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## **“Muted group” in *Under Western Eyes*: An analysis of female characters**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims at evaluating Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* vis-vis female characters and their actions. The novel is a site where one finds the company of powerful women involving in social and political activities. *Under Western Eyes* reveals female homosocial relationship while emphasizing women's dominant control over men along with their social involvements. Furthermore, women's roles are more pervasive and stronger than those of Joseph Conrad's earlier novels. Conrad employs a different and non-patriarchal culture in *Under Western Eyes* in which income, wealth, and power are distributed equally between men and women. Hence, the novel shows that the

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muted group or women are able to break the boundaries of male group insofar as they participate in social ceremonies and /or political rituals. Incidentally, the novel introduces a new subject both in Conrad’s literary career and his era when many of his literary contemporaries insisted on a male-dominated society in their writings.

**Keywords:** Joseph Conrad, gender, cultural studies, Homosociality, *Under Western Eyes*

## 1. Introduction

A survey of Conrad’s major novels from the beginning of his career toward the middle demonstrates the author’s obsession with issues of gender and sexuality. Yet, the study shows that his works, particularly those which were written toward the end of his life, deal with female characters or at least Conrad was not absent-minded toward non-male characters. In fact, in many cases Conrad diverges from the central paradigm of English fiction produced by male writers. Conrad wrote his fiction at a time when many of his literary contemporaries portrayed female characters as an intense bond between some men. The lives of these female characters are invariably controlled and managed by the male ones so that socially and psychologically, the women are manipulated as to serve and to help the course and growth of the male societies. Characters like Molly Bloom and Adela Quested serve such a role in *Ulysses* and *A Passage to India*. In the former, Molly’s role is to connect Leopold to the artist Stephen and in the latter Adela cements a bond between the British Fielding and the Indian Aziz. In the early writings of Conrad, we can also view such female mediators who, if not marginalized, are secondary to the male characters. In *Lord Jim* (1900) Jewel loses Jim’s care and then receives Marlow’s, or in *Heart of Darkness* (1898) the Intended

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attempts to connect Marlow with Kurtz. Hence, in such system of patriarchal kinship, women are treated as an object under the male supervision. According to Eve Sedgwick, men seek to remove difference of class, power, and ideology among themselves by victory over women. Sedgwick states:

The spectacle of the ruin of a woman – apparently almost regardless of what counts as “ruin”, or what counts as “woman” - is just the right lubricant for an adjustment of differentials of power between landlord and tenant, master and servant, tradesman and customer, or king and subject. (*Between Men*, p. 76)

Hence, women are assumed as the principal factors in reinforcing the bonds between major male characters in many works of fiction. Their partnership is to follow another primary partnership which apparently is subdued by the male one.

In Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (Hereafter called UWE) which is among his later works in his course of writing, women's roles are more pervasive and stronger than those of his earlier works. The homosociality of men in *Lord Jim* is a tough one. It is so fixed and consolidated that Jim searches and struggles to gain his real identity among the strict male communities. Incidentally, this homosociality emphasizes on making Jim 'one of us' according to Marlow and places him among the circle of men. Explicit homosexuality probably is not the major focus of Conrad in *Lord Jim*. Yet, the homosocial relationships are at the center of the novel so that the tension and distrust that can be men's obsession is also Jim's concern. In fact, such distrust is rooted in the bonds between men and also in the risk of being cut off at any moment.

In *Heart of Darkness*, although Marlow puts women 'out of it', he reveals that his course of life is determined by his aunt and the Intended, the two powerful women. Even Kurtz's life is shaped by two women, one is his Intended for whom he appears in Africa to

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afford her marriage, and the other is the African lady who helps him to find his place among her tribe. Thus, in *Heart of Darkness* the homosociality of men is accompanied by, or parallel with, a limited circle of women. Even in *Lord Jim*, the principal character cannot escape a domestic life provided by Jewel and her mother. Jewel, being a powerful woman, unlike the conventional adventure narrative saves Jim’s life. Even it is she who rescues Jim when he is ambushed and Jim is not ignorant of her strength and passion toward him.

## 2. Discussion

Depicting some forceful women, Conrad in his novels acknowledges the fact that women’s success is depended on their courage and conviction. However, he never conceals the point that in the long run such courage cannot ensure their victory. Conrad is not ignorant of the reality that in a patriarchal society, a woman’s position revolves round her association with a man. Such a bond usually crystallizes in the shape of marriage which as an institution affords women with insufficient rights and scanty freedom. Even marriage does not guarantee women not to be exposed by any exploitation or ferocity in the society. This causes women to grasp power by unification between them or by generating other possible forms of affinity.

Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes* is a novel in which the author implicitly expresses his awareness toward marriage as a compact treated by male community. Entering Razumov’s place to be assisted and protected, Victor Haldin finds his university fellow trustworthy enough to express some of his revolutionary codes. He addresses Razumov:

Ah! You are a fellow! Collected – cool as a cucumber. A regular Englishman. Look here, brother! Men like me leave no posterity, but their souls are not lost. No man’s soul is ever lost. It works for itself –

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or else where would be the scene of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, of conviction, of faith .... (*UWE*, p. 18)

Such a premature trust in Razumov together with an intense recognition of him can be the sign of a deeper sexual orientation or undertones in Victor. That is why he repeats twice “men like me leave no posterity”. This emotional utterance at first seems to carry a revolutionary convention but when Victor speaks of his sister who “has the most trustful eyes of any human being that ever walked this earth” and a woman who “will marry well ... may have children – sons perhaps” (*UWE*, p. 19), in fact, he is proffering his sister in marriage to a man who is rare in this world and there are not many like him. Conrad depicts not only a male community which determines whom a woman should marry, but also discloses the fact that the link between Victor and Razumov is reinforced by a woman. Indeed, Victor treats his sister Natalie as an object of his own gratification in merging into the figure of Razumov. Later, Razumov finds out that Natalie resembles her dead brother, and it is by their alliance that Victor’s vision of continuity in love is fulfilled.

This homosocial pact which issues forth the exchange of a woman is not a success. First of all Razumov betrays Victor and the contract turns to be a failure, and second Natalie does not obey the conventional system of placing women as gifts or objects. More interestingly, Natalie’s behavior and qualities are not shaped or governed by the homosocial network of power. In other words, she is not the typical woman who may crowd the fissure between men in the society. However, Natalie’s masculine qualities underline her replacement for Victor as a sexual object, thus “her voice, slightly harsh, but fascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality, had the accent of spontaneous conviction” (*UWE*, p. 106), or “[h]er walk was not but a frank, strong, healthy movement forward” (*UWE*, p. 134), or “how attractive physically her personality could be to a man capable of appreciating in a woman something else than the mere grace of

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femininity” (*UWE*, p. 78), or “[h]er glance was as direct and trustful as that of a young man yet unspoiled by the world’s wise lesson” (*UWE*, p. 78). Hence, “her strong vitality ... her glance ... as that of a young man” (*UWE*, p. 78), and her “deep” voice (*UWE*, p. 78) are the traits Conrad attributes to her so that being eligible to attain such a position in a patriarchal structure or homosocial set-up.

Among the woman characters of the novel, Natalie emerges as unique and distinctive one. She refuses marriages and unlike her brother Victor who sought posterity through her, she feels that it is herself who should ensure her destiny. In this, Sophia Antonova resembles Natalie. Both are brave and decisive figures. Being so much entangled in their inner world and succumbing to their impulses, the language Professor and Razumov are passive and irresolute. Natalie confesses that she is “an inexperienced girl” (*UWE*, p. 100) but not a “slavish”, and the narrator also emphasizes that she is “so true, so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced!” (*UWE*, p. 107). Sophia is a revolutionary leader who is admired by other cohorts. She is:

The respected, trusted, and influential ... whose word had such a weight in the ‘active’ section of every party. She was much more representative than the great Peter Ivanovitch. Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, she was the true spirit of destructive revolution. (*UWE*, p. 194)

She also prefers to forge her own destiny and not to succumb to marriage. In action and enactments she shows some superior qualities comparing those of the male characters. In fact, she is the one who is very self-confident and self-possessed while grasping some worthy experiences of life. Unlike Natalie who realizes the harsh face of life almost late, that is when she listens to the disconcerting confession of Razumov, Sophia is a mature and veteran woman. In her discussion with Razumov she observes: “You other men are fastidious, full of

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self-love and afraid of trifles ... what you want is to be taken in hand by some women” (*UWE*, p. 181). Contrasting men and women, she accentuates:

You men are all alike. You mistake luck for merit. You do it in good faith too! ... It’s masculine nature. You men are ridiculously pitiful in your aptitude to cherish childish illusions down to the very grave. There are a lot of us who have been at work for fifteen years - I mean constantly – trying one way after another, underground and above ground, looking neither to the right nor to the left! I can talk about it. I have been one of these that never rested .... (*UWE*, p. 183)

Hence, in a contrast between the two most eminent revolutionists, Sophia Antonova and Peter Ivanovitch, it is Sophia who is committed and industrious. Peter is a revolutionary Feminist and a great writer in the view of the other revolutionists. He is involved in some theoretical and abstract pursuits. Being a familiar guest of Madame de S.’s mystic revolutionary salon, Peter is among the leading circle of Russian revolutionists in Geneva, the heart of democracy according to the narrator. But this male Feminist and revolutionist is not a trustworthy one in the views of other characters. Natalie suspects his intrinsic bearing on a woman’s matter. She easily finds out this fact when she observes Peter’s behavior with the simple-minded Tekla, so contemptuous that Natalie asserts, “[I] shouldn’t wonder if she [Tekla] would have preferred abuse, or even a blow” (*UWE*, p. 123). In his note to *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad reveals, “Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S. are fair game. They are the apes of a sinister jungle and are treated as their grimaces deserve” (*UWE*, p. xxi).

In her provocative book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler points out that if acts, gestures, and enactments are performative and fabricated then the gendered body is performative so that it has no ontological status. She avers:

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If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity. (*Gender Trouble*, p. 186)

Referring to Sartre who looks at gender as “a style of being” and to Foucault who believes it to be “a stylistics of existence”, Butler emphasizes, “gendered bodies are so many ‘styles of the flesh’”. Then she concludes:

Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (*Gender Trouble*, p. 191)

Butler views gender as a norm that it can never be internalized. To her ‘the internal’ is nothing but a surface signification and gender norms are impossible to embody so that they are finally phantasmatic. She argues that gender reality is created through sustained performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality. (*Gender Trouble*, pp. 192-193)

Hence, Butler opines that gender is neither true nor false, it can be neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. According to her, gender can also be rendered radically incredible. Deconstructing and undermining the traditional boundaries and definitions of sex and gender, Butler’s theatrical metaphor highlights the fragile and

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provisional concept of gender, and “the sum total of its appearances rather than the expression of a unifying core” (*Genders*, p. xxvi).

*Under Western Eyes* emphasizes Judith Butler’s concept of ‘performativity’ by introducing female characters whose actions characterize their gender. Thus, it is their lives rather than the male characters that allow them to have their role in the society. Being a matter of culture, gender refers to learned patterns of behavior and action, opposing what biology determines. Hence, what makes a person male or female is not grounded in laws of nature so that from culture to culture, male and female bodies express different forms of femininity and masculinity. Gender is performative and as a result of which both heterosexuality and homosexuality are not invariable or constant. According to Jonathan Dollimore, “civilization depends upon that which is anterior to it and is deemed incompatible with it, particularly homosexuality” (*Sexual Sameness*, pp. 9-10). In the case of Razumov and Victor, their homosocial connection leads to the heterosexual relationship of Razumov and Natalie.

By drawing some female characters for whom destiny does not mean the body, Conrad employs a different and non-patriarchal culture in which income, wealth, and power are not distributed unequally between men and women. Neither the family nor the sexuality places the female characters in a subordinate status. Both Natalie and Sophia are androgynous figures who help to remove the boundaries between men and women. They mark the possibilities of the polymorphism of sexual voicing. In fact, Razumov’s psychological progress is indebted to these principal characters who assist him to follow his inner and sentimental education. The first Part of the novel predominantly focuses on Razumov who is an inspired and young man. The entire novel promises a *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist starts from simplicity and innocence and undertakes an educational development. The novel unfolds in Razumov’s psychic development an “encounter between truth and image, abstraction and concreteness, darkness and illumination” so that “[T]o defy darkness

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is to assert the self by invading the heart of all truth” (*Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, p. 147). Further, it seems Razumov’s act of betrayal leads to self-abandonment so that in “a manner that is reminiscent of Kurtz, Razumov must be seen as having abandoned himself to a passion of evil” (*A Casebook on Heart of Darkness*, p. 207). Further, Razumov’s life seems to be struck in a limbo so that he becomes motionless. Almost from the time he is unwillingly trapped in the revolutionary pitfall, Razumov lingers over a situation in which he is not certain what to do and how to act. At first, he wanted to help Victor to disappear but later, suffering from indecision, he decided to give him up. Obsessed in his inner world of betrayal, Razumov who has no sympathy for any political groups, also being an introvert and impartial person with no group-feeling, destroys himself. In fact, group-feeling has no place in Razumov’s pack of ideas. In the words of Osborn Andreas:

Group-feeling in itself is of such paramount value that for any individual to mimic it for one evil group even in order to further the interests of another good group is to destroy an element in himself essential to his existence as an individual. (*Joseph Conrad*, p. 127)

In the novel, Razumov attains a stability of mind only when he falls in love with Natalie and more importantly when he discloses the fact to her. This paralysis of the mind and immobility in action is restored by his confession to Natalie which is psychological, the consequence of Natalie’s polyvalent existence and gender performativity.

Finding the circle of women where gender borderlines are no longer lodged, Razumov gets an insight in his life that enriches his sentimental education. Before leaving St. Petersburg, he was in a male-dominant arena among his university fellows and emerged in his expectations of a better future. But in the political atmosphere of Geneva, together with its female-dominant environment and ambience, he encounters some new set of experiences. Such

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experiences keep him in touch with new-found awareness toward life. *Under Western Eyes* revolves round an ordeal that is undertaken by a socially isolated character. Razumov manages to surmount such an ordeal, thanks to his contact with some Janus-faced characters who accompany him half the way.

A look at the works of other literary contemporaries of Joseph Conrad shows that the protagonists in many of their novels are not in touch with the female communities, or rather for them women have the domestic qualities and subordinate positions – Rickie Elliott, Paul Morel, Stephen Dedalus, to name a few. Conrad's original plot for *Under Western Eyes* was to have Razumov marry Natalie and reveal the fact to her later. Such a plot emphasizes the masculinist assumption of Conrad's time that is heterosexuality, monogamy, and domestic status of women in a patriarchal society where providing progeny is primary. Consequently, in Conrad's original version, Natalie's status is confined to the house sphere and she lacks any power and autonomy. Virginia Woolf speaks of Conrad as a writer who sees once and sees forever. How could such a visionary novelist change the events and characterize Natalie as to be deceived and betrayed by Razumov? In fact, Conrad's plan had nothing with Natalie's powerful character and the author probably could not resist the force of the events and situation in which Natalie was to react appropriately and accurately.

Several times, the narrator refers to Natalie as an honest and true girl "but so dangerously inexperienced" (*UWE*, p. 107). Highlighting her lack of experience, the Professor of languages attempts to develop a patriarchal value which insists on the inabilities of women and their failure to sustain without men's partnership. However, taking their own codes of social activities and gender roles, these female characters refuse such a view. Natalie is invited by Peter to join their meetings at the Chateau Borel but she is not interested in such public participation. She rejects Peter's invitations and it is her own choice when she decides to approach the Chateau Borel only to visit

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Razumov. Sophia’s choice of sexuality also manifests her freedom in not only politics but also in social conventions. She is among many male revolutionists but remains single and at times fulfills her maternal impulses by discussing and flirting with young men.

Among the female characters in *Under Western Eyes*, Natalie and Sophia enjoy both politically and sexually emancipated status. Conrad indicates this freedom not only in their choices in politics but also in sexuality. In other words, because of their involvement in political activities, these women could break the social boundaries of sexuality and recognize their true desire and ‘self’. That is why Sophia’s words to Razumov illustrate this:

You men can love here and there and desire something or other – and you make a great to do about it, and you call it passion! You! While it lasts. But we women are in love with love, and with hate, with these very things I tell you, and with desire itself. That’s why we can’t be bribed off so easily as you men. In life, you see, there is not much choice. You have either to rot or to burn. And there is not one of us, painted or unpainted, that would not rather burn than rot. (*UWE*, p. 186)

Hence, Sophia reveals that the world of politics uncovers other scopes in which women’s desire gets manifested based on their disposition. For them, it is not the society with its authority and power that affect and identify the human beings’ habit but their aspiration and desire. This is how politics and sexuality are connected and how politics contributes to sexuality.

In his two essays of ‘Belief and the Problem of Women’ (1972) and ‘The “Problem” Revisited’ (1975), Edwin Ardener, an Oxford anthropologist, renders some stimulating analysis of female culture and its boundaries. Ardener’s essays suggest that women belong to a ‘muted group’ while men constitute a ‘dominant (male) group’. He opines that the models of history and culture are not androcentric and

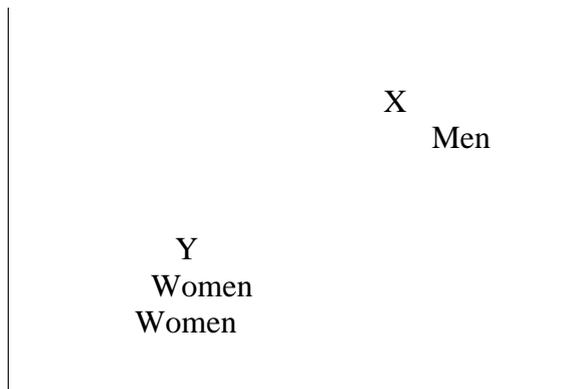
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so incomplete. By the term 'muted', Ardener reveals the inadequacies of both language and power. The dominant group controls the structures needed for the articulation of consciousness. Thus:

[M]uted groups must mediate their beliefs through the allowable forms of dominant structures. ... all language is the language of the dominant order, and women, if they speak at all, must speak through it. (*Modern Criticism and Theory*, p. 323)

Ardener suggests that women's views are opened through ritual and arts, and these are the expressions that can be disclosed by the ethnographers who intend to perceive beyond the screens of the dominant structure.

Ardener's diagram of the dominant and the muted groups and their relationship is:



As it is shown, the muted circle Y falls within the limits of dominant circle X, and a crescent of Y is outside the dominant boundary. Ardener refers to this crescent of Y as a 'wild zone' or the women's consciousness. This is the area which is always imaginary to the men. However, women know about the male crescent, because all

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of male consciousness is within the circle of the dominant structure and it is structured by language or is accessible to language.

Ardener’s analysis of female culture and women’s consciousness interestingly reveals that such consciousness is articulated through the ritual. Hence, the historically marginalized women attempt to find their real status in society and reveal their consciousness which has been ignored for a long time. Thus:

relegated to a subaltern space in a phallocratic culture, women have invented ways of hitting back from the periphery of power by dislodging those who occupy the center by exercising their power to show or exhibit that they do and can occupy the center, thus voicing their own cultural perceptions and prerogatives. (*Beyond the Walls*, p. 20)

In Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*, the women’s ritual turns to be a political one. In fact, their social and political activities are part of a big ceremonial and ritualistic phenomenon of consciousness that aim at ushering and proving a new language and a new culture. In this respect, these women are revolutionists in two fields. One is the surfaced field of political and revolutionary enactments or politics which is general and universal in the sense of being part of a social movement supported by both men and women. The other is a blurred and murky field that is constituted by women but is ignored by men. It means that a character like Sophia is a revolutionary woman who is involved in a current political movement. This ritualistic activity, incidentally, prompts her to insist on her female consciousness and identity. In other words, as a member of Ardener’s ‘muted group’, Sophia is able to express her truth only when the ‘wild zone’ becomes the place for the revolutionary women’s language. The dominant male group may control and order any beliefs or ideas of social reality through forms or structures. However, the muted group or women can

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break the boundaries of this dominant group, insofar as they participate in social ceremonies and rituals.

Another factor which emphasizes on women's power of action is the fact that they act as mediator in synthesizing thoughts and feelings. Characters like Sophia or Natalie do not let themselves be swept along by the force of their emotions. For them, the public and the private spheres are not overshadowing their control or action in separate, if the public means their revolutionary activities and the private is their inner tendencies and desire. In other words, they are not repressed by one at the cost of the other. Victor Haldin seeks his feeling in choosing death and Razumov pursues his reason in betraying Victor (Razumov stands for 'reason' in Russian). Both are suffering from an imbalance between what they think and what they feel. Sophia reveals such a balance among women:

Oh. You squeamish, masculine creature ... There's no looking into the secrets of the heart ... It is not for us to judge an inspired person. That's where you men have an advantage. You are inspired sometimes both in thought and action. I have always admitted that when you are inspired, when you manage to throw off your masculine cowardice and prudishness you are not to be equaled by us. Only, how seldom ... Whereas the silliest woman can always be made of use. And why? Because we have passion, unappeasable passion. (*UWE*, p. 186)

In fact, Natalie is a worthy confidante for Razumov when he approaches her due to his emotional impulses. This happens toward the end of the novel while at the beginning, he confessed to Haldin, Mikulin, and General T., and could not attain the inner peace and moral freedom. In other words, Natalie absorbs and purges him so that through this filter he can gain a balance between feeling and reason. Razumov who was living in a world limited to some university activities and colleagues, by the resourceful power of some

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women achieves a state in which all human passions of hatred could be faced. So he tells Natalie:

An hour after I saw you first I knew how it would be. The terrors of remorse, revenge, confession, anger, hate, fear, are like nothing to the atrocious temptation which you put in my way the day you appeared before me with your voice, with your face, in the garden of that accursed villa. (*UWE*, p. 262)

Thus, Razumov learns about the truth of love which is an essential part of human soul. It is a love which leads to another love. It is love of him which is different from narcissism. He experienced such a false and static love when he succumbed to his university ideals among his college fellows during his student days. But love of Natalie turns out to be a more trusted and dynamic one for Razumov. By such recognition, he fulfills his duty and promise in life, and his attitude towards sentimental education becomes more humanistic and refined. He confides to her in his book of confession, the sovereign power of her person over his imagination and also her role in guiding him through his emotional passage. He reveals:

You were appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace. You! And you have done it in the same way, in which he ruined me: by forcing upon me your confidence. Only what I detested him for, in you ended by appearing noble and exalted ... Listen – now comes the true confession ... I’ve never know any kind of love ... I must tell you that I had ended by loving you . And to tell you that I must first confess ... You fascinated me – you have freed me from the blindness of anger and hate – the truth shining in you drew the truth out of me ... I am independent. (*UWE*, pp. 265-267)

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The question is what truth Razumov found in his contact with the revolutionists in general and with Natalie Haldin in particular? Contrasting two worlds of individuality and community, the novel unfolds the significance of the romantic, maternal, and communal aspect of life. Before facing these aspects, Razumov had emphasized on some dichotomies in life. This one-sided outlook made him a naïve and childish person who tried to preserve these schisms. His insistence on ‘History not Theory’, ‘Patriotism not Internationalism’, ‘Evolution not Revolution’, ‘Direction not Destruction’, and ‘Unity not Disruption’ resulted in his mental and moral collapse and led him to trust on a more matter-of-course aspects of life. The novel also exhibits how Razumov’s distinctions are shattered; it is by the revolutionists’ activities and their effects on Russia’s Evolution together with their political theories (those of Haldin, Sophia, and so on), also by the importance of Geneva as a place for all these refugees and the role of the Western Professor of languages who repeatedly comments on Russia and Russian people. Also whether the aristocrats in the novel are interested in the world’s opinion about Russia’s political affairs or not, it is a matter of Internationalism and worldwide so that the entire events of these characters are under the Western eyes, and then it is both Patriotism and Internationalism which draw a map for the revolutionists. Furthermore, Victor’s act of terrorism which is viewed by Razumov as Disruption is a part of revolutionist’s Direction for Russia’s Evolution. In his useless attempts to preserve all his ideological distinctions, Razumov realizes that there are other forces in life that he is ignorant of. Natalie made him encounter these forces and Razumov could discover that the heroic ideas and acts are not enough in life. In fact, they are merged in the daily tasks which revolve round some substantial and humanistic desires. In other words, the truth Razumov could achieve is the truth of life mirroring the communal and all its attributes to the individual.

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### 3. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, many critics scorned at Conrad's novels for being dominated by male characters. This might be true of *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness* in which homosociality has a male orientation. The role of the women is marginalized at the cost of male characters' undertakings and enterprises. The homosocial relationship among men is at the center of *Lord Jim* so that the tension and distrust which can be men's obsession is also Jim's concern. He is a real outcast entangled in a network of male figures. Jim tends to be a marginal and explores marginal situations. In Conrad's *Lord Jim*, men-to-men bonds and interactions are crucial to the making of a carceral network and homosociality so that Jim is trapped in this game. Indeed, the entire novel captures Jim's search for his real identity and to find out his actual function among the strict male community. Homosociality in *Lord Jim* emphasizes on making Jim 'one of us' in Marlow's words and placing him among the society of men.

Conrad's *Lord Jim* was written in 1900 immediately after the Decadence Movement found its place in European literature. This literature presents aspects of a decadent life-style or reflects Decadence through the deformation and refinement of style, form, syntax, and language. Some authors of the period made references to Homosexuality or Lesbianism, though they were not overtly gay or lesbian. Also, there were authors like Eric Stenbock (1860-1895) and Arthur Rimband (1854-1891) who led decadent lives by being homosexual though not reflecting decadence in their works. Conrad neither wrote clearly gay fiction nor had a homosexual form of life and behavior. However, he was not separate from the milieu of the late nineteenth century in which there were a smooth change from Aestheticism to Decadence, both in life-style and literature. It is an age when artifice was relished over the earlier Romantic's concept of Nature. In fact, Decadence is a transitional period that functions as a bridge between Romanticism and Modernism.

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Conrad is mostly praised as a modernist writer who viewed and felt the circumstances of his own time properly and created a literature that was novel in both content and language. However, distinguishing some possible traces of decadence in his writings and finding out the specific tradition's influences on him may help one to understand *Lord Jim* as a response to the atmosphere Conrad lived in. This is not the case only with Conrad's works but also with the novels of James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and W. B. Yeats as well. These writers grew beyond Aestheticism and came across Decadence in one way or another. They also responded to Darwin's theory of Evolution in which Nature is shown as a battlefield. They came to believe in man's power to have an upper hand over Nature and to be superior to it while simultaneously being detached from it. Perhaps, because of this, some authors have attempted to create fake and bizarre literature, lead odd life-style, and also tended to get involved in sterile kind of sexuality; hence, Baudelaire spoke of women as natural while being abominable to him (*A Preface to Conrad*: 44). In case of Conrad's *Lord Jim*, one may look at its male homosociality as a smooth issue of Decadence, or at least, it is possible to claim that the novel's little attention towards women and their role is the result of the social and literary atmosphere of the time. The traces of Decadence are opaque in Conrad's novels and they are limited to the homosocial world of men and explicit homosexuality is not the major focus of Conrad in any of his novels.

In contrast to the male homosociality in *Lord Jim*, Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* reveals female homosocial relationship and its dominant control over men and their actions. It is not the desire of the men which selects and guides other desires or powers, but women's courage and convictions become crucial. The novel acknowledges women's success and power in the society. The female homosocial pact in *Under Western Eyes*, as it was emphasized earlier, shows a non-patriarchal culture in which power and wealth are not in the hands of men. Hence, sexuality is viewed as an unimportant factor in

“Muted group” in *Under Western Eyes*

the novel, or at least, power is shared and distributed among women and men equally. Although in other novels of Conrad the emphasis is on the domestic qualities and subordinate position of the women, his *Under Western Eyes* introduces a new subject both in Conrad’s literary career and in his atmosphere where many of his literary contemporaries emphasized a male-dominated society in their writings. This chapter focuses on gender and sexuality and their power distributions in Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and *Under Western Eyes*. In the former, the macho Conrad portrays the world of men, their interactions and struggles vis-à-vis the sea and the land; in the latter, Conrad touches upon the feminine aspect of his soul to issue forth a suppressed and concealed psyche of men’s nature, and to reveal a social world in which men and women share the same desire, power, demands, and necessities.

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