the protection of life and of property (Gray 39). But even with this narrow view of state functions, revolutionary movements of his day were a further source of horror and contempt for him, and he purportedly once offered his opera glasses as a telescopic rifle sight to a guardsman who had opened fire on a crowd during the popular demonstrations of 1848 in Frankfurt (39).

There was no stability in Schopenhauer’s philosophical career, which began with his 1813 doctoral dissertation “On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason” (Gryzanovski 40). Working in “perfect solitude” in Dresden between 1814 and 1818, he honed his thoughts into a full-grown system of philosophy in his principal work, *The World as Will and Representation*, published in 1819 and augmented throughout his life (40).¹⁵ The second edition of this *magnum opus* was published in 1844, but his popularity was only entrenched with the 1851 publication of his final work, *Parerga and Paralipomena* – a collection of essays firmly grounded in the system he had established in *The World as Will and Representation* (Gryzanovski 40-41).

¹⁴ Schopenhauer inherited his wealth.

¹⁵ The title given to the earliest English translation available, by Haldane and Kemp, is *The World as Will and Idea*. For the purposes of my argument, however, I make use of the more readily accessible *The World as Will and Representation*, Volumes 1 and 2, as this version translates all of the passages of the original text, and not only those originally written in German. I therefore refer to the text by this title.

Critics who argue for a Schopenhauerian influence on writers – such as Joseph Conrad, who is often mentioned in association with Schopenhauer (links were forcefully argued in the 1970s by Mark Wollaeger, Bruce Johnson and William J. Scheik [see Knowles 77]) – frequently cite *The World as Will and Representation* as a direct source (Stinchcombe 6-7). Wollaeger claims that Conrad would have read the Haldane and Kemp translation (31). Johnson says that “Conrad is never far from the implications of Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Idea*” (29). Panagopoulos cites the work when he analyses connections between the philosopher’s treatises and Conrad’s fiction. Even revered Conradian scholar Cedric Watts (96) attributes Schopenhauer’s “influence” to *The World as Will and Representation*. But Owen Knowles (77-78) and Norman Stinchcombe (6-8) convincingly argue that a more plausible avenue for an author to be influenced by Schopenhauer (in their argument specifically Conrad, although I wish to return to generalization here in order to focus attention on the philosophical works) would have been through reading his more popular essays, and by encountering the widespread, indirect manifestations of his philosophy in late nineteenth-century culture. While it is true that Schopenhauer’s philosophy can only fully be grasped for academic and scholarly purposes by reading his major work, a working knowledge of its essential arguments could be gained by reading the far shorter essays (Stinchcombe 10-11). These are a more approachable expression of his thought, as “Schopenhauer will often give bolder expression to a particular idea in his essays than he has done in his main work – less tentative, less qualified, more clear-cut” (Magee 245). For a man of letters not a professional academic, it seems more plausible to be attracted to the clarity of the essays than to the “sometimes tortured abstractions” of *WWR* (Knowles 78).

An application of Ockham’s razor shows that authors need not have read a large portion of Schopenhauer’s work to have a functional understanding of Schopenhauerian pessimism (Stinchcombe 9).¹⁶ The essay “On Ethics” is a succinct presentation of the philosopher’s ethic of compassion and his metaphysics of the will, for instance, and includes his most scathing indictments of human nature, as it considers an 1841 report on slavery in America (he condemns the practice in no uncertain terms). T. Bailey Saunders’s 1896 volume *The Art of Controversy* includes essays explaining Schopenhauer’s views on the transcendental possibilities of aesthetic appreciation; and the 1898 *Studies in Pessimism: A*

¹⁶ Ockham’s razor is a principle originating in the fourteenth century and has a high standing in the world of science as a result of its strong appeal to common sense. The principle states that plurality must not be posited without necessity – enjoining researchers to favour the simplest hypothesis consistent with the available data (Berger and Jefferys 64).

Series of Essays explains Schopenhauer's pessimism, his rejection of the world and the metaphysics that underpin these. Mrs. Rudolf Dircks translated Schopenhauer's misogynistic attack "On Women" and an abridged version of "The Metaphysics of Love" which examines the metaphysics of sexual love, in an 1892 volume called *Essays of Schopenhauer* (see Stinchcombe 8-12). These translations were very popular, with selected Bailey Saunders translations being reprinted five times by 1913 and widely reviewed in mainstream publications (12).

The most profound yet basic truth for which no evidence is needed, Schopenhauer claims, is this: "The world is my representation" (*WWRI* 3). This truth, he proceeds, "is valid with reference to every living and knowing being, although man alone can bring it into reflective, abstract consciousness" (3). In his philosophy, Schopenhauer argues that human beings are operated like puppets by an "untiring mechanism" which drives them indifferently and indefatigably (*WWRI* 358). All objects in this world (i.e. physical things that can be perceived by a subject – including the subject itself) are merely physical manifestations of this mechanism – the "will-to-live" (*WWRI* 358). The will-to-live is "an irrational impulse" without ground or reason "in the external world" (358). It is the Kantian "thing-in-itself" (*WWRI* 110), the kernel of everything in the universe (Stinchcombe 13), which is in turn merely the "phenomenon, the visibility, the *objectivity*" of the will (*WWRI* 110; emphasis in original). As the only thing-in-itself, the will is "outside time" (265), as time, space and causality are themselves constructs of subjectivity (i.e. categories that humans impose on the objective manifestations of the will in a vain attempt to understand them) and are therefore illusory. The will is "only a blind, irresistible urge" (275), easier to conceptualize – as Janaway argues – in negative terms: it is not a consciousness and it does not direct things to any rational purpose (*SI* 7). The world is thus a purposeless representation mirroring the will-to-live; a reflection in which "the will knows itself in increasing degrees of distinctness and completeness, the highest of which is man" (*WWRI* 274-75).

Pre-empting Darwinian and Freudian thought, Schopenhauer's philosophy does not separate man from other animals by arguing that humans occupy a position of privilege. Rather, it explains all thought-processes as having organic, survival-directed functions (Janaway, *SI* 41). Humans are merely capable of greater abstract thought than are other animals, as they can create mental representations of representations of the will-to-live (abstractions that Schopenhauer called "concepts" or "second class objects"). This ability exacerbates our experience of suffering (22). Schopenhauerian thought recognises the influence of unconscious drives, feelings and emotions on the intellect, and places sexuality –

and the relentless desire to reproduce – at the core of human psychology (22).¹⁷ The concept of the will suggests that the belief that there may be rational, independent thinkers is no more than an illusion (22). Given that the world as it is experienced is nothing more than the affirmation of the will-to-live, with all living beings merely playing a mindless role in a purposeless pantomime, “[a]ll life is suffering” (*WWR1* 310). Schopenhauer pictures this world as “the battleground of tormented and agonized beings”, each of which is an objectification of the same will-to-live, “who continue to exist only by each devouring one another” (*WWR2* 581; Stinchcombe 14). The will-to-live is therefore auto-cannibalistic: it “must live on itself, since nothing exists besides it, and it is a hungry will” (*WWR1* 154). Because all things are manifestations of this one will, “tormentor and tormented are one” at the most profound metaphysical level (345). Suffering is therefore an ineluctable feature of life, resulting from the “Faustian infinity of desire” (Eagleton 156):

Everything in life proclaims that earthly happiness is destined to be frustrated, or recognized as an illusion. The grounds for this lie deep in the very nature of things. Accordingly, the lives of most people prove troubled and short. The comparatively happy are often only apparently so, or else, like those of long life, they are rare exceptions; the possibility of these still had to be left, as decoy-birds. Life presents itself as a continual deception, in small matters as well as in great. If it has promised, it does not keep its word, unless to show how little desirable the desired object was; hence we are deluded now by hope, now by what was hoped for. If it has given, it did so in order to take. The enchantment of distance shows us paradises that vanish like optical illusions, when we have allowed ourselves to be fooled by them.

(Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 573)

Any individual life vacillates between periods of pain, misery and frustration (Janaway, *SI* 104). These states bring about suffering, as the individual is constantly driven towards ends that either cannot be attained, prolonging the experience of suffering, or that, once attained, lead to a state of boredom and ennui, reintroducing suffering (104-105). Satisfaction and happiness, then, are negative concepts in the Schopenhauerian system as they refer only to a temporary absence of suffering, the positive concept which inevitably reasserts itself (105). An existence free of suffering is not that of a human individual (105). Humans are “constantly needy creatures who continue for a time [...] pass their existence in anxiety and

¹⁷ The reproductive function, Schopenhauer argues, does not serve to assert importance or value in any individual member of the species in a dynastic sense. It rather serves as an expression of the affirmation of the will-to-live, in that it ensures continuation in the species as a group: once born, the individual is of no further consequence (see *WWR2* 283, 312, 334-35; 510-16).

want, and often endure terrible afflictions, until they fall at last into the arms of death” (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 349). Only a “myopic sentimentalism” could imagine that the “paltry pleasures of human existence” could compensate for its “unrelieved wretchedness” (Eagleton 156). Nothingness should therefore be seen as more desirable than life (Stinchcombe 15). It is exactly because of the nature of the blind, restless will, and the struggle for survival between every individual manifestation thereof, that this is the “*worst* of all possible worlds” (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 583; emphasis in original).

While it may seem logical to conclude from the above overview of Schopenhauer’s pessimism that if nothingness is more desirable than life, and if the will is indifferent and uncaring, and if there is no hope of punishment or reward, then the distinction between ethically right and ethically wrong action would indeed serve no end. But Schopenhauer is not nihilistic and there *is* a salvationist element described in *WWR* – albeit secular, divorced from any conception of a god or saviour figure. His philosophy concludes that there is one permanent way to be “removed from all the burdens and sorrows of life” (*WWR1* 90), and that is the complete denial of the will-to-live (Singh 29-31; Stinchcombe 14; Eagleton 157-59; Janaway, *SI* 110-14). This may be achieved involuntarily through “the excessive pain felt in one’s own person” and “great misfortune” or voluntarily through “knowledge of the suffering of the whole world” (Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 393). Saints, ascetics and mystics who consider the world as “nothing” (*WWR1* 412) are “overcomers of the world” (90) and have accomplished “a complete transformation of [their] nature and disposition [...] as the result of which salvation appears” (*WWR2* 604). But Schopenhauer is unable to communicate how the death of the will-denier and that of the will-affirmer will differ, as the language of philosophy is inadequate to do so:

In the hour of death, the decision is made whether a man falls back into the womb of nature, or else no longer belongs to her but:– we lack image, concept and word for the opposite, just because all of these are taken from objectification of the will, and therefore belong to that objectification; consequently, they cannot in any way express its absolute opposite; accordingly this remains a mere negation.

(Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 609)

Death is not an escape, as all that perishes, according to this philosophical system, is the “personal phenomenal appearance” and that which falsely experiences and conceives of itself as individual; but not the “true inner nature” which is essentially the will (491).

Schopenhauerian salvation, Stinchcombe argues, is therefore content with nothingness (15).

The first volume of *WWR* is salvationist in this sense and ends: “[T]o those in whom the will has turned and denied itself, this very real world of ours with all its suns and galaxies, is – nothing” (412). Crucial to my argument, though, is Schopenhauer’s inclusion of a footnote to the word “nothing” in which he acknowledges that this concept is “the Prajna-Paramita of the Buddhists, the ‘beyond all knowledge’” (412).

As an ideology, Schopenhauerian pessimism thus contradicts the Swedish Academy’s judgement on the value of ethical choice in Coetzee’s fiction – provided that a case can be made that this indeed expresses a valid extra-textual referent to his work. Consideration of the ethical implications arising from the acknowledged affinities between Schopenhauerian pessimism, Brahmanism and Buddhism may serve to validate my counter-argument that, regardless of the apparent hopelessness of existence, moral decisions still serve some end.

Section Four – Schopenhauerian Ethics: The East, Character and Compassion

The primary ethical message of *The World as Will and Representation*, following from Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of will, is salvationist, seeing life as a “disease” for which the complete denial of the will-to-live is the “radical cure” (*WWR1* 362). Life is futile and the world’s “non-existence would be preferable to its existence” as it is “something which at bottom ought not to be” (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 576). Schopenhauer’s praise for asceticism and for the “mortification of our will” which will eliminate the “delusion that holds us chained to the bonds of this world” becomes more strident in the second volume of his main work (*WWR2* 638-9), and Salvationism is clearly the *de facto* solution he appears to endorse (Stinchcombe 16). Since the “will in itself is absolutely and entirely self-determining, and for it there is no law” (Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 285), moral prescription would be pointless, as “every good is essentially relative” and applies only “to a desiring will” (362).

Cartwright argues that Schopenhauer’s treatment of “human actions from a moral point of view”, even when considering the supplementary essays of the 1844 edition, is but a “passing stage along the route to the denial of will” (*SB*, 297). But Cartwright’s perspective not only downplays Schopenhauer’s ethic of compassion (discussed in Book IV of Volume 1 and in its supplements in Volume 2), which is strengthened by the admiration for eastern thought that he frequently expresses. It also fails to account for the fact that instances of Salvationism are outnumbered in the more popular essays by occasions for advice on how best to live as *part* of the world (Stinchcombe 16, 24), since complete renunciation of the will-to-live is hardly ever attainable. Schopenhauer uses Christian Saints and the Brahman

and Buddhist Sufis, Samanas, and Sadhus as exemplars of the difficulty of the required renunciation of the will-to-live and the withdrawal from the world (Singh 43-44).¹⁸ In the “Preface to the First Edition” of *WWR*, Schopenhauer confirms the similarities between his work and eastern ideas:

I surmise that the influence of Sanskrit literature will penetrate no less deeply than did the revival of Greek literature in the fifteenth century; if, I say, the reader has also already received and assimilated the divine inspiration of ancient Indian wisdom, then he is best of all prepared to hear what I have to say to him. It will not speak to him, as to many others, in a strange and even hostile tongue; for, did it not sound too conceited, I might assert that each of the individual and disconnected utterances that make up the *Upanishads* could be derived as a consequence from the thought I am to impart [...].
(Schopenhauer, *WWR1* xv-xvi)

Schopenhauer’s admiration for the *Upanishads* is significant, as the affinities between his pessimism and these religious tracts can serve to help us understand how morally right and wrong actions are of importance, even if non-existence is the best state individual beings can expect after life. The *Vedas* began as commentaries, descriptions, and explanations of the complicated rites performed in the pre-Aryan Indus Valley by *Brahmins* (the caste of priests) for the *Kshatriyas* (the castes of clan warriors and rulers), and were passed on as a sacred heritage, claiming to reveal knowledge given to humanity at the dawn of time (Easwaran 11, 13). These are the oldest known texts of Hindu civilization (Deussen 10; Singh 14). The *Upanishads* is a group of treatises appended to the *Vedas* (Easwaran 11). Although there is little certainty as to how many originally existed, ten have been considered as “principal *Upanishads*” based on the authority of Shankara, an eighth-century mystic (12). While collectively the *Upanishads* do not explain or develop a coherent philosophy, or even a line of argument, nor do they act as chapters in a single book, their teachings are considered to be *darshana*, meaning that students are not only expected to listen to them, but to *realise* them (14). This realisation requires ascetic discipline and a strenuous re-ordering of life, with adherents usually spending upwards of twelve years retired with their *guru* in an *ashram* (Easwaran 12-15; Deussen 13) – that is, in a manner not unlike the “resignation and

¹⁸ It should be noted that Schopenhauer admired the centrality of suffering in Christianity, but his version of the New Testament, and his own expressions of the concepts of “original sin,” “grace” and “salvation” are thoroughly comparable to Hinduism (Brahmanism), Buddhism, and the thoughts expressed in the system of Vedanta (see Singh 43; Schopenhauer, *WWR1*, xv 4, 389; and *WWR2* 508, 607).

withdrawal from life” prescribed by *WWR* (Stinchcombe 24).¹⁹ Their lessons cannot be taught, but the knowledge contained in the *Upanishads* arises in one who is pure, restrained, meditative and armed with a razor-sharp intellect capable of pure contemplation (Singh 18).

One of the most striking similarities between these sacred texts and Schopenhauerian philosophy is best illustrated in the characterisation of the Vedic gods. These are not numinous beings, but multiple aspects of a single underlying power called *Brahman*, which both pervades and transcends creation, making it the first principle in so far as anything is comprehensible in the universe (Easwaran 13; Deussen 38-39). *Brahman* is unknown and needs to be explained, introducing the second fundamental idea in the *Upanishads*: the *âtman*. *Âtman* refers to everything that can be known in the world. It is through this that the unintelligible *Brahman* comes closest to being comprehended (Deussen 38). The *Vedas* look outward in reverence and awe of the physical world, while the *Upanishads* look inward, considering the powers of nature and the physical world as nothing more than expressions of human consciousness (concentrating on the *Brahman*) (Easwaran 13). Death-contemplation is considered an all-important but enigmatic issue intimately connected with self-realisation throughout the *Upanishads*, and is seen as the way of attaining knowledge of *samparaye*, i.e. the “world beyond” (Singh 16). But *samparaye* signifies more than its literal translation seems to imply: the “world beyond” is not only a world beyond life, but also a contemplative life in which *atmanjnana* – knowledge of the true nature of the soul, or of *Brahman* – has realised that all worldly things are illusions (Singh 16-18). Similar to Plato’s philosophy, this idea posits that everything encountered in this world is not real (in the Kantian sense of “things-in-themselves”), but is a form of deceit and illusion (called *Mâyâ*) and, as explained by the demon Virocana in the *Chandogya Upanishad* and by Yajñavalkya in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, has no intrinsic value, as everything exists only in the *âtman*, not the *Brahman* (Deussen 42-43). It is essential to note that the concept of the veil of *Mâyâ* does not mean that there is no material world, or that human senses are not to be trusted, as in common scepticism, but that these are of no *genuine worth* (Janaway, *SI* 19). Schopenhauer refers to *Mâyâ* by name throughout his work, and his conception thereof is almost identical to its expression in Eastern thought:²⁰

¹⁹ *Ashram* literally translates as “forest academy”, and is a space where students “sit down near” (translated as *Upanishad*) the feet of an illumined teacher in an intimate session of spiritual reflection (Easwaran 11).

²⁰ See *WWR1* 17, 253, 274, 284, 330, 352, 365, 370, 373, 397, 399, 419, 420, 495; and *WWR2* 321 and 601.

[F]inally, the ancient wisdom of the Indians declares that “it is *Mâyâ*, the veil of deception, which covers the eyes of mortals, and causes them to see a world of which one cannot say either that it is or that it is not; for it is like a dream, like the sunshine on the sand which the traveller from a distance takes to be water, or like the piece of rope on the ground which he regards as a snake.”
(Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 8)

The illusion and deceitfulness of worldly objects first appear in the *S’vetâs’vatara Upanishad* 4.10 (Deussen 42), although the term *Mâyâ* was only introduced in later books to describe these concepts. On the one hand, failure to realise the unity of all beings leads to a belief in diversity and individuality (a delusion Schopenhauer designates the “*Principium Individuationis*”), as well as to an excessive attachment to *samsara* (“worldliness”), resulting in rebirth after death (best known as metempsychosis or reincarnation). Death-contemplation (or Schopenhauer’s understanding of ascetic life), on the other hand, leads to the realization that *Brahman* (analogous to Schopenhauerian “will”) and *âtman* (Kantian “things-in-themselves”) are identical, and that the material world that can be experienced and empirically tested (Schopenhauerian “representation”) is not eternal, and is therefore not something that can be trusted (Singh 20-23; Janaway, *SI* 18-19). One who keeps all earthly passions at bay dwells in *Brahman* and becomes *Brahman* and, at the end of his or her earthly life, attains *Ananda* (“supreme joy”) by *not* being reborn into the material world, thus exiting the evil cycle of life (Singh 20-23). By seeing through the “veil of deception,” one who practises death-in-life achieves *samparaye* in the here-and-now, and realises that death is but one more illusion of *Mâyâ* and, as such, is neither real nor something worthy of fear (16, 19, and 25). But this practice must be understood as a cultivation of moderation rather than as a suppression of the genuine needs of the body, and the “voluntary death” it advocates is a life of denial and renunciation of *excessive* worldliness – it is not an embracing of death by suicide (23, 25). As Schopenhauer argues in the personal, interleaved and annotated manuscripts of his work that were bequeathed to his disciple and eventual editor, Julius Frauenstädt (Payne, qtd. in Schopenhauer, *MRI* vii):

Against suicide it could be said that a man ought to rise above life, ought to recognize that all happenings and events, pleasures and pains, do not touch his better and inner self and that therefore the whole thing is a game, an ignominious tournament, and not a struggle in earnest, and consequently he ought not to introduce into it any seriousness. But this he could do in two different ways: either by vice, which is nothing but an action contrary to that inner and better self, whereby he thus makes this self an object of mockery and fun, the game, however, being played in earnest. Or he could do it by suicide, and here he shows that he cannot take a joke, but takes this as something serious. Therefore as a *mauvais joueur* he does not bear the loss with composure, but when bad cards are dealt to him he peevishly and impatiently refuses to go on playing, throws down the cards, and breaks up the game.²¹

(Schopenhauer, *MRI* 33; emphasis in original)

Salvation, or *moksha* (Singh 20), can only be attained through the denial of the will-to-live, an idea dominant throughout Schopenhauer's *magnum opus*, which "preaches a gospel of renunciation [...] and withdrawal from the world" (Stinchcombe 23-24), with clear similarities to Eastern thought.²²

However, Schopenhauer, acknowledging the difficulty of achieving salvation, also prescribes defiance and engagement, offering worldly advice on how to live as part of the world in his more popular essays (24). In "On the Sufferings of the World" he sums up life as "*a disappointment, nay, a cheat*" (emphasis in original) which is "an unprofitable episode, disturbing the blessed calm of non-existence" (*SP* 14). The world, he claims in *Councils and Maxims*, is a place "where the 'dice are loaded'" and we need "a temper of iron, armour against fate, and weapons against mankind" (*PPI* 475).²³ He quotes Voltaire to the effect that, in this world, we succeed only at the point of a sword and die with weapons in hand, and encourages his readers not to give way to evil, "but to face it more boldly" (Virgil, *Aeneid*, qtd. in Schopenhauer, *PPI* 475). Far from being disheartened by the misfortunes of life, he argues, mankind's motto should be "*No Surrender*" (emphasis and capitalisation in original), and the ills of life should be the source of fresh courage (475). This advice would seem distinctly uncharacteristic of Schopenhauer if one paid attention only to *The World as Will*

²¹ *Mauvais joueur* is translated as "bad loser."

²² While I believe the above discussion is an adequate description of the affinities between Schopenhauer's thought and tenets of Brahmanism (and, through congruous thought, Buddhism), it is necessarily a simplification of highly complex religious worldviews, and is intended neither as a summary of any religious doctrines outside of the scope of my interest, nor as a commentary on nor assessment of the merits of any religion. Rather, it should be seen to serve the ends of showing that there is a value in ethical and moral choices in systems other than those that posit Judeo-Christian rewards and punishments in the afterlife.

²³ While *Councils and Maxims* is available as a separate volume, the version I have used is included in Volume 1 of E. F. J. Payne's translation of *Parerga and Paralipomena*.

and Representation – a fault perpetuated by most literary theorists, Stinchcombe maintains (see 13-20).

Schopenhauer's theory of character is central to the worldly elements of his philosophy (Stinchcombe 25), and most especially to his notion of an ethic of compassion. It is also, as will be explained shortly, a point of convergence between a literary study and his philosophy. While his theory is addressed in Book IV of *WWR1* and its appendices in *WWR2*, there is more attention devoted to this alternative form of salvation in his other essays (25, 31). Barbara Hannan argues that:

Schopenhauer found life unbearable, until he saved himself through his work. His work is the expression of his nature, of his own brilliant and conflicted soul. Thus, if we look at Schopenhauer's life, instead of listening to his official teaching, we see that Schopenhauer *shows* a path to salvation more accessible to most of us than saintly denial of the will. He shows us that we can save ourselves by becoming, and expressing, who we are.²⁴

(Hannan 143)

Self-realisation, as the above passage suggests, is a crucial feature in Schopenhauer's alternative to his "official" Salvationism through the denial of the will-to-live and the rejection of life in the world (Stinchcombe 31). Atwell (qtd. in Stinchcombe 29) and Cartwright agree that the majority of essays published outside of his *magnum opus*, especially "Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life" – which was so popular that its English translation was reprinted eight times between 1890 and 1912 – provide a "eudemonology, instructions for the art of living as successfully and pleasantly as possible" (Cartwright, *SB* 408). Bryan Magee maintains that these essays express a "love of life" and explain Schopenhauer's "gargantuan appetite" for it (259). Other essays still consider the denial of the will-to-live as the ideal, but a life which has "acquired character" and "self-knowledge" at its heart remains a viable option (Stinchcombe 30).

Just as the world has two aspects in Schopenhauerian philosophy, so too does character (38). In *On the Freedom of the Will*, Schopenhauer explains that human character has four features: it is individual (49); it is empirical (meaning that it can only be known through experience) (50); it is constant (man "never changes; as he has acted in one case, so he will always act again – given completely equal circumstances") (51-52); and the individual character is inborn – it is the "work of nature itself" and not a "work of art or of

²⁴ This form of salvation underpins the argument that Coetzee's and Conrad's novels tentatively consider the possibility that aesthetic creation could be an alternative arena for ethically valuable experiences, presented in Chapter Four, below.

accidental circumstances” (54-55). The highest and “cleverest animals” all manifest an individual character, although this is expressed “with the decisive preponderance of the species character” – in other words, the main characteristics of the species are repeated in every single expression thereof, thus forming the “basis of all” (49). However, a “difference of combination and mutual modification of [these] characteristics” result in a significant difference of degree throughout the species of man, making assumptions of moral differences across characters possible (49-50). As a result, the effect of the same motive on different people is different, and knowledge of motives alone is therefore inadequate to “predict” the resultant act; one must “also have precise knowledge of the character in question” (50).²⁵

Every individual character is expressed in the phenomenal world. It is part of the world as representation. Adopting Kantian terms, Schopenhauer calls this the “empirical character” (*WWRI* 287). Everything in nature “has its forces and qualities that definitely react to a definite impression,” and so motives reveal a person’s empirical character by calling forth actions and reactions “with necessity” (287). Through *acting*, the empirical character not only reveals itself, but also reveals the intelligible character, or “the will in itself, of which [each empirical character] is the determined phenomenon” (287; Janaway, *SI* 88).²⁶ The intelligible character is therefore an act of will residing “outside time and change” (Stinchcombe 38; Janaway, *SI* 50; *WWRI* 296). The result of this is that, being an act of the universal will, which is thing-in-itself, the intelligible character can never be an object for a subject, as it is in effect the only subject possible (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 175; Janaway, *SI* 50-51). It can only ever be known *a posteriori* from the deeds of the empirical character (Stinchcombe 40), requiring “time to unfold itself and show the very diverse aspects which it may possess” (Schopenhauer, *HN* 125). Self-knowledge, or knowing one’s worldly “individual” character, arises from observing one’s own deeds (Stinchcombe 39). Being armed with adequate knowledge as to what causes pain, suffering and frustration, and being able to predict adequately how one would respond to certain conditions, make it possible to avoid unpleasant situations (41). But humans are not presented with self-knowledge; they have to obtain it “through contact with the world” and subjecting their experiences to “reflection” (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 303 and 305).

²⁵ Schopenhauer uses the word “motive” to refer to “a representation in the conscious mind” that causes a body to act (Janaway, *SI* 44). These include threats, dangers, promises, etc. (Schopenhauer, *FW* 5). The strongest motives are survival, nourishment and reproduction (Janaway, *SI* 48).

²⁶ In the essay “Character” in *On Human Nature*, Schopenhauer also uses the term “character in action” to describe this concept (92).

Given that the empirical character expresses the intelligible character, self-knowledge appears to be relatively easy. But the true self (as will) is not a part of the world of representation and objects. Being outside of time and space means that it lacks causality; it is not identified with a body or even an individual human being, given the nature of the will (Janaway, *SI* 50), and is therefore susceptible to deception as a result of the veil of *Mâyā* (Gray 29). Wishful thinking – and one’s desire not to recognise oneself as something that is void of “any special value”, as being a human is neither a good nor a dignified thing (Janaway, *SI* 92) – also serves to distort the “true reflection” of one’s character in the “mirror of life” (Stinchcombe 41; Schopenhauer, *HN* 92). It is therefore possible to misjudge one’s own character, and to assume one would act in a given way under specific circumstances, only to be corrected by the “hard blows” of experience as one attempts to make one’s way in the world (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 304-5; Stinchcombe 41-42). Since predictions as to how one would behave may come awry, it is possible to be surprised by one’s own actions (41). It is only “through contact with the world” and through subjecting their experiences to critical reflection that people eventually gain acquired character, which is “the most complete possible knowledge of our own individuality” (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 303-305). With acquired character comes an understanding of “the unalterable qualities of our own empirical character” and of all the strengths and weaknesses “of our own individuality”, including “mental and bodily powers” (305). After stating that individual characters are unalterable and that every person must always “appear [consistently] like himself” without the need for acquired character gained “through experience and reflection”, Schopenhauer immediately poses the question as to whether there is a point to gaining an acquired character (303). He explains that even though “the tendencies to all the human aspirations and abilities” are apparent in everyone:

[...] and although a man is always the same, he does not always understand himself, but often fails to recognize himself until he has acquired some degree of real self-knowledge. As a mere natural tendency, the empirical character is itself irrational; indeed its expressions are in addition disturbed by the faculty of reason [...]. For these always keep before him what belongs to *man in general* as the character of the species, and what is possible for him both in willing and doing.

(Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 303)

Without scrutinizing and carefully considering their deeds and what these reveal about their individual characters, people end up like “children at a fair” who snatch at “everything that fascinates [them] in passing” – ultimately grasping nothing – because they falsely assume

that they have the capacity or potential to succeed because other people have (303). But to accomplish something substantial and to succeed, one should pursue a goal that can be achieved by virtue of one's individual character and its particular qualities, renouncing those pursuits which seem to be within our reach purely because these "are in the reach of '*man in general*'" (Stinchcombe 44; emphasis in original). Acquired character is therefore important as it enables people to apply their knowledge of themselves to practical problems.

This practical application of acquired character brings four main benefits. First, by indicating the ends that are "feasible" and "suitable" for individual characters, it enables people to focus their attention "on areas where [their] talent lies and avoid things for which [they] have no natural aptitude" (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 304-305). Secondly, by knowing their strengths and weaknesses, people are able to plan direct paths by which to reach those ends best suited for them, rather than having to wander aimlessly like a "will-o'-the-wisp" (303). Thirdly, the distinct knowledge acquired about the "unalterable role" of their character means that people will manifest their true nature through their deeds "without hesitation, without inconsistencies" (305). The final benefit is hedonic – it allows people to "escape in the surest way" the "bitterest of all sufferings, dissatisfaction with ourselves", to the extent that self-dissatisfaction is not an ingrained part of their character (307). Acquired character therefore enhances a person's innate individuality, and is necessary for worldly satisfaction and self-fulfilment, but it is incapable of altering one's character, as this is innate and unchangeable (Stinchcombe 47; Schopenhauer, *FW* 51-2). As character is unchangeable, it follows that virtue cannot be taught (Schopenhauer, *BM* 190-191; *WWRI* 58, 84, 86, 361-62, 367-8; *WWR2* 600; and *PP2* 203-204). The intelligible character's metaphysical nature makes it impervious to moral instruction, as "willing cannot be taught" (Schopenhauer, *PP2* 238) and qualities of goodness and badness are to be found in the "heart" and "not in the head" (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 239). Knowledge is impotent when it comes to moral improvement (Stinchcombe 48):

That is why a man may have weak reasoning powers and a weak understanding and yet have a high sense of morality and be eminently good; for the most important element in a man depends as little on intellectual as it does physical strength.

(Schopenhauer, *HN* 111)

"Moral character," as Schopenhauer occasionally calls it, is a function of individual character, and refers to each person's capacity for good and evil (Schopenhauer, *HN* 91;

WWR2 236). Every human deed, Schopenhauer argues, can be attributed to one of the “*three fundamental incentives* of human actions” (*BM* 145; emphasis in original) – egoism, malice and compassion (Stinchcombe 47; Janaway, *SI* 98).

Egoism – the seeking of one’s own well-being – accounts for the bulk of human character and is so prevalent that, without the juridical laws of state, Schopenhauer maintains that humanity would engage in *bellum omnium contra omnes* – an all-encompassing war (Janaway, *SI* 98-99). At one extreme, malice is a disinterested attempt to increase the woe of another, although cruel and wicked actions need not arise from “malice proper” and often spring from a combination of incentives (Janaway, *SI* 98; Singh 37-38). Actions arising from malice – albeit despicable – and self-interest, Schopenhauer argues, have no moral value.²⁷ Compassion, at the other extreme, is the seeking of another’s well-being or the alleviation of another’s woe, resulting from the recognition that the distinction between the self and the other is illusory, and forms the only basis of an action of moral worth (Janaway, *SI* 97-100).²⁸ This view once again illustrates the strong affinity between Schopenhauer’s philosophy and Buddhism and Brahmanism. The ethical system of the *Upanishads* is also concerned with subjective interpretations of moral action, attributing less importance to their external results (Deussen 365). The moral value of actions is to be measured in relation to the greatness of personal sacrifice and the actor’s consciousness of the greatness thereof (364). As a result of these considerations, what is important is the degree of self-denial (“*tapas*”) in relation to the degree of self-renunciation (“*nyāsa*”) exhibited in any action, whether it is of great, little or absolutely no value to others (364). Schopenhauer’s affinities with this thought are acknowledged as he adopts one of the most famous *mahavakyas* as his ethical tenet: *Tat tvam asi* (“You are that”) – which he understands as affirming the desirability of true compassion and supporting his philosophy of the illusion of plurality (Easwaran 25; see Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 220, 355, 374; *WWR2* 600; *PP2* 219, 373).²⁹

Each of these fundamental incentives is “present in everyone in different and incredibly unequal proportions” (Schopenhauer, *BM* 192), implying that moral natures depend on the “unique combination of the three basic moral incentives” (Atwell, qtd. in Stinchcombe 47). Moral teachings, culture, and acquired character are therefore “of

²⁷ This observation will be used as the foundation for Chapter Two, in which the atrocious deeds committed by Peter Ivanovitch in *UWE* and Colonel Joll in *WB* are shown to have no moral value as a result of their incentives, in order to counter the Swedish Academy’s assertion that the difference between right and wrong is “crystal clear” (“PR” para. 3).

²⁸ This conception of compassion underlies the argument that the narrators of *UWE* and *WB* could be read as narrative rehearsals of Schopenhauerian ethics presented in Chapter Three.

²⁹ A *mahavakya* is a “great truth” in Brahmanism and Buddhism (Easwaran 25).

importance not so much for ethics proper as for life in the world” (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 307), as each combination of incentives is fixed and unchangeable.

Julian Young has labelled Schopenhauer’s assertion that “philosophy can never ‘guide conduct’” a “dispiriting claim” and questions “why one should take the trouble to read Book IV [of *WWRI*] at all” (159). But Young appears to misinterpret Schopenhauer’s contextual use of the term “conduct”. Schopenhauer’s argument is levelled against one of the “old claims” of philosophy – that it can “transform character” (*WWRI* 271). In this context, “conduct” is used to refer to *moral* conduct which supervenes upon character and is “fixed and incorrigible” (Stinchcombe 49). If one hoped to change one’s character – the individual will and the combination of moral incentives – by reading philosophy, it would be a wasted effort. What Schopenhauer maintains, and what Young, as a result of attacking terms out of context fails to recognise, is that one can change one’s knowledge of one’s character, which could in turn lead to modification of one’s behaviour. In this sense, “conduct” – meaning behaviour, or how we act, in the same sense as Young uses it in his criticism of Schopenhauer’s position – can be changed by knowledge (Stinchcombe 49). Possibly the most pressing reason to gain acquired character is that it enables people to avoid performing deeds that they would later regret and repent of, as they discover “more accurate” information and “corrected knowledge” about their intelligible character (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 296). Repentance is more than regretting the “choice of means” to achieve an end, but extends to “what is properly ethical” (296). It is possible, Schopenhauer argues, as a result of the “capacity to think,” that a “man can present to himself the motives whose influence on his will he feels in any order” and to deliberate, considering a variety of abstract motives, which “try out repeatedly, against one another, their effectiveness on the will” (*FW* 36-37). The decidedly strongest motive “drives the others from the field and determines the will. This outcome is called resolve” (37). It is therefore also possible, through the process of deliberation, for counter-motives – such as the threat of punishment for criminal actions – to outweigh a motive, in which case an idea penetrates the intellect (the “organ” of “the authentic man” or moral agent) “from the outside and becomes a motive” (100-101). A man with a predisposition to steal, for example, may realise that it is not in his best interest to do so, and be able prudently to refrain from committing robbery (see Stinchcombe 49-50). In this case, the would-be-criminal is “acting out of his character” (Schopenhauer, *FW* 44), but his restraint results from self-interest, and it therefore has no moral value. Likewise, it is possible for one who lacks self-knowledge to mistakenly act against the fixity of their moral

character, acting “more [or less] egoistically than is in accordance” with their character (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 296).

It is only the individual who knowingly acts in the interest of others regardless of his or her own desires – the person whose actions are motivated by true compassion – whose actions are of any worth. Any value to moral and ethical choices are greatly limited in scope, as even those who act out of malice – even those who may be considered pure evil – are but hapless slaves to the indefatigable impulses of the will. Schopenhauer’s ethical system certainly denies that there is any “divine spark in man”, as the Swedish Academy asserts (“PR” para. 3). If analogies of flame are to be drawn, then perhaps the best Schopenhauerian philosophy and ethics have to offer is the rapidly fading glow of a cooling coal – the promise of a joyful annihilation and an end to this cursed life.

Knowles and Stinchcombe maintain that these Schopenhauerian meditations on character seem to have engaged Joseph Conrad’s creative attention. I would further argue that establishing similarities between Coetzee’s work and a Conradian text – a strategy necessitated by the parallels already drawn in the statements made by the Swedish Academy that I am countering – could be a productive exercise to establish manifestations of similar concerns in *WB*. What would be needed is a way to examine the interplay between Schopenhauerian philosophy and the characterization and narrative techniques used in *WB* and *UWE*, to show whether it is valid to consider Schopenhauerian ethics (which holds that there is a degree of value inherent in ethical action, as described above) as being present in the primary texts.

Section Five – An Approach to the Destruction of Dreams: Avoiding the Over-Interpretation of the Ethical in Texts

A potential pitfall for this thesis, made glaringly obvious by its title as well as the lengthy exposition of Schopenhauerian thought, is this: Arthur Schopenhauer is *principally* a *philosopher* whose prose is very seductive. He regularly refers to literary works by Shakespeare and Goethe to illustrate his arguments – arguments which in turn are infused with such a caustic sense of wit that even the most philosophical are relatively accessible to the amateur pundit. Schopenhauer’s *magnum opus* is nothing if not epic in scale and his philosophy creates the impression of being all-encompassing. In the collections of essays translated by T. Bailey Saunders which were, according to Owen Knowles, widely accessible

as a result of the saturation of “Schopenhaueriana” (Knowles’s term) throughout Europe in the late 1800s (see 78–80), the philosopher even expresses his views on literature:

What an inestimable boon it would be, if in every branch of literature there were only a few books, but those excellent! This can never happen, as long as money is to be made by writing. [...] [E]very author degenerates as soon as he begins to put pen to paper in any way for the sake of gain. [...] But even though the number of those who really think seriously before they begin to write is small, extremely few of them think about the subject itself. [...] A man who is in want sits down and writes a book, and the public is stupid enough to buy it.

(Schopenhauer, “Authorship” 13-14)

His views on criticism are equally amusing:

The following brief remarks on the critical faculty are chiefly intended to show that, for the most part, there is no such thing. [...] The disastrous thing for intellectual merit is that it must wait for those to praise the good who have themselves produced nothing but what is bad. [...] So even Shakespeare’s dramas had [...] to give place to those of Ben Jonson [and] Kant’s serious philosophy was crowded out by the nonsense of Fichte, Schelling, Jacobi, Hegel. [...] For, say what you will, the public has no sense for excellence.

(Schopenhauer, “Criticism” 63-65)

Critics who believe that these statements suggest that their role, no matter how “disastrous” it may be, is to distinguish between good and bad for the benefit of a hapless public “mistake their own toy-trumpets [*sic*] for the trombones of fame” (Schopenhauer, “Criticism” 64). It is with this scathing quotation that I would like to turn attention to my penny-whistle. Stanley Fish questions whether it is possible for literary studies to be immediately engaged with pressing political issues such as oppression, racism, terrorism, violence against women and homosexuals, cultural imperialism, and so on (*PC* 1). He does not doubt that literary critics have something valuable to contribute to discussions on these topics, but expresses the concern that as long as their contributions are from within the accepted practices of literary criticism, these will lack political effectiveness (1). His view is that the moment contributions are afforded a degree of import, they are no longer considered literary criticism (1). As a result, he argues, literary critics are not organic intellectuals in the Gramscian sense, but are specialists defined and limited by the traditions of a craft, and it is a condition of this craft that they remain removed from any effort to work changes in social structures (1).

But is this a bad thing?

When asked why his films were not concerned with important social issues, Samuel Goldwyn answered: “If I wanted to send a message, I’d use Western Union” (qtd. in Fish, *PC*

2). John Crowe Ransom once stated that he found it “atrocious” for an English department “to abdicate its own self-respecting identity” by failing to establish and defend “the peculiar constitution and structure of its product” (qtd. in Fish, *PC* 16). English, he reportedly “thundered” (Fish, *PC* 16): “might almost as well announce that it does not regard itself as entirely autonomous, but as a branch of the department of history, with the option of declaring itself occasionally a branch of the department of ethics” (Ransom 335). The argument here seems to be that in order for English to earn the respect of other disciplines, it should be, or at least be able to present itself as being, distinctive (Fish, *PC* 17). I agree with Valentine Cunningham, who says that denying theory any absolute innovativeness does not amount to denigrating it (39) – but what is needed is an approach that reasserts the primacy of the literary material being studied. It seems that it is a scholar of literature’s ethical responsibility to concentrate on the value of the texts being studied in their own right and on their own terms. A desirable approach to my thesis needs to investigate ways in which and the degrees to which texts engage with Schopenhauerian philosophy – regardless of whether they affirm or reject its tenets – and not the ways in which the texts can be used to validate the philosophy. The *primary texts* and *not the philosophies* are the “authorities” against which any claims I make must be measured. It is reasonable, then, for this current study to treat Schopenhauerian philosophical pessimism – which was used to discuss and evaluate topics such as music and painting, love and matrimony, theatre and politics (73) – as a set of texts espousing an ideology, in the Russian sense of the word. It is simply an “idea-system” (Holquist 429), regardless of how unpleasant its central theses may be, and, as such, legitimises the use of Bakhtinian literary theory.

In a deliberately provocative article, Gareth Cornwell calls for a “renewed and reinvigorated literary criticism” that moves away from the deconstructionism of Derrida and marks a return to hermeneutics (7-8). Hermeneutic practice, of which Wendell V. Harris describes the core activity as “the human endeavour to understand the intended meaning of verbal utterances and, more especially, written texts” (193), has become increasingly philosophical and tends to be associated with metaphysical questions about truth and reality. Heidegger, for instance, extends hermeneutics to include the interpretation of being (Harris 193-194). It is therefore important to clarify that the literary hermeneutics Cornwell calls for refers to the “intersubjective endeavour that locates meaning in the domain of human consciousness” (7). Reading literature, this understanding implies, “should be an open-minded and open-hearted, entirely empirical and always approximate endeavour, marked by tact, humility and reflection” (7). Unlike “pure” approaches, which focus on theories, so-

called because they do not “possess the authority of a truth claim”, Cornwell’s model reasserts the value of experience in the interpretative process (6). Returning a sense of dignity to the activity of reading by recognising the “authority of our own experience” over “some hypothesized determinism” (6), this approach falls in line with the functions of literature as defined by Umberto Eco (*OL* 2-4). Characteristically humorous, Eco states that literature should be read for its own sake and need not serve a greater purpose, but because he does not wish to be the person known for comparing the pleasures of literature to the pleasures of jogging, he adds that it keeps collective heritages and languages alive, and, by doing so, contributes to a sense of identity and community (2-4). For the sake of pragmatism, though, it should be noted that by no means does this view of the literary function imply some idealistic belief that it can in any way offer relief to the vast number of people who lack basic food and medicine (3) – such activities, as suggested earlier, are not considered to be within the ambits of literary criticism. It is also important to note that the importance of experience is tempered and policed by the word “empirical” in Cornwell’s formulation – it does not invite what Eco calls the “critical heresy” according to which we can read into a literary work “whatever our most uncontrolled impulses dictate to us” (3). Empirical, textual support is a prerequisite.

Cornwell proceeds to summarize the features that he suggests would characterize a reinvigorated critical approach (9-10). I have had the audacity to manipulate these in order to define the parameters of the critical approach I intend to adopt, presenting elements of theory as possible “answers” or “solutions” to the challenges each parameter sets. I have drawn extensively from Eco’s approaches toward literary studies – with references to *The Open Work*; his 1990 Tanner Lectures reprinted in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*; and *The Limits of Interpretation* – and will deploy these in conjunction with strategies suggested by Gabriele Helms, whose studies in cultural narratology and dialogism have been widely praised in narratological circles (Nünning 62). Helms argues that narrative techniques are “formal means of inscribing socio-cultural experiences” and, as such, cannot be “timeless ideal types [...] in ready-to-use systems” (21). Rather, they are historically determined (21). Analysing textual practices, as these are socially constructed and result from “complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by the relations of power that implicate writer, reader, and text” (Lanser, qtd. in Helms 21), provides an understanding of historically determined moral conflicts, world views and habits of thought (21). The “semanticization [*sic*] of narrative forms” (Nünning 63) enables literary and cultural historians wishing to address the ethical, ideological and political issues expressed in specific narratives to “profit from the application of the toolbox that narratology provides” (63), as

context and form, content and narrative technique are more closely intertwined than structural narratologists have previously asserted. The results of techniques such as those Helms advocates take both thematic and formal features of texts into account, and examine “the ways in which epistemological, ethical and social problems” are articulated in the forms of narrative representations (63).

After identifying Schopenhauerian philosophy as an ideology, it seems the logical choice to subject the ideas of the “Destroyer of Dreams” to the scrutiny of theories espoused by Mikhail Bakhtin – especially given that questions of ethics and moral responsibility were at the forefront of his early writings in 1920 and again in his later essays (Helms 40-41). Helms identifies Bakhtin’s conception of dialogism (although Bakhtin never used this form of the word himself) as a framework that can be used in conjunction with cultural narratology, which itself provides adequate descriptive tools that enable cultural analyses to “attend to the tools and strategies that are characteristic of narratives” (Nünning, qtd. in Helms 22). Subject positions in dialogic relations, unlike what is suggested by liberal readings of Bakhtin, are inscribed along a “vertical social axis” (43), meaning that dialogic relations inevitably operate along implicit principles of domination and subordination (43-44). Bakhtin’s ideas expressed in “Discourse in the Novel” – with a particular focus on the utterance, dialogism and characterization – resonate with arguments by Knowles and Stinchcombe that it is Schopenhauer’s meditations on character that seem to have engaged Conrad’s creative attentions most rigorously. Bakhtin’s theories therefore offer a viable way to examine the interplay between dialogism (using Schopenhauer’s pessimism as an ideological system rather than as a philosophy), characterization and narrative techniques in *WB* and *UWE* called for at the end of Section Four above.

Cornwell’s precepts begin with an enjoinder that “literary text[s] should in the first instance be honoured as a speech act, an act of human communication, and read so as to attempt to ascertain the author’s intended meaning” (9). The speech act, according to Bakhtinian definitions, comprises specifically social, historical, concrete and dialogised utterances that contribute to polyglossia and stratification (Holquist 428-31). Every word and discourse betrays the ideology of its speaker (429) – meaning that an approach treating the text as a speech act makes it possible to access the ideologies represented in a text – whether these are socially dominant, obscure or abhorred.

But to suggest that an author’s intentions should be considered during interpretation seems at first anathema. W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley’s famous (if not notorious) article, “The Intentional Fallacy”, introduced what John Ellis describes as “one of the best-

explored theoretical topics” (97) to date. Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that authors are not the best judges of their work due to their closeness to the text, and that texts communicate through the public – not private – conventions of language (6-8; 10-12). “Critical inquiries,” they conclude, “are not settled by consulting the oracle” (18). Cornwell labels this a “straw man argument”, as attempting to establish an implied author’s intention is not to argue that that intention is in fact discoverable, nor that it exhausts all the possibilities of the text’s meaning, or the text’s ability to create and communicate meaning (Personal Correspondence, 22 August 2015). Similarly, at no point in this thesis am I implying that either the biographical Coetzee or the biographical Conrad deliberately consulted Schopenhauerian writings while composing their texts. What I am suggesting, however, is that the final products do not exclude – and could perhaps even invite – Schopenhauerian interpretations, given their respective engagement with pessimistic ideologies. My position adopts Cornwell’s, and concurs with Eco’s response to the intentional fallacy, in which he argues that when a text is produced for a community of readers:

[T]he author knows that he or she will be interpreted not according to his or her intentions but according to a complex strategy of interactions which also involves the readers, along with their competence in language as a social treasury.

(Eco, *IO* 67)

An author is aware of the potential of multiple interpretations of the work, and thus constructs the text in such a way as to limit and restrict these, to varying degrees, by utilizing what Eco describes as the “intention of the text” (Eco, *IO* 25). This concept and, by extension, the position I adopt in my argument, locates ultimate authority within the text.

Noël Carroll’s “modest actual intentionalism” describes a model that accommodates both Eco’s concerns for the rights of the text, and Bakhtin’s dialogical principle. Modest actual intentionalists argue that the only intentions expressed by the author to be taken seriously are those that the linguistic or literary unit (in other words, the text) can support, given linguistic and literary conventions (76). Where the linguistic unit can support multiple meanings, the only correct interpretations are those that are compatible with the author’s actual intention – if these have been expressed – provided that this is supportable by the language of the text (76).

The next two principles in my proposed model will be treated jointly. The appropriate way to read a text is in a writerly way (in other words, closely), and, while the text is the

primary source or object of enquiry, any extraneous information that could be used “in the hermeneutic or interpretative endeavour can and should be made use of” (Cornwell 9). René Wellek argues that the view that there is nothing outside of text, that every text refers or defers to another, ignores that texts – political, juridical, religious, philosophical, and even imaginative – have actually shaped the lives of men (43). Such theories deny the self and minimise the perceptual life of man (43). Evaluation – and, by extension, criticism – Bakhtin argues, never takes place in a void (Holquist 428). The novel, he contends, is the maximally complete register of all the social voices of an era, always contains more than one voice, and is therefore dialogized (430; 434). Dialogism implies that everything means and is understood as part of a greater whole, implying that the novel is a site where there is a constant interaction between meanings, each of which could potentially condition the others (426). External, contextualizing expressions of ideologies or authorial intentions then become valid and admissible evidence in a textual investigation, to the degree to which they can be supported, using modest actual intentionalism, and thus avoiding what Eco describes as “unlimited semiosis” (*IO* 8) – or the notion that any text has limitless potential readings. I believe the use of Schopenhauerian pessimism as an ideology that provides an “extratextual context”, as described in Section Two above, and the deployment of Helms’s narratological/Bakhtinian interpretative model effectively prevents unlimited, relativist readings.

The final injunction that I wish to adapt from Cornwell’s article is a cautionary one – one that, if strictly adhered to, should ensure that my study remains within the acceptable parameters of literary studies, and is reminiscent of concerns raised by Richard Freadman and Seamus Miller in their sub-section entitled “Reading for the Ethical” (87-90): “To use a literary text for a purpose other than that for which it was intended *without first reading it in the way adumbrated above is abusive and unethical*” (Cornwell 9; emphasis added).

Chapter Two:

The Meaning of Humanity: The Feminist, the Soldier, and Humiliation³⁰

Section One - Introduction

Now that a methodological model and a theoretical paradigm have been described, the first counterargument I wish to present is to problematize the Swedish Academy's assertion that the difference between morally right and wrong action is "crystal clear" ("PR" para. 3). To do so, this chapter will explore ways in which atrocious behaviour can be considered to be morally neutral. In parallel with the recurring tendency in the fictional works of J. M. Coetzee for protagonists to "derive strength from being stripped of all external dignity" (Swedish Academy, "PR" para. 10) is a recurring process through which the loss of dignity is sustained. Hania Nashef convincingly argues that one of the most consistent themes in Coetzee's fiction is that of humiliation – an action or condition that is imposed by an external agent, and that at once humbles, alienates, and shames whoever falls victim to it (1). In the earlier novels, including *WB*, humiliation is induced by external forces, such as agents of a political regime, which are too powerful for individuals to oppose effectively, while the later novels (most obviously, *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*) identify the undesired process of aging or of accidental physical disability as its causes (1).

Schopenhauer's philosophy recognizes that pain, degradation and despair – and, implicitly, humiliation – offer individuals an alternative route to the "high road to salvation" (Lewis 162).³¹ According to Schopenhauer, extreme suffering is exemplified by the lives of Christian saints and the holy men of the Hindu and Buddhist faiths (Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 383). A person who has fallen victim to excruciating hardships, he argues, renounces the world and eliminates all forms of desire in order to avoid further suffering, assuming that they do not deliberately end their own life (an action Schopenhauer condemns) (Lewis 162). Consequently, this person leads a life marked by the same asceticism and chastity attendant on knowledge of the Veil of *Mâyâ* (162). As Schopenhauer explains:

³⁰ The magistrate uses these words in his description of the tortures he endures at the hands of Warrant Officer Mandel and his colleagues: "They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity, and in the space of an hour they showed me a great deal" (Coetzee, *WB* 126).

³¹ As explained in Chapter One, knowledge that pierces the Veil of *Mâyâ*, recognizing that the world is mere representation and thus quieting the will to life, leads the individual to the blissful annihilation of salvation. Schopenhauer recognized the difficulty inherent in attaining this salvation, and so offered a worldly way of approaching it in the essays collected in *PP* volumes 1 and 2.

Nothing can distress or alarm him any more [*sic*]; nothing can any longer move him; for he has cut all the thousand threads of willing which hold us bound to the world, and which as craving, fear, envy, and anger drag us here and there in constant pain. He now looks back calmly and with a smile on the phantasmagoria of this world which was once able to move and agonize even his mind, but now stands before him as indifferently as chess-men at the end of a game, or as fancy dress cast off in the morning, the form and figure of which disquieted us on the carnival night. Life and its forms merely float before him as a fleeting phenomenon, as a light morning dream to one half-awake, through which reality already shines, and which can no longer deceive; and, like this morning dream, they too finally vanish without any violent transition.

(Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 390-91)

While this passage is, as Lewis describes it, “beautiful” (162), it is not comforting. Its poeticism, as is the case with most Schopenhauerian writing, disguises the bleakness of its vision, which “ends with a negation” (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 612).³² It also distracts from the “unpleasant emotions [...] shame and embarrassment” (Miller ix), not to mention the pain, endured before the requisite state of resignation is reached. As Ian Miller maintains, even though the chivalric code of honour is no longer an “official ideology”, its ethic still survives “in pockets of most all our lives” (9). This arises from the fact that people generally know how to act “as proper socialized beings” (4), and specifically try to avoid actions and situations in which they may feel awkward or embarrassed as a result of falling foul of “social disciplining” and ostracism (3). While the passage quoted above implies that according to Schopenhauer’s teachings there is value inherent in removing oneself from a social context, Miller’s arguments imply that most of what people do is done in the natural hope of avoiding exactly such a removal.

Miller’s conception of humiliation originates in his studies of the representation of heroic society in Icelandic sagas, which he has since expanded to include considerations of “the discomfitures [which] plague us in even [the] most conventional of social structures” (ix). His definition of humiliation is broader than the one posited by Nashef, who constructs his according to the entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Miller defines humiliation as one of the “richest emotions” (2) which is deployed as a tool of ostracism, derision and “social disciplining” (3) through various tactics: ignoring someone; verbal put-downs; interruptions; answering questions with dismissively short answers; and excessively using a person’s name

³² In other words, Schopenhauer’s philosophy assumes “a *negative* character” as it can only speak of “what is denied or given up; but what is gained in place of this [...] it is forced [...] to describe as nothing” (*WWR2* 612; emphasis in original). The consolation Schopenhauer offers is that this is “merely a relative, not an absolute, nothing” (612).

in direct address, or not using it at all (3). The threat of being humiliated is thus constant, even in the most routine of social interactions (x). Most socially competent people easily negotiate such exchanges, emerging with their honour and self-esteem intact (x). Miller's definition is valuable to this study as it rejects masochism and torture as providing the paradigm for humiliation: humiliation *in extremis* – that found in death camps and interrogation rooms (or in the repurposed barracks of *WB*) – is recognised as a perversion of the usual forms of humiliation in everyday social interaction, rather than the other way round (10).

By adopting Miller's definition, it becomes possible to investigate humiliation in Joseph Conrad's *UWE* – the novel the Swedish Academy identified as sharing the metaphysical malaise of *WB* (Swedish Academy, "PR" para. 6). This is relevant as it enables a significant point of intersection with Schopenhauerian philosophy – which, as explained in the previous chapter, is a common lens through which critics approach Conradian texts.

An important implication in Miller's definition of humiliation is the notion that people act in such a way as to avoid it, because, simply put, the respect and regard that actions elicit from others are important to an individual's self-esteem and sense of worth (Miller ix; 4; 11; 175). Schopenhauer similarly recognises that the opinion of others is important, listing it as one of the three "fundamental qualifications" that "establishes the difference in the lot of mortals" (*PPI* 315). Herein lies the power of the State. Like Hobbes, Schopenhauer argues that laws should be geared toward the repression of the negative effects of humanity's natural egoism by meting out punishments and penalties that make the pursuit of certain self-interested behaviours (such as theft or slavery) seem less desirable (Cartwright, *NS* 271-72):

If in men, as they are in most cases, the good outweighed the bad, it would be more advisable to rely on their justice, fairness, gratitude, fidelity, love, or compassion than on their fear. But since the bad outweighs the good, the opposite course is more advisable.

(Schopenhauer, *PPI* 453)

Fear of reprimand or of legal sanction are only two of the fears tempering self-interested pursuits. The other, perhaps more powerful fear, is founded in the idea that public opinion starts from a fundamental principle: "*Operari sequitur esse*" (Schopenhauer, *BM* 122).³³ Schopenhauer speaks of a natural conviction in the unalterable nature of character and that what a person has once done will inevitably be repeated under precisely the same

³³ "What we do follows from what we are" (Payne's translation; qtd. in Schopenhauer, *BM* 122).

circumstances (*BM* 123). Quoting Timon, he says that “there is nothing either good or bad, but human opinion has made the difference” (*BM* 122).³⁴ Because of these convictions, which Schopenhauer reduces to the claim that “moral character is unalterable”, honour, once lost, “cannot be recovered unless the loss had rested on a mistake or a false view of things” (*PPI* 363). According to him: “Whoever breaks trust and faith has for ever lost trust and faith, whatever he may do and whoever he may be, and the bitter fruits, entailed in this loss, will not fail to come” (Schopenhauer, *PPI* 363). Ascribing all just and lawful acts to any moral origin is thus the sign of an “inexperienced simpleton” who is “greatly and childishly mistaken” (*BM* 122). One should rather realise that people are mostly self-interested, and that the reason why they restrain themselves is simply because the humiliation and ostracism that would result from their pursuing their true desires would deprive them of future benefits.

The above similarities between Schopenhauer and Miller’s views suggest that it is possible to examine and critique acts of humiliation with reference to the Schopenhauerian conception of moral incentives, explained in Chapter One, in order to identify and evaluate the ethics of the agents responsible for such acts.³⁵ By looking at those figures responsible for inflicting humiliation on others, this chapter focuses on the actions of the principal antagonists. A commonplace assumption would be that, if there are indeed immoral or morally dubious acts portrayed in a text as “crystal clear” (Swedish Academy, “PR” para. 3), these would be committed by those in obvious opposition to and conflict with the protagonists. In so doing, this chapter intends to show that such actions are neither in *WB* nor *UWE* are such actions obvious and that, consequently, the view expressed by the Academy is reductive.

Both Miller and Schopenhauer’s contentions closely resemble Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “lateral transgression” (*PD* 311), which, as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan summarises it (90), refers to the “need of the self to be authored and the need for one’s acts to be authorized”:

³⁴ Shakespeare’s Hamlet expresses the same view to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern when he says: “...for there is nothing / either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (*Hamlet* 2.2.247-248). Schopenhauer frequently lists Shakespeare, along with Goethe, as an intellectual worthy of critical attention.

³⁵ Pages 30-32 above.

The most important acts, constitutive of self-consciousness, are determined by their relation to another consciousness [...]. To be means to communicate. [...] Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself he looks in the eyes of the other or through the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception). [...] I receive my name from the other.

(Bakhtin, *PD* 311-12)

Self-perception, then, is constituted by the perception of the other (Erdinast-Vulcan 90). Bakhtin's conception of "lateral transgradience" is not only commensurate with humiliation and Schopenhauer's emphasis on public perceptions, but is also a useful tool to evaluate the disconcerting effect that Peter Ivanovitch, the feminist revolutionary of *UWE*, and Colonel Joll, the high ranking officer of *WB*'s Empire's Third Bureau, have on the other characters with whom they interact.

This chapter will consider ways in which Ivanovitch and Joll are equally agents of humiliation, using Miller's broader definition of the concept. Schopenhauer's empirical notions of morality – which maintain that ethics are voluntary (as opposed to their prescriptive nature according to Kant's categorical imperatives), descriptive and virtue-based (Cartwright, *NS* 263; see Schopenhauer, *BM* 68, 75, 138) – will be used to comment on the ethicality of each character's actions as figures who humiliate others and to show that this is anything but "crystal clear" (Swedish Academy, "PR" para. 3).

In keeping with Noël Carroll's "modest actual intentionalism" and Eco's argument that the ultimate interpretative authority is located within a text, it should be noted that I consider neither Colonel Joll nor Peter Ivanovitch human.³⁶ Rather, using the technical definitions supplied by narratology, they are existents – actors usually designated by the subject or object of sentences – endowed with anthropomorphic traits, engaged in anthropomorphic actions, to which readers ascribe anthropomorphic attributes (Prince 12, 28). Characters are, as Mieke Bal explains (114-15), effects of the text which occur as a result of being endowed with distinctively human characteristics. While they are complex semantic units resembling real people, they have no real psyche, personality, ideology or competence to act and often inspire psychological criticism and fallacious projection (115). It is with this in mind, rather than from any misplaced formalism, that I intend to delimit and restrict my commentary to those facts presented or supported by "the *actual* words of the text" (116;

³⁶ Modest actual intentionalism and Eco's "intention of the text" (*IO* 25) are discussed in detail in Chapter One, Section Five.

emphasis in original). This check is crucial, as characters are frequently described in terms strongly coloured by the critic's personal ideology and are attacked or defended as if they were real people that critics like or dislike (118).

I do not claim that I shall be able completely to divorce my discussion from the fact that I like neither Joll nor Ivanovitch, nor from the fact that I consider both morally repugnant (Ivanovitch more so than Joll, as I feel that Joll's despicableness is redeemed – albeit only slightly – by the fact that he is not as much of a hypocrite). By imposing these limitations on myself, I hope to be able to conduct the discussion rationally, and in such a way as to make my findings relevant to all readers of the primary texts, without overlooking the fact that each reader brings a unique frame of reference to bear on them (see Bal 118-19).³⁷

Section Two – “I hope that she won't hesitate to beat him”: The Case of Peter Ivanovitch³⁸

After reading *UWE* for the first time, one of Joseph Conrad's most trusted readers, Edward Garnett, accused the author of having poured his hatred of Russia into his portrayal of the Russian exiles (Luyat 41). Garnett was not the only contemporary critic to make such a remark, and the novel was soon labelled as decidedly “anti-Russian” (Najder 119). Yet in 1912 it became the first of Conrad's novels to be translated into Russian, and it proved so popular that a new translation was issued in 1925, eight years after the Bolshevik Revolution (119). The translated *UWE* was well received, and Conrad was repeatedly praised for his insight into “Russian realities” and for “his psychological perspicacity” (120). The relationship between autocracy and revolution that Conrad stresses, and which he portrays as being obscure to Western eyes, is, as Andrzej Busza argues, nothing new to Russians themselves (110). What seems to have coloured many of the critiques of *UWE* by Western critics is Conrad's passionate and delving 1905 essay, “Autocracy and War”, which presents a vision of countless lives subjugated by imperialist Russia (Melnick 232). Encouraged by the 1904 “humiliation of Russia” by Japan – before then an unconsidered Eastern power – the essay is written with a violence, intensity and one-sidedness that shocked many of the

³⁷ In relation to the interpretation of characters, Bal describes the “frame of reference” as “that section of reality [referred to as] the outside world” to which a reader refers in order to compensate for a lack of information in the text (119). While the frame is never entirely the same for each reader, or for the reader and writer, it refers to “information that may, with some confidence, be called communal” (119).

³⁸ Conrad, *UWE* 289.

author's admirers (Crankshaw 100-102). Its public pronouncements make it clear that Conrad had no personal love for the Bear (Sawyer 196).

These pronouncements should not, however, be taken as the author's manifesto for his engagement with "the moral and emotional reactions of the Russian temperament to the pressure of tyrannical lawlessness" in *UWE* (Conrad, *UWE* 6). Conrad responded heatedly to Garnett in a letter dated 20 October 1911:

You are so russianised, my dear, that you don't know the truth when you see it – unless it smells of cabbage-soup when it at once secures your profoundest respect [...]. Or are you like the Italians (and most women) incapable of conceiving that anybody ever should speak with perfect detachment [...].
(Conrad, *CL4* 488-89)

Conrad may have been a Pole, but what is often forgotten, as Crankshaw reminds readers, is that he was, until 1886, also a Russian (92). In the "Author's Note" to *UWE* Conrad explains that his interest lies in an "attempt to render [...] the psychology of Russia itself" rather than in depicting its "political state" (Conrad, *UWE* 5). He argues that the "peculiar experience of [his] race and family" obliged him to "express imaginatively the general truth" underlying "Russian affairs" with "absolute fairness" (5). With the expressed intention of writing about the spirit of Russia, not drawing from "special experience but [from] general knowledge, fortified by earnest meditation" (5), Conrad did not present *UWE* as an analysis or description of the contemporary revolutionary actions and thoughts of Russian emigrés active in Geneva (who, at that time, included Lenin amongst its number) (Crankshaw 96). Rather than creating a cast of evil characters – as Garnett's criticism seems to suggest – Conrad formulates a Russia that is an arena of "tyrannical lawlessness, which, in general human terms, could be reduced to the formula of senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny" (Conrad, *UWE* 6). He sympathetically (although, as will be argued below, not without the irony typical in Conradian forewords) attributes the "existence" of his "various figures playing their part" to "general knowledge of the condition of Russia" (6). Peter Ivanovitch, Mme de S—, and Nikita Necator are identified as typical products of their backgrounds (Cox 102).

While a few critics such as Beth Sharon Ash accuse Conrad of "rhetorical violence" (278) because of his reduction of all Russians to sameness, the majority of critics argue that the characters in *UWE* are depicted as victims of the evils of autocracy (Crankshaw 98).³⁹

³⁹ An example of this "rhetorical violence" is Conrad's closing statement in his Author's Note that "[t]he oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together" (*UWE* 7).

Leo Gurko (449), Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan (108) and Anne Luyat (42-43) argue that the majority of *UWE* characters are rendered in a way that is “kindly ambiguous” (Luyat 42). Sophia Antonovna and Tekla are most frequently mentioned as figures of this nature. Gurko argues that the character portrayed as the “most faithful figure in the novel” (449) is not only Russian, but is a state official: police chief “His Excellency Gregory Gregorievitch Mikulin” (Conrad, *UWE* 234).⁴⁰ Mikulin is tried and convicted of unspecified crimes and sentenced to death by his “faithless masters” (Gurko 450). He falls prey to “one of those state trials which astonish and puzzle the average plain man” yet remains “dignified, with only a calm, emphatic protest of his innocence” (Conrad, *UWE* 234). Conrad describes his faithful refusal to disclose any information “damaging to a harassed autocracy” – despite his falling victim to “unsuspected intrigues” – as a demonstration of “complete fidelity” to his masters, as well as “a display of bureaucratic stoicism” (234). The narrative voice clearly ascribes this worthy’s downfall to the fact that: “the savage autocracy, no more than the divine democracy, does not limit its diet exclusively to the bodies of its enemies. It devours its friends and servants as well” (Conrad, *UWE* 234). Given Conrad’s claim to fairness in the “Author’s Note” and considering the sympathetic portrayal of Mikulin, his assertion that “[n]obody is exhibited as a monster here – neither the simple-minded Tekla nor the wrongheaded Sophia Antonovna” (Conrad, *UWE* 6) seems to counter claims, such as Garnett’s, that his Russian figures are expressions of a personal hatred of Russians.

But there is one figure for whom, as Jacques Berthoud suggests, the narrator harbours a “special aversion” (166).⁴¹ This figure is representative of “a morbid conscience” (Hay 27); a figure Irving Howe calls Conrad’s “unambiguous [...] peacock leader” of the Russian emigrés, represented with malice, even though “at least on the political side he is done full justice” (519): Peter Ivanovitch. In a moment of intensity, the English teacher of languages (the narrator) issues a declaration that critics such as Howe use to strengthen associations between the character’s political views and the author’s (518-19):

⁴⁰ Gurko calls Mikulin the “counter-espionage chief,” but I have used his designation as presented in the text (Conrad, *UWE* 235, 288).

⁴¹ The effects of narrative perspective are examined in detail in Chapter Three.

A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane and devoted natures; the unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement – but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims [...].

(Conrad, *UWE* 108)

This passage provides several clues as to why the figure of Peter Ivanovitch is often described as a mere caricature (e.g. Luyat 42; Melnick 238) or as a satirical treatment of political abstractions (Wallaeger 185): as a self-styled revolutionary leader and intellectual, he is the embodiment of all that the narrator finds wrong with violent political revolutions.⁴² Peter Ivanovitch therefore represents the narrator's "cold contempt for a certain species of humanity" (Cox 105) and not an indictment on Russians per se.

Conrad's "Author's Note" – written in 1920, and thus benefitting from knowledge of the criticisms levelled against *UWE* – adds further credence to claims that Ivanovitch is portrayed maliciously (Howe 519). While the reader is meant to believe that "[n]obody is exhibited as a monster" (Conrad, *UWE* 6), the claim is soon undermined by the statement that Ivanovitch and his benefactress, the ghoulish Mme de S—, are "fair game" (6). Conrad describes them as "apes of a sinister jungle" who are "treated as their grimaces deserve" (7). He continues to render his original claim dubious by stating that what "troubled him most" in dealing with Nikita (the double-agent who deafens Razumov) was his "banality" and not "his monstrosity" (7). Clearly, then, while Conrad may not have depicted his characters as obvious monsters, their "monstrosity" was certainly implicit.

Ivanovitch, as Cox (105), Melnick (238), Hay (283) and Ash (278-279) contend, is an amalgamation of historical revolutionary figures but is most explicitly modelled on the social anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (who, like Ivanovitch, escaped to the West after suffering incarceration at the hands of the Russian government). Bakunin's politics upheld what could be considered, for all its force as a rhetorical device, an empty credo: "the universal church of freedom" (Ash 279). Similarly, Ivanovitch elevates the idea of Russian womanhood to the level of a spiritual cult, ejaculating meaningless drivel such as "we have the Russian woman. The admirable Russian woman" (Conrad, *UWE* 97). In the narrator's recounting of Ivanovitch's biography, he describes how Ivanovitch attributes his liberation from a Siberian prison (97) to the "favour conferred" on him by a "feminine, indomitable soul" (99). A young

⁴² This claim will be clarified as the current discussion progresses.

lady gives Ivanovitch a file that was meant for her lover to make his escape when she learns that he has died. During his attempt to cut away the second of his fetters, Ivanovitch drops and loses this file (98). Reduced to a naked, filthy brute – a “primary savage” (99) – in the space of six weeks (100), Ivanovitch shies away from human contact for fear of being turned in to the nearest constabulary. He accidentally stumbles across a young woman who takes “profound pity” (100) on him. He is “restored to the ranks of humanity” (101) when the woman, who sheds “sacred, redeeming tears” (101) over him, discovers his “complex misery” (101). Spurred on by her “feminine compassion” (100), and thanks to providence (the passage makes it clear – although obviously tainted by a touch of the scorn and hostility the narrator reserves for Ivanovitch – that his escape was as a result of his having some divine, higher purpose), the young lady arranges that her blacksmith husband frees the “heroic fugitive” – a title bestowed on Ivanovitch by the reviewer of the English translation of his book (101-102). Ivanovitch is thus converted to and continues to espouse a “vague doctrine of revolt based on the cult of the woman” (Hay 283). Following the success of his first book, and his becoming a “world-wide celebrity” (Conrad, *UWE* 102), Ivanovitch becomes an ideologue of Russian feminism and is frequently referred to as “the great feminist” (173).

But while Bakunin’s credo was used in the relentless pursuit of a stateless society, it becomes apparent that Ivanovitch’s feminism is merely a tool of self-aggrandisement in both the individual and political realms (Ash 279). The English teacher of languages notices the self-serving nature of Ivanovitch’s actions. According to hearsay, he reports, Ivanovitch is “an industrious busy-body” who ensures that he is seen “conferring [...] the honour of his notice” on “compatriots” in “public gardens” (Conrad, *UWE* 102). His presence at the Haldin household, however, on his first appearance in the novel, is “an unwelcome visit” (102) precipitated, the narrator suggests, by media attention following Victor Haldin’s execution.

The narrator also presents a strikingly ambiguous vignette in which Peter Ivanovitch and “the galvanised corpse out of some Hoffman’s Tale” (168), the self-styled occultist Mme de S—, could either be interpreted as “extravagant parodies” (Berthoud 167) of fashionable thought leaders like “Voltaire and Mme de Staël” (Conrad, *UWE* 101), or as a wildly inappropriate, “shameless exposure” (Berthoud 167) of a perverted liaison:

Driving through the streets in her big landau she exhibited to the indifference of the natives and the stares of the tourists a long-waisted, youthful figure of hieratic stiffness, with a pair of big, gleaming eyes, rolling restlessly behind a short veil of black lace. [...] Usually the “heroic fugitive” [...] accompanied her, sitting, portentously bearded and darkly bespectacled, not by her side but opposite her, with his back to the horses. Thus facing each other, with no one else in the roomy carriage, their airings suggested a conscious manifestation. Or it may have been unconscious. [...] Considering the air of gravity extending even to the physiognomy of the coachman and the action of the showy horses, this quaint display might have possessed a mystic significance, but to the corrupt frivolity of a Western mind, like my own, it seemed hardly decent.

(Conrad, *UWE* 101-102)

The two revolutionaries are apparently keenly aware of the importance of maintaining appearances – not an unlikely interpretation given the centrality of the acts of observing and images of seeing found throughout the novel – but may be inadvertently revealing too much. Both display an awareness of the importance of the regard that their actions elicit from others (Miller ix, 4, 11, 175), although Ivanovitch seems to exploit this knowledge more keenly than his paramour, as these opinions translate into an improved “lot” for himself, as Schopenhauer maintains (*PPI* 315). Given the narrator’s enquiry of Sophia Antonovna as to whether Mme de S— eventually leaves all of her fortune to Ivanovitch when she dies, and the lack of surprised outrage with which Antonovna answers (Conrad, *UWE* 288), I would concur with Ash that this vignette reveals the extent to which the “great feminist” is a “sexual grifter” prepared to “shill” his patroness (281). It could be argued that this interpretation, as will be shown in the next chapter, is coloured by the bias of the narrator’s low opinion and personal dislike of Ivanovitch, and is therefore not a reliable way to read Ivanovitch’s motivations as a character – the interpretation of which the narrator is constantly at pains to identify as “a vain enterprise for sophisticated Europe to try and understand” (Conrad, *UWE* 102).

Ivanovitch’s top hat provides a further textual clue to the superficiality of the role that the great feminist has constructed for himself. As Berthoud argues, this fashionable accessory is frequently used as an icon of respectability in Conrad’s fiction (167), and yet, in *UWE*, it always seems to be in the way. Before the narrator meets Ivanovitch for the first time, the “tall silk hat” is “on the floor” next to its owner’s chair (Conrad, *UWE* 97). Shortly after the presentation of the vignette discussed above, Ivanovitch picks up his hat, “only to deposit it on his knees” (102). When the teacher of languages contemplates his belief that Natalia Haldin and Razumov are nothing more than “quarry” for the “heroic fugitive”, he prophetically visualizes Ivanovitch as “bareheaded” (133). Indeed, when Razumov is met by

Ivanovitch at the Château Borel, the “bared head of Europe’s greatest feminist” accentuates his “dubious status” in “the house rented by Mme de S—,” where he seems to occupy a liminal space: “[h]is aspect combine[s] the formality of the caller with the freedom of the proprietor” (160). Suggesting that he and Razumov “take a stroll”, Ivanovitch leaves his hat “upstairs on the landing” (160). The hat, either forgotten or deliberately abandoned, is mentioned as being “opposite the double door of the drawing room” (165), the location of Razumov’s first encounter with Mme de S—. This could suggest that there is no place for respectability where these particular revolutionaries meet. The nearly ubiquitous hat is always noticed when it is doing everything except conferring the dignity of which it is a metonym.

It is telling that Razumov, a figure whom readers must assume shares the “Russian simplicity” (102) of the revolutionaries as they are “all Russians together” (7), during this episode at the Château Borel, focalized through his perspective, not only notices the abandonment of the hat, but also considers Ivanovitch a figure “so odious that if he had had a knife, he fancied he could have stabbed him not only without compunction, but with a horrible, triumphant satisfaction” (163). Shortly after this insight, Ivanovitch reveals what Ash describes as a “nakedly avowed appetite for power” (281). In his arrogance, the “heroic fugitive” (Conrad, *UWE* 101) divides humanity into “the dregs of a people [...] which ought, *must* remain at the bottom” and an elite class of “nobility” (164; emphasis in original). These “dregs”, as Ash argues (280-81), are the middle classes and not the peasants (see Conrad, *UWE* 101). Ivanovitch seems to accept the impoverished masses simply because he considers them easy to manipulate, revealing an underlying contempt for the people he presumes – or, more accurately, pretends – to be saving (Ash 280). Furthermore, in the exchange with Razumov, Ivanovitch reveals himself as having a willingness to rationalize death and genocide. This willingness is a sign of Ivanovitch’s fascist mind set, and indicates that revolution, or, at least, his conception of it, is a “totalizing ideology” that suppresses all thoughts of a shared humanity (Ash 281).

["F]or us at the moment there yawns a chasm between the past and the future. It can never be bridged by foreign liberalism. All attempts at it are either folly or cheating. Bridged it can never be. It has to be filled up."

A sort of sinister jocularly had crept into the tones of the burly feminist. [...]

[Razumov] added that surely whole cartloads of words and theories could never fill that chasm. No meditation was necessary. A sacrifice of many lives alone ... He fell silent without finishing the phrase.

Peter Ivanovitch inclined his big, hairy head slowly.

(Conrad, *UWE* 165)

Ivanovitch's flair for the melodramatic and his many affectations become even more apparent shortly after this, when he constantly exclaims "Eleanor" (173) in an attempt to prevent Mme de S—, whom Razumov perceives as "a witch in Parisian clothes" (167), from emotionally exhausting herself as she considers the imperative of "extirpating" an entire "class in Russia" (173). The "Russian Mazzini" and his "Egeria" (167) – the sobriquets used by the narrator to describe the two revolutionists – have elevated themselves to such self-styled heights that their arrogance transforms them into figures representative of Razumov's earlier scornful words to Councillor Mikulin: "Visionaries work everlasting evil on earth" (79).

Tekla, Ivanovitch's long-suffering lady companion, provides perhaps the most damning indictment of the "great feminist", who has left her "disillusioned" (180). As Tekla tells Razumov, Ivanovitch "stands for everything" (180) – especially for the revolutionaries. Sophia Antonovna's final words in the novel not only echo this sentiment, but assist in undercutting the legitimacy of Ivanovitch as an ideologue. While she tells the narrator that "Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man" (289) in a "firm voice" (289), it is ironized by the fact that she has also just explained that he has moved back to Russia and "united himself to a peasant girl" (289) – a woman from the very caste he earlier so openly snubbed. Antonovna's revelation is a fine example of the Conradian technique of delayed decoding, which, in this instance, acts to undercut the Russian idealism and mysticism that he has represented throughout the novel by providing the narrative with an ironic gloss (Wallaeger 189; Busza 113). Tekla's condemnation of him, uttered on two separate occasions to fellow Russians Razumov and Natalia Haldin, reveals the superficiality of his devotion to the "cult of the woman" (Hay 283), and displays an inclination toward the Schopenhauerian ethical motive of malice.

While the narrative is at pains to impress upon the reader that public opinion regards Ivanovitch as a visionary thinker – he is "a 'heroic fugitive' of world-wide celebrity" (Conrad, *UWE* 102) – Tekla's accounts of her experiences with him reveal a "tyrannical author exploiting the labour of his amanuensis" (Wallaeger 185). Ivanovitch's use of dictation transforms the act of writing into a social activity (whereas Razumov's writing under the statue of Rousseau is intensely private), and his attempts to mechanise Tekla can therefore be interpreted as replicating the coerciveness apparent in his social interactions throughout the novel (185).

In a study on the interaction between the gaze and the inverse relationship between intimacy and power (which can be reduced to the observation that the more power one assumes by looking at someone who cannot look back, the less intimate the human contact

is), Jeremy Hawthorn illustrates how the dynamics at play between Ivanovitch and Tekla not only reveal the hypocrisy of the feminism Ivanovitch espouses, but also show his appetite for power and control over others (292-99). If, as Hawthorn maintains, looking at others allows others to look back, inviting a degree of intimacy (294), then it is telling that Ivanovitch actively attempts to control Tekla's eye movements. She explains how the "slightest movement [...] puts to flight" Ivanovitch's ideas (Conrad, *UWE* 118). Disturbed by her "stupidly" staring out of the window, the visionary "changed the position of the table" so that she faced "the wall" (118). Should Tekla try to "look at him over [her] shoulder", he would "stamp his foot" and "roar, 'Look down on the paper!'" (118). Cruelly, Ivanovitch informs his *dame de compagnie* that he is "put off" and "irritated" by her "air of unintelligent expectation" (118). Although Natalia Haldin is shocked that "Peter Ivanovitch could treat any woman so rudely," Tekla explains that she does "not mind in the least" (118). What she finds cruel is the effect that his inability to compose "revolutionary gospels" has on her beliefs: seeing Ivanovitch for the fraud that he is results in her "illusions [being] destroyed" (118), leading to her lack of faith in the man who "stands for everything" (180). The cruelty of his peevish taunts against his assistant of two years, and his attempts to control Tekla's eye movements show the true extent to which Ivanovitch is prepared to humiliate and subjugate his lady companion; to rob her of her power of looking. This disables Tekla's attempts – to have recourse to Erdinast-Vulcan's formulation (90) of Bakhtin's notion of lateral transgression – to be authorized by the other. Without the requisite human intimacy during this exchange, the humanity that the character of Tekla is meant to represent is stripped away. The more domineering figure of Ivanovitch uses verbal put-downs and derision to discipline Tekla into conforming to the role he requires her to perform in the social activity of dictating his work to her (see Miller 2-3). In short, in Miller's terms, the tactics Ivanovitch employs against Tekla systematically humiliate her.

Ivanovitch does not reserve his humiliating for the privacy of the study. Natalia Haldin reports how he "turn[s] upon" Tekla, scolding her in an "unheard of [and] shameful" manner, in front of both her and Razumov, over the way she had prepared eggs for Mme de S— (Conrad, *UWE* 131). As Natalia explains the incident to the teacher of languages, the hurtfulness of the lambasting is not as a result of "abusiveness" but because of "an odious performance" in which Ivanovitch makes his "voice soft and deprecatory" and raises his hat (131). During this show, Haldin reports that Tekla "did not know where to look" (131). Given the high regard that Tekla has for Peter Ivanovitch, and the admiration that she has just recently expressed for Razumov, the ordeal understandably leaves her "terribly upset" (131).

Ironically, though, Ivanovitch's actions toward Tekla can also be seen as symptomatic of his *own* humiliation. As Miller explains, humiliation is intimately connected with pretension (10). One of the most common strategies to avoid humiliation is to narrow the competence one claims to have, thereby limiting the range of accountability (2). Ivanovitch, the "world-wide celebrity" (Conrad, *UWE* 102) who styles himself as a visionary like "Voltaire" (101) and a "great feminist" (173), has created public expectations that he is unable to fulfil. As Tekla notes, the author of "revolutionary gospels" gropes "for words as if he were in the dark as to what he meant to say" (118). Although she recognizes that this process "is disenchanting" (122), she seems to be so besotted with the ideals that Ivanovitch represents that she still considers him to be "a man of genius" (122), seemingly attributing his lapses in concentration to the notion that she is not "the kind of woman who is not likely to check the flow of his inspiration" (123), as she describes Natalia Haldin. It is Sophia Antonovna's ironic gloss that "Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man" (289) after revealing that he has "united himself to a peasant girl" (289) and abandoned the cause that opens the character to a peevish yet revealing jibe from the narrator:

"He just simply adores her."

"Does he? Well, then, I hope that she won't hesitate to beat him."

(Conrad, *UWE* 289)

The teacher of languages is aware of the ways in which Ivanovitch meted out humiliating blows to the one figure who adores him – Tekla. The sentiment also reveals the narrator's awareness of Ivanovitch's hypocrisy. Shortly before this statement, he remarks that Ivanovitch is taking "a tremendous risk" (289) as a leader of the revolution, for the "sake of a peasant girl" (289), and wants to know whether Antonovna thinks "it's very wrong of him" (289). While Antonovna's "mysterious silence" (289) could be taken as a regrouping in which she decides on the most politically expedient response, it could be considered an affirmation of the narrator's query.

To assess Ivanovitch as a representation of a Schopenhauerian ethical agent, it is essential to attempt to distinguish between the apparent and the genuine motivations behind his actions. As Schopenhauer explains, the individuality of every man with a "definite intellect" determines, "like a penetrating dye", all of his actions and thoughts, even down to the most insignificant (*PP2* 230). Readers of *UWE* are shown that the narrator and Razumov see Ivanovitch's apparent lovingkindness and his demands for social justice for his fellow Russians – women in particular – as self-serving, egoistic pretences. They consider his

treatment of those around him as malicious; but therein lies the problem. Ivanovitch is not only a character in a novel, he is a character who has every action and apparent motive refracted through the perspective of other characters, all of whom dislike and mistrust him. While it is tempting to label Ivanovitch as unethical, or even as an indictment of the morality of the revolutionary type he represents, to do so would be to ignore the motives of those figures – most especially the narrator – who despise him, and to ignore the narrative complexity of the text.

While Ivanovitch's actions and hypocrisy seem deplorable, they need not be indicative of unethical behaviour. It is perhaps more important for the sake of the text to view him as an ethical void, as having no ethical purpose other than to indicate what Eloise Knapp Hay calls "the missing centre" (qtd. in Najder 135) in the Conradian novel which most "frustrates efforts to locate" morality (Larson, qtd. in Maisonnat 90) while "directly addressing moral, social, political and ideological issues" (Maisonnat 90). If, as Hawthorne contends, the human gaze invites intimacy (294), then it is remarkable that Ivanovitch enjoys a panoptical view of the novel's proceedings.⁴³ Like the monstrous Colonel Joll of *WB*, Ivanovitch is rendered a disconcerting presence because of one device that makes it impossible for those around him to form a human connection with him: mirror-like sunglasses.

Section Three – The Reflection of Absence

Peter Ivanovitch and Colonel Joll both represent the "human sterility of the look of power" (Hawthorne 299) as they cast a gaze that invites no reciprocity on those about to fall victim to their respective brands of humiliation. The narrator of *UWE* receives "the impression that behind these dark spectacles of his [Ivanovitch] could be as impudent as he chose" (Conrad, *UWE* 105). One of the most striking features of the great feminist's wardrobe, besides the silk hat used as everything but headwear, is his "spectacles with smoked glasses" (97). The "dark blue glasses" mask Ivanovitch from Razumov (160), leaving the double agent feeling "baffled" (164). Their "glassy steadfastness" confers "an air of absolute conviction" to Ivanovitch (implying that the conviction is incomplete at best), but are "impenetrable" to Razumov (166), who realizes that this ocular device obscures the great feminist's true, predatory nature: "'Curse him,' said Razumov to himself, 'he is waiting behind his spectacles

⁴³ Hawthorne describes the panoptical view as the ability to see without being seen (299).

for me to give myself away” (177). Wearing these dark glasses “in the subdued light” (250) of a hotel room as he is party to “an abortive military conspiracy [...] to invade the Baltic provinces” (251) makes Ivanovitch “more mysterious than ever” (250). As the “central figure” (251) in this vignette of political intrigue in a Genevan hotel room, the inhumane ethical void represented by Ivanovitch seems to act as a vortex around which the Russian conspirators congregate. If “mutual reflection and perception” (Bakhtin, *PD* 312) are essential to effective “lateral transgradience” (Erdinast-Vulcan 90), then any character that looks to the figure of Ivanovitch, who “stands for everything” (Conrad, *UWE* 180), for authorization of their involvement in revolutionary action, is thwarted by the impenetrability of his lenses. Ivanovitch is not an ethical agent whose perception could be used by other characters to construct their self-worth, as he is a figure void of all morality.

J. M. Coetzee’s magistrate finds Colonel Joll’s sunglasses no less bemusing. *WB* opens with the narrator saying that he could “understand it if [Joll] wanted to hide blind eyes. But he is not blind” (1). As the “two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire” are a new “invention” to the frontier people, they represent a curiosity of modern civilization from the Empire’s capital (VanZanten Gallagher 283), where “everyone wears them” (Coetzee, *WB* 1). As in the case of Ivanovitch’s eyewear, Joll’s dark glasses are “opaque from the outside, but he can see through them” (1). Joll is therefore also granted the ability to be a panoptical viewer, with those upon whom he focuses being unable to return his gaze. As Susan VanZanten Gallagher argues (282-83), the sunglasses reflect a disempowering absence to those who view them. The apparent lack of humanity in the figure of Joll, then, in very much the same way as in Peter Ivanovitch, represents “some kind of moral vacuum” (283).

But Joll’s sunglasses have more unsettling symbolic implications when considered in light of their metonymic relationship with the Empire. Barbara Eckstein highlights the fact that the sunglasses not only permit agents of Empire to “see or not see without being seen” (191), implying a degree of ethical impunity, but also protect Joll’s skin from wrinkles. As Joll explains to the magistrate, “They save one from squinting all the time” (Coetzee, *WB* 1), and the magistrate notices that “[Joll] has the skin of a younger man” (1). As Eckstein explains, Joll uses the technology of Empire to be not only “unfettered by conscience” (191) but also to become ageless, making him an example of Nietzsche’s superhuman (and is thus, she argues, also subhuman).

Joll is representative of one of the most salient and obvious binaries in Coetzee’s novel: civilization in opposition to barbarity (185). VanZanten Gallagher identifies the

torturer as a “storm-trooper-like security man” (282) whom the narrator is unable to comprehend: the particulars of the activities in the torture chamber are a source of frustration which cause the magistrate to attempt to elicit details from the barbarian girl (Wenzel 64). Unlike the revolutionary idealism represented by Ivanovitch of *UWE*, Joll represents one of “two sides of Imperial rule, no more, no less” (Coetzee, *WB* 148-49). “Cold” and “rigid”, the Colonel is “the truth that Empire tells [itself] when harsh winds blow” (148). Michael Moses argues that the Third Bureau and its agents (specifically Joll and Warrant Officer Mandel) embody the worst barbarities of the Empire’s regime, deriving their powers from their cynical manipulation of the written codes of law (119): “They will use the law against me as far as it serves them, then they will turn to other methods. That is the Bureau’s way. To people who do not operate under statute, legal process is simply one instrument among many” (Coetzee, *WB* 92).

Joll’s “other methods” involve the humiliation *in extremis* (Miller 10) of others, and bring his figure close to the clichéd presentations Coetzee scorns in his essay “Into the Dark Chamber”. Torture chambers, he argues, are “riddled with pitfalls” for the writer, especially for one who “intends to avoid the clichés of spy fiction, to make the torturer neither a figure of satanic evil, nor an actor in a black comedy, nor a faceless functionary, nor a tragically divided man doing a job he does not believe in” (Coetzee, “Chamber” 364). It is tempting to read Joll – a man who boasts about a “mountain of [animal] carcasses” (Coetzee, *WB* 1) – as a malicious figure, but examining his actions through a Schopenhauerian ethical lens may lead to a far less comforting assessment.

Section Four – The Black Flower of Civilization⁴⁴

Unlike Peter Ivanovitch, an ideological fraudster manipulating the perceptions of the public for personal and political gain, Colonel Joll actively participates in torturing prisoners and commits several “atrocities” for the Empire he serves (Kannemeyer 339). The magistrate attributes Joll’s apparent immunity to “being shunned” (he struggles to be anything “more than correct in [his] bearings towards [Joll]” after the first prisoner – an old man – is killed) to the Colonel’s activities as a “roving headsman” (Coetzee, *WB* 13). Pondering whether Joll has a “private ritual of purification”, the magistrate speculates that the Colonel may be a

⁴⁴ The narrator’s description of the Empire’s activities at the border outpost (Coetzee, *WB* 86). The phrase is borrowed from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, where the narrator uses it to describe the prison, one of the earliest buildings erected in Salem (see Hawthorne 36).

“new kind of man” created by the Bureau “who can pass without disquiet between the unclean and the clean” (13). The magistrate is bemused (and becomes steadily more unsettled) by Joll’s ability to maintain “a certain front” (3) before people he is about to humiliate and hurt, as “the noise of life [...] does not cease because somewhere someone is crying” (5).

Several critics argue that Joll represents the paranoia of Empire, and that he is the agent used to create the enemy – or the ‘other’ – that the Empire needs in order to authorize itself and validate its own existence, in a process not dissimilar to Bakhtin’s lateral transgression: as long as there are those who remain outside, then there must be an inner centre, namely Empire.⁴⁵ As Hammad Mushtaq argues, although Joll is sent to the border outpost to “investigate and pre-empt an expected attack” (28), the ways in which he puts his emergency powers to use bring terror, disturbance, unrest, and destabilization to the area. This interpretation supports Derek Attridge’s explanation of the critical tendency to treat *WB* as an allegory – especially given its unspecified temporal and spatial settings – and to explain its characters as “enigmatic” presentations of the “dark truths of the human condition” (32).

However, Colonel Joll is one of only three characters given a name in the text – the other two are Warrant Officer Mandel (who ultimately tortures the magistrate, under Joll’s orders) and Mai the cook (Dooley 124). The Colonel’s sunglasses, besides being instruments preventing others from establishing human connections with him, also represent, as Dooley points out (42), the “signs of a moderate realism” in which authors “supply the particulars [and] allow the significations to emerge themselves” – a technique explained by Elizabeth Costello (Coetzee, *EC* 4). Like the well-groomed and grandly outfitted Emperor, Praetors and Consuls who await the arrival of the barbarians in Constantin Cavafy’s poem, Joll’s immaculate appearance and grooming are specifically mentioned: “his tapering fingernails, his mauve handkerchiefs, his slender feet in soft shoes” (Coetzee, *WB* 5).⁴⁶ Indeed, as pointed out above, the magistrate points out that Joll represents “the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow” (148). It is significant, then, that the only figure to see Joll without his sunglasses, albeit briefly, is the representative of the “lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy” (148) – the magistrate (1). The magistrate is thus the only figure in the book presented with the remotest opportunity to establish “mutual reflection and perception”

⁴⁵ See Ashcroft (104-105); Newman (128); Marais (13); Spencer (177); Urquhart (6;8); Moses (116; 119); Kerr (25-26); Franklin (4); Eckstein (185; 189-190); Craps (61-63); and Wenzel (66-68).

⁴⁶ Cavafy’s “Waiting for the Barbarians” is the source of Coetzee’s title and is an obvious thematic intertext, especially considering the moral of the two concluding lines: “And now what will become of us without Barbarians? / Those people were some sort of a solution” (qtd. in Newman 127).

(Bakhtin, *PD* 312) with Joll, as the other, and to be authorized as an independent ethical agent by him (cf. Erdinast-Vulcan 90). Yet both are shown, by virtue of the magistrate's observation, to be different expressions of the same thing – namely Empire. If Joll is merely an allegory, then he could be interpreted as representing Empire's inability or reluctance to recognize its own atrocities and its project of justifying its own existence. This interpretation has further implications when considering the magistrate's steadily increasing recognition of the true enemy of the Empire.

Shortly after his arrival at the outpost, Joll is informed by the magistrate, who at this point is still anxious to make a good impression on the man from the capital, that "[t]here is not much crime here and the penalty is usually a fine or compulsory labour" (Coetzee, *WB* 2). Having witnessed Joll's deadpan demeanour, the magistrate finds himself "pleading" (4) for the two prisoners by explaining to the Colonel that "[t]his so-called banditry does not amount to much" (4). He grows irritated by his guest's "cryptic silences" and the "paltry theatrical mystery of dark shields" hiding his eyes (4); yet he seems compelled to speak to Joll and soon after realises that "[p]ain is truth" (5). When Joll's first prisoners start arriving only four days after his excursion party leaves (18), the magistrate is angry at his conscripts for not telling Joll that these are "fishing people" and not "thieves, bandits, invaders of the Empire" (18). The response Joll is reported to have given to the conscripts, that "[p]risoners are prisoners" (22), reveals his role in creating and delineating the opposition that must exist in order for Empire to have something against which to define itself (Ashcroft 104). Joll's attitude towards the native ways of life is represented as paranoid, and he polices the borderland and desert in such a way as to suggest that the Empire needs to be protected from a "deadly encroachment" (Kerr 25).

The magistrate begins to recognise that Colonel Joll's activities are humiliating him: "I curse Colonel Joll for all the trouble he has brought me, and for the shame too" (Coetzee, *WB* 21). As Dooley notes, Coetzee's characters are always aware of a certain superiority or privilege granted to them by virtue of their social status (87). The magistrate is acutely aware of his position as a civil servant in the outpost – a fact that becomes apparent when he attempts to reassert his authority and to restore the outpost to its former state once Joll and his forces leave (see Coetzee, *WB* 26). The magistrate is surprised to learn, when Joll "begins his interrogations" after returning and taking a day's rest, that "[i]n his quest for the truth he is tireless" (23). At a meal they share before Joll's return to the capital, the magistrate pointedly asks the Colonel if his "inquiries [...] among the nomad peoples and the aboriginals" (25) – words he appears to select in order to antagonize his guest, as he does not use Joll's preferred

label “barbarians” – have been “successful”, enquiring whether the people of the outpost “have anything to fear” (25). Joll’s response is silence, and the magistrate notes the unsettling and uneasy manner of their conduct towards each other:

Throughout a trying period he and I have managed to behave towards each other like civilized people. All my life I have believed in civilized behaviour; on this occasion, however, I cannot deny it, the memory leaves me sick with myself.

(Coetzee, *WB* 25)

Civility is no longer a problem when the magistrate returns from taking the barbarian girl back to her people and finds that the “promised campaign against the barbarians is under way” (83). His office is sequestered by Warrant Officer Mandel and two guards, and the magistrate is arrested for “treasonously consorting with the enemy” (85). His arrest paradoxically renders the magistrate, in his own opinion, “a free man” whose “alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over” (85). It is at this point that the magistrate is first able to set himself “in opposition” to Joll and Mandel, whom he labels “the new barbarians” (85). In the darkness of his windowless cell, the magistrate recognises the truth of the “nightmare figure” of Colonel Joll:

I too, if I live long enough in this cell with its ghosts not only of the father and the daughter but of the man who even by lamplight did not remove the black discs from his eyes and the subordinate whose work it was to keep the brazier fed, will be touched with the contagion and turned into a creature that believes in nothing.

(Coetzee, *WB* 89)

But despite this newfound recognition and paradoxical liberation, the magistrate does not “tak[e] easily to the humiliations of imprisonment” (92). Joll and Mandel’s treatment of the narrator involves not allowing him to clean himself; depriving him of sunlight and human interaction; and providing him with a diet which makes it “an agony for [him] to move [his] bowels” (93). While he is not beaten, starved or spat upon, the magistrate finds his humiliation “all the more degrading” as a result of its “pettiness” (93). Because of his suffering, the magistrate finds himself living in “boredom” (96). During the final interrogation in which Joll listens to the magistrate fabricate an interpretation of the “allegories” to be found on poplar slips (120-25), the magistrate, who no longer recognizes his ties to the Empire, voices his keenest indictment against the Colonel:

‘Those pitiable prisoners you brought in – are *they* the enemy I must fear? Is that what you say? *You* are the enemy, Colonel!’ I can restrain myself no longer. I pound the desk with my fist. ‘*You* are the enemy, *you* have made the war, and *you* have given them all the martyrs they need – starting not now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here! History will bear me out!’

(Coetzee, *WB* 125)

The magistrate’s clarity and lack of equivocation in this accusation are misplaced (Eckstein 189): he still distinguishes between his role as a civilian leader and Joll’s as a military one (188). The two leaders are more closely related than the narrator would care to recognize. In an earlier after-dinner debate with Mandel, the magistrate expresses the wish “that these barbarians would rise up and teach us a lesson, so that we would learn to respect them” (Coetzee, *WB* 55). His stereotypical assumptions of the barbarians, though, are no different from the perceptions of Joll and the other state functionaries. To him, the “barbarian way” is described as “intellectual torpor, slovenliness, tolerance of death and disease” (56). As a result, his scathing damnation of Joll’s characterization of the other as enemy fails to take into account that he too conceives of an ‘other’ in the first place. Kerr suggests that Joll’s acts of torture are a “horrible travesty” of the magistrate’s own diggings (26) – both are attempts at unearthing truths: the magistrate’s about the previous settlement, and the Colonel’s about the barbarians’ military intentions.

That Joll seeks truth for his own ends through violent means cannot be disputed (Urquhart 6), but whether this makes his character a symbol of “extraordinary, sadistic evil” (Eckstein 188) is debatable.⁴⁷ During the most graphic episode involving Joll, the Colonel makes a public spectacle of the debasement of a group of male prisoners (see Coetzee, *WB* 113-18). “[T]welve miserable captives” are paraded “naked” in procession, each bound by means of “[a] simple loop of wire [...] through the flesh of each man’s hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks” (113). In the same way that Peter Ivanovitch is aware of the importance of public appearance, Colonel Joll’s actions reveal a recognition that, as Timon asserts and Schopenhauer concurs, “[b]y nature there is nothing either good or bad, but human opinion has made the difference” (Schopenhauer, *BM* 122). Aware that public perception of his actions confers honour, rank and reputation, Colonel Joll’s parade allows every father from the outpost to “prove to his children that the barbarians are real” (Coetzee

⁴⁷ Eckstein claims that this evil is not altogether alien in the figure of the narrator, as the magistrate and Joll share many ideological traits, but her argument does suggest that Joll occupies the position of “sadistic evil.”

WB 113). The magistrate is disgusted by “the noise of patriotic bloodlust” and wishes that his “fellow-townsmen” were going about their daily routines, undistracted by the grotesque display, but notes with dismay that “[i]f comrades like these exist” then he does not know them (114). He equates all of those present – from the prisoners to the townsfolk – with barbarism:

Let it at the very least be said, if it ever comes to be said, if there is ever anyone in some remote future interested to know the way we lived, that in the farthest outpost of the Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian.

(Coetzee, *WB* 114)

While the magistrate tries to push to the front of the scene, believing that, if he cannot save the prisoners he can at least save himself by intervening (114), the crowd is clearly engrossed by the activity in the “arena [...] for the exemplary spectacle” (114). One father even requests help to lift his son onto his shoulders so that he may see (113). The description of the crowd invites the Schopenhauerian comment that “[t]he thousands who throng before our eyes in peaceful intercourse are to be regarded as just so many tigers and wolves whose teeth are secured by a strong muzzle” (*BM* 129). The fragile restraint to which Schopenhauer refers is enforced by the State, and people recoil in horror when they realise that “perfidy and duplicity and [...] spiteful wickedness of men and women” (*BM* 129) would be the order of the day were it not for the compulsion of laws and the necessity of civil honour.

Colonel Joll, then, is skilfully manipulating the inhabitants of the outpost into siding with the Empire, by presenting them with concrete enemies. In a strategic move, the Colonel writes the word “ENEMY” across four of the men’s backs. This is, as Moses explains, an example of Heidegger’s “hermeneutic circle” dressed in the “ideological garb” of the Inquisition: the only truth (as Joll has explained that pain is truth) that Joll could conceivably extract from the bodies about to be tortured is the one he has projected onto the blank space of his victim (Moses 121). In a way similar to the young boy who told Joll everything he believed Joll wanted to hear in order to prevent suffering any further pain (see Coetzee, *WB* 12), the citizens see the enemies as enemies because Joll – the representative of the State they obey – has labelled them as such. The magistrate realizes that those around him do not have expressions of “hatred” or “bloodlust” but are drained by “a curiosity” and “a new and ravening appetite” (115). A young girl is given “obscene advice” as, “giggling,” she hits one prisoner’s buttocks (116). This brings a “scramble for the canes [during which] the soldiers

can barely keep order” (116). The chaos is only dissipated when the magistrate, enraged by the sight of a hammer “cradled in the Colonel’s folded arms” (117), asserts a degree of commonality between the oppressors and the oppressed: “Look at these men [...] *Men!*” (117). Even though he is beaten severely for his actions and dragged back to his cell, the magistrate hears the crowd begin to murmur (118), suggesting that he has managed to free them from the influence Joll has exerted. However, that the townspeople “titter and gawp” at the gruesome proceedings testifies to the fact that Colonel Joll has succeeded in denying humanity to the barbarians, placing their pain beyond the pale of the tormentors’ moral imagination (Spencer 174). By dehumanizing the victims and debasing the perpetrators – in this case, by giving the townsfolk justification to torment the prisoners – questions of “morality will not enter the frame” (Kelman, qtd. in Spencer 174). Inscribing the word “ENEMY” on the backs of the prisoners marks them as “not human” (174). In so doing, Joll is able to validate the Empire’s actions against the barbarians in the eyes of those whose best interests he and the Empire serve. Given this, the ethical motivation that seems to be adhered to in his actions is not malice, but a self-interested egoism: the figure of Joll serves to represent the Empire’s tactics of serving itself, and is therefore, in Schopenhauerian ethical terms, void of any ethical value. While the pain that he inflicts on those whom he identifies as barbarians is despicable, his reason for doing so is not that he enjoys inflicting it.

Section Five – Conclusion

If the humiliation of others is not necessarily morally wrong, as long as the motivation for such action is not pure malice, then perhaps the Swedish Academy has a valid point. Perhaps “the distinction between right and wrong [...] can be seen to serve no end” (Swedish Academy “PR” para. 3).

Peter Ivanovitch and Colonel Joll are not likable characters. As I have argued, both symbolically prevent those around them from establishing any degree of common humanity by inhabiting the position of panoptical spectators. This pose – best represented by the dark glasses both figures wear – prevents others from being able “to communicate” or to constitute their “self-consciousness” in reference to Ivanovitch or Joll’s perceptions of them, as is required by Bakhtin’s “lateral transgradience” (Bakhtin, *PD* 311-12). Instead, others search in vain for recognition and meet “some kind of moral vacuum” (VanZanten Gallagher 283), with only images of themselves reflected back. This is an alienating and baffling experience for those who find themselves confronted by the “human sterility of the look of power”

(Hawthorne 299). There is no reciprocity for those about to fall victim to Ivanovitch's or Joll's respective brands of humiliation.

Applying Schopenhauer's descriptive ethics to the actions of these characters seems to support views that "there is nothing either good or bad, but human opinion has made the difference" (Timon, qtd. in Schopenhauer *BM* 122) and that "[t]he thousands who throng before our eyes in peaceful intercourse are to be regarded as just so many tigers and wolves whose teeth are secured by a strong muzzle" (*BM* 129). Joll and Ivanovitch are masterful manipulators of public opinion, conscious that their successes or failures depend on what they represent "in the eyes of others" (Schopenhauer, *PP1* 315), and so skilfully control their reputations.

Further consideration of the ethical incentives displayed in Ivanovitch and Joll's behaviour shows, rather disturbingly, that they are not ethically wrong. This does not mean, however, that their actions are good, desirable, or pleasant. What it does indicate, though, is that the "distinction between right and wrong" is not as "crystal clear" as the Swedish Academy maintains ("PR" para. 3).

While considering the morality represented by Joll and Ivanovitch – the two most obviously involved in undesirable deeds – could be seen to strengthen the opinions I am arguing against, to consider this definitive overlooks the fact that neither character is presented directly to the reader. Rather, both figures are refracted through the perspectives of others who neither like nor respect them. It could therefore be illuminating to investigate the biases and motivations of the narrators of *UWE* and *WB*.

Chapter Three

Complex Narrators: A Rehearsal of Schopenhauerian Ethics

Section One – Introduction

It seems counterproductive to argue that the despicable actions of Colonel Joll are ethically neutral. If it is true that there are neither good nor bad deeds except insofar as they are labelled as such by nothing more objective than “human opinion” (Timon, qtd. in Schopenhauer, *BM* 122), then the distinction between the two “can be seen to serve no end”, as the Swedish Academy claims (“PR” para. 3). But showing that Joll’s vile actions are not readily identifiable as morally wrong is a necessary step in my argument, as it undermines the Swedish Academy’s assessment that the “distinction between right and wrong” is “crystal clear” in Coetzee’s fiction (“PR” para. 3). Furthermore, if Coetzee’s work portrays an antagonist capable of such brutality as a “moral vacuum” (VanZanten Gallagher 283), then perhaps the ethical implication is that there is no good reason not to choose morally wrong action given that, effectively, there is no such thing. This case seems strengthened when one considers that the analogous character in *Under Western Eyes*, Peter Ivanovitch, the “‘heroic fugitive’ of world-wide celebrity” (Conrad, *UWE* 102), is still considered an “inspired man” (289) by those around him, despite being derisively dismissed by Conrad as one of the “apes of a sinister jungle” (7). Readers are constantly reminded that the main reason they fail to sympathise with Ivanovitch is that he is Russian – his motivations are “a vain enterprise for sophisticated Europe to try and understand” (102).

But these inferences are only logical if ethics are considered to be legislative and imperative (Cartwright, *NS* 255). Schopenhauerian ethics, as stated in Chapter Two, are neither. They are empirical, descriptive and virtue-based, concentrating on the moral psychology and character of ethical agents (263). Schopenhauer criticises the Kantian moral incentive of respect as a thinly veiled “paraphrase of [the] commitments” found in theological forms of ethics (260) that Kant has divorced from their context (255). His argument is that imperative forms necessarily assume that someone has issued them as commandments. As Kant rejects the theological context of ethics, Schopenhauer claims that his moral laws become “hypothetical imperatives of prudence”, which means that all agents would act ethically only when it suited them and that all actions “will always be selfish, and consequently without moral value” (Schopenhauer, *BM* 55). That Schopenhauer considers

actions to have moral worth and value is implicit in this critique. The proper form of the moral law, Schopenhauer suggests, is either: “[i]f you desire that others help you, then you ought not to be indifferent to their fate” or “[i]f you desire the well-being of others, then you ought not to be indifferent to their fate” (qtd. in Cartwright, *NS* 259).

I would argue that an understanding of these formulations and seeing them at work in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes* would reveal “the surprising involvement of the outsider” signalled in my title and mentioned by the Swedish Academy (“PR” para. 1-2). Unlike the Swedish Academy, though, but in agreement with Schopenhauerian ethics, I believe that this “involvement” is “surprising” because it is in fact the very consideration of “the outsider” that confers moral worth on any ethical action. According to Schopenhauer:

To obtain generally a really necessary, clear, and thorough comprehension of the true and very melancholy nature of most people, it is very instructive to use their conduct and actions in literature as the commentary of [*sic*] their conduct and actions in practical life, and vice versa. This is very useful for avoiding mistaken ideas either about ourselves *or* about others. But no special trait of meanness or stupidity which we come across in life or literature should ever be the subject of anger or annoyance, but merely of knowledge, in that we see in it a new contribution to the characteristic qualities of the human race and accordingly bear it in mind.

(Schopenhauer, *PPI* 454)

While the “conduct and actions” of Peter Ivanovitch and Colonel Joll definitely reveal a “special trait of meanness”, the nature of Schopenhauerian ethics suggests that what is needed to assess ethical value is, on one hand, insight into a character’s true motives and, on the other, a narrower definition of what constitutes morality, as the title of David Cartwright’s article suggests (*NS* 252).

Gabrielle Helms’s description of the interplay between fictional narrative texts and the real world shows that her interpretative model, which combines the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism with cultural narratology, is a useful tool in translating “commentary” on fictional conduct” into observation of action in “practical life” (Schopenhauer, *PPI* 454). She argues that complex relationships exist between culture and literature (Helms 1) and that novels contribute significantly to cultural attitudes (2). Literature helps to consolidate social visions or encourage resistance (2). It cannot be reduced “to a sociological current” (Said 73) but rather defies the separation of an isolated cultural sphere “believed to be freely and unconditionally available to weightless theoretical speculation and investigation” (Said 57)

from a political sphere “where the real struggle between interests is supposed to occur” (57). As narrativity is the “enabling force” present at every point in a narrative, and as it serves to “illuminate every text no matter how ostensibly disjunctive or conjunctive texts are to the worlds they represent” (Sturges 763), an understanding of its source would make it possible to identify the commentary of which Schopenhauer speaks. Every event in a story is mediated in a text through some particular point of view “verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his” (Rimmon-Kenan 72). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan states that it is “almost impossible to speak without betraying some personal ‘point of view,’ [sic] if only through the very language used” (73), making it possible for novels to expose contradictory ideologies and to challenge hegemonic centres (Helms 4). Narrative fiction, such as the literary works produced by J. M. Coetzee and Joseph Conrad, present a “*succession of events*” (Rimmon-Kenan 2; emphasis in original) recounted by a fictional narrator to a fictional narratee (4). Cultural narratology, which acknowledges that novels employ specific narrative techniques to produce their own fictional worlds (Helms 20), recognizes that the narrative form is “far from being a neutral, value-free, transparent container” (O’Neill 123). An analysis of these textual practices – and, I would argue, of the narrative voice in particular – can therefore provide an understanding of historically determined “world views, habits of thought, and individual and collective reality models” (Helms 21) and, most saliently, of moral conflicts (21). This enables readers, as Susan Lanser argues, to identify with and understand cultural experiences translated into and produced by texts (59), rather than merely to focus on those acts in the real world “that generate literary narratives”, as Seymour Chatman’s contextualist (as opposed to cultural) narratology prescribes (Chatman 310).

In this chapter, I will therefore present a close analysis of how the relationship between the narrators of *UWE* and *WB* and their subject matter serves to show authorial considerations of a particular type of ethics. These ethics are not portrayed didactically, but are rather implicitly embodied in the texts through the behaviour, disposition, opinions and considerations of the narrators as characters in the events portrayed. Both narrators effectively rehearse authorial considerations of various moral conflicts that, given the pessimistic tone of both *UWE* and *WB*, could be interpreted as entertaining the notion that Schopenhauerian ethics are of use in an uncaring, indifferent universe.

Section Two – The Compassionate Old Teacher as Ethical Agent in *Under Western Eyes*

The narrative perspective of *UWE* has baffled critics since the novel's appearance in 1911 (Carabine 209). It is experimental in its obsession with lies and truth, interpretation and misinterpretation, construing and misconstruing, and is relayed by a narrator who offers an excess of explanation in a process that impedes the construction of the story it tries to relate (213). This narrative duplicity has elicited a wide range of critical assessments. Edward Garnett notes that the narrator's insistence on the incomprehensibility of all things Russian ensures that the "last page leaves us almost as in the dark as the first. We can only feel sure that certain actual facts have been presented, and that there is probably an explanation of them if we could only hit upon it" (qtd. in Carabine 209). Astute readers will realise that the narrator's claims of Russian incomprehensibility is also a veiled commentary on the accessibility of the "mere bald facts" as he presents them (Conrad, *UWE* 11), given that he admits to being an Anglo-Russian born in St Petersburg, only leaving Russia at the age of nine (40), and is thus not strictly a Westerner himself. This could support Tony Tanner's view that Razumov's nightmare is filtered through a "smug narrator" whose attempts at "disclaim[ing] and distancing his dark material" result in that same material distancing "the whole nexus of western common sense and complacency" with deliberate irony (199-200). C. B. Cox argues that while Tanner's interpretation of the narrator is excellent, the "control over the double irony" that it affords Conrad is less sure than Tanner allows (104). Rather, the narrator's "several attitudes" – most notably his disdain for Russian cynicism and Genevan banality – are difficult for readers to "sort out" and result in the novel's partial failure (105). Similarly, Douglas Hewitt considers the novel a failure because the old teacher's position is inconsistent and "there can be no doubt that Conrad is in general agreement with [the narrator's] judgements" (81). But theorists such as Gene Moore, Terence Cave and Bruce Henricksen, who exclude authors from their consideration of texts, hold the old teacher exclusively responsible for the deformations and mutilations of the text and for its incompatible elements, preferring to concentrate their critical efforts on his character, devices and desires. Jacques Berthoud considers the narrator to be rational, "reliable and trustworthy", even if he is a "fussy and cautious old man" who fails to understand Russians "because they are not understandable" (163). Eloise Knapp Hay calls the narrator a "nonentity" (296) while Terry Eagleton considers him "wholly incapable of interpreting the significance of the turbulent events he observes" and, qualifying Hewitt's suggestion slightly, a "safety valve" for Conrad's "anti-revolutionary bias" (21). Frank Kermode labels the

narrator the “father of lies” and “diabolical” (153). Ironically, Razumov calls “the old Father of Lies” – a synonym for Satan – the “national patron” of Russia (Conrad, *UWE* 266). That Kermode intends to equate the narrator with the subject of Razumov’s observation is unlikely.

The degree of complexity in the narrative of *UWE* therefore makes it doubtful that the narrator is to be taken at his word as being a “dense Westerner” (Carabine 211). Nor should his relationship with Conrad – either as a transparent mouthpiece (Hewitt 81) or as a “safety valve” for authorial commentary (Eagleton 21) – be considered unproblematic.⁴⁸

For Conrad, the universe is morally neutral (Schwarz 551), just as it is indifferent in Schopenhauerian philosophy. It is a familiar and venerated critical truism that Conrad’s narrators embody the author’s emotional life, objectify his values and express his particular concern with loneliness and isolation (Schwarz 548, 550). Much of the despair found in figures such as Dr Monygham (of *Nostramo*), Marlow, and the unnamed young sea captain on his first command in *The Shadow-Line* originates in the insurmountable solitariness of subjectivity (Schwarz 549; Artese 176). Consequently, characters retreat inwards (176) only to find that they have to create their own “islands of satisfaction and meaning” (Schwarz 551), albeit momentarily, by instinctively committing to the values of fidelity, courage and steadfast dedication to a task of labour for its own sake, rather than by subscribing to any transcendental sense of purpose (550-51). Their urge towards self-fulfilment is thus frequently recognized as interfering with what Conrad believed to be their moral responsibility towards their fellows (549). While the teacher of languages in *UWE* digresses into many verbose and “passionate presentations” that collapse Conrad’s self-avowed distance from the narrator (Bimberg 39), such as his disparaging comments about Russian cynicism and national character, no episode is as characteristically Conradian as the narrator’s final appeal to the reader to appreciate Razumov’s predicament “on the ground of common humanity” (Carabine 227; Conrad, *UWE* 225). But this “moral discovery which should be the object of every tale” (Conrad, *UWE* 58), as the narrator argues, is not immediately apparent. Instead the “tragic character” (5) to which Conrad alerts his readers in the “Author’s Note” only becomes evident by the beginning of Part Fourth. While it may be tempting to claim that the discovery is delayed because of the narrator’s own attempts to make sense of Razumov’s story, such an assessment overlooks the obvious. The narrator has

⁴⁸ The narrator’s role as a textual mask for the author’s biographic prejudices and opinions will be discussed below.

expertly framed the sequence of events in Geneva by interrupting an interview between Razumov and Councillor Mikulin at the point which would have revealed Razumov's double agency. This information would be readily available to him, especially considering his claims from the outset that he is merely translating and presenting "something in the nature of a journal, a diary" (11) – an act that paradoxically vouches for the authenticity of the fiction while drawing attention to its artificiality (Carabine 215). The narrator claims not to be in "possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression" (Conrad, *UWE* 11) central to a novelist's calling, and he reassures his readers that the narrative is neither an "invented story" nor a "work of the imagination" (83). As a result, and unlike in any of Conrad's other first-person narratives, the unnamed narrator of *UWE* has to frame, introduce and characterise himself as an editor before relaying the translation (Carabine 214) of events in which he also features as a character (Bimberg 41). The result is a dense narrative construct in which the stance vacillates between incomprehension, aversion and critical distance, on the one hand, and sympathy, empathy and personal identification on the other (41).

One of the central thematic and structural features in Conrad's oeuvre is the use of characters who are lonely souls who reach out for another, whom they hope will recognize, understand and authenticate them (Schwarz 549). This humanist element of his work is frequently ignored, however, resulting in commentary that overemphasizes the sense of pessimism, nihilism and scepticism (549). While it also relies heavily on the traces of pessimism in *UWE*, my argument here is that the tension created by the narrator's attempts to realize such humanist ambitions in a pessimistic context gives rise to the very narrow scope and only space in which morally valuable acts may – or may not – take place in the novel.

As a result of a growing epistemological scepticism about literature's ability to represent reality, the unreliable narratives of the early Modernist and late Victorian periods tend not to focus on events themselves, but rather contemplate the problems experienced by a narrator who attempts retrospectively to reconstruct and make sense of those events (Zerweck 161). This paradigm shift undermined assumptions that literary discourses could present authoritative versions of events (161) and is evident in several of the teacher of language's digressions, prefatory asides and insistence that understanding Russian motives is "a vain enterprise for sophisticated Europe" (Conrad, *UWE* 102).

The opening paragraphs of *UWE* are, as Carabine argues, "among the most puzzling in the history of the English novel" (213). They present readers with an unnamed teacher of languages whose first act is to amputate his creative faculties and "to disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression" required to produce a work of fiction

(Conrad, *UWE* 11). He claims that whatever creativity he may have once possessed has been “smothered out of existence” by a “wilderness of words”, which are “the great foes of reality” (11).⁴⁹ As with all narrators who apologise for their inadequacies and attempt to invoke “documentary evidence” (11), such as Razumov’s Russian journal, the teacher begins a self-reflexive tale comprised of double narrative and double temporal schemes, with the narrator hovering “in the writing time of his editing over Razumov’s diary [and] another work [which charts an] interchange of antagonisms through a range of competing voices, perspectives, values, racial and historical conditions” (Carabine 214). Establishing “verisimilitude-as-ethos” (Chatman, qtd. in Attridge, “YD” 271) is therefore essential to the success of the old teacher’s project. Conrad uses verisimilitude to create “lines of communication” (271) with readers of *UWE* in order to appeal to their trust. Seymour Chatman argues that verisimilitude should be considered the literary equivalent of *ethos* in rhetoric (qtd. in Attridge, “YD” 271). Aristotle uses *ethos* to indicate the influence of a speaker’s personal authority on the perceived credibility of their discourse (Attridge, “YD” 271). The speaker’s *character* therefore effects persuasion when a speech is uttered, and this results in the speaker being considered worthy of belief (Chatman, qtd. in Attridge, “YD” 271). Similarly, the teacher of languages pleads with readers to accept that his work is neither an “invented story” nor a work “of the imagination” (Conrad, *UWE* 83) but an attempt by an alienated outsider “strong in the sincerity of [his] purpose” (83) to edit a document that was never intended for Western eyes. He attempts to use the diary as a device to distance himself from the narrative presented, the accuracy of which should be attributed to Razumov – a man who purportedly understands the Russian character and its political intrigues.

But as Carabine (215), Hewitt (81) and Eagleton (21) argue, the old teacher’s hyperbolic claims of ignorance of all things Russian and his denial of his creative abilities function self-referentially to remind the astute reader that the narrator serves as a “mask for the lurking author” (Carabine 215). The Anglo-Russian narrator who has neither art nor imagination, nor supposedly any knowledge of Russia, is “the reverse image of his author” (215) – an Anglo-Pole firmly established as an English author starting on his fourteenth novel. Christiane Bimberg notes that Conrad uses the teacher to offer various presentations of complex feelings, problems and situations, but fails to maintain a consistent authorial detachment from the narrative, despite two overt pretensions (45). First, the teacher claims to be dedicated to “fact” and “punctilious fairness” while being “unidentified with anyone in

⁴⁹ The potential of language to be a space for ethical interaction will be considered in more detail in Chapter 4.

this narrative where the aspects of honour and shame are remote from the ideas of the Western world” (Conrad, *UWE* 225). The second pretension is his supposed incomprehension of and astonishment at the Russian national character and psyche. In addition to the facts that he is an Anglo-Russian himself and has exposed himself to the surroundings of “*La Petite Russie*” and Geneva “for a long time” (Conrad, *UWE* 11), several of his digressions expose Conrad’s own profound concerns with moral failure, desertion, betrayal (Crankshaw 91-97), and his Polish conception of Russia as an arena of “tyrannical lawlessness which, in general human terms, could be reduced to the formula of senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny” (Conrad, *UWE* 6). The old teacher’s insistence on the validity of the documentary evidence for the story he relates echoes Conrad’s use of such material to justify the novel itself in the “Author’s Note”:

I am encouraged in this flattering belief by noticing that in many articles on Russian affairs of the present day reference is made to certain sayings and opinions uttered in the pages that follow, in a manner testifying to the clearness of my vision and the correctness of my judgement. 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 world.
[...]

The most terrifying reflexion (I am speaking now for myself) is that all these people [the Russian characters – revolutionaries and state functionaries alike] are not the product of the exceptional but of the general – of the normality of their place and time – and race.

(Conrad, *UWE* 5, 7)

The narrator’s disclaimers and digressions, which at times seem little more than “prefatory asides”, exhibit Conrad’s “self-consciousness with regard to his personal involvement” in the subject matter of *UWE* (Carabine 215-16). Conrad’s Polish anti-Russian prejudices are subtly disguised by the teacher’s supposed inability to comprehend the Russian character because of the “illogicality of their attitude, the arbitrariness of their conclusions, [and] the frequency of the exceptional”, which he claims “should present no difficulty to a student of many grammars” (Conrad, *UWE* 12). To the narrator, Russians have an “extraordinary love of words” which makes them little more than “very accomplished parrots” (12). Perhaps, he argues, they have a “special human trait” (12) that separates them from the “different conditions of Western thought” (27). He also finds it “inconceivable that [Razumov] should

have wished any human eye to see” his retrospective journal, given the nature of its content (12).

This insight, though, does not prevent the teacher from assuming the role of editor, as it is important to write “of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth’s surface [...] till some key word is found; a word that could [...] hold truth enough to help the moral discovery” (58). Notwithstanding the inconsistencies of this statement, the teacher seems to assert that he is able to unearth something that “may perchance hold truth enough” (58) despite admitting to a two-fold incapacity (Carabine 217).⁵⁰ As an interpreter the old teacher is “like a traveller in a strange country” (Conrad, *UWE* 134). The editorial model also carries over into the teacher’s functions as a character in and witness to the events in Geneva in the story time of his own narrative (Carabine 216). As an actor in the events portrayed, he feels like a “disregarded Westerner” (Conrad, *UWE* 329) who plays the “bit part” of Natalia Haldin’s faithful attendant (Carabine 216). This alienation of the narrator from the events he narrates emphasizes both his own and his reader’s presumed incomprehension (216). Yet despite his resolutions and declarations to present the “mere bald facts” (Conrad, *UWE* 11) because of the “sincerity of his purpose” (83) to show the “moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth’s surface” (58), he is aware of not being in full possession of those facts:

It had also become clear to me that Miss Haldin was unwilling to enter into the details of the only material part of her visit to the Château Borel. But I was not hurt. Somehow I didn’t feel it to be a want of confidence. It was some other difficulty – a difficulty I could not resent.

(Conrad, *UWE* 134)

Why, then, would Conrad use the old teacher “to render not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia itself” (Conrad, *UWE* 5)? The narrator seems to be using “fact”, “punctilious fairness” and “naked truth” and his claims of being “unidentified with anyone in this narrative” (225) to distract readers from the way in which he increasingly loses his narrative distance and gradually identifies himself more closely with the events, experiences

⁵⁰ It is inconsistent that someone who resolutely declares that “[w]ords as is well known are the great foes of reality” (Conrad, *UWE* 11) and who frequently lambastes the Russians for their “extraordinary love of words” (12) should attempt to validate his artistic project by searching for a word that could be trusted to “hold truth enough” (58). This will be considered more thoroughly in Chapter 4. However, for the sake of the current argument, it is important to note that the teacher is effectively as reliant on and fond of words as those whom he ridicules, perhaps as a result of his being Anglo-Russian – a fact easily forgotten due to his frequent assertions of his status as a Westerner.

and people in his story – as he “falls into the trap of empathy” (Bimberg 46). If anything the old teacher’s narrative is as much a “subtly mendacious” dialogue (Conrad, *UWE* 233) as are the clandestine meetings between Razumov and Councillor Mikulin. The description not only passes as the narrator’s comment on the deceitfulness of Razumov’s interactions with the Geneva-based revolutionaries, Natalia, and the old teacher, but it also captures Conrad’s relationship with his readers.

By the start of Part Fourth, it becomes apparent that readers have been engaged with a narrative characterized by a high degree of artistry denied in the narrator’s insistence on his incompetence (Bimberg 45). But careful examination of the teacher’s discourse reveals that Conrad has used this fictional persona to offer an account distinguished by psychological depth, dialectical consideration and a critical evaluation of opposing positions and arguments (45). The narrator has exceeded his stated duty as translator of a Russian diary, attempting to render Russian political intrigues and to clarify Russian linguistic and intercultural misunderstandings for his Western readers, in order to turn a “strange human document [into a] rendering [...] of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth’s surface” (Conrad, *UWE* 58). If the teacher were honest when he announces that his story is “not a work of fiction: [he has] no talent” (Conrad, *UWE* 83), then the narrative would be “flatly unimaginative” (Watts 45). But either the narrator is guilty of a “false modesty” or the implied author, as Watts contends (45), abandons textual consistency in favour of vividness. Watts’s argument is that while the journal is meant to be the source of the tale it is unlikely to be elaborate enough to contain the sensitive details that the teacher presents, and that the inclusion of details of which Razumov could not possibly have been aware – such as people dodging him as he walks staring at the ground, preoccupied – suggests such authorial abandon (45-46). The language teacher is also permitted implausibly easy access to conspiratorial secrets. It is highly unlikely that an outsider like him, considered inimical to their aims, would be permitted into a room filled with undisguised revolutionaries pouring over a “map of the Baltic provinces” which charts “imperfect disclosures” (Conrad, *UWE* 251) of a plotted insurrection. But this convenience neither goes unmarked, as Watts suggests, nor does it seem that the implied author assumes to have succeeded in misleading his readers. In fact there seems to be yet another “subtly mendacious dialogue” (Conrad, *UWE* 233) afoot. The teacher states that although “the world was not much interested” in the plot, he thinks that “the old settled Europe had been given in [his] person attending that Russian girl [Miss Haldin] something like a glimpse behind the scenes” (251). In another episode that seems to perturb Watts inordinately, Razumov confesses his betrayal of Victor

Haldin to Natalia, before he asks, astounded, “How did this old man come here?” (Conrad, *UWE* 268). Given that the teacher is one of only three characters standing in the “glaring light” of the anteroom (260), it is “highly improbable [Razumov] would not have seen him” (Watts 45). Watts concludes that the narrator varies between self-effacing and intrusive; cynical and humane; unseen and seen; proficient and clumsy; lubricant and impedimental (46). But while Watts suggests that this is why the narrator is a “questionable contrivance” (46), I am inclined to agree with Carabine’s assessment that it is “precisely because [readers] have been deceived by the author’s subtly mendacious dialogue with [them]” (230) that they are implicated as witnesses and interpreters who share a human characteristic:

Let me but remark that the Evil One with his single passion of Satanic Pride for the only motive is yet, on a larger, modern view allowed to be not quite so black as he used to be painted. With what greater latitude then should we appraise the exact shade of mere mortal man, with his passions and his *miserable ingenuity in error*, always dazzled by the base glitter of mixed motives, everlastingly betrayed by a short-sighted wisdom.
(Conrad, *UWE* 233; emphasis added)

Razumov’s story is not one of a single, self-interested act of betrayal – which would make it easy for readers to condemn him and his actions – but is a “tale of unrest of a man at the end of his tether” (Carabine 231). It is because the teacher of languages has strategically withheld the fact that Razumov is a spy in order to increase the intrigue in the plot that it seems plausible that the narrator’s sudden emphasis on “mere mortal man” and his “short-sighted wisdom” suggests that he has tried to protect Razumov from premature judgement from his readers (Manocha 193). The teacher’s delayed revelation not only implicates his readers as witnesses who share in the short-sightedness he experienced during the time of the events he recounts, but his reiterated appeals to latitude and common humanity invite them to engage with the “morality” of the narrative strategies he has so cunningly employed (Carabine 229-30).

The teacher, as Watts argues despite his criticism of the narrative “inconsistencies [that] call the implied author’s methods and the integrity of the work into question” (45), is a mixture of “all-too-human” (46) qualities compounded by his conflicting functions as Conrad endeavours to control a difficult narrative. While Watts views this as a textual weakness, I feel that *UWE* could therefore be seen as a narrative relayed by a highly personalized narrator whose attempts to convince readers that his discourse is authoritative and objective (by relying on the journal as documentary evidence) reveal how problematic his version of events

is (Zerweck 161). By assuming the role of translator of meetings and practices that “wear perhaps the sinister character of old, legendary tales [of] the Enemy of Mankind” when viewed through the “morality of a Western reader” (Conrad, *UWE* 233), insisting that “[t]o us Europeans of the West, all ideas of political plots and conspiracies seem childish, crude, inventions for [...] a novel” (90), the narrator reveals himself to be a “sneering fault-finder” and cynic (Carabine 221). It is therefore significant that in his quest for “some key word” (Conrad, *UWE* 58) he decides on one that emphasises his similarity with the objects of his scorn:

I turn over for the hundredth time the leaves of Mr Razumov’s record, I lay it aside, I take up the pen – and the pen being ready for its office of setting down black on white I hesitate. For the word that persists in creeping under its point is no other word than *Cynicism*.

[...] In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity and in the secret readiness to debase itself in suffering the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism. It informs the declarations of her Statesman, the theories of her revolutionists and the mystic vaticinations of prophets to the point of making freedom look like a form of debauch, and the Christian virtues themselves appear actually indecent ... But I must apologise for the digression.

(Conrad, *UWE* 58; emphasis added)

To be cynical, characters have to possess a “doubt of good motives” (Carabine 220), implying a degree of consciousness and awareness that the narrator has already denied the Russians by claiming that they may not “really understand what they say” (Conrad, *UWE* 12).⁵¹ The old teacher’s anticipation of the norms and values of his contemporary Western readers could therefore be an authorial strategy to show that, contrary to the narrator’s contention, the gap between the historical and political experiences of the West and Russia – a gap Carabine claims also alerts the reader to the separation between the teacher and Conrad (221) – is not as great as he assumes. Rather, the insights the teacher provides reveal a “commentary of [his fictional] conduct” that could be “very useful” for the implied reader, and by extension the real reader, to understand the narrator’s behaviour in terms of “practical life” (Schopenhauer, *PPI* 454).⁵²

⁵¹ This suggests that the Russian characters are used by language more than users of language, an idea suggested by Carabine (220).

⁵² The implied reader is a “fictional inhabitant [and construction] of the text” that functions to mark “positions and attitudes in the text,” whereas the real reader is the biological being physically reading the book and bringing its own subjective frame of reference to bear on the interpretation thereof (Iser 33).

Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan argues that texts told from a first-person perspective in which the “I” is both the addressee and subject-object of the telling call the narrative identity into question, albeit at the risk of trivializing and diluting humans into storytelling beings (*Tells* 1). Conrad – through the old teacher – artistically highlights the different ontological status of authors and their creations when, during an outburst of anger at the narrator, Razumov cries out: “I am not a young man in a novel” (Conrad, *UWE* 145). As Erdinast-Vulcan points out, while a fictional character denying being a fictional character could amount to no more than a “gimmick”, it may artistically point to the relationship between literary characters and human subjects or more accurately to an ethical statement about the relationship “between narrative fictions and lived realities” (*Tells* 2-3). A statement in the “Author’s Note” serves to complicate this “seemingly trivial thesis” (*Tells* 3). Using the Bakhtinian claim that an author is “exotopic” or “transgradient” (i.e. able to know what the protagonist is incapable of knowing and thus able to comprehend the narrative as a whole), ontological lines are blurred by Conrad’s claim that:

[...] when I began to write I had [...] the three figures of Haldin, Razumov and Councillor Mikulin, defined exactly in my mind.

It was only after I had finished writing the first part that the whole story revealed itself to me in its tragic character and in the march of its events as unavoidable and sufficiently ample in its outline to give free play to my creative instinct and to the dramatic possibilities of the subject.

(Conrad, *UWE* 5)

Conrad’s statement that the story itself presented its true nature to him suggests that its tragic quality had originally been available as the result of a “principle for visualising and understanding the world, [an] idea present only for the characters, and not for [...] the author” (Bakhtin, *PD* 24) – one of the early explanations offered to describe the organisational and structural functions of polyphony (Mladenov 442). Polyphony refers to the interaction between different characters’ speeches, visions, opinions and hallucinations (such as Razumov’s repeated spotting of Haldin lying in the snow as he decides to betray him) which leads readers to identify an idea or concept as an object of *UWE*’s textual representations and not of any characteristic of the idea itself – in this case, of tragedy (Mladenov 443).

But is *UWE* a polyphonic novel? As I contend above and have suggested in the previous chapter, the narrative is told from the unchanging perspective of a first person narrator, with varying degrees of separation from the implied author. The teacher of

languages is omnipresent (Watts 46) and still provides his cynical digressions during episodes that use Razumov as focalizer. For instance, his controlling presence cannot be ignored in the second section of Part First – the episode in which Razumov, having locked Victor Haldin in his quarters and departed in search of the getaway driver Ziemianitch, decides to betray the revolutionist to Russian authorities for the murder of Minister de P— and several bystanders. In the opening paragraphs, the teacher could be conceived as merely providing a conventional Conradian narrative frame to Razumov-as-narrator, as he characteristically explains that the thoughts that seemed “to have rushed upon [Razumov]” (Conrad, *UWE* 26) are “inappropriate or even improper” to “the Western reader” only because of “the different conditions of Western thought” (27) before returning to the “fulness [*sic*] and precision” (26) of the documentary record. But this is a contrivance on the narrator’s part that allows him to disguise his own (and arguably Conrad’s) anti-Russian sentiments as though they originate in Razumov-as-narrator:

[...] under the soft carpet of snow [he] felt the hard ground of Russia, inanimate, cold, inert, like a sullen and tragic mother hiding her face under a winding sheet – his native soil! – his very own – without a fireside, without a heart! ...

[...]

He responded to it with the readiness of a Russian who is born to an inheritance of space and numbers. Under the sumptuous immensity of the sky, the snow covered [...] everything under its uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history.

[...]

In Russia, the land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations, many brave minds have turned away at last from the vain and endless conflict to the one great historical fact of the land. They turned to autocracy [...]

(Conrad, *UWE* 32-33)

These reflections are most certainly not “like the thoughts of most human beings few and simple” (26), which would be the “faithful reflection of the state of [Razumov’s] feelings” if the narrative frame provided by the teacher at the beginning of the section is to be believed. Furthermore, they are most certainly not consistent with the thoughts of a character who views Russia as his “closest parentage” (16) and who refuses to adopt a definite position on the “throes of internal dissensions” like a “good-natured man” who refuses to take “definite sides in a violent family quarrel” (17). If this passage reflects Razumov’s actual thoughts at this early stage in the story – especially the conclusion that “brave minds [...] turned to autocracy” (33) – then Councillor Mikulin would have no reason to tell him later that “[y]ou

shall be coming back to us. Some of our greatest minds had to do that in the end” (227), especially given what readers have been told of Razumov’s personal aspirations. Rather, the view of an inevitable turn to autocracy is consistent with a sentiment the teacher shares with Razumov during their first meeting: “I think that you [Russians] are under a curse” (151). The double agent responds: “The great problem [...] is to understand the nature of the curse” (152). Given this exchange, it seems plausible that the understanding evident in the above extract belongs to the old teacher and not to a young tsarist agent who scornfully describes an occidental he sees in a Genevan café as: “Elector. Eligible. Enlightened. [...] A brute all the same” (159).

Even though the dialogic views expressed throughout the text – such as the episodes seemingly focalised by Razumov and the speeches of characters such as Ivanovitch and Antonovna – are ultimately filtered through the perspective of a single character, the teacher does not “seek a simple solution” to these views “by privileging one discourse” (Helms 224). Rather, the narrator’s ostensible Western-centric dismissal of all things Russian ultimately shifts to a plea in favour of Razumov as the result of and posited solution to the heteroglossia manifested in the teacher’s “discourse of doubts [and] internal dialogism” (235). These doubts explain why the narrator, whom Artese describes as “an embattled conscience” (185), so frequently clarifies and subtly changes his function in the tale – moving from nothing more than an editor and translator (Conrad, *UWE* 11-14), to commentator on the “moral conditions” of Russia (58), and ultimately to the only voice pleading for “punctilious fairness” (225) towards Razumov on the “ground of common humanity” (225). In so doing, the distinction between narrator and implied author – supported by what is known of the biographical Conrad – is once again blurred. Conrad considered ideology, politics and interest in material goods inimical to contentment (Schwarz 548), which could only be found in alternatives, such as unwavering fidelity to duty. In Conrad’s oeuvre, characters zealously committed to political ideals – like the Monteros, Don José and Charles Gould of *Nostromo* and the Professor in *The Secret Agent* – “sacrifice their potential for personal growth” (Schwarz 550), regardless of what those ideals may be. This could explain why figures whose active lives are shown to revolve around either upholding or destroying the status quo – such as Sophia Antonovna, Nikita Necator, Victor Haldin, Father Zosim, General T–, Prince K– and the gormless “Madcap Kostia” – are portrayed as being involved in a “ritualistic hunt” or

“values and ideals” that subsumes their humanity (550).⁵³ As Conrad declares in his “Author’s Note”:

The ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions.

(Conrad, *UWE* 7)

Yet Razumov is “treated sympathetically” because he is “an ordinary young man, with his healthy capacity for work and sane ambitions” (6). Just as the implied author asserts, so too does the narrator realize that Razumov is a man of conscience who has no real option but to accept “the test of another faith” (Conrad, *UWE* 226) offered to him by Councillor Mikulin at the beginning of Part Fourth. The elliptical framing of the episodes in Geneva between Mikulin’s question “Where to?” (82) and the exposing of Razumov’s double agency (232-33) amplifies the tragic interpretation of the novel (Carabine 229). Razumov becomes the representative of “mere mortal man” who falls prey to his own “miserable ingenuity in error” (Conrad, *UWE* 233), as a result of his yearning to be a “[s]ervant [...] in a brotherly solidarity of force [to the] Russian nation” (231). Razumov, then, is a character who embodies the Conradian virtues of fidelity, courage and responsibility to his fellows (Schwarz 550), regardless of the fact that these are given to an autocratic regime. These insights and the teacher’s reiterated appeals to the reader’s sense of fairness achieve, for the teacher, a “magisterial blend of compassion and scepticism reminiscent of Marlow” (Carabine 229) and show Razumov as perhaps the only other figure of human morality in the novel. The revolutionaries Razumov betrays acknowledge a redemptive element in his “public confession in Laspara’s house” (Conrad, *UWE* 287) in the final moments of the novel:

⁵³ Razumov convinces Kostia to rob his wealthy father, by appealing to the student’s desire to be “of service” (Conrad, *UWE* 238) to Razumov, whom he views as his “saviour” (239). Kostia hands over a large sum of money to Razumov on the night of his staged flight from Russia, feeling as though he has contributed to the revolutionary cause. The tsarist agent, however, flings the “small brown paper parcel” from his train carriage without opening it (241).

There are evil moments in every life. A false suggestion enters one's brain and then fear is born – fear of oneself, fear for oneself. Or else a false courage? who [sic] knows? Well, call it what you like; but tell me how many of them would deliver themselves up deliberately to perdition as he himself says in that book, rather than go on living secretly debased in their own eyes? How many? And please mark this – he was safe when he did it. It was just when he believed himself safe, and more – infinitely more – when the possibility of being loved by that admirable girl first dawned upon him, that he discovered that his bitterest railings, the worst wickedness, the devil-work of his hate and pride, could never cover up the ignominy of the existence before him. There's character in such a discovery.

(Conrad, *UWE* 287)

Sophia Antonovna's comments point towards a sense of right and wrong that are defined by her political cause. Razumov's work for Imperial Russia is "devil-work" and "the worst wickedness" caused by "hate and pride" rather than an act of solidarity. If readers are expected to believe that Antonovna's remarks capture the novel's view of morality, then this would not only imply that there is a moral imperative but it would also encourage a tacit acceptance of the righteousness of political revolution, which is clearly at odds with the themes of *UWE*.

But it is insurmountable that ultimately readers are unable to escape the subjectivity of the old teacher of languages, which is a "necessary consequence" of the novel's narrative structure (Artese 176). I would therefore argue that Antonovna's ethical assessments are not only self-servingly used to valorize her own political agenda by turning Razumov into a martyr-figure, but are rendered obsolete in favour of what the teacher holds as virtuous: "I accepted her conclusion in silence. Who would care to question the grounds of forgiveness or compassion" (Conrad, *UWE* 287).⁵⁴ Compassion, yet again, emerges as the supreme ethical virtue.

From a Schopenhauerian perspective, Antonovna and the other highly politicized characters of *UWE* illustrate how "at almost all times there prevails [...] in literature some false fundamental view, fashion, or mannerism which is admired" (Schopenhauer, *PP2* 509). In the novel, readers "encounter the incorrigible rabble of mankind, everywhere present in legions, filling and defiling everything, like flies in summer" (556). That the novel ultimately dismisses the offered imperative assessment of the ethics of Razumov's actions in favour of compassion suggests that it extols a virtue-based system of morality not dissimilar to the

⁵⁴ In this sense, Sophia Antonovna and Peter Ivanovitch are similar in their manipulation of public perceptions of events in order to garner favour and support for themselves.

narrow confines of Schopenhauer's ethics. The "elaborate narrative environment" (Artese 185) of *UWE* supports the view that this virtue-based morality is of great significance as the "subtly mendacious" (Conrad, *UWE* 233) narrator and implied author conspire against the reader to reveal that appeals to "common humanity" (225) are the ultimate "moral discovery" (58) of this tale.⁵⁵

Section Three – The Magistrate's Trajectory towards Compassion in *Waiting for the Barbarians*

Showing an affinity between a Conradian novel and Schopenhauerian philosophy is, as has been stated, by no means new. What is surprising, though, is not so much that a similar connection could be drawn between the same philosophy and J. M. Coetzee's *WB* as that Schopenhauerian thought is far more pervasive in Coetzee's work than in Conrad's.⁵⁶

Two major narratological strategies used in *WB* contribute to the reader's identification with and understanding of the unnamed magistrate's ethical awakening: the careful authorial control of the novel's first-person narrative and the use of the present tense for both "the experiencing and the narrating self" (Tegla 76; Del Conte 436). By eliminating the gap between the time of narration and the occurrence of the experience that is narrated (referred to as "simultaneous narration"), Coetzee's text invites readers to engage directly with the fiction, as there is no textual construct (like the teacher's implied Western audience of *UWE*) to "buffer" the authorial audience from the narrator (Del Conte 430, 433). Unlike the teacher, the magistrate necessarily tells of events as they happen (428), turning him into a reporter (430). As a result of Coetzee's explicitly voiced preoccupation with this morphological feature of his work he calls "the middle voice" (Macaskill 447), there is no opportunity for the narrator to retrospectively analyse and comment on his experiences (Del Conte 429). Whereas the old teacher maintains and capitalizes on the opportunity to create a "subtly mendacious" dialogue with his assumed Western readers (Conrad, *UWE* 233), the magistrate's simultaneous present tense narration's necessary lack of reflective pauses invites readers to supplement the interpretative and evaluative functions usually fulfilled by more traditional retrospective narrators (Del Conte 428-30).

⁵⁵ This supports my contention that the Swedish Academy's assertion that ethical action in *UWE*, implicit in the parallels it draws between *UWE* and *WB*, "serve[s] no end" ("PR" para. 3) is absurd.

⁵⁶ I refer to *UWE* and *WB* in particular and not to the entire oeuvres.

One of the more salient results of this narrative strategy is its metaphorical value, which resides in its “resistance of agency” (Macaskill 452). This could be seen as one of Coetzee’s solutions to the ethical imperative in liberal white South African fiction at the height of the apartheid era to represent otherness without appropriating it (Blair 489). The middle voice allows Coetzee to provide extensive but limited portrayals of others while also conveying their resistance to and disruptions of the discourses which define them as other – including colonial, liberal and novelistic contexts (490). In so doing, Coetzee’s work offers readers “a fresh thinking-through of significant aesthetic, ethical, and political issues” (Attridge, *ER x*). The importance of his novels, Attridge argues, lies:

in the way they raise and illuminate questions of immense practical importance to all of us. These include the relation between ethical demands and political decisions, the human cost of artistic creation, the exactingness and uncertainty of confessional autobiography, and the difficulty of doing justice to others in a violent society.

(Attridge, *ER x*)

Anton Leist and Peter Singer likewise identify an ethics of social relationships as the thematic centre of Coetzee’s work, with shame being the “most significant index of personal involvement” (8-9). As the magistrate tries to explain himself to himself, with “no likely interlocutor in [his] fictional world” (Dooley 43), the authorial audience of his simultaneous narration experiences unfiltered access to several failures of self-analysis (45). This results in a blurring of the ontological distinctions between implied and real readers (Del Conte 440), implicating the audience merely as a result of their being vicarious witnesses to events through the eyes of a narrator who gradually recognizes his own complicity in the Empire’s actions (436), and justifying the view that the text itself is a site of ethical interaction.

Unlike *UWE*, *WB* does not present readers with a carefully controlled revelation of an already completed ethical experience (see Del Conte 438). Rather, readers witness an ethical awakening as it occurs – emphasising the *process* rather than the product (439). The magistrate is not in control of the events he narrates, but is exposed by his present tense narration as *being manipulated* by those events (439). Indeed, at the close of the novel, he demonstrates his continued uncertainty as to the relevance of his experience: “Like much else nowadays I leave it feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere” (Coetzee, *WB* 170).

I would argue that the act of pressing on despite the possibility of ending “nowhere” conveys a sense that there *may* be value in the magistrate’s continuing along the trajectory of

the ethical awakening that he and the story's readers have experienced together. While this implies that the importance of ethically right action is only tentative, there is a significant difference between accepting a remote possibility and dismissing something out of hand, as the Swedish Academy has done (see "PR" para. 3).

Coetzee himself has spoken explicitly of the "metaphysical quest" fictionalized in *WB*: "The novel asks the question: Why does one choose the side of justice when it is not in one's material interest to do so" (Coetzee, *DP* 394). But this does not imply that there is an ethical imperative present in the text – merely an inquiry. After all, Coetzee laconically denies the notion that novels "ought to have a message" (Attwell, *SL* 164):

a [novel] is not a message with a covering [...] not a message plus a residue, the residue, the art with which the message is coated. [...] There is no addition in [novels] [...]. On the keyboard on which they are written, the plus key does not work.

(Extract from Coetzee, "The Novel Today," qtd. in Attwell, *SL* 164)

But this does not detract from the idea that the novel, as argued by Attridge, should be seen as "an ethically charged *event*" (*ER xi*; emphasis added). The magistrate embodies the trajectory of a shift from duty-bound imperative-based ethics to virtue-based ethics despite this not being in his material interest (Tegla 68). Readers share in his "involved, painful, and ambivalent process of self-evaluation and self-critique" (Head 72-73) and, thanks to the blurring of the ontological distinctions caused by Coetzee's use of the middle voice, are invited to consider how they share in his complicity in attempts to appropriate others into master discourses. While *WB* does not overtly appeal for ethical action on the "ground of common humanity" (Conrad, *UWE* 225), mapping the progress of the magistrate's metaphysical quest can serve to illustrate the text's affinities with this Schopenhauerian idea – regardless of whether the hero succeeds.

In Part 1 – the events spanning Colonel Joll's first arrival at the outpost to his departure – readers meet the unnamed magistrate, who is acutely aware of his duty as administrator. He engages in polite conversation on the first night with his guest from the Third Bureau. Both interlocutors – Joll and the magistrate – are actively engaged as they discuss a mutual interest: hunting (Tegla 69). The topic not only serves as a prefiguration of Joll's subsequent hunting of barbarians as though they are animals, an analogy dating back to ancient times and evident in writings by Aristotle (Williams, qtd. in Tegla 69), but also contains elements that subtly distance the two men from each other (Tegla 69; Eckstein 190-

191; Marais, “WB” 72). Joll boasts of his last hunting excursion “when thousands of deer, pigs, bears were slain, so that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot (‘Which was a pity’)” (Coetzee, *WB* 1). Readers later come to realize that Joll’s words betray a defining characteristic of his activities: “exaggerated, superfluous killing” (Tegla 69), first of animals and later of barbarians. The magistrate’s prey seems unimpressive by comparison. He tells Joll “about the great flocks of geese and ducks that descend on the lake” annually, about “native ways of trapping them” and even suggests taking Joll fishing “by night in a native boat” (Coetzee, *WB* 1). Joll seems to revel in the notion of human dominion over non-humans (Marais, “WB” 72), slaughtering *en masse*, while the magistrate already demonstrates a predilection toward favouring “native” ways. While his invitation to Joll most obviously evinces the “typical behaviour of a person trying to be hospitable” and to please his guest (Tegla 70), it is rendered ironic as readers soon discover Joll’s hatred and mistrust of all things native (Kerr 25).

This brief episode defines the magistrate’s interactions with Joll for the entire first part of the novel. He has ensured that Joll is set “in the best room of the inn” (Coetzee, *WB* 1), which is the “best accommodation the town provides” (1-2). Staff have been informed that Joll is “an important visitor” upon whom they “must make a good impression” (2). Ensuring his guest the best treatment not only illustrates the magistrate’s hospitality, but also betrays what Tegla (70) identifies as a “certain fear of authority” and a degree of submissiveness. Although the polite conversation shows a slight difference in the nature of their interests in hunting, it still reveals an affinity and shared interest between the two men (Eckstein 190; Marais, “WB” 72). Significantly, it also reveals the magistrate’s desire to avoid confronting the uncomfortable reality informing Joll’s visit: “We do not discuss the reason for his being here. He is here under the emergency powers, that is enough. Instead we talk about hunting” (Coetzee, *WB* 1).

The magistrate tries to maintain a friendly conversational tone with Joll the following day as they visit an old man and young boy held prisoner in the granary storeroom. Rather than address the issue of the captives or elaborate his concern that there are inappropriate incarceration facilities, he opts to speak about crops: “We hope for three thousand bushels from the communal land this year. We plant only once. The weather has been very kind to us” (2). In a similar conversation to the one the night before, he and Joll exchange ideas on how to control the number of rats. But the polite dialogue soon degenerates into a dramatic monologue, with the magistrate receiving no response from his guest other than irritating “cryptic silences” and the “theatrical mystery of dark shields hiding healthy eyes” (4). Joll’s

refusal to answer the magistrate's observations that the prisoners are "simple people" who could not "be of any use" to him and that "[n]o one would have brought an old man and a sick boy along on a raiding party" (4) illustrates Joll's "wall-like resistance to any logic or sympathetic reasoning" (Tegla 70). The magistrate realizes that he is "pleading" for the prisoners, and obediently retreats when Joll diplomatically dismisses him: "You would find it tedious. We have set procedures we go through" (Coetzee, *WB* 4).

During their next encounter, readers are once again shown how the magistrate is inclined to "speak in human terms" (Tegla 70) while Joll is confidently located in the discourse of power and authority of Empire (Ashcroft 104; Eckstein 186) as he explains the process of discovering the truth through torture with hermetic certainty:

[“]First I get lies, you see – this is what happens – first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth.”

Pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt. That is what I bear away from my conversation with Colonel Joll [...].

(Coetzee, *WB* 5)

A limit has been reached between the humanist moral code of the magistrate and his visitor's devotion to the Empire's interests. With the insight that for Joll "[p]ain is truth," the magistrate realises his visitor's capacity for violent action. But faced with a potential conflict with another of the Empire's servants, the magistrate understandably opts to retreat (Tegla 70). Even though he disagrees with Joll's actions, he rationalizes his choice to turn a blind eye to the torture by claiming that "Empire does not require that its servants love each other, merely that they perform their duty" (Coetzee, *WB* 6). For the rest of the first part of the novel, the magistrate embodies this state of non-participation (Tegla 70). He claims to have not heard any "[o]f the screaming [...] from the granary" (Coetzee, *WB* 5), despite having an ear "tuned to the pitch of human pain" (5) and the proximity of the store to his own rooms. But his admission that "[a]t a certain point [he] begin[s] to plead [his] own cause" (5) immediately following his observation that "the noise of life [...] does not cease because somewhere someone is crying" (5) suggests that his ignorance may be more wilful than he admits.

Later episodes, especially those following the arrival of the first batch of prisoners sent back to the outpost by Joll's expeditionary forces, show that the magistrate succumbs to

his urge to deny the reality in front of him, averting his eyes from the “morally demanding sight of mistreated barbarians” (Tegla 71):

From my window I watch them cross the square [...] and from my window I stare down, invisible behind the glass. [...] I stand back while the onlookers crowd around [...] I turn my back on the Colonel’s triumph and make my way back to my rooms. [...] I try to pay no attention to the new batch of prisoners in the yard. [...] I hurry out in the early-morning light, occupy myself all day [...] I sit in my rooms with the windows shut [...]. Another day and another night I spend away from the empire of pain.

(Coetzee, *WB* 18, 21, 22, 23, 24)

In the above extract, Coetzee suggests the complicity and identification between the magistrate and Colonel Joll by presenting the narrator as shielding himself from any “human, moral response” (Tegla 71). As argued in Chapter Two, Colonel Joll enjoys a “panoptical view” (Hawthorn 299) that thwarts attempts at “mutual reflection and perception” (Bakhtin, *PD* 312) essential to lateral transgradience – or the need to be authorised in the eyes of others (Erdinast-Vulcan 90). Like the Colonel, the magistrate hides behind glass: windows as opposed to smoked lenses (Tegla 71). He acknowledges his refusal to see the prisoners shortly after Joll departs for the capital:

I last saw them [the prisoners] five days ago (if I can claim ever to have seen them, if I ever did more than pass my gaze over their surface absently, with reluctance). What they have undergone in these five days I do not know.

(Coetzee, *WB* 26)

Despite expressing a violent wish that “these ugly people” be “obliterated from the face of the earth” (26), sentiments readers would more readily ascribe to Joll, the magistrate seems to reveal a humane desire “to restore the prisoners to their former lives as soon as possible” (26). But this is not the result of any sense of empathy, pity or compassion. Rather, much like Joll, and Ivanovitch in *UWE*, the magistrate’s actions are the result of the self-interested impulse of egoism.⁵⁷ He claims that “fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages” belong to the “new men of Empire” and that his only interest is to “struggle on with the same old story” (26). Calling in the doctor to attend to the injured, restoring the village barracks to their former state, feeding and returning the “prisoners to their former lives”, are all part of an

⁵⁷ See Chapter One, Section Four for a discussion of the importance of the moral incentives in Schopenhauer’s conception of ethically valuable behaviour.

attempt to ensure that they are “as far as possible” (26) from the outpost so that the magistrate can return to the comforts and luxuries that were attendant on his position as administrator “of law and order” (26) before Joll’s arrival. It is only once the magistrate begins his unusual interaction with a young barbarian girl left crippled and partially blinded as a result of her torture that readers, thanks to the effects of the middle voice, encounter the beginning of a series of attempts at self-analyses that lead to a process of ethical awakening (Dooley 45; Del Conte 438-39).

At the beginning of Part II the magistrate comes across a barbarian woman “the Colonel brought in” (Coetzee, *WB* 27) begging on the street. She is partially blinded and walks with great difficulty, and the magistrate offers her work and “a place of abode” (29) in his rooms. The invitation is initially resisted and the girl cautions him: “You do not understand. You do not want someone like me” (29). The barbarian girl nevertheless joins him in his quarters, encouraging the magistrate – whose responses toward her range from baffled to apologetic – to attempt to understand their relationship in terms that propel him along the trajectory of an ethical awakening. His initial response is to offer the girl an unexpected excuse (Tegla 72):

“This is not what you think it is,” I say. The words come reluctantly. Can I really be about to excuse myself? Her lips are clenched shut, her ears too no doubt, she wants nothing of old men and their bleating consciences. I prow around her, talking about our vagrancies ordinances, sick at myself. Her skin begins to glow in the warmth of the closed room. She tugs at her coat, opens her throat to the fire. The distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible; I shudder.

(Coetzee, *WB* 29)

His “shudder” at the similarity between himself and “her torturers” and his offhanded description of himself as an old man with a “bleating conscience” (29) show the first signs of a “moral awakening” (Tegla 72). But this awakening is strictly an individual and essentially selfish one, with the magistrate failing to understand his attraction to and treatment of the girl (Marais, *SI* 28). Although his ethical negotiation starts in physical, sexual terms (Tegla 72), he repeatedly dismisses the sexual component of his behaviour (Marais, *SI* 28):

I feel no desire to enter this stocky little body glistening by now in the firelight. It is a week since words have passed between us. I feed her, shelter her, use her body, if that is what I am doing, in this foreign way.

(Coetzee, *WB* 32)

The magistrate is surprised, perplexed and bewildered by his own behaviour, constantly dwelling on his inability to understand his relationship with the barbarian woman in rational terms, as suggested in the above extract (Marais, *SI* 28-29). He questions what the “woman beside [him] is doing in [his] life” (Coetzee, *WB* 50) and is frustrated that “whatever raptures she may promise or yield [...] remain as obscure to [him] as ever” (70). Rather than act on any sexual impulse, the physical relationship is reduced to a curious purification ritual in which he washes her naked body, rubs it with oils, caresses it, and then falls asleep as if under a spell (Tegla 72; Marais, *SI* 29; VanZanten Gallagher 284-85): “often in the very act of caressing her I am overcome with sleep as if poleaxed, fall into oblivion, sprawled upon her body, and wake an hour or two later dizzy, confused, thirsty” (Coetzee, *WB* 33). His inability to understand his own behaviour leaves him “angry with [himself] for wanting and not wanting her” (35) and unable to “remember what [I] ever desired in her” (35). The resultant confusion and frustration leads to his insistence that the barbarian girl tell him what her torturers did to her, as his liberal conscience meets her baffling unreadability, expressed through her lack of response to his touch (Hayes 61).

At this stage the magistrate is guilty of a double invasion of the barbarian girl. First, he physically invades her.

Caress and physical assault (reaffirmation of altering, and invasion of the body's privacy) are *both* instances of touching and – as so many court cases have shown – notoriously difficult to distinguish from each other. The caress is the gesture of one body reaching towards another; already, from the start, in its inner ‘structure’, an act of *invasion*, let it be just tentative and explanatory. Being invited or welcome is not its necessary condition. Neither is its reciprocation and mutuality.

(Bauman 93; emphasis in original)

As in the case of her torturers, the magistrate has power over her body. What differentiates him from them is his limiting his actions to caressing, rather than transgressing the limitation her body imposes by asserting his will forcefully upon it, as Joll has (Tegla 73; see Gaita, *GE* 88). Besides this confused physical interaction, the magistrate also persists in asking: “What did they do to you? [...] Why don't you want to tell me” (Coetzee, *WB* 34). This is a second form of invasion: an attempt to penetrate her inner being. Her continued refusal to answer the magistrate, as Tegla argues, is meaningful because, at this point, he is still incapable of an appropriate moral response (73). As he attempts to understand the barbarian girl, who is powerless to resist him (Hayes 67), he tries to interpret the ways Empire has inscribed itself

and its forms on her through torture, reducing her to no more than a living text to be deciphered (Moses 121). His inability to recognise the barbarian girl on her own terms and to “confer on her an inner reality” (Tegla 73) is indicated by his choice of words as, confused and baffled, he attempts to convey the sense of his experience. Repeatedly the barbarian girl is described as an empty object: “with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface” (Coetzee, *WB* 46) and “[t]here is no answering life. It is like caressing an urn or a ball, something which is all surface” (52).

The magistrate seems obscurely aware of what links him to her torturers and is vaguely bothered by the fact that he intentionally chose not to see what Joll and his agents were doing, but his actions still result from a self-interested, egoistic incentive. As Raimond Gaita explains, “[c]orrupt forms of remorse *are* a form of self-absorption [...] a false semblance of the radically singular ‘I’ who is discovered in genuine remorse” (*GE* 49). His curious, automatic falling asleep while trying to establish a moral connection with the girl suggests that the magistrate fails to understand the true nature of the harm she has experienced, and exemplifies the self-centredness of the ritual. Just as Colonel Joll is imagined to have a “private ritual of purification” (Coetzee, *WB* 13), the magistrate’s ritual is reminiscent of the biblical washing of feet (Urquhart 12) and suggests an overriding concern with penance. As long as the magistrate obsesses over her torturers and his resemblance to them, he remains incapable of recognizing and authorizing the barbarian girl.

The first intimation of a truly ethical recognition of the injustice done to her and of the unjust nature of the entire situation occurs to him during a hunting expedition. When the magistrate hunts, he does so with the same intention to kill as Colonel Joll (Marais, “WB” 72). He recalls the joy of hunting as an opportunity to savour and revel in “all the strength and stiffness of [his] manhood” (Coetzee, *WB* 42). For the magistrate the process of hunting is more interesting than the results, as can be seen in his discussion of native techniques with Joll at the opening of the novel, although various episodes show that he does accept the sacrifice of animal life as necessary (Eckstein 191). On one trip he is unusually lucky and “[a]lmost at once, with absurd good fortune, [...] come[s] upon a waterbuck” (Coetzee, *WB* 42). Once again, like the torturers, he is in a position of absolute power over the body and life of an other. But on this occasion, hunter and prey exchange looks (Tegla 74; Eckstein 191):

The movement [of raising and aiming the rifle] is smooth and steady, but perhaps the sun glints on the barrel, for in his descent he turns his head *and sees me*. His hooves touch ice with a click, his jaw stops in mid-motion, *we gaze at each other*.

(Coetzee, *WB* 42; emphasis added)

Unbeknownst to the magistrate, and unlike in any of the episodes in which he has been able to shelter behind the glass of his windows, the reciprocal gaze required for “mutual reflection and perception” (Bakhtin, *PD* 312) needed for successful lateral transgradience (Erdinast-Vulcan 90) has been established. He ignores this significant connection and attempts to continue with the action of taking the waterbuck’s life: “[m]y pulse does not quicken: evidently it is not important to me that the ram die” (Coetzee, *WB* 42). Yet this moment marks the magistrate’s sudden awakening to the moral significance of the recognition of the other (Tegla 75):

He chews again, a single scythe of the jaws, and stops. In the clear silence of the morning I find an obscure sentiment lurking at the edge of my consciousness. With the buck before me suspended in immobility, there seems to be time for all things, time even to turn my gaze inward and see what it is that has robbed the hunt of its savour: the sense that this has become no longer a morning’s hunting but an occasion on which either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim [...].

(Coetzee, *WB* 42)

The shift from an everyday, normal, common practice to a realization by one individual that he has the power to do to another body anything that he desires – to kill it or miss – turns the hunt into an ethical encounter too strong for the magistrate to continue to ignore and is a suggestion of ethical responsibility (Tegla 75; Marais, “WB” 72). It also indicates the ethical code that Marais argues the novel adumbrates: ethical action should not be grounded in the perceptions, experiences and understanding of a rational, autonomous individual (“WB” 66, 72). The novel also treats knowledge and “Western ethical theory’s preoccupation with the rational subject as the centre of ethical action” with suspicion by using the middle voice to convey the perplexities experienced by such an agent (the magistrate) upon his encounter with an other (66-67). The shift away from rationality that this invites suggests room for a virtue-based ethics such as the one argued for by Arthur Schopenhauer.

Although the magistrate lets the waterbuck escape unharmed, he tries and fails to rationalize the experience to the barbarian girl: “Never before have I had the feeling of not

living my life on my own terms” (Coetzee, *WB* 43). Eckstein argues that it is significant that the magistrate’s moral inability to kill the waterbuck occurs after he has taken in the barbarian girl (191), implying that his experiences with her have been leading to this moment of ethical awakening. It is even more important that after revealing this epiphany to her, she finally offers the story of her torture to him without being prompted. As she recounts how her eyes and ankles were damaged, the magistrate is appalled: “Is this the question I asked? I want to protest but instead listen on, chilled” (Coetzee, *WB* 44). The girl offering her story after the magistrate’s experience with the waterbuck suggests that she has identified in his moral being a readiness to accept her that had previously been lacking (Tegla 75). But the experience has merely marked a point in the magistrate’s moral trajectory. Although he begins to think in moral terms, considering his responsibility over the girl – “this body in my bed for which I am responsible, or so it seems, otherwise why do I keep it” (Coetzee, *WB* 47) – he continues to speak of her in terms of surface and blankness that indicate that she lacks interiority (Tegla 76). He also fails to realize that the barbarian girl has been damaged forever (76). Rather than concentrating on her individuality as a victim of gratuitous cruelty and injustice, the magistrate returns to his demands for a response from, and recognition of himself by, her damaged body. Frustrated, he asks: “What do I have to do to move you? [...] Does no one move you” (Coetzee, *WB* 47). Exasperated, the magistrate leaves his post to return the barbarian girl to her people in Part III. When he arrives back, he will finally reach a full recognition and understanding of the girl after he is subjected to similar degradations and torture, finally marking a more significant movement in his trajectory towards true compassion.

The magistrate returns to find Colonel Joll and his forces back at the outpost. His apparent sympathies for the barbarians, which are manifestations of his indulgence in and consideration of the ambivalences he has identified during his ethical awakening, and the assistance he has offered the barbarian girl are enough for Joll to trump up charges of desertion and collusion with the enemy of Empire, and the magistrate is imprisoned (Mushtaq 29; Tegla 76). Initially this is a welcome development as it appears to solve his ongoing crisis of conscience: “I sense a faraway tinge of exultation at the prospect that the false friendship between myself and the Bureau may be coming to an end” (Coetzee, *WB* 84). As he is escorted to his make-shift cell he becomes aware of his “elation” at the thought that his “alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over, [he] has set [himself] in opposition, the bond is broken” (85). In the midst of this self-appraisal, he recognizes that the loss of his

comfort and sense of civil peace to Joll's military power – which seems to grow with the pain it inflicts (Eckstein 187) – ironically makes him “a free man” (Coetzee, *WB* 85).

At this point readers may wish to consider the magistrate's moral growth as complete and to see this episode as an act of redemption separating the narrator from the unpleasantness of Joll's actions. But the magistrate initially feels unchanged, suggesting that his behaviour is still as self-centred as before. Indeed he underestimates the ways in which Joll and the men of the Bureau will break him and his resistance, which Eckstein argues originates in the magistrate's hope that, as a civilian officer, he is innocent of the atrocities committed by the military (187). The insidious humiliations he endures begin as relatively simple: his movements are confined; he suffers hygienic restrictions; and he is, at times, supposedly forgotten and left to starve. His suffering finally allows him to reflect on the experiences of the barbarian girl and her people, which he had originally elected not to recognize, as he begins to appreciate “the moral dimension of [his] plight” (Coetzee, *WB* 96).

Awareness of this dimension finally culminates in the same scene used to demonstrate Joll's moral vacuity in Chapter Two: the brutal public beating of a dozen barbarians in the town square. This scene, showing public depravity and revealing “the thousands who throng before our eyes in peaceful intercourse” as nothing more than “tigers and wolves whose teeth are secured by a strong muzzle” (Schopenhauer, *BM* 129), is the key point in the magistrate's trajectory of moral growth, turning him into a figure who pleads for behaviour premised on the “ground of common humanity” (Conrad, *UWE* 233) like the old teacher of *UWE*.

The magistrate is lured from his cell by the loud noise of “thousands of ecstatic souls” (Coetzee, *WB* 112). On investigation he finds a “cloud of dust over the whole square” (112) as horsemen returning from Joll's foray into the hinterland behave like heroes on a victorious return, “smiling and laughing [with] hands raised high in triumph [while one] waves a garland of flowers” (112). A dozen prisoners are led into the square in a display of such viciousness that the images can only serve to appal the reader (Tegla 78): “[They are] tied neck to neck [...], stark naked, holding their hands up to their faces [because] a simple loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man's hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks” (Coetzee, *WB* 113). The reader's response is shared by the magistrate, whose “heart grows sick” (113). Like the hunting scene described earlier, this is an ethical encounter. Again the magistrate tries to ignore the ethical significance of what is before him and struggles to convince himself that it would be better to return to his cell “for [his] own sake” (114):

For me, at this moment, striding away from the crowd, what has become important above all is that I should neither be contaminated by the atrocity that is about to be committed nor poison myself with impotent hatred of its perpetrators. I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself. Let it at least be said [...] there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian.
(Coetzee, *WB* 114)

Implicitly, the magistrate recognises that witnessing evil can contaminate and pollute the witness because, as Gaita points out, “guilt of others can be the occasion for one’s own guilt” (*CH* 93). At this point, the middle voice implicates readers in a similar, vicarious transgression, inviting an ethical response to the scene (Attridge, *ER* 64) as a response to the charge that there “existed one man [the magistrate] who in his heart was not a barbarian” (Coetzee, *WB* 114). Despite his fears that he may be contaminated by the evil with which he is surrounded, the magistrate *fails* to remove himself. As in the case of his unsuccessful hunt, he finds himself in a situation in which he is confronted by the faces of others:

On every face around me, even those that are smiling, I see the same expression: not hatred, not bloodlust, but a curiosity so intense that their bodies are drained by it and only their eyes live, organs of a new and ravening appetite.
(Coetzee, *WB* 115)

The magistrate does not detect even the slightest moral reaction to what is happening (Tegla 79). There are no signs of disagreement, indignation or protest, let alone any sympathy for the victims (79). Joll, as has been argued in Chapter Two, inscribes a preordained truth on the prisoners’ bodies (the word “ENEMY”) as he creates a hermeneutic circle – torturing their bodies in order to extract the truth he has already projected on them (Craps 63). In the process the prisoners are dehumanized and transformed into objects only conceptualized in terms of surface, like the barbarian girl. Just as the magistrate had been, the villagers are curious to see how far one can go when in a position of complete power over a body made available as nothing more than an object (Tegla 79). The magistrate is the only figure aware of the threat to the spectators of moral implication, and he considers intervening. He appears to contemplate this intervention in terms held favourable in Schopenhauerian ethics: “[i]f you desire the well-being of others, then you ought not to be indifferent to their fate” (qtd. in Cartwright, *NS* 259). Gaita expresses a similar view that people become complicit in others’ wrongdoing “only if one failed to do something to prevent their deeds *or at least protest them*” (*CH* 93; emphasis in original).

But the magistrate remains mute until finally Joll's actions push him to an enraged outburst: "Over his head, exhibiting it to the crowd, Joll holds a hammer, an ordinary four-pound hammer used for knocking in tent-pegs" (Coetzee, *WB* 116). The magistrate lunges forward, protesting against the atrocity of beating another human being with such a tool (Tegla 80):

"Not with that!" I shout. The hammer lies cradled in the Colonel's folded arms. "You would not use a hammer on a beast, not on a beast!"
[...]
"Look!" I shout. "We are the great miracle of creation! But from some blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself! How —!" Words fail me. "Look at these men!" I recommence. "*Men!*" Those in the crowd who can crane to look at the prisoners, even at the flies that begin to settle on their bleeding welts.
(Coetzee, *WB* 117)

This tirade not only appeals to those around the magistrate for moral recognition of the prisoners' "common humanity" (Conrad, *UWE* 233) but also marks the point in his ethical awakening at which, for once, he loses all traces of interest in self-preservation and abandons his former devotion to his duty to the Empire. Injured, he insists on making full use of this momentary indifference to his own fate: "Never mind: all I want is a few moments to finish what I am saying now that I have begun" (Coetzee, *WB* 117). It is also significant that in this state of heightened moral responsibility, in which he refuses to turn his back as he had at the beginning of the novel, the magistrate remonstrates with Colonel Joll: "'*You!*' I shout. Let it all be said. Let him be the one on whom the anger breaks. 'You are depraving these people!'" (116).

The magistrate has previously obeyed the voice of duty, submitting to authority and its decisions regardless of how questionable these are, and readers have experienced his inner conflict as he attempts to extricate himself from the guilt he feels. Up to this point the narrative has concentrated on his moral development: from his deliberate refusal to acknowledge the ethical qualities of the Third Bureau's operations under the emergency powers, to his new-found refusal to adopt a passive stance as others are once again dehumanized (Tegla 80). Even though his own torture and imprisonment have physically reduced him to an animalistic state, he has achieved an elevated sense of morality through recognition of the barbarity of Empire (VanZanten Gallagher 284). As Marais argues, when the magistrate speaks out against the actions of Empire he seems to do so involuntarily, suggesting an ethic grounded in bewilderment rather than focused on the rational subject as

the locus of ethical action (“WB” 66-67). Rather, the novel seems to extol ethical action that is virtue-based and located in a subject’s emotions. Zygmunt Bauman argues that “[t]he duty of us all which I know, does not seem to be the same thing as *my responsibility* which I feel” (53-54; emphasis in original). The magistrate’s actions at this climactic point in his moral awakening seem to be based purely on compassion, elevating his actions to ones of moral worth in Schopenhauerian ethics.

Section Four – Conclusion

Neither *UWE* nor *WB* prescribes a code of ethics. Rather, both texts appear to demonstrate ethical behaviour to readers through the actions of narrators who double as characters in the events that they narrate.

The first-person narrator of *UWE*, who engages in a “subtly mendacious” (Conrad, *UWE* 233) dialogue with his readers, does so in order to hide the fact that he – who claims to be “unidentified with anyone” (225) in the narrative – has already adopted a compassionate stance toward Razumov, for which he attempts to garner support by appealing to the reader’s sense of “common humanity” (233). His hyperbolic claims of ignorance of all things Russian and his denial of creative abilities function self-referentially to remind the astute reader that the narrator serves as a complicated textual “mask for the lurking author” (Carabine 215; Hewitt 81; Eagleton 21). Given the explicit statement that the purpose of any tale should be “moral discovery” (Conrad, *UWE* 58), the narrator’s constant appeals could be interpreted as implying, at least to the degree that the narrator serves as a mask, an authorial consideration of the value of “common humanity” and, by extension, compassion (233).

Coetzee’s magistrate similarly appeals to a humanity shared between those who consider themselves civilized and those whom they label barbaric. But unlike Conrad’s typically densely layered narrative position, Coetzee’s novel actively blurs the ontological distinctions between real and implied readers through his characteristic use of the middle voice (Macaskill 447). Unlike the old teacher of *UWE*, Coetzee’s narrator is not afforded the luxury of being able to retrospectively analyse his narrative and manipulate his audience’s response, as he is effectively narrating himself *to himself* (Del Conte 429). As such, the text of *WB* is more an “ethically charged event” (Attridge, *ER xi*) than a “mendacious dialogue” (Conrad, *UWE* 233).

The novel is not “a message with a covering... not a message plus a residue, the residue, the art with which the message is coated” (Coetzee, qtd. in Attwell, *SL* 164), and my

argument does not imply that it is one. But the novel undeniably investigates the question of why one would “choose the side of justice when it is not in one’s material interest to do so” (Coetzee, *DP* 394). To accomplish this, it affords readers direct access to the mind of a figure who is launched on a trajectory towards a moral awakening that seems to suggest the ethical value of actions based on compassion.

In Chapter Two I demonstrated that the distinction between right and wrong in Coetzee’s fiction is not as “crystal clear” as the Swedish Academy maintains (“PR” para. 3). The current chapter has further shown that both Conrad and Coetzee show signs of favouring and valuing virtue-based ethical systems founded on compassion, recognizing its moral worth in much the same way as Schopenhauer did. How, then, could an institution as highly regarded as the Swedish Academy make the statement that, in Coetzee’s work, the difference between right and wrong serves no end (“PR” para. 3)?

I believe that the answer might be found by addressing the elephant in the room. If compassion is valuable in an indifferent and uncaring universe, why does Coetzee’s magistrate seem to flounder and ultimately fail ethically?

Chapter Four

The Elephant in the Room: Ethical Failure

Section One - Introduction

If the magistrate is a character launched on a trajectory towards moral awakening, and *WB* is to be considered an “ethically charged event” (Attridge, *ER* xi), then why do readers leave the text with the overwhelming sense that this trajectory has been disrupted? Why is it that despite his humiliating encounter with the agents of the Third Bureau the magistrate takes the lead “in all measures for [the settlement’s] preservation” (Coetzee, *WB* 159), occupying himself in his “old hobbies” (168) once the imperial forces abandon the outpost? He once again falls into the habit of using the body of the other, resuming a sexual relationship with Mai, who had visited his apartment “in the afternoons” before her second marriage and is once again “searching for something” (165). Recognizing the relationship to be “a mistake”, he simply terminates his visits and is briefly bothered by “a quiet, fickle sadness” before he begins “to forget” (167) their liaisons. Although he has “lived through an eventful year”, the magistrate admits that he “understand[s] no more of it than a babe in arms” (169). Just as during the episodes of his attempts to understand the Barbarian girl, he recognizes that meaningful insights remain elusive and enigmatic – yet necessary. Dismayed at his “devious [...] equivocal [and] reprehensible” (169) attempts to record the history of the settlement “for posterity” (168), he senses that “[t]here has been something staring [him] in the face” that he is nevertheless still unable to see (170). If Coetzee’s text, like Conrad’s, favours a virtue-based empirical ethical system founded on the incentive of compassion as I have argued, then what are readers to make of the magistrate’s apparent return to his former egotistical and morally neutral behaviours? Do the shifts away from compassion and the character’s ethical regression necessarily imply that the text refutes the value of choosing between right and wrong action, as the Swedish Academy concludes (“PR” para. 3)? My contention is that both the magistrate’s reversion to his former ways and the behaviour of Razumov in *Under Western Eyes* indicate ways in which the texts suggest alternative ways to renounce the will to life necessary for acts of compassion.

That which is morally valuable, Schopenhauer argues, not only lies beyond all possible knowledge, but is incommunicable or ineffable (Glock 441). It cannot be “put into words” but “shows itself” (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 611) simply “in the deeds, in conduct, in the course of a person’s life” (Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 370). Such deeds result from “a consciousness of the identity of one’s own inner being with that of all things, or with the

kernel of the world” (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 613). But the self-denial and self-renunciation (or, as described in earlier chapters, the rejection of the *Principium Individuationis*) which arises when an individual recognizes that all beings are merely phenomenal manifestations of a single world will is rarely sustained (Glock 438; Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 405; *WWR2* 605-606). Schopenhauer recognizes that conscious renunciation is exemplified in the lives of saints or, more seldom, in the lives of those enduring extreme suffering. Yet he acknowledges that temporary escape is possible through acts of compassion or through appreciation of true art – an observation that links ethics and aesthetics (Glock 438). During aesthetic appreciation or, more importantly for my argument, creation, Schopenhauer argues that:

we no longer consider the where, the when, the why and the whither in things, but simply and solely the what. Further, we do not let abstract thought, the concepts of reason, take possession of our consciousness, but, instead of all this, devote the whole power of our mind to perception, sink ourselves completely therein and let our whole consciousness be filled by the calm contemplation of the natural object actually present. [...] We *lose* ourselves entirely in this object, to use a pregnant expression; in other words we forget our individuality, our will, and continue to exist only as pure subject, as clear mirror of the object. [...] What is thus known is no longer the individual thing as such, but the *Idea* [...] at the same time, the person who is involved in the perception is no longer an individual, for in such perception the individual has lost himself; he is *pure* will-less, painless, timeless subject of knowledge.
(Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 178-79)

Aesthetics therefore mirror compassionate acts in that both result in the temporary recognition that every member of the phenomenal world is an expression of the constantly striving, goal-less metaphysical will that imprints its nature on every one of its manifestations (Cartwright, “NS” 270). Given Schopenhauer’s insistence that morality must be located in a voluntary and virtuous act on the part of an individual (*BM* 138), and his argument that literary style represents the “physiognomy of the mind” (*WWR1* 446) and a faithful image of the movement of thought (Glock 437), it is possible to argue that writing could be seen as an ethical exercise – depending on the spirit the author employs.

Both *UWE* and *WB* present characters whose attempts at writing could be seen to augment their ethical behaviour as they try desperately, and to an extent abortively, to redeem themselves. Regardless of the outcomes, though, the prominence of and sustained textual concentration on these activities strongly suggest that both texts place a great deal of importance on the *attempt* to behave morally.

Section Two – Razumov and the Great Foes of Reality⁵⁸

Joseph Conrad's finest expression of the value and function of writing can be found in the 1897 "Preface" to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. Conrad, following the rhetorical traditions of Cicero and Quintilian, expresses a holistic view of writing that does not separate the author from his work, nor ethics from style (Busza 105).

The formulation he offers readily invites comparisons to Schopenhauer's views on aestheticism and its relation to ethics. Fiction, Conrad argues:

must be, like painting, like music, like art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments, whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time.

(Conrad, "Preface" 5)

Authors not only appeal to their readers' "capacity for delight and wonder", but also speak to the "sense of mystery" of life (4). Furthermore, fiction speaks:

to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.

(Conrad, "Preface" 4)

The notion of a "solidarity" that "binds men to each other" and knits "together all humanity" in the above extract is analogous to Schopenhauer's conception of the roles of compassion and aesthetic appreciation, which also lead to a recognition of metaphysical unity. But it would be reductive to assert that this, considered along with fiction's role of creating a "moral" and "emotional atmosphere", translates into a simple equation between aesthetic writing and moral value.

As indicated in Chapter Three, for instance, this relationship is not readily apparent to the characters involved in such undertakings. The teacher of languages only gradually realises the ethical implications of his presentation of the narrative of *UWE* (Fleishman 124;

⁵⁸ The teacher of languages asserts that "Words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality" (Conrad, *UWE* 11).

Simmons 143): “The task is not in truth the writing in the narrative form a *précis* of a strange human document, but the rendering – I perceive it now clearly – of the moral conditions ruling over a large portion of this earth’s surface [...] (Conrad, *UWE* 58). This “profound linguistic transformation” (Fleishman 124) and the potential ethical impact of words that this revelation of his agenda suggests, is complicated by his stark pronouncement that “[w]ords, as is well known, are the great foes of reality” (Conrad, *UWE* 11). His declaration is borne out in a “narrative in which revolutionary atrocities are committed in the name of utopia” (Simmons 143).

The narrator frequently lambastes Russians for their “extraordinary love of words” (Conrad, *UWE* 12) and often expresses sentiments not unlike Schopenhauer’s scathing indictment of bad authors: “Inferior minds [...] gladly grasp at words” (*WWR2* 144). Yet, as I have argued above, the teacher – equally reliant on and as fond of words as his Russian subjects – nonetheless attempts to validate his artistic project by searching for a word that could be trusted to “hold truth enough” (Conrad, *UWE* 58). The “key word” identified to help “moral discovery” is “cynicism” (58). The cumulative effect of the teacher’s writing and his attitudes, though, is an attempt to distract readers from the way in which he develops empathy for certain characters in his tale (Bimberg 46) and creates a “rhetorical trap” for himself (Simmons 144). Despite having acknowledged the incomprehensible, unintelligible nature of Russians and the inefficiencies of language, the teacher of languages continues to translate Russian words and feelings to make them intelligible to his projected Western audience (Simmons 144). But perhaps an even more significant consideration of the ethical potential of language and aesthetic writing can be traced in the development of Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov who, until now, I have only considered as the recipient of compassion.

Both the teacher and Razumov are engaged in hermeneutic projects in which they read, interpret and write (Raval 145). But Razumov is far less tentative in his conception of the power of writing. Fleischman argues that the figure of Razumov is “not something given, but is a composition” resulting from his own acts of writing (124). Besides the obvious fact that Razumov, like all the other characters and events in the novel, is a narrative construct generated by the act of reading the text of *UWE*, he is at one further remove from the reader. It is Razumov’s notebook, the “strange human document” (Conrad, *UWE* 58), that has “enabled [the narrator’s] pen to create for the reader the personality” of Razumov himself (11). As such, the initial act of writing the notebook establishes the “linguistic equivalent of Razumov’s identity” (Fleischman 124). It is only as a result of the act of writing that readers are enabled “to project the living Razumov” (124). Unlike the teacher, who considers that

there may be “a wonderful soothing power in mere words” (Conrad, *UWE* 12) given that “so many men have used them for self-communion” (12), or that they offer “some form or [...] formula of peace” (12), Razumov longs “desperately for a word of advice, for moral support” (37) so that he can finally be “understood” (37). This “universal aspiration with all its profound and melancholy meaning” (37) is rendered all the more poignant by the observation that Razumov has “no heart to which he could open himself” (37).

The teacher’s scepticism towards Russians and his opinion that words are deprived of fixed meaning as a result of the ways in which they use language combine with the idea that the notebook has managed to preserve the vital being of its writer to illustrate the complexity and ambiguity of Razumov’s situation (Fleishman 123; Simmons 146-47). Razumov is a third-year philosophy student at St Petersburg University, and his distrust of the relevance of revolutionary rhetoric to real life can be historically justified (Simmons 145; see Conrad, *UWE* 12-14).⁵⁹ But in a “culture of surveillance and suspicion”, Razumov is a “blindspot” misread by Russian authorities, would-be revolutionary comrades and “by the first-time reader of the novel” (Greaney 160). His “taciturn personality” and his “attitude of an inscrutable listener” are “credited with reserve power” and make him “an altogether trustworthy man” – an opinion later revealed to be held by revolutionaries and tsarists alike (Conrad, *UWE* 13). But Razumov defines his “closest parentage [...] in the statement that he [is] a Russian” (16) and shrinks “mentally from the fray” (16) between the autocratic state and the revolutionaries “as a good-natured man may shrink from taking definite sides in a violent family quarrel” (17).

At the beginning of the novel Razumov hopes to “devote all his time to the subject of the prize essay” (17). As the names of the entrants are “submitted to the Minister” of Education, Razumov illustrates an awareness of how writing can be used instrumentally: while the “mere fact of trying would be considered meritorious”, winning the silver medal would grant him a “claim to an administrative appointment of the better sort” and help him further his personal goals (Simmons 145). But his ambitions come “undone by the merciless logic of fate” (145):

⁵⁹ Philosophy departments were purged from universities by Tsar Nicholas the First in response to the Decembrist attempt on his life in 1825. While historically after the events described in *UWE*, this counter-measure was again deployed by Lenin after the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917 (Simmons 145). Philosophy departments – and subsequently the discipline to which Razumov has devoted himself – were particularly vulnerable “in a country where an opinion may be a legal crime visited by death or sometimes by a fate worse than death” (Conrad, *UWE* 13).

Fatality enters your rooms while your landlady's back is turned; you come home and find it in possession bearing a man's name, clothed in flesh – wearing a brown cloth coat and long boots – lounging against the stove. It asks you “Is the outer door closed?” – and you don't know enough to take it by the throat and fling it downstairs.

(Conrad, *UWE* 70)

As Simmons argues, Razumov, whose name draws on *razum*, the Russian word for “reason”, is undone on his discovery of Victor Haldin in his apartment (145). The aspirations Razumov has for his future are reduced to a blank page, as the student never undertakes his intended writing project. Not only could the unwritten prize essay be understood as Razumov's loss of hope, but it could also reinforce the blankness of his identity and the moral double-bind in which he finds himself (Greaney 161). With Haldin locked in his room as Razumov attempts to convey a message to the getaway driver Ziemianitch, he considers his “tragic mother” Russia (Conrad, *UWE* 32):

Under the sumptuous immensity of the sky, the snow covered the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country, obliterating the landmarks, the accidents of the ground, levelling everything under its uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history.

(Conrad, *UWE* 33)

Snow has effaced the Russian topography of its variations, substituting “in their place a vision of transcendental purity” (Greaney 161). This blankness prefigures Razumov's “lasting moral predicament” (Lothe 278), which is clarified when he equates himself with his country (Hay 309): “Russia *can't* disown me [...] I am *it*” (Conrad, *UWE* 163; emphasis in original). Having betrayed Haldin to the authorities, Razumov composes a document entirely different from the prize winning essay – a manifesto which could be read as a set of five opposing ethical imperatives (Lothe 273):

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

(Conrad, *UWE* 57)

These conflicting imperatives illustrate the complexity of Razumov's moral conundrum (Busza 111). Haldin has unwittingly forced a moral problem upon Razumov, who has to choose among his loyalty to the autocratic state, his commitment to the revolution, his right to self-preservation and the dictates of human solidarity (111). That Razumov makes the wrong decision is made clear as his chosen course of action is consistently stigmatized by Conrad's use of the word "betrayal" (111). But the tragedy lies in the fact that Razumov lives in a society that imposes extremely difficult moral problems upon its members (111-12):

It was a sort of sacred inertia. [...] Razumov stood on the point of conversion. He was fascinated by its approach, by its overpowering logic. [...] In Russia, the land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations, many brave minds have turned away at last from the vain and endless conflict to the one great historical fact of the land. They turned to autocracy for the peace of their patriotic conscience as a weary unbeliever, touched by grace, turns to the faith of his fathers for the blessing of spiritual rest. Like other Russians before him, Razumov, in conflict with himself, felt the touch of grace upon his forehead.
(Conrad, *UWE* 33)

Razumov yields to the "sacred inertia" (Conrad, *UWE* 33) of the immensity of Russia, in the process sacrificing all "personal longings of liberalism" (35) and submitting to the "overpowering logic" (33) of autocracy. In the above extract, Razumov rationalizes his self-interest by clothing it in the rhetoric of the "Russian Idea" (Busza 112). His conversion to the autocratic principle is a process during which he is possessed by words and transformed into "a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot" (Conrad, *UWE* 11). Under the influence of "[s]ome superior power" Razumov holds a "discourse with himself with extraordinary abundance and facility" (34), suggesting a mystical experience at which a "sovereign power" is at work (Fleishman 123).

Razumov is caught in a political trap (Simmons 144). The sovereign power at work is best described by the same keyword chosen by the teacher of languages to "hold truth enough" to enable "moral discovery" – cynicism (Conrad, *UWE* 58; Simmons 144). Razumov considers cynicism an ineluctable aspect of his national inheritance and, given his identification with Russia as his only parentage, an essential part of his self: "We are Russians, that is – children; that is – sincere; that is – cynical" (Conrad, *UWE* 161). It also serves further to strengthen the idea of a solidarity among all the Russian characters in the novel:

For that is the mark of Russian autocracy and of Russian revolt. In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism. It informs the declarations of her statesmen, the theories of her revolutionists, and the mystic vaticinations of prophets to the point of making freedom look like a form of debauch, and the Christian virtues themselves appear actually indecent.

(Conrad, *UWE* 58)

As Razumov believes that man's "real life" is "accorded to him" in the "thoughts of other men" (Conrad, *UWE* 19), his "mystic acceptance of the principle of autocracy" (Conrad, *UWE* 14) reveals another aspect of the contradiction and moral bind in which he finds himself (Simmons 146). Despite being driven to accept the Russian state, he is aware that his life is circumscribed and inhibited by that very state, personified by Minister de P—, the president of the Repressive Commission (147). Betraying Haldin to the police may be an act of self-preservation to ensure that he remains free of implication in the crime (147), but it also turns him into an instrument of the state when Councillor Mikulin recognizes Razumov as a "tool" that "the revolutionists themselves had put into his hands" (Conrad, *UWE* 235). Through the act of betrayal, Razumov places himself at the mercy of impossible forces in which he effectively orchestrates his own entrapment in the workings of the state (Simmons 147). Too late he realizes that "[i]n giving Victor Haldin up, it was [himself], after all, whom [he] betrayed most basely" (Conrad, *UWE* 274).

Significantly, it is Razumov's manifesto of imperatives that appeals to Councillor Mikulin and elevates Razumov in his estimation beyond reproach, as Mikulin credits the student with an autocratic outlook. It is therefore through his writing that Razumov becomes a state functionary, although the nature of his appointment as a police spy is at odds with the administrative post he had hoped to secure by winning the silver medal in the essay contest.

While it is true that he sincerely and honestly identifies himself with the state at the beginning of the novel (Hay 294), Razumov is an intellectual whose capacity for sympathetic identification, best expressed by his ability to be "swayed by argument and authority" (13), qualifies him to be trusted by revolutionaries and police alike: he appears committed when he in fact is not (Hay 293). Razumov hints at this to Mikulin with characteristic terseness: "I take the liberty to call myself a thinker. It is not a forbidden word, as far as I know" (Conrad, *UWE* 75). The councillor responds that "the principal condition is to think correctly" (75). This condition highlights a specific view on the nature of writing also expressed by Arthur Schopenhauer: authorial style represents the "physiognomy of the mind"; is a safer "index to the character than the face"; and the language in which a man writes indicates "the

physiognomy of the nation to which he belongs” (“Style” 21). Through his official writing of reports on revolutionary activities in Geneva, Razumov enables Mikulin and the Russian authorities to police those who do not “think correctly” (Conrad, *UWE* 75), because his way of thinking, indicated by his writing, is assumed to be autocratic. But this purely functional conception of writing also serves to initiate Razumov’s “moral culpability of betraying” Haldin, who had come to him in confidence (Lothe 282). Councillor Mikulin reads an excerpt from the transcript of Haldin’s interrogation which, despite the clinically functional language used, highlights Razumov’s lasting moral predicament (Lothe 278):

Question – Has the man well known to you, in whose rooms you remained for several hours on Monday *and on whose information you have been arrested* – has he had any previous knowledge of your intention to commit a political murder? ... Prisoner refuses to reply.

(Conrad, *UWE* 77; emphasis added)

By obliquely revealing that his agency suspects Razumov of collusion in Haldin’s assassination plot, Mikulin indicates that the option of becoming a state spy is illusory, as it is in actuality the only way for Razumov to assuage their suspicions (Simmons 147, 154). Furthermore, the report also reveals that Haldin rejects the opportunity to avenge himself on Razumov, despite knowing that he has consigned him to certain death, by electing to preserve his “stubborn silence” (Lothe 279; Conrad, *UWE* 77).

The striking contrast in personal loyalty between the two characters forms the basis for authorial irony noticeable later in Sophia Antonovna’s remark: “And what is death? It is not a shameful thing like some kinds of life” (Conrad, *UWE* 200). Razumov feels “something stir in his breast” (200) at this unintentionally pointed remark, even as the revolutionist proceeds to tell him of Ziemianitch’s suicide – news that finally secures his position within their ranks (Lothe 278). Yet the news leads Razumov to feel “the need of perfect safety, with its freedom from direct lying” (Conrad, *UWE* 214) and strengthens the novel’s concern with the moral issue of human responsibility through his heightened mental reaction to the “external alienation” the unexpected death implies (Lothe 279). That Razumov’s growing remorse and the moral agony of his situation are thematically significant is indicated by the teacher of language’s refraining from inserting his usual asides and comments (279). This suggests that the narrator’s burgeoning compassion for Razumov discussed in Chapter Three parallels Razumov’s intensifying moral agony.

Almost immediately after this the novel shows how the revolutionaries employ similar tactics to the autocrats (Ross 159). Julius Laspara, editor of the anarchic newsletter significantly titled *Living Word* (Conrad, *UWE* 219), urges Razumov to “write something for us” (Fleishman 123; Conrad, *UWE* 220). Laspara has a specific view on the functions of writing and appears to share Mikulin’s implicit belief that it can convey how to “think correctly” (Conrad, *UWE* 75; Fleishman 123). He claims not to understand how anyone capable of writing would refrain from addressing social, economic or historical topics, as “[a]ny subject could be treated in the right spirit,” especially “for the ends of social revolution” (Conrad, *UWE* 220).

Compelled by escalating moral pressures and his disdain for the “[c]ursed Jew” Laspara (221), Razumov recognizes an imperative course of action: “Write! Must write! He! Write! A sudden light flashed upon him. To write was the very thing he had made up his mind to do that day” (221).⁶⁰ Unbeknown to Laspara, Razumov’s guarantees to write are ambiguous (Lothe 279). He notes that not to write “would be worse than moral suicide – it would be nothing less than moral damnation” as he sets about compiling his first spy report (Conrad, *UWE* 221-22). The ambiguity of Razumov’s response and the irony of being reminded to write his report by one of the very party on which he is reporting (222), not only indicates that writing consists of multidimensional aspects – the most important of which I identify as ethical – but also points to the thematic importance of the act of writing in the novel (Lothe 279).

Razumov begins his writing in a particular style. The report is instrumental in that Razumov hopes it will accomplish “kinetic effects” best understood as the reaction of the autocratic state to the information conveyed (Fleishman 124). But purely instrumental writing leaves Razumov unsatisfied and he begins to write in a confessional and aesthetic mode (124-25). What Razumov then writes gives the teacher cause to consider, as editor and translator of the material, that words must have “a wonderful soothing power” that could provide “all men” with “some form or perhaps only some formula of peace” (Conrad, *UWE* 12). This provides a clue as to the function that language and writing may serve for Razumov at the time he composes his journal: “self-communion” (Conrad, *UWE* 12; Fleishman 125).

⁶⁰ Razumov’s anti-Semitism here conveys his lack of composure and a subsequent move away from reason. While it does suggest that he may indeed hold anti-Jewish sentiments, the narrator significantly interjects: “this is not a story of the West and this exclamation must be recorded accompanied by the comment that it was merely an expression of hate and contempt, best adapted to the nature of the feelings Razumov suffered from at the time” (Conrad, *UWE* 221). Again, it is interesting to note that the teacher’s growing sympathetic identification with Razumov leads him to defend the Russian from charges of racism.

As I have mentioned above, the writing of the notebook and Razumov's attempts at self-communion establish the linguistic equivalent of his identity as they provide the raw material for the teacher of languages' narrative (Fleishman 125). The notebook serves as an aesthetic attempt to preserve Razumov's vital being, and the narrator recognizes this:

She [Natalia] walked to the writing-table [...] a mere piece of dead furniture; but it contained something living, still, since she took from a recess a flat parcel which she brought to me.

“It's a book,” she said rather abruptly. “It was sent to me wrapped up in my veil. [...]”

(Conrad, *UWE* 284)

Razumov's expressed desire “to be understood” (Conrad, *UWE* 37) has led him to attempt to convey his inner life and his moral being to Natalia through writing, hoping that he could formulate a verbal equivalent of himself accessible to her (Fleishman 124-26). In a novel in which silence is frequently associated with death and in which words are “the great foes of reality” (Conrad, *UWE* 11), the emptiness and vanity of words at least grope for understanding and peace, even if these are not to be found (Fleishman 125-126). Alternatives may be disturbingly meagre, but – to borrow the teacher's formulation – if real peace is unattainable, at least people can content themselves with “some formula of peace” (Fleishman 126; Conrad, *UWE* 12).

His act of writing the journal serves to amend the spoken revelation Razumov offers to Natalia: “Listen – now comes the true confession. The other was nothing. [...] do you know what I said to myself? I shall steal [Haldin's] sister's soul from her... [But] I felt that I must tell you that I had ended by loving you” (Conrad, *UWE* 272-74). The journal is not a confession of guilt, like the face-to-face encounter between Razumov and Natalia shortly before this passage, but a confession of his love of her. Not only does the passage refer to their previous exchange, but Razumov also uses it to render his avowal of love conditional on his public confession to the revolutionaries: “And to tell you that I must first confess. Confess – go out – and perish” (Conrad, *UWE* 274; Fleishman 127). The teacher of languages characterizes Razumov's writing as the “queer pedantism of a man who had [...] lived, pen in hand” but recognizes that there is “the sincerity of an attempt to grapple by the same means with another profounder knowledge” (Conrad, *UWE* 271; Fleishman 127). This knowledge, Ted Boyle argues, transcends the extremes of evil autocracy and equally evil anarchism that characterize the political dimensions of the novel and between which Razumov has been

trapped (198). What he needs to acknowledge is that his betrayal of Haldin represents “an attempt to revoke the invisible bond which ties one man to another” (198). Finally, he must also realize that no human being can “bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad” (198; Conrad, *UWE* 37).

That Razumov recognizes, with the final entry in his aesthetic-hermeneutic project, that “perdition is [his] lot” (Conrad, *UWE* 274), and feels compelled to make a third and public confession to the revolutionaries indicate that he has realized his project has failed. He stops writing, packages the book and reverts to purely instrumental writing – addressing the parcel to Natalia – before he flings “the pen away from him into a distant corner” (274). But despite this failure, in the sense that it has only provided him a momentary escape from his torturous ethical predicament and shame, readers still feel sympathetic towards Razumov when his only response to Laspara’s final invitation to submit a piece to *Living Word* is a disillusioned comment: “I have written already all I shall ever write” (Conrad, *UWE* 276). Yet after his revelation to the gathered crowd, his brutal deafening and his crushing by a tramcar, Razumov experiences a momentary reprieve from his “moral solitude” (198): “Silent men, moving unheard, lifted him up, laid him on the side-walk, gesticulating and grimacing round him their alarm, horror and *compassion*” (280; emphasis added). While Razumov’s aesthetic writing is a failed attempt to escape the moral suffering he endures, it enables him to realize that the moral value he seeks lies, to use Schopenhauerian formulations, beyond all possible knowledge and is incommunicable and ineffable (Glock 441). His failed attempt to find some form of comfort in writing makes him realize that what is needed is action (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 613); yet, at the same time, it is possible to read his writing as one such action, albeit unsuccessful. The novel appears to value Razumov’s project as an attempt to set right his wrongs, as he “desire[s] the well-being of others” (see Schopenhauer, qtd. in Cartwright, *NS* 259). While Razumov himself does not experience any form of salvation or relief from his torment, it is significant that this leads to his being the only character in the novel to be associated with the word “compassion” (Conrad, *UWE* 280). Because of the process he undertakes, in which he gradually becomes less “indifferent to [the] fate” of “others”, ultimately expressed by his compulsion to confess, others help him in his time of need (see Schopenhauer, qtd. in Cartwright, *NS* 259). Razumov’s aesthetic writing fails to lead him to the recognition that all beings are merely phenomenal manifestations of a single world will (see Glock 438; Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 405; *WWR2* 605-606). But the prominence and sustained textual concentration on Razumov and his writing strongly suggest that *UWE*

places considerable importance on his *attempt* to avoid “moral suicide [and] moral damnation” (Conrad, *UWE* 221-22).

Section Three – A Devious, Equivocal and Reprehensible Exercise⁶¹

In his later fiction, J. M. Coetzee explicitly ponders the nature of sympathy. In *The Lives of Animals*, Elizabeth Costello dismisses Nagel’s counterargument to compassion (he asks what it is like to be a bat to prove that humans are incapable of fully understanding an “other”):

Despite Thomas Nagel, who is probably a good man, despite Thomas Aquinas and René Descartes, with whom I have more difficulty in sympathizing, there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination.

(Coetzee, *LA* 35)

Yet, in a novel published in the same year, David Lurie delivers a lecture in which he contemplates Byron’s Lucifer:

[W]e are invited to understand and sympathize. But there is a limit to sympathy. For though he lives among us, he is not one of us. He is exactly what he calls himself: a *thing*, that is, a monster. Finally, Byron will suggest, it will not be possible to love him, not in the deeper, more human sense of the word. He will be condemned to solitude.

(Coetzee, *DG* 33-34)

While these passages are necessarily presented out of context here, Geoffrey Baker argues that they form a neat paradox characteristic of the affective aim of Coetzee’s fictions (26-27). Both passages are extracts from lectures delivered by fictional academics who are also writers, much like the biographical Coetzee (Baker 27). When considered together, they support the view that, if Coetzee is to be “charged with any crime” (27), it is that he raises issues fraught with paradox but characteristically refuses to offer quick and easy, prescriptive solutions to them (27). However, while these later novels are ostensibly more realist and less theoretically challenging (probably by virtue of their greater historical specificity) than his earlier works, they do not sponsor, overtly or in an uncomplicated manner, a simple movement toward sympathy and compassion as a basis for ethical value (34, 35, 39). They

⁶¹ These are the adjectives the magistrate uses to describe his unsuccessful attempt to record a history of the frontier settlement (see Coetzee, *WB* 169).

rather seem to suggest that the author posits a mode of everyday engagement for readers to consider, even though his novels, considered either together or individually, do not fully sponsor this mode. The result is that Coetzee's artistic projects appear to chart prescriptions for ethical action, but acknowledge that effective change must first take place on a fundamental level (34). One result of this approach – most readily identified in the experiences of the magistrate in *WB* – is a sense of bewilderment, frequently shared between protagonists and readers, crucial to each novel's "achievement as a work of art" (Attridge, *ER* xi). This again suggests an ethic grounded in bewilderment rather than focused on the rational subject as the locus of ethical action, as identified by Mike Marais ("WB" 66-67).⁶² As a literary artist, Coetzee has also expressed a belief that the South African writer is:

in a situation in which his art, no matter how well intentioned, is – and here we must be honest – too slow, too old fashioned, too indirect to have any but the slightest and most belated effect on the life of the community or the course of history.

(Coetzee, *DP* 98-99)

Given this utterance and the apparently sustained authorial concern with providing tentative, tenuous possibilities for ethical, everyday engagement with alterities – or "others" – it is significant that a text such as *WB*, which is itself a site of ethical interaction, should pay thematic consideration to the act of writing.⁶³

Carrol Clarkson argues that writing is a "matter of linguistic choice" (54), with each decision affecting the style of the artwork. Linguistic choices construct the text and implicitly reveal relations of power between the writer and the reader and subject, as each choice necessarily involves the rejection of other possibilities (54). Paying close attention to the ways in which these relationships are constructed can therefore provide a sharper sense of what is at stake in ethical terms (54). In Chapter Three I discussed how Coetzee's use of the middle voice narrative position in *WB* results in implicating readers in the magistrate's ethical dilemma and suggests their complicity in the atrocious acts of the Empire. What is interesting is that this same instrumental use of writing is echoed and heightened in the official statements, transcribed for the official record and presented to the magistrate, on the death of the old man (see Coetzee, *WB* 6).

⁶² This is explained more fully with reference to the magistrate's intervention in the public beatings in Chapter Three Section Three (pp. 92-94).

⁶³ See the discussion of the text as a space of ethical interaction in Chapter Three Section Three (pg. 83 above).

The Third Bureau's approach to the "letter of the law" (6) is reminiscent of the transcript of Haldin's interrogation that Mikulin reads to Razumov in *UWE* (77). Both passages are "brief" (Coetzee, *WB* 6) and dehumanize the subjects by referring simply to the "prisoner" (Coetzee, *WB* 6; Conrad, *UWE* 77), a practice that reaches its climax in *WB* when Joll inscribes the word "ENEMY" on the backs of prisoners, thereby further removing those under his power from ethical consideration (see Coetzee, *WB* 115). For Joll, Mandel and the other Third Bureau agents, the report allows them to present issues in such a way as to suggest that they are "cut and dried" (Kerr 25):

'During the course of the interrogation contradictions became apparent in the prisoner's testimony. Confronted with these contradictions, the prisoner became enraged and attacked the investigating officer. A scuffle ensued during which the prisoner fell heavily against the wall. Efforts to revive him were unsuccessful.'

(Coetzee, *WB* 6)

The report is presented in the passive voice. This particular syntactical structure avoids agency as, unlike the active voice, the short form of the passive voice, which Joll so astutely employs here, allows the writer or speaker to omit the "agentive or instrumental phrase" (Macaskill 450-51). In this case, the syntactical construction allows Joll not to name or place on record the members of the Third Bureau responsible for the old man's death: rather, the "investigating officer" (Coetzee, *WB* 6) is only specified when he is the target of the old man's purported aggression.

What the passage effectively does is link the private subject – the old man – with the "'public' domain of imperial discourse" (Ashcroft 102). The style of Joll's report is reminiscent of the tone used by the Russian security police in *UWE* and significantly includes repetition of the word "prisoner" (Kannemeyer 332).⁶⁴ Readers should be able to recognize the effects of this repetition as absurd, especially given the magistrate's earlier comment that "[n]o one would have brought an old man and a sick boy along on a raiding party" (Coetzee, *WB* 4). But in eradicating the old man as an individual subject, Colonel Joll positions him as an enemy because, as he comments after being told that the captives from his first foray cannot be of any use to him in his hunt for barbarians, "Prisoners are prisoners" (Coetzee, *WB*

⁶⁴ As Kannemeyer also argues, the tone and style echoes those of the South African police report on the death of Steve Biko (see 332-33) – a reading intensified by the details of the damage found on the corpse on later inspection, which mirror the injuries suffered by Biko.

22; Ashcroft 104). In the absence of “real” barbarians, Joll and the Third Bureau are satisfied with vilifying fishermen and nomads (Newman 128).

This report therefore serves as the first indication of the Empire’s habit of delineating an opposition, an enemy that *must* exist in order for it to define itself (Ashcroft 104), although the extent to which writing has been instrumental in obscuring this project only becomes apparent as the magistrate begins to question the accuracy of the official account. When the magistrate investigates the old man’s corpse, he discovers swollen lips, broken teeth and an empty eye socket (Coetzee, *WB* 7). He notes that such injuries seem unlikely to be the result of the old man’s having “hit his head on the wall” (7) – regardless of how heavy the fall is reported to have been.

Like Julius Laspara and Councillor Mikulin, with their implicit belief that writing can convey how to “think correctly” (Conrad, *UWE* 75; Fleishman 123), Joll’s report reveals the agenda of the Empire – to ensure the stability of its laws on a “potentially unstable frontier” (Kerr 25). Those who fall outside of the ambit of Empire – “others” – are automatically to be considered threats to the preferred way of life. But as the magistrate notes:

Of this unrest [the reason for the declaration of emergency powers] I myself saw nothing. In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle [...]. Show me a barbarian army and I will believe.

(Coetzee, *WB* 9)

The “hysteria” is fuelled by the results of “*investigations*” (Coetzee, *WB* 9; emphasis in original) – a word the magistrate recognizes as a euphemism for torture – and recorded dishonestly by reports such as Joll’s, using writing to hide the active role Empire plays in the “provocations [...] and the tremors along the frontier” (9). The magistrate even recognizes that the morality of the report is questionable and reveals that his ethical awakening is initiated by this writing. He acknowledges that he would have been able to continue his “easy years” had he “without reading it, or after skimming over it with an incurious eye, put [his] seal on [Joll’s] report” (9). Instead, he realizes that the writing has been used to obfuscate and distort the true events, by hiding the Third Bureau’s activities “like a banshee beneath a stone” (9). Using Schopenhauer’s conception of writing as an art form in conjunction with the effects of the shortened passive voice mentioned earlier, the first report to issue from the settlement illustrates an “inexpressible *satisfaction in words* [...] thoroughly characteristic of

inferior minds” (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 144-145; emphasis in original). It also shows that the Third Bureau gladly “grasp[s] at *words*, especially those which denote indefinite, very abstract, and unusual concepts” (144; emphasis in original). It may therefore be argued that the Third Bureau’s propensity for terms (such as “prisoner”) that obscure the truth – in this case that the prisoner is an old man accompanied by a sick boy – and its skilful use of the shortened passive voice to elide any guilt in the old man’s death reveal a similarity between Coetzee’s Empire and Conrad’s autocratic Russia: both use the fact that words are the “great foes of reality” (Conrad, *UWE* 11) to further their own political agendas. This act is fundamentally self-interested, though, and thus lacks any moral value in Schopenhauerian terms. However, it is the effect the report has on the magistrate, who, as a result of not being able to ignore the facts it attempts to distort, at this early point begins to be concerned with those defined as “outsiders” by Empire. This makes this particular piece of writing ethically important. Although the magistrate is not yet launched on the ethical trajectory discussed earlier, he grows “conscious that [he is] pleading for them” (Coetzee, *WB* 4) when he realizes Joll’s intention towards the old man and boy. Although the magistrate desists from his pleading with Joll, the report later provides him with the impetus needed to investigate Joll’s methods.

Given that the Colonel and the magistrate are “[t]wo sides of Imperial rule, no more, no less” (Coetzee, *WB* 148-49), it should not be surprising that the magistrate, in an attempt to preserve in writing the story of the settlement, fails:

It seems right that, as a gesture to the people who inhabited the ruins in the desert, we too ought to set down a record of settlement to be left for posterity buried under the walls of our town; and to write such a history no one would seem to be better fitted than our last magistrate. But when I sit down at my writing-table, wrapped against the cold in my great old bearskin, with a single candle (for tallow too is rationed) and a pile of yellowed documents at my elbow, what I find myself beginning to write is not the annals of an Imperial outpost or an account of how the people of that outpost spent their last year composing their souls as they waited for the barbarians.

‘No one who paid a visit to this oasis,’ I write, ‘failed to be struck by the charm of life here. [...] This was paradise on earth.’

(Coetzee, *WB* 168-69)

The magistrate sees that his message is “as devious, as equivocal, as reprehensible” as Joll’s testimony (Coetzee, *WB* 169). Like Razumov, whose hermeneutic project begins as a spy report but soon evolves into a personal journal that eventually provides the raw materials on

which the narrative is ostensibly based (Fleischman 124), the magistrate's project is aesthetic. But unlike Razumov, who uses his aesthetic writing as a platform to confess, even though he realizes that there is still need for action in order to atone for his misdeeds, the magistrate considers his writing inimical to the truth:

‘Perhaps by the end of winter,’ I think, ‘when hunger truly bites us, when we are cold and starving, or when the barbarian is truly at the gate, perhaps then I will abandon the locutions of a civil servant with literary ambitions and begin to tell the truth.’

(Coetzee, *WB* 169)

The magistrate seems to consider setting down this record for posterity an ethical imperative – telling “the truth” appears to be a duty thwarted by his “literary ambitions”. Yet earlier he has recognized that if “the barbarians were to burst in now” (156), each inhabitant of the settlement would meet “his own fitting end” (157). The barbarians would use the town archives to “wipe their backsides” (157) and “[t]o the last we will have learned nothing” (157). On the one hand, the magistrate's attempts to record the history of the settlement thus seem futile but, on the other hand, it seems significant that one image he uses to describe “the medium of time” is that it is as “dry as paper” (157) – an image not unlike that of autocratic Russia and Razumov's frustrated desires at the beginning of *UWE*.

The magistrate's failed attempts at creating an aesthetic product that could lead to the recognition of a metaphysical unity (see Schopenhauer, *WWRI* 405; *WWRI* 605-606) show that Coetzee's work does not overtly sponsor nor present an uncomplicated view of the movement towards compassion and sympathy as “a means of self-transformation” (Baker 39). They also suggest that to argue that the work obviously endorses Schopenhauerian ethics is indeed reductive. But the option is presented and, in both the magistrate's personal ethical trajectory and his attempts to create an alternative space in which moral actions can be of value – in the form of his writing – it is “given a largely sympathetic treatment” (Baker 39). Coetzee's characteristic linguistic and rhetorical scrutiny of certain syntactic constructions, such as the short form of the passive voice (Macaskill 450-51), and the recognition of the magistrate's inextricable complicity in the operations of the Empire (see Coetzee, *WB* 148-49) mean that, while the magistrate may be the best fitted “to write such a history” of the settlement to be “buried under the walls of our town” for “posterity” (Coetzee, *WB* 168), his failure to achieve anything more than a temporary form of salvation is inevitable. After all, he is as guilty of perpetuating the subjugation of the Empire's outsiders as Joll himself.

But this does not mean that Coetzee's text offers no possibility for a truly ethical interaction other than the magistrate's intervention during the public beatings. Rather, it is ironic that the work of the outsiders constructed by Empire's oppressive regime seems to offer the magistrate the conceptual space in which he is able to identify himself with the other yet again: through his ostensible "translations" of the poplar slips he is inspired to present to Joll (see Coetzee, *WB* 120-123).

Colonel Joll confronts the magistrate with the "three hundred slips of white poplar-wood" which are bound with string and are "written on in an unfamiliar script" (Coetzee, *WB* 120), believing them to contain information not only relevant to the barbarian uprising, but known to the magistrate (Moses 121-22; Urquhart 7-8). Despite Joll's apparent certainty that the text conveys some form of meaning, the magistrate has "no idea" what the characters "stand for" (Coetzee, *WB* 121). He has "isolated as many as four hundred different characters in the script, perhaps as many as four hundred and fifty" (121), but does "not even know whether to read from right to left or from left to right" (121). The magistrate is not even sure whether each symbol stands for "a single thing" or if the four hundred characters are "nothing more than scribal embellishments of an underlying repertory of twenty or thirty whose primitive forms [he is] too stupid to see" (121).

As Urquhart argues, while Joll is confined by the rigidity of Imperial law and his view that every object has a name that defines it, the magistrate constructs a "catalogue of the atrocities" committed by the Third Bureau based on his knowledge of how the Empire has treated the barbarians (7-8).⁶⁵ During this episode, the magistrate is able to target and criticize Joll's military exploits (Newman 137) by declaring that the poplar slips "form an allegory" (Coetzee, *WB* 122).

Significantly, as allegorical texts represent a "structured foreignness between [their] *literal* and *proper meanings*" and involve a dislocation between linguistic signs and their referents, they are regulated by culturally established codes to stabilize "that foreignness" within a coherent ideology (Saunders 224; emphasis in original). The ability to interpret allegorical signs correctly is dependent on the reader belonging to the specific "code-knowing culture" which regulates those specific signs and understanding that culture's "conventions and customary meanings" (224). The dislocation of meaning characteristic of allegory

⁶⁵ This characteristic rigidity of concepts is made clear when Joll displays his prisoners to the settlement's inhabitants to prove that the "barbarians" are real and that they are "enemies" rather than "men" by inscribing the label "ENEMY" on each naked back (Newman 135; Kerr 25; Coetzee, *WB* 135). That this is a thematic concern is made clear early in the novel, with Joll's categorical decree that "Prisoners are prisoners" (Coetzee, *WB* 23).

therefore inscribes a space in which hermeneutic error by outsiders is inevitable (224). The magistrate takes advantage of this hermeneutic zone, in an act which could be interpreted as a temporary renunciation of his membership in the culture of Empire, showing that even though he and Joll are members of a common category, such categories can be inverted and imaginatively reshaped (Newman 137). By embracing this aspect of the aesthetic writing of the barbarians, the magistrate yet again moves towards a form of compassionate identification with the other that frees him to once more oppose Colonel Joll on moral and ethical grounds. The most scathing indictment against the Third Bureau comes in the form of his consideration of a single character:

See, there is only one single character. It is the barbarian character *war*, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice*. There is no knowing which sense is intended. That is part of barbarian cunning.

(Coetzee, *WB* 122; emphasis in original)

The magistrate seems to be the one who is “cunning” in this episode. By equating “*war* [...] *vengeance* [and] *justice*” he is insinuating that Joll and the Empire, as the necessary opposition to the barbarians, are unjust and that, given the way in which the old man and his sick grandson had been treated at the beginning of the novel, they are guilty of creating their own enemies. He also undermines the political and moral distinctions among the three concepts (Moses 122). As with the incident in which he interrupts the public beatings (see Coetzee, *WB* 116-19; discussed in Chapter Three), the magistrate’s behaviour once again conforms to terms favourable to Schopenhauerian ethics: “[i]f you desire the well-being of others, then you ought not to be indifferent to their fate” (qtd. in Cartwright, *NS* 259). Gaita expresses a similar view that people become complicit in others’ wrongdoing “only if one failed to do something to prevent their deeds *or at least protest them*” (*CH* 93, emphasis in original).

Yet again, while it is clear that the magistrate has indeed made use of the hermeneutic zone of error inherent in allegory (which, not knowing what the text means, is in fact his own construction) and that he has utilized the freedom of interpretation this purportedly grants him in order to identify with the other to criticize Empire, the exercise is only temporary and is problematized almost immediately. Colonel Joll characteristically reasserts his control over the situation by calling the magistrate “the one and only official [...] who has not given [...] his fullest co-operation” (Coetzee, *WB* 123). On one hand, the power of the aesthetic writing

– its ability to serve as a space for ethical engagement – is abruptly diminished with Joll’s curt dismissal: “They are very likely gambling-sticks” (123). On the other hand, Joll does acknowledge that the magistrate’s behaviour appears to be an attempt to be recorded in history as “the One Just Man, the man who is prepared to sacrifice his freedom to his principles” (124). Although Joll makes it clear that no one will “put [the magistrate] in the history books” (125) as he is too insignificant to be included in the master discourse of the Empire, the magistrate significantly decides not to re-enter that discourse. When pressed by Joll to write a report on what transpired between him and “the barbarians on [his] recent and unauthorized visit to them” the magistrate simply refuses (125). The ethical value of his course of action is uncertain at best:

Easier to lay my head on a block than to defend the cause of justice for the barbarians: for where can that argument lead but to laying down our arms and opening the gates of the town to the people whose land we have raped? The old magistrate, defender of the rule of law, enemy in his own way of the State, assaulted and imprisoned, impregably virtuous, is not without his own twinges of doubt.

(Coetzee, *WB* 118)

The “twinges of doubt” do not, however, evolve into a conscious ethical resignation. Rather, the magistrate continues to attempt to behave morally toward the barbarians and gradually becomes more vociferous in his opposition to Joll, culminating in his accusation: “*You* are the enemy, *you* have made the war, and *you* have given them all the martyrs they need” (Coetzee, *WB* 125; emphasis in original). He recognizes that the shame he feels at the end of the novel results from having “wanted to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects” (169) and failing. Even though he is bewildered and “understand[s] no more of [the year] than a babe in arms” (169), he recognizes the transcendental value and importance of the poplar slips, coating each in linseed oil and resolving to bury them for future investigators to discover (169).

Section Four – Conclusion

Neither Razumov in *UWE* nor the magistrate in *WB* succeeds in becoming *permanently* converted ethical agents. Instead, each attains a transient state of ethical awareness during which their actions are fleetingly valuable in that they are able to “identity [their] own inner being with that of all things, or with the kernel of the world” (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 613).

But the recognition that all beings are merely phenomenal manifestations of a single world will is rarely sustained (Glock 438; Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 405; *WWR2* 605-6). In fact, neither character appears to fully acknowledge this at any point.

Rather, both texts appear to suggest that the compassion that Razumov and the magistrate experience, regardless of how feebly, arises when they are no longer being rational but are acting while experiencing a sense of bewilderment. The novels therefore seem to extol an ethic that is virtue-based and located in a subject's emotions rather than focused on the rational subject (see Marais, "WB" 66-67).

The ethic this suggests is not unlike Schopenhauer's conception of acts that are morally valuable: their worth lies beyond all possible knowledge and is incommunicable and ineffable (Glock 441). It cannot be "put into words" but "shows itself" (Schopenhauer, *WWR2* 611) simply "in the deeds, in conduct, in the course of a person's life" (*WWR1* 370).

Despite the characters' ultimate failure, the thematic focus on the act of writing, like the conception of the link between aesthetics and ethics in Schopenhauerian philosophy, suggests that both novels consider alternative sets of values (Spencer 181). Although they are guardedly and tentatively articulated (Spencer 181), these alternatives are not summarily dismissed, which would have corroborated the Swedish Academy's assertion that the distinction between right and wrong is ultimately of no importance ("PR" para. 3).

Conclusion:

The Swedish Academy's Reductive Public Statements

When the Swedish Academy lauded Coetzee for portraying situations in which “the distinction between right and wrong, while crystal clear, can be seen to serve no end” (“PR” para. 3), it presented an interpretation of his texts that considers ethics to be legislative and imperative (see Cartwright, *NS* 255). However, not only did it identify a common metaphysical malaise between Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*, it also offered pessimism as a dubious explanation for this apparent lack of value in choosing between right and wrong action. My argument has been a response to what I consider the logical inconsistencies of this opinion, characterizing it as a particularly bad argument to which I have offered a sustained systematic counterargument, with the aim of suggesting an alternative interpretation.

In Chapter One, I have formulated interpretive and methodological models that draw on the works of Gabriele Helms, cultural narratology and Bakhtinian theory in order to investigate the texts, using the philosophy of one of the foremost German pessimists, Arthur Schopenhauer, as an ideological point of reference. The affinity between Schopenhauerian philosophy and Eastern religions (particularly Brahmanism and Buddhism) suggests, contrary to the implications of the Swedish Academy’s statements, that there is value in ethical and moral choices in systems other than those that posit Judeo-Christian rewards and punishments in an afterlife, and that pessimism cannot legitimately be used to nullify this value.⁶⁶ The influence of Schopenhauer on Conradian fiction is a critical commonplace, suggesting that, if there are indeed links between Conrad’s and Coetzee’s work, these could be used to explain the common pessimistic tone identified by the Swedish Academy. To prevent the “critical heresy” of over-interpretation identified in 1990 by Umberto Eco as part of his Tanner Lectures at Cambridge University, the chapter adopts and adapts the tenets of the “new(ish)” critical approach suggested by Gareth Cornwell (5-11) and argues that the only interpretations to be considered correct are those that can be supported by the texts (Carroll 76).

With the theoretical, methodological and ideological underpinnings of the argument in place, Chapter Two proceeds to show how the Swedish Academy’s comment that the

⁶⁶ The description I have provided of rewards in an afterlife is an oversimplification but is adequate for the sake of the argument.

difference between “right and wrong is crystal clear” (“PR” para. 3) could be considered incorrect. In order to undermine this claim, the chapter presents the argument that the deplorable actions of *UWE*’s Peter Ivanovitch and *WB*’s Colonel Joll – both generally accepted as antagonists of the novels – are of no moral significance at all, especially in light of the empirical, value-based ethics favoured in Schopenhauerian philosophy.

After problematizing the alleged clarity between morally right and wrong action identified by the Swedish Academy, the counter-argument shifts to illustrate, through a series of close readings, ways in which the respective narrators of the novels suggest an authorial consideration of the value of compassionate actions. Conrad’s teacher of languages and Coetzee’s magistrate both embody what I have argued are ethical trajectories towards compassion, suggesting an affinity between the novels and Schopenhauerian ethics, which consider true compassion to be the only ethical motive of any moral value. While Conrad’s text could be considered a “subtly mendacious dialogue” (Conrad, *UWE* 233), Coetzee’s skilful use of the middle voice transforms the text of *WB* into a site of ethical interaction (Attridge, *ER x*). The resultant implication of readers in the ethical dilemma experienced by the magistrate, I argue, suggests that Schopenhauerian thought may be more pervasive in Coetzee’s text than in Conrad’s.

The fourth and final chapter addresses the fact that neither the teacher of languages nor the magistrate, despite their experiences, is permanently converted into a compassionate ethical being. Rather, Conrad and Coetzee seem to present stories of ethical failure. Schopenhauerian philosophy recognizes that salvation is reserved for saints and, very seldom, those who endure extreme suffering (Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 405; *WWR2* 605-606). But the recognition that every member of the phenomenal world is an expression of the goal-less metaphysical will (Cartwright, “NS” 270) that is a defining characteristic of true compassion is temporarily mirrored in aesthetic contemplation and creation (Schopenhauer, *WWR1* 178-79). As both *UWE* and *WB* present characters who attempt to write in order to augment their ethical behaviour as they try desperately and abortively to redeem themselves, the chapter presents the argument that the prominent and sustained textual concentration on this activity strongly suggests that both texts place considerable emphasis on the importance of *attempting* to behave morally.

Through this systematic counterargument, I have attempted to show that the assertions published by the Swedish Academy concerning the nature and role of ethics in Coetzee’s fiction is at best misleading and at worst absurd. The alternative interpretations I have offered are firmly delimited by the primary texts and, I hope, have shown how the

Academy's interpretation can be considered poor. I maintain that the Swedish Academy's assessment of the moral worth of actions in Coetzee's fiction is flawed because it considers ethics as necessarily legalistic and prescriptive and leading to a distinctly Judeo-Christian reward or punishment. To this extent, I would agree with their claim: Neither Conrad's nor Coetzee's fiction suggests anything like a transcendental salvation or punishment for morally good or bad action.

But both *UWE* and *WB* present an alternative set of ethics – one that is voluntary and virtue-based. Basing my arguments on the novels' textual affinities with Schopenhauerian ethics, I have maintained that neither Conrad nor Coetzee offers uncomplicated presentations of the value of compassion. Yet the sustained thematic and authorial considerations of compassionate deeds suggest that there is indeed value in deciding between morally right and morally wrong action – even if the 'rewards' are not guaranteed and may only be temporary at best. In Schopenhauerian terms, the temporary non-existence of the individual subject and the accompanying escape from the ineluctable misery of life, no matter how fleeting, should be sufficient reason – and reward.

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