Towards a Poethics of Terror

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Contents

The contempoprary experience of terrorism asks considerable questions of classical conceptions of law and legal theory in the field of political violence. These questions are rooted in problems of definition, and they are not reserved to the discipline of law. It has been argued that terrorism is an innately mythic construct, and that the world in which the terrorist, and counter-terrorist, operates, is one of collective enchantment. This article is premised upon this supposition. It argues that a 'poethical' approach, one that embraces the particular disciplinary insights of language and literature, presents a vital supplement to present jurisprudential endeavors to comprehend terrorism. The first part of the article argues the case for a poethics of terror. The second and third then discuss the particular treatment of terrorism in the novels of Joseph Conrad, Feodor Dostoevsky and J.M. Coetzee. The final part of the article reiterates the particular strategic value of a poethical approach in our endeavor to access an ethical, as well as political and cultural, understanding of modern terrorism.

Terrorism has taken the academic world by storm. It has always been there, as its more nuanced commentators have duly noted.[1] Acts of terrorism are scattered across biblical and classical texts.[2] But the most recent "wave" of terrorism, culminating most spectacularly in the events of "9–11," has become a centerpiece of contemporary musings on the subject of international law and (dis)order. "Something terrible happened on September 11," Jacques Derrida confessed, "and in the end we 'don't know what.'"[3] But we are not short of opinions, particularly scary ones. It is argued that we now live in an age of 'hyperterrorism,' where the nature and scale of terrorism has reached a new level, and that the question of 'How to deal with international terrorism is quickly becoming the defining issue of our age.'[4]

The legal implications of this challenge are immediate. According to Harold Koh, the very 'spirit of the law' is at stake.[5] U.S. President George W. Bush has advised of a 'lengthy campaign' against terrorism, one that will dictate whether 'civilisation' can defeat the forces of 'evil.' It will be the defining battle for 'progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.'[6] A similarly fantastical rhetoric can be found in German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's claim that 9–11 represented a 'declaration of war against

[1] See W. Lacqueur, *Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977), pp. 3–20, and also, more recently, F. Megret, "Justice in Times of Violence", *European Journal of International Law* 14 (2003), p. 328.

[2] See J.Sterba, "Introduction", in J. Sterba, ed., *Terrorism and International Justice*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 2–3, and Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 7–8, 21–2.

[3] J. Derrida, "Dialogue", in G.Borradori, ed., *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Juergen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 87.

[4] A. Dershowitz, *Why Terrorism Works: Understanding the Threat, Responding to the Challenge*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), pp. 11–12. A similar question is articulated by Dominic McGoldrick at the outset of his *From '9–11' to the Iraq War 2003*, (Oxford, Hart, 2004), pp. 1–2.

[5] H. Koh, "The Spirit of the Laws", *Harvard International Law Journal* 43 (2002), 23–4.

[6] In McGoldrick, *From 9–11*, p. 11.

all of civilization.'[7] Perspective can temper the hyperbole.[8] But in a world of impressions, cold facts are of limited value. If the success of terrorism is calculated in terms of how great is the terror spread, the current experience of 'hyperterrorism' seems to be remarkably effective. The discourse of terrorism today is an apocalyptic one; both terrorists and counter-terrorists prefer it that way.[9]

Terrorism, as we shall see, is an elusive subject, evading precise political, jurisprudential and cultural definition. Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass have observed that 'terrorism becomes that heart of darkness' within which there appears to be no precise definition, or understanding. Beset by alternative terrorist and counter-terrorist strategies of evasion and allusion, it emerges as a sort of 'dehumanized world that has lost all touch with reason and morality.'[10] It is here that we, the ordinary citizen of this world, need to be careful. For we have to try to make some sense of all this, pick our way through the evasion and the various allusions. David Burrell, quoting Norman Mailer, puts it more succinctly, but no less convincingly. If we are not to fall prey to the kind of 'media fabrication' that our political elite likes to fashion, if we are not to lose sight of the real human context, then we must ensure that our 'built-in crap detectors' stay on full alert.[11]

The purpose of this article is to argue the case for a distinctively poethical strategy, one that attempts to overcome what Richard Hofstadter famously termed the 'paranoid style' of terrorist discourse.[12] For whilst the immediate experience of terrorism may, thankfully, be limited to the unfortunate few, the rest of us still experience terrorism in different, if secondary, ways. It is a discourse that affects all our lives, and the collateral argument that terrorism somehow validates the occasional abrogation of so many of our most cherished legal principles, is something that should concern all of us, legal scholars and citizens.

The first part of this article will explore the various and related implications posed by the experience of terrorism, and the political, ethical and jurisprudential discourses that surround it. The second and third parts will then explore some of the deeper 'poethical' issues that terrorism brings to the fore, and will do so through the writings of Conrad, Dostoevski and Coetzee. In this way, it will necessarily argue the case for literature as providing a vital supplement to the clearly limited strategies of classical legal and jurisprudential discourse. As the doyen of terrorist studies, Walter Lacqueur,

[7] In M. Rasmussen, 'A Parallel Globalization of Terror: 9–11, Security and Globalization', *Cooperation and Conflict* 37 (2002), p. 333.

[8] As Zulaika and Douglass observe, between 1974 and 1994, more people died each year of beestings in the U.S. than of any terrorist-related events. This a country in which approximately 100,000 are murdered each year. See J. Zulaika & W. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables and Faces of Terrorism*, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 6.

[9] Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, p. 30.

[10] Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, p. 25.

[11] In D. Burrell, 'Narratives Competing for Our Souls', in Sterba, *Terrorism*, pp. 88, 93.

[12] R. Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics', in R. Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966), p. 37.

observed, as long ago as 1977, 'fiction holds more promise for the understanding of the terrorist phenomenon than political science' ever can.[13]

I. Terror and Poethics

The idea that this might be so resonates very strongly with those legal scholars who have argued the merits of a consciously interdisciplinary study of 'law and literature,' and in turn 'law and humanities.'[14] At the heart of this evolving scholarship is the belief that literary texts can provide a 'supplement' to legal texts; a capacity that becomes ever more vital in instances where the authority of the legal text seems uncertain.[15] To a certain extent, much of 'law and literature' scholarship seeks to deploy literature as a teaching tool. But there is a deeper aspiration too; one that finds a pioneering expression in Richard Weisberg's invocation of a jurisprudential 'poethics.' According to Weisberg, perhaps more than any other discipline, literature can 'revitalize the ethical component of law.' "Stories about the 'other,'" he confirms, 'induce us to *see* the other, and once we do so, we endeavor consistently to understand the world from within the other's optic.'[16]

Other leading 'law and literature' scholars have followed suit. Maria Aristodemou has appraised the potential for literature to access a 'new ethics' of 'otherness' in real, as well as imagined, jurisprudential contexts. 'No writing,' she affirms, 'ever takes place outside the mirroring love of, and for, others.'[17] And the same metaphor is deployed by Melanie Williams, who sees in literature a unique capacity to present 'a mirror to ourselves.' Literature is the primary 'vehicle' by which jurists can approach the various challenges of 'ethical modelling.'[18] Such a claim carries an overt humanistic injunction.[19] According to Williams, the ultimate aspiration of 'law and literature' study is to reinvest a sense of 'joint humanity.'[20]

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[13] Even if it is, as he adds, 'no place for leisurely strolls'. See Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 149–50.

[14] For a recent charting of the evolution of 'law and literature' and 'law and humanities', see J. Stone Peters, 'Law, Literature, and the Vanishing Real: On the Future of an Interdisciplinary Illusion", *PMLA* 10 (2005), 442–53.

[15] Within this context, for example, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* is one of the most studied of all 'law and literature' texts. Others include Kafka's *The Trial* and Sophocles' *Antigone*.

[16] R. Weisberg, *Poethics and Other Strategies of Law and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 46.

[17] M. Aristodemou, *Law and Literature: Journeys from Her to Eternity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 295. See also pp. 2, 225.

[18] M. Williams, *Empty Justice: One Hundred Years of Law, Literature and Philosophy* (London: Cavendish, 2002), pp. xxiv, 180.

[19] For an account of this development, see I.Ward, 'Universal Jurisprudence and the Case for Legal Humanism', *Alberta Law Review* 38 (2001), pp. 941–59, and 'The Echo of a Sentimental Jurisprudence', *Law and Critique* 13 (2002), pp. 107–25.

[20] Williams, *Empty Justice*, p. 218.

This idea, of the necessity of a literary 'supplement,' aligns with grander postmodern claims that law, as a classical discipline, is limited. The dictates of 'law,' as Jacques Derrida famously advised, leaves no 'place for justice or responsibility.'[21] Taken to an extreme, Derrida affirmed that the 'very work of the political amounts to creating (to producing, to making etc) the most friendship possible.'[22] Friendship is the primal characteristic of humanity, its politics and its jurisprudence. It gears, not just 'democracy,' but also 'truth, freedom, necessity and equality.' It defines the strength of any political community, its politics and its morality.[23] In *On Forgiveness*; Derrida concluded that the intensely literary expressions of 'humanity' and 'confession' are to be found 'beyond the juridical nature.'[24] A similar view is expressed by Costas Douzinas, who argues for a narrative 'imaginary,' one constructed from 'memories of fear, tales of pain and suffering and the experience of oppression' that can protect the 'integrity of unique beings in their existential otherness, by promoting the dynamic realisation of the freedom with others.'[25]

And the case for deploying literature as a supplement to legal or political text is not reserved to identifiable 'law and literature' scholars. Writing to what is essentially the same theme, Martha Nussbaum has sought to present a liberal jurisprudence as an expression of 'imagination, inclusion, sympathy and voice.'[26] In *Cultivating Humanity*, she defined the good liberal as someone possessed of 'the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have.'[27] It is for this reason, as she affirmed in her rather earlier *Love's Knowledge*, that literature has far greater value in securing the 'good society' than any number of laws, quite simply because it can more readily access our 'narrative emotions,' and it is these emotions that nurture our capacity to 'love' and which, ultimately, make life worth living.[28]

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[21] J. Derrida, 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides', in Borradori, *Philosophy*, pp. 128–9, 134–5.

[22] J. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, (London: Verso, 1997), p. 8.

[23] Derrida, *Politics*, p. 100.

[24] "On Forgiveness", in J. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 28. See also p. 59.

[25] C. Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights: Critical Legal Thought at the Turn of the Century* (Oxford: Hart, 2000), pp. 1–4, 17–19, 121–31, 253, 259, 341. For a similar statement, see Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 115–16, arguing that narrative is a vital "supplement", one that can abridge the essential 'disjuncture between law and justice' which describes 'fundamental humanity.'

[26] M. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), pp. 73–8, 90–1, 115–20.

[27] M. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 10–11.

[28] M. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 53, 75–6, 94–6, 165–6, 190–1.

The aspiration has a particular resonance today, for all of us; but particularly, perhaps, for jurists. For, according to U.S. President George Bush, we now live in a world in which 'there are no rules.'[29] It is a conclusion that echoes those voices that sagely advise an end of international law.[30] We have, according to Jacques Derrida, moved 'beyond' the international law of 'phantom-States.'[31] We now live amidst a new world 'disorder' where the pretences of classical international jurisprudence are 'nowhere respected.'[32] Philip Allott similarly anticipates the ending of an essentially positive jurisprudence that is the very antithesis of real humanity, the 'deformation of all selfhoods.'[33] The twenty-first century world is one of terror and chaos. Alain Finkielraut describes a 'sickness of geography,' the reduction of superpower confrontation to 'bitter little wars, to disagreements over borders, to a ridiculous and bloody hotch-potch of squabbles, to the tautology of identity politics.'[34] For many critics, global or 'hyper' terrorism has become an ultimate expression of this acutely depressing geopolitical chaos.[35] John Gray has argued that the emergence of more sophisticated transnational terrorist networks, such as Al-Qaeda, is a 'byproduct' of globalisation and the 'weakened' condition of the modern state. 'The Hobbesian anarchy that flows from failed states,' he confirms, 'has enabled stateless armies to strike into the heart of the world's greatest power.'[36]

Terrorism, once again, appears to be an ultimate expression of this anxiety. The seemingly indefinable is always a matter of concern, particularly to lawyers. And terrorism is peculiarly difficult to define. As Lacqueur observes, any attempt at 'specific' definition is 'bound to fail, for the simple reason that there is not one but many different terrorisms.'[37] For some lawyers, this realisation cripples any attempt to refine a particular 'law' of terrorism. Rosalyn Higgins argues that terrorism is a 'term without legal significance,' merely a 'convenient way of alluding to activities, whether of

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[29] In McGoldrick, *9–11*, p. 87.

[30] See, for example, Juergen Habermas, 'Fundamentalism and Terror' in Borradori, *Philosophy*, pp. 35–8, arguing that we are presently experiencing a 'transition' phase, moving from the governance of international 'law' to a governance of 'world citizenry'. Altogether less optimistic is Bill Bowring, who worries about an ongoing 'degradation' of international law. See his "The degradation of international law?", in J. Strawson, ed, *Law After Ground Zero* (London: Glasshouse Press, 2002), pp. 3, 14–16.

[31] J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 84–5.

[32] Derrida, 'Autoimmunity', p. 10. For a similar view, see M. Koskenniemi, 'The Politics of International Law', *European Journal of International Law* 1 (1990), p. 7.

[33] P. Allott, 'Reconstituting Humanity – New International Law', *European Journal of International Law* 3 (1992), pp. 247–8.

[34] A. Finkielraut, *In the Name of Humanity: Reflections on the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), p. 97.

[35] See, for example, N. Chomsky, 'Moral truism, empirical evidence and foreign policy', *Review of International Studies* 29 (2003), pp. 605–20.

[36] J. Gray, *Al-Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003), pp. 1–2, 21, 73–5, 84.

[37] W. Lacqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 46.

States or of individuals, widely disapproved of and in which either the methods used are unlawful, or the targets protected, or both.'[38] The idea of a 'law' of terrorism has no sensible meaning; anymore, indeed, that does the idea of a 'war' against it. For this reason, in practice, terrorist 'crimes' tend to be despatched to various domestic or international criminal courts, or, all too often, dealt with by distinctively extra-judicial means.

It is within this context that international jurists and those engaged in the more immediate discourse of terror have been increasingly tempted by the lures of aesthetics and narrativity. Roland Bleiker urges a consciously aesthetic 'approach' to contemporary crises in international order, one that has 'to do with validating the whole register of human perceptions,' and emotions. The challenges are of such magnitude that it would be reckless 'not to employ the full register of human intelligence to understand and deal with them.'[39] Likewise, commenting on the particular terrors of the Balkan wars, David Campbell argues the case for deploying the 'micronarratives' of literature and confession alongside the 'macronarratives' of international law and order.[40] Amongst jurists, perhaps the most compelling echo of this strategy can be found in William Twining's demand for a reinvested global *ius humanitatis*, one that can be conceived as a series of 'mental maps,' the 'construct of a multiplicity of impressions' and 'complexes of social relations.' Such a mapping emphasises the 'complexities and elusiveness of reality, the difficulties of grasping it, and the value of imagination and multiple perspectives in facing these difficulties.'[41]

Such an approach resonates, not just with those arguments mounted in defence of 'law and literature' or 'law and humanities' scholarship, but also with much of the most recent work in terrorist studies. The world in which the modern terrorist, and counter-terrorist, works, it has been observed, is one of 'collective enchantment,' of 'secrecy, masks and hidden agendas.'[42]Any response must, accordingly, take account of these deeply, and radically, impressionistic implications. In similar vein, Don DeLillo has suggested that '9–11' was a 'narrative' event; a symbolic clash, not of civilizations, but of competing narratives.[43] Akin to this observation is the notorious suggestion, mooted separately by both Damien Hurst and Karl Heinz Stockhausen, that the destruction of

[38] R. Higgins, 'The general international law of terrorism', in R. Higgins & M. Flory, eds., *Terrorism and International Law* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 28.

[39] R. Bleiker, 'The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory', *Millenium* 30 (2001), pp. 513, 519, 529.

[40] D. Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 234.

[41] W. Twining, *Globalisation and Legal Theory* (London: Butterworths, 2000), pp. 51, 172, 243.

[42] R. Leeman *The Rhetoric of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism* (London: Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 13–17, 52–5, and Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, pp. 183, 186–90, 210–12, 226.

[43] Quoted in K. Hayward & W. Morrison, 'Locating Ground Zero: caught between narratives of crime and war', in Strawson, *Ground Zero*, p. 139.

the Twin Towers was an act of 'poetic power,' a 'work of art.'[44] The suggestion might be controversial, even repellent. But that should not detract from its acuity.[45]

The terrorist and the counter-terrorist are engaged in the same essentially aesthetic and literary endeavor; to describe a picture, to craft a narrative of events, and in so doing elevate impression to the status of reality, even truth. The terrorist presents a story of heroism and necessary sacrifice. The counter-terrorist presents a counter-narrative of defiance and vengeance, replacing the image of the martyr with that of inhumanity, even bestiality.[46] The rhetorical struggle is a slippery one, engaged in a linguistic environment, to borrow Derrida's phrase, of 'semantic instability.'[47] The adage of today's terrorist being tomorrow's liberator is an old one. But it has force too. And we, the audience, have to try to make some sense of all this, pick our way through the heroes and anti-heroes, the mythologies and the realities. It is, again, for this reason that we need to be so careful. There is much crap to detect. And anyway we are not supposed to breach the ultimate taboo. We are not supposed to engage our imagination too readily. As Zulaika and Douglass remind us, we are not supposed to interact, in any sense with "the terrorist 'other.'"[48] Still less should we seek to understand, or to question the validity of 'our' responses, or those of our political leaders. We are just supposed to be terrified.

And we are. But we need to feel different emotions too; emotions that the legal technician rarely seeks to engage, and which the counter-terrorist strategist would prefer not to engage at all. Yet, we can only come to understand terrorism, as an experience, and as our experience, if we can better access these emotions. Alongside terror and fear, we need to feel sympathy and compassion. In her essay *Compassion and Terror*, Martha Nussbaum has reiterated her belief that compassion alone gives us a necessary moral 'urgency.' More than ever, she argues, the cause of justice today requires rather more attention to the human, and rather less to the formal institutions of law. For 'we will achieve no lasting moral progress unless and until the daily unremarkable lives of people distant from us become real in the fabric of our own daily lives, until our everyday eudaimonistic judgments about our important ends include them as ends.' And if we are going to realise this challenge, the ability to nurture a suitably cosmopolitan ethical 'imagination' will be vital. It is the telling, and the listening to, stories, whether they be in courts of law or between the pages of books, which alone can invest in all of us 'a larger sense of the humanity of suffering.'[49]

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[44] Hayward & Morrison, 'Ground Zero, p. 144. For a similar sentiment, see Habermas, 'Dialogue', p. 28.

[45] See Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, p. 219.

[46] See Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, pp. 6, 103–4, 109–13, 178–82 and A. Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature: From Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 3–5.

[47] Derrida, 'Dialogue', p. 105.

[48] Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, p. x.

[49] M. Nussbaum, 'Compassion and Terror', in Sterba, *Terrorism*, pp. 231, 244–5, 249–51.

II. Conrad's Terrorists

The insight is not new, of course, anymore than is the experience of terrorism itself. A century ago, Europe was thrilled and terrified, in roughly equal measure, by the 'propaganda by deed' terrorism of the anarchist and nihilist gangs of Johannes Most, Sergei Nechaev and the like.[50] It was Nechaev who first embraced the term 'terrorist' in the late 1860s.[51] According to John Gray, the desire to 'remake the world by spectacular acts of terror' is a characteristic of the modern terrorist.[52] It is. But it is not, once again, new. The events of 9/11 and 7/7 have impacted upon our consciousness in much the same way as the assassination of Tsar Alexander II did a hundred and forty years ago, or indeed that of General Mesentzoff a couple of decades later. Mesentzoff's assassin, Stepniak, was fully attuned to the need, for the aspiring terrorist, of attaining the 'sublimities' of mythic 'grandeur' in his or her work.[53] The purpose of terrorism is not to kill, or at least not only. It is to terrorise the living.

Someone who fully appreciated this chilling truth was Joseph Conrad, whose two most overtly political novels, *The Secret Agent*, published in 1907, and *Under Western Eyes*, published in 1911, were both focussed on the experience, and perverse thrill, of terrorism.[54] Both novels are, at once, about both the universal and the immediate; the universal experience of terror, and the particular context of the Russian 'problem.' Both novels have a Russian context, immediate in the case of *Under Western Eyes*, in which much of the action oscillates around exiled Russian anarchists in Geneva, and more remote in *The Secret Agent*, in which the action is centred in London, but in which the trigger for violence comes from the Russian paymasters of the indolent double-agent Verloc. For Conrad, as for most of his audience, the 'propaganda by deed' terrorism of the anarcho-nihilists was part of the greater Russian 'problem,' a problem which, it seemed, was spreading like a plague, not just to the more familiar

[50] The term, originally coined by the French anarchist, Paul Brousse, was officially introduced in 1876 at the Anarchist International; part, inevitably, of a wider rhetorical battle with the perceived forces of the state, including the media. At its most vigorous, 'propaganda by deed' terrorist effected the targeted assassinations of Tsar Nicholas II, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovitch and the Interior Minister Plehve; the latter event being used by Conrad as his model in *Under Western Eyes*. See Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 11–5, 49–53, Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, pp. 17–8, Houen, *Terrorism*, p. 34, and also G. Guillaume, 'Terrorism and International Law', *International and Comparative Law Review* 53 (2004), p. 538.

[51] M. Scanlon, *Plotting Terror: Novelists and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), pp. 5–6.

[52] Gray, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 22.

[53] From his *Underground*, quoted in Houen, *Terrorism*, p. 57.

[54] The subtlety of these two political novels has long been appreciated. George Orwell no less would later acclaim their 'grown-upness and political understanding'. See E. Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 7. For a similar commentary, see O. Knowles, 'Conrad's Life', in J. Stape, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 9–12, and also Z. Najder, *Conrad in Perspective: Essays on Art and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 139–41.

terrorist haunts of Geneva or Paris, but even to London too.[55] Whilst the instances of nihilist-inspired violence had, by the first decade of the twentieth century, substantially diminished, Conrad's audience, fed a steady diet of lurid newspaper reports of lurking Fenians and swarthy Slavs, remained, by and large, possessed of terrible fear that the next outrage was just round the corner.[56]

The Russian context was of enormous personal importance to Conrad. Like his father, he was active amongst Polish émigrés. Both argued virulently against Russian rule in their native land.[57] Conrad focussed his critical attention on the 'problem' in his essay *Autocracy and War*, published in the wake of the 1905 revolution, in which he railed against the 'inhuman' despotism that characterized imperial 'autocracy,' and the 'oppressive degeneration of legality' that it appeared to nurture. According to Conrad, the Polish *émigré*, the Russian empire was 'simply the negation of everything worth living for.'[58] As he wrote *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad confessed that the 'question' of Russia 'haunted me.'[59] Conrad's protagonist, Razumov, is overcome with Russia's

[55] As the narrator in *Under Western Eyes* confirms, it is a 'story of Western Europe'. J. Conrad, *Under Western Eyes* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 20 [hereafter *UWE*]. For a commentary on this dominant theme, see A. Busza, 'Rhetoric and Ideology in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*', in N. Sherry, ed., *Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 109.

[56] See Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 53, 227, Melchiori, *Terrorism*, pp. 1–33, Houen, *Terrorism*, pp. 21–33, and Watt, *Conrad*, p. 238, suggesting that the decades surrounding the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represented something of a 'golden age' for the terrorist *agent provocateur. The Times* was particularly inclined to regale its readers with reports of pending Fenian outrages, rejoicing, in suitably horrified tones, when one actually took place, on the occasion of the Westminster bombing in January 1895. Intriguingly, in its report of this bombing *The Times* drew a distinction between the 'cowardly' nature of this atrocity, when compared to the more 'intelligible' acts of nihilist assassins on the 'Continent'. See Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 34–5, 41–2, 92–5.

[57] The Korzeniowskis were members of the landowning gentry. Conrad's father aligned himself with the putatively revolutionary 'Reds'. Conrad eschewed such overt radicalism, but the nature of his sympathies, and his behind-the-scenes activities in émigré circles, should not be underestimated. See Hay, *Conrad*, pp. 31–80, Knowles, 'Conrad's Life', pp. 4–9, and M. Biskupski, 'Conrad and the International Politics of the Polish Question, 1914–1918: Diplomacy *Under Western Eyes*, or Almost *The Secret Agent, Conradiana* 31 (1999), pp. 84–98. Mikhail Bakunin famously referred to Russia as the 'wicked stepmother' to the masses, and centred his influential *Statism and Anarchy* on the associated questions of the demise of Russian autocracy and the cause of Polish liberty. See M.Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 61.

[58] See J. Conrad, 'Autocracy and War', in *Under Western Eyes*, pp. 324–6. Discussed in Najder, *Conrad*, pp. 123–5. Alexander Herzen famously echoed Conrad's sentiments, asking 'What is this monster called Russia, which demands so many offerings and which leaves to its children nothing but a sorry choice of either moral perdition within an environment hostile to everything humane, or death at the beginning of their lives'. In Najder, *Conrad*, p. 121. For many contemporaries, the 1905 revolution itself appeared to be 'terroristic'. See Houen, *Terrorism*, p. 66. For a commentary on Conrad's particular distaste for this mask of mysticism, see Hay, *Conrad*, pp. 267–8, 284.

[59] So much so that a novel, which he originally intended to write in just six weeks, in the end took over two years. It is to this agony of composition, and this 'haunting', that Conrad's breakdown of 1909–10 is often ascribed. See Houen, *Terrorism*, p. 72, and Knowles, 'Conrad's Life', pp. 9–10.

'immensity.'[60] Neither he nor his creator was alone. The apparent demise of 'mother Russia' nourished its own particular and vigorous literary canon, nurturing, amongst many, Kravchinski's *Underground Russia*, Brzozowski's *Flames*, and, as we shall see shortly, Dostoevski's *The Demons*.[61]

The plots of both novels, *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent*, were framed by real instances of spectacular acts of political violence. In *The Secret Agent*, the instance was given by Michel Bourdin's attempt to blow up Greenwich Observatory in 1894; an attempt that resulted only in his own destruction.[62] The bombing of the Observatory, the repository of what Conrad's shadowy First Secretary terms the 'sacrosanct fetish' of time and certitude, carried an obvious semiotic charge; not unlike that represented by the Twin Towers.[63] In *Under Western Eyes*, the novel is founded on the murder of a prominent government official, 'Mr.de P'; an event that is clearly modelled on the notorious murder of the Russian Interior Minister, Plehve. The assassination of this official, the narrator of the novel emphasizes, represents the 'moral corruption of an oppressed society where the noblest aspirations of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity' have been 'prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear, the inseparable companions of an uneasy despotism.'[64]

The plots set, Conrad can then turn to what interests him most; the human experience of terror, those who perpetrate it and those who suffer it. This is Conrad's fascination; the juxtaposition of ordinary people and extraordinary events. His novels are famously character-driven; their center lying in the reaction of plot and character, and the extent to which this reaction, particularly at points of moral and political stress, can expose the innermost aspects of the human condition. It is for this reason that Conrad is often ascribed the broad soubriquet of realist or modernist.[65] And his protagonists, most obviously Razumov and Verloc, are intensely ordinary. Terrorists are ordinary. Killing is ordinary. It is just that both terrorists and counter-terrorists

[60] Discussed in Najder, *Conrad*, p. 131, and also Busza, 'Rhetoric', pp. 110–1, arguing that *Under Western Eyes* is a pointed repost to Dostoevski's idea of Russia.

[61] Conrad's particular relationship with Dostoevski was notoriously antipathetic; the latter being dismissed as 'too Russian for me', the expositor of 'fierce mouthings from prehistoric ages'. See Najder, *Conrad*, p. 126. We will revisit this antipathy in due course.

[62] Whilst debate continues to surround the extent to which he did so consciously, it is difficult to conceive that Conrad could have conceived his plot outwith the historical context of the Bourdin 'plot'. Initially Conrad admitted the inspiration. 'This book is that story', he confessed in the 'Author's Note' to the first edition. Later, for no clear reason, he denied it. For a comprehensive discussion of Conrad's use of the 1894 Observatory bomb 'outrage', see N.Sherry, 'The Greenwich Bomb Outrage and *The Secret Agent*', *Review of English Studies* 18 (1967), pp. 412–28.

[63] J. Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, (London: Penguin, 2004), pp. 24–5 [hereafter *SA*]. See Hay, *Conrad*, pp. 243–4, and also C. Coroneos, 'Conrad, Kropotkin and Anarchist Geography', *The Conradian* 18 (1994), p. 19.

[64] *UWE*, pp. 7–8.

[65] See K. Graham, 'Conrad and Modernism', in Stape, *Conrad*, pp. 204–5, and also A.Guerard, 'A Version of Anarchy', in Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 150–1.

like to present it as something more. Conrad, like Mailer today, was keen that we should be able to detect the crap.

Thus when the idealist Haldin tries to justify his assassination of 'Mr.deP,' in terms of destroying those who 'destroy the spirit of progress and truth,' it is Razumov who voices his suspicion of the 'fanatical lovers of liberty,' and those 'visionaries' who 'work' their 'everlasting evil on earth.'[66] There is, he comes to realize, a hideous and overpowering futility, as well as inhumanity, in 'scattering a few drops of blood in the snow.'[67] It is a sensitivity born of ordinariness, and a desire to be ordinary.[68] Despite the extraordinary nature of his events within which he has become entrapped, Razumov remains convinced that the 'exceptional' cannot 'prevail against the material contact which make one day resemble another.' 'Tomorrow,' he tells himself, 'would be like yesterday'; not today.[69]

The ordinariness of Verloc, the protagonist in *The Secret Agent*, is just as pronounced. Indeed it verges on the contemptible.[70] His is not the thrilling life of the glamorous spy or the liberator of the masses.[71] *The Secret Agent* should be a novel of thrills and derring-do, of spies and terrorists, heroes and anti-heroes. But it is not. Instead, it is, to quote Hugh Walpole, a novel about desperately 'normal people.'[72] And not only are they normal, but so too are they flawed, troubled, in many cases degenerate, and degenerating.[73] Conrad's Verloc is a seedy pornographer by trade, who pretends to be a *agent provocateur*, the kind of man, indeed, who 'generally arrived in London' from his sojourns on the continent 'like the influenza.'[74] Yet, whilst Verloc is repulsive, he is not diabolic. Verloc's is a very ordinary kind of degeneracy.[75] He is also

[66] *UWE*, pp. 16, 37, 68.

[67] *UWE*, p. 45.

[68] His name is a sort of epithet for reason as common sense, from the Russian *razumet*, to understand. See Hay, *Conrad*, p. 292.

[69] *UWE*, p. 40.

[70] According to Irving Howe, appreciating the juxtaposition of ordinary and extraordinary, Verloc 'remains a dull-minded complying Englishman, a beef-and-ale patriot whose ordinariness has served, by a wild curve of irony, to place him beyond the limits of ordinary society'. From his *Politics and the Novel*, quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, p. 141. The ordinariness of Verloc was also cited by F.R. Leavis as one of the triumphs of Conrad's irony. See his comments from *The Great Tradition* quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 121–2. One contemporary review, in *Country Life*, concluded that, in creating Verloc, 'Mr Conrad had set himself the impossible task of trying to make dullness interesting'. Quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, p. 28.

[71] See Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 77–8.

[72] Quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, p. 115.

[73] See Hillis Miller's observations, in *Poets of Reality*, discussing Conrad's depiction of the 'intrinsic absurdity' of human life, quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 179–80, 186.

[74] *SA*, p. 5.

[75] *SA*, p. 10.

indolent, possessed of a 'fanatical inertness.'[76] He is, characteristically, stunned by the First Secretary's suggestion that it is time he actually terrorised someone.[77]

The portrayal of Razumov is more sympathetic, precisely because he is more sensitive. Whilst Verloc too is both protagonist and victim, ultimately murdered by his wife, Razumov's fate seems all the more tragic. For unlike Verloc, whose indolence appears to nullify his sensitivities, Razumov is fully aware of the 'naked terror,' and 'true loneliness' of his existence.[78] In betraying Haldin, Razumov becomes the unwitting agent of the Tsarist regime, a double-agent indeed.[79] The idea of the state as an instrument of terror lies at the heart of both novels. Imperial Russia, especially, has a terrible 'aspect' of 'despotism.'[80] In *Under Western Eyes*, it is a particular state, Tsarist Russia. Conrad is fully aware of the co-dependence of terrorist and counter-terrorist. They are both, as he has one of his terrorists in *The Secret Agent* observe, of the 'same basket.'[81]

The existential tone which shrouds Razumov is particularly acute in those moments at which he explores his own guilt. As an émigré, Conrad too admitted 'the desperate shape of betrayal' as an intensely personal emotion.[82] And betrayal leads to confession. For Razumov this is an agonizing experience. Whilst Conrad would later dismiss the confessional tradition, a 'discredited form of literary activity,' it is no coincidence that Razumov's personal redemption only commences when, beneath the statue of the greatest exponent of literary confessional, Rousseau, he begins to write his confession of betrayal.[83] In doing so, he hopes, he will finally prove himself 'capable of compassion.'[84] Razumov's confession, of course, carries a series of necessary ambiguities; part admission of guilt, part plea in mitigation, part rhetorical strategy. The narrator is clearly uncertain as to what the confession is, and how it should be treated. 'A mysterious impulse of human nature,' he presumes.[85] Again, the fact that all the

[76] *SA*, p. 10.

[77] *SA*, pp. 17–22. Vladimir's harangue and Verloc's stunned silence represent, according to Thomas Mann, the 'satirical height' of the novel. See T. Mann, 'Joseph Conrad's *Secret Agent*', in Watt, *Conrad*, p. 108.

[78] *UWE*, p. 30.

[79] It is often suggested that part of Razumov's character appears to be based on the notorious double-agent and assassin, Azev.

[80] *UWE*, p. 34, and also pp. 215–16.

[81] *SA*, 40, pp. 48–52.

[82] Comment made in his *Personal Record*, and quoted in Hay, *Conrad*, p. 61. It has often been observed that much of Conrad's own personal agonies can be traced to his own burning sense of betrayal, and feelings of guilt at abandoning Poland. See E. Crankshaw, 'Conrad and Russia', in N. Sherry, ed., *Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 91, and also Rieselbach, *Conrad's Rebels*, pp. 59–60.

[83] See Najder, *Conrad*, pp. 139, 142–3, 147–8.

[84] *UWE*, p. 131.

[85] *UWE*, p. 6.

events surrounding Razumov and his confession will be filtered through this narrator introduces yet another refractory layer.[86]

Aside from their respective protagonists, both novels, *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent*, present a motley array of victims and conspirators. Of the latter, Conrad indulges in much caricature. Amongst Verloc's degenerate bunch of cronies can be found the 'ticket-of-leave apostle' Michaelis, generally thought to be an ironic mix of Marx and Kropotkin, with his 'enormous stomach and distended cheeks,' and his endlessly dreary monologues on economic determinism, the 'toothless' Yundt, often cited as a caricature of Bakunin, self-styled 'terrorist,' albeit a decrepit, and essentially passive one, a 'spectre' still possessed of an 'extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence,' and the 'posturing' former medical student and 'wandering lecturer,' Comrade Ossipon, a 'robust anarchist' who, it transpires, on actually coming across an act of violence, is 'terrified out of all capacity for belief or disbelief.'[87] And most degenerate of all, there is the sinister Nietzschean 'megalomaniac,' the Professor, who so despises the 'idealistic conception of legality' and is determined that 'public faith in legality' can only be confounded by acts of 'violence.'[88] The distinguishing feature of the Professor is his desire to actually terrorize, rather than merely talk about it. And so he makes bombs; though, as ever, he would prefer it if others actually carried out the bombings.

We are supposed to despise these 'fanatics.' Far from elite or dedicated, or even capable, Verloc's anarchists are as verbose and incompetent as they are physically degenerate.[89] As the Professor acerbically comments, 'you talk, print, plot, and do nothing.'[90] Even Verloc wonders precisely what could 'be expected' from 'such a lot.'[91] The destruction of this particular myth, of the dedicated clique, is central to Conrad's counter-terrorist strategy.[92] The émigré group which Razumov joins at Geneva is similarly populated. Their leader, Ivanovitch, the self-styled 'man of genius,' so contemptuous of the ordinary 'dregs' of society, so convinced of his messianic importance, is variously thought to represent a mix of Kropotkin and Bakunin, with perhaps a dash

[86] See J. Larson, 'Promises, Lies and Ethical Agency in *Under Western Eyes*', *Conradiana* 29 (1997), pp. 41, 48–9, and A.Fleishman, 'Speech and Writing in *Under Western Eyes*', in Sherry, *Conrad*, pp. 119–28.

[87] *SA*, pp. 31–2, 35–6, 38–9, 211–4. Together, as Thomas Mann observed, 'hardly lovable types', in Watt, *Conrad*, p. 107.

[88] *SA*, pp. 54, 60–1. For a commentary on the Professor's character, and possible caricature, see E.Said, 'Conrad and Nietzsche' in Sherry, *Conrad*, p. 65.

[89] According to Irving Howe, in describing the bunch, Conrad 'drops to a coarse-minded burlesque'. In Watt, *Conrad*, p. 145. Conrad was not alone in being fascinated by the grotesque in terrorism. Similar portrayals can be found in Dostoevski, Zola, Stevenson and James. See Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 153–4, and also Guerard quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 158–60.

[90] *SA*, p. 54.

[91] *SA*, p. 39.

[92] Though in portraying his terrorists in this fashion, as grotesques and degenerates, Conrad is himself engaging in a rhetorical strategy common to counter-terrorism. See Leeman, *Rhetoric*, pp. 72–5, and Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, pp. 112–13.

of Rousseau's grand capacity for selfdelusion.[93] Only Razumov refuses to be properly deluded, dismissing a self-promoting 'busybody' with the apposite observation that it is 'just as well to have no illusions.'[94]

It has been commonly remarked that the more interesting characters in Conrad's political novels tend to be the quieter, very often female, ones.[95]The figure of the female terrorist enjoyed a particular iconic status in nineteenth century literature. A striking number of Russian anarchist-nihilist assassins were female, and the gender of the perpetrators of these acts caused especial consternation amongst the terrified and the thrilled.[96] M de S. the 'dilettante spiritualist' and a confessed 'supernaturalist,' who flitters around the Geneva émigrés with her terrifying fixed 'stare' of 'murderous hate' is perhaps more of a caricature, but the characters of Sophia Antonova, possessed of the 'true spirit of destructive revolution,' and Natalie Haldin are altogether more complex.[97] The latter's fervor is altogether more ethical and idealistic, and therefore, Conrad would have us sense, more troubling.[98]Natalie believes in the 'power of the people's will to achieve anything.' The role of the revolutionist does not lie in destroying things, but in changing minds, in countering the 'cruel,' and in promoting an 'era of concord and justice.' The 'will must be awakened, inspired, concentrated.'[99]

And then there is Winnie, Verloc's long-suffering wife, commonly regarded as one the most perplexing figures in Conrad's entire corpus. Quieter, and more troubling, even than Natalie Haldin, it is Winnie who finally emerges as the one character of destructive resolution in *The Secret Agent*. It is Winnie who, driven by an all-consuming if undetected hatred, finally rises up to murder her husband.[100] For this reason, it has often been suggested that Winnie is the true anarchist; at least insofar as she visits an

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[93] *UWE*, pp. 105, 110–13, 150. For a broad discussion of Ivanovitch, see K.Carabine, 'From *Razumov* to *Under Western Eyes*', *Conradiana* 25 (1993), pp. 3–29, arguing that Conrad retreated from an original intention, clear from earlier drafts, to insinuate an allusion between Ivanovitch and Dostoevski. Ivanovitch's apparent 'escape' from captivity in Tsarist Russia most obviously resonates with Bakunin's similar experience, though the actual philosophy he appears to espouse is more ambiguous. See also Najder, *Conrad*, pp. 147–8, and Coroneos, 'Conrad', pp. 22–3.

[94] *UWE*, pp. 91, 147.

[95] See P. Kirschner, 'Introduction', to *UWE*, p. xxii.

[96] See Houen, *Terrorism*, pp. 60–6.

[97] *UWE*, pp. 158, 176, 185. The most obviously grotesque figure in the novel is Ziemanitch, the drunk peasant who was supposed to aid Haldin's escape.

[98] *UWE*, p. 93.

[99] *UWE*, pp. 96, 233.

[100] Something which, according to the critic Edward Garnett, makes her the 'real heroine of the story'. Garnett's comment was made in his famous review of *The Secret Agent*, published in *The Nation* in September 1907, and quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, p. 44. For Conrad's own admission, that Winnie emerged as the pivotal character in the novel, see his 'Note', in *SA*, p. 231. David Mulry has described the extent to which Conrad revised earlier drafts of the novel in order to give greater substance to Winnie's character. See his 'Patterns of Revision in *The Secret Agent*', *The Conradian* 26 (2001), pp. 52–4. For a broad discussion of Winnie's 'story', see E.Harrington, 'The Anarchist's Wife: Joseph Conrad's Debt to Sensation Fiction in *The Secret Agent*', *Conradiana* 36 (2004), pp. 51–63.

apocalyptic destruction on her own domestic world.[101] She certainly reinforces Conrad's fear that real violence is the complement of 'immoderate' emotions. It is listening to Verloc's heartless report of her nephew's death, whilst carrying the bomb for her idle husband, which triggers Winnie's sudden moment of supreme violence. She is overcome with 'rage and despair, all the violence of tragic passions.'[102]

It is the unpredictability of violence that terrifies us, the thought that the seeds of destruction should lie deep within Winnie, and by implication, the rest of us. Conrad's portrayal of her nephew, 'poor Stevie,' carries a similar insinuation.[103] Whilst his aunt's passions remained constrained, at least until she plunges her knife into Verloc's back, Stevie's 'convulsive sympathy,' and the 'pitiless rage' which it inspires, is clear for all to see.[104] The eager-to-please Stevie is just the sort of *naïf* whose life can be so easily destroyed by witless self-delusion; 'blown to fragments in a state of innocence and in the conviction of being engaged in a humanitarian enterprise.'[105] Stevie is only innocent in the sense of being naïve. He is also a terrorist, albeit a bumbling one.

In terms of plot, and context, and in the presentation of events and character, there is then much that is common to both *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad's politics remains consistent, and uncompromisingly conservative. *The Secret Agent*, as more than one critic have observed, is a 'defence of the Establishment.'[106] So is *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad loathed those who thought that violence was a legitimate political strategy.[107] The broader debate regarding the legitimacy of political violence was a virulent one.[108] Some, such as Bakunin, remained uncertain as to the role, and legitimate extent, of political violence.[109] The assassination of a hated monarch or minister might have a reasonable chance of currying popular sympathy. Mass slaughter

[101] See Houen, *Terrorism*, p. 54 and also, lauding the murder scene as one of 'genius', F.R. Leavis, quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, p. 123.

[102] *SA*, p. 156.

[103] *SA*, pp. 6–8.

[104] *SA*, p. 124.

[105] *SA*, p. 195.

[106] See Melchiori, *Terrorism*, p. 81, and also Watt, *Conrad*, p. 245, describing Conrad as an 'arch-reactionary' as a young man, and only marginally milder as an older one. Irving Howe wondered if Conrad could be termed a 'Tory anarchist', but concluded that he was probably better described as a 'Tory with repressed affinities for anarchism'. Quoted in J. Surgal, '*The Secret Agent*: A Simple Tale of the XIX Century?', *Conradiana* 29 (1997), p. 130.

[107] The narrator in *Under Western Eyes* is a consistent critic of those who seek to justify violence in terms of ideology. VS.Pritchett referred to Conrad as a 'fixed reactionary', and discussed the nature of his dilemma in 'An Émigré', in Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 133–9. See also Carabine, '*Under Western Eyes*, pp. 132–3.

[108] See C.Hamilton, 'Revolution From Within: Conrad's Natural Anarchists', *The Conradian* 18 (1994), pp. 31–48.

[109] See Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 27–30, suggesting that Bakunin would have recoiled from the kind of mass slaughter effected in September 2001.

of the innocent, it was feared, would not.[110] 'Propaganda by deed' terrorism tended to oscillate unpredictably between the alternatives.

Conrad did not. The First Secretary's diatribe on the 'philosophy of the bomb' in *The Secret Agent*, is intended to arouse our revulsion.[111] The great virtue of the bomb, according to the Secretary is that it has 'all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy.'[112] But there is nothing particularly thrilling, or virtuous, about a science that can effect, in the words of Chief Inspector Heat, 'ages of atrocious pain and mental torture' that can 'be contained between two successive winks of the eye.'[113] The juxtaposition, between self-justifying rant and human compassion, and horror, is stark. Conrad intends it to be. Terrorism is contemptible, not because it favors or disfavors any particular politics or ideology, but because it destroys human beings. The thrill of blowing people up, or assassinating them, is a 'sort of terrible childishness,' a grotesque immaturity born of a failure to empathize. Conrad deploys the same metaphor in both novels.[114]

It is humanity that matters, not politics, and certainly not ideology. It is Chief Inspector Heat, musing on the 'shattering violence of destruction' which had reduced Stevie's body to a 'heap of nameless fragments,' who articulates Conrad's own despair at the particular 'absurdity' of terrorist killing.[115] Verloc identifies two types of terrorist. There are the 'fanatics' who operate out of a 'sense of justice.' And then there is the rest, the 'remaining portion of social rebels,' their motivation 'accounted for by vanity, the mother of all noble and vile illusions, the companion of poets, reformers, charlatans, prophets, and incendiaries.'[116] The fanatic, and the deluded; both fail to anticipate the misery that their haphazard violence will cause to real people, that spectacular public acts can only lead to devastating private consequences.

At first glance it might seem that the sharpest distinction between the two novels lies in the parting images. *The Secret Agent* ends with the Professor, undeterred by the

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[110] Marx and Engels famously used terrorism as a stick to beat Bakunin's anarchists, arguing vigorously that the resort to violence could only be counter-productive and could only dilute radical energies that would be better channelled into fomenting the revolution of the proletariat. For a discussion, see Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 63–9, 104–5, 124–7.

[111] Though Conrad was himself fascinated by physics, he was not uncritical of it, and he was determinedly sceptical of the hyperbole which characterized much late Victorian commentary on the subject. See Houen, *Terrorism*, pp. 38–49, and also M.Whitworth, 'Inspector Heat Inspected: *The Secret Agent* and the Meanings of Entropy', *Review of English Studies* 49 (1998), pp. 40–59, discussing Conrad's particular interest in thermodynamics.

[112] *SA*, p. 25

[113] *SA*, p. 65. For a commentary, see Hamilton, 'Revolution', pp. 42–3.

[114] *UWE*, p. 24. The same metaphor is again deployed by the narrator, at p. 79, when he observes 'To us Europeans of the West, all ideas of political plots and conspiracies seem childish, crude inventions for the theatre or a novel'. It is also found in *The Secret Agent*, at 101, where the Secretary of State, who would prefer not to be troubled by the 'details' of terrorist atrocities, dismisses the anarchists as 'nasty little children'.

[115] *SA*, pp. 65, 68–72.

[116] *SA*, p. 39.

bungled bombing of the Observatory, busying himself in his laboratory making new bombs, and scurrying around the streets of London with them strapped to his body, 'like a pest in the street full of men.'[117] There will, it seems, always be pests. *Under Western Eyes* appears to close rather more hopefully, with Natalie Haldin's image of a 'new sun is rising,' with a prospective moment when the 'anguish of hearts shall be extinguished in love.' But the dominant image, once again, is one of uncertainty and unpredictability. The narrator applauds Natalie's sentiment, but betrays an essential skepticism; love, a 'word of wisdom, a word so sweet, so bitter, so cruel sometimes.'[118] As he imagines the Professor abroad in the streets of London, Ossipon contemplates this unpredictability, and the 'madness and despair' wreaked by just one bomb.[119] Conrad denies reassurance. He wants us to be troubled.

III. Coetzee's Master

The novel and the terror are mutually sustaining. As well as Conrad's novels, the late Victorian and Edwardian connoisseur of terrorist fiction could also find contributions by the likes of Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, and, of course, Feodor Dostoevsky.[120] Terrorism was, as we noted before, prominent in the popular consciousness, and the subject had a ready audience. For much of the first part of the twentieth century, however, as attention turned to an alternative kind of horror, the terrorist novel fell into abeyance. Today, however, for very obvious reasons, terrorism sells once more.[121] One of the most compelling contributions to this now revitalized genre is J.M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*; itself an overt homage to one of the founding novels of the genre, Feodor Dostoevsky's *The Demons*.[122]

The Demons describes the devastating impact of a pair of young radicals, Nikolai Stavrogin and Pyotr Verkhovensky, who descend from Petersburg on a sleepy provincial town. The two, who have family roots in the town, insinuate themselves into

[117] *SA*, p. 227. For a commentary on the 'terrifying simplicity' of the Professor's 'madness', see S.Kim, 'Violence, Irony, and Laughter: The Narrator in *The Secret Agent*', *Conradiana* 35 (2003), pp. 84–5.

[118] *UWE*, p. 264.

[119] *SA*, pp. 226–7.

[120] Being *Princess Casamassina, The Dynamiters* and *The Demons* respectively. The latter of these is a primary focus of this part of the article.

[121] Leading examples include Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist*, Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* and Friedrich Duerrenmatt's *The Assignment*. See Scanlon, *Terrorism*, pp. 11–12, and also P. Widdowson, 'Terrorism and literary studies', *Textual Practice* 2 (1988), pp. 8–20 tracing a similar re-emergence of the genre.

[122] For an overview of Coetzee's work, see D.Head, *J.M. Coetzee*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), particularly chapter 1. This leading study, of course, predates, of course, Coetzee's receipt of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003. As a homage to Dostoevsky, *The Master of Petersburg* confirms, as Scanlon puts it, an 'inevitable logic'. See Scanlon, *Terrorism*, pp. 14, 83 and 133, appraising, in turn, the position of Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* and Duerrenmatt's *The Assignment* also within this genre.

local radical politics, whilst the latter devotes his particular skills of duplicity and dissimulation to incite the murder of a former, but now disillusioned, revolutionary, Shatov. As with Conrad's two political novels, the plot is again based on an historical event, the murder, by some of Nechaev's followers, of a young student at Petersburg Agricultural Academy in 1869.[123] The immediate political context, of anarchonihilist terrorism spreading abroad, is, of course, the same as that which Conrad deployed in his two political novels; except, critically, that Dostoevsky perceived the contagion to be coming from western Europe and infecting the Russian body political.[124] Stavrogin and Verkhovensky may have come from Petersburg, but the ideological infections, which have already corrupted their own personalities, come from beyond Russia, from a Europe gripped by a diabolic atheism.[125]

The two young men provide the same kind of stimulus as that given by the First Secretary in *The Secret Agent*. And as was the case with Conrad's motley gangs of revolutionaries, the members of the Virginsky 'circle' of radicals in *The Demons* had, hitherto, been more than happy to potter about penning tracts that nobody read

[123] For a commentary on the background to *The Demons*, see J. Jones, *Dostoevsky* (Oxford: University Press, 1983), pp. 239–40, 251–2. For a specific discussion of the murder of the student Ivanov, see Offord, 'Context', in W.Leatherbarrow (ed), *Dostoevsky's The Devils: A Critical Companion* (Evanstion:Northwestern University Press, 1999), pp. 68–9.

[124] For a general commentary on the political background to *The Demons*, see Offord, 'Context', in Leatherbarrow, *Critical Companion*, pp. 63–99. Dostoevsky had attended radical circles in Geneva, the recognized haven for exiled putative plotters for much of the nineteenth century, and only superceded when, as Conrad emphasized in *The Secret Agent*, London assumed that symbolic role instead. Interestingly Dostoevsky did so at the same time as Nechaev, though there is no evidence that they actually met. Earlier events in Geneva haunt *The Demons*, most importantly Shatov's insulting and striking Verkhovensky. The insinuation that the latter's apparently laudable objectives, to protect the integrity of the political cause, merely exist to mask a more personal and visceral hatred, runs throughout the novel. In convincing an uncertain Nikolai as to the necessity of killing Shatov, Verkhovensky further evidences his particular capacity for lying to his closest comrades; a skill defended by the likes of Nechaev in his revolutionary *Catechism*. There was, Nechaev repeatedly advised, no room for sentiment, still less friendship, in the politics of nihilism and revolution. Following the murder of Shatov, a troubled Stavrogin flees to Geneva, only to return to his own suicide. See F. Dostoevski, *The Demons* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1994) [hereafter *D*], pp. 76, 612–13, 674–8. For a commentary, see Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 241–2, and Frank, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 435–8 and 443–4 investigating the extent to which Dostoevsky tried to present his novel, and particularly its portrayal of Nechaev and his anarchist cronies, as pastiches and ironic caricatures, rather than precise representations, and also pp. 445–6 and 451–2, discussing the original murder of the student Ivanov which provided the model for Shatov's demise.

[125] They are not the only ones infected, of course. Stepan Trofimovich's constant recourse to French linguistic mannerisms emphasizes the extent to which Dostoevsky fears the perversion and abandonment of that which ultimately defines Russia, its language. See Offord, 'Context', pp. 88–9. For a discussion of Dostoevsky's particular distrust of 'western' ideology, and its demonic presentation, see Leatherbarrow, 'Life and Work', in Leatherbarrow, *Critical Companion*, pp. 9–11, 16–23, suggesting that Shatov emerges as the epitome of Russia and Russian–ness, and its pending demise, and also pp. 39–40.

and muttering about the possibility of insurrection, one day far into the future.[126] No one really wanted to murder anyone. It took a peculiarly demonic impetus, one which is introduced from outwith mother Russia, to set in motion the events that would lead to Shatov's demise. When the circle discusses Shatov's case, one of their number expresses a preference for a 'humane solution.'[127] None, Verkhovensky replies, is possible.[128] Barely comprehensible murder, Dostoevsky implies, the ultimate expression of terrorism, is the product of a demonic inhumanity.[129]

Verkhovensky, whose father Stepan Trofimovich was a leading intellectual figure amongst the more idealistic radicals of the previous generation, assumes the role of Nechaev in Dostoevsky's novel.[130] Trofimovich, a man of 'extreme kindness' and possessed of a 'gentle and unresentful heart,' articulates Dostoevsky's despair.[131] Stepan simply cannot understand either his son's motivation or his politics. The novel presents an uncompromising denunciation of the younger generation, and the havoc the essentially selfserving and vainglorious activities have on the ordinary lives of ordinary Russians. They are 'demons,' possessed of a myriad barely comprehensible impulses, most of which seem determined to destroy and to mutilate; impulses which, ultimately,

[126] For an account of the circle's seemingly endless discussion of procedure, and its invariable tendency to assume that actually doing something would be too impetuous, see *D*, 292–400. For a commentary, see Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 243–4.

[127] *D*, p. 8.

[128] His contemptuous dismissal of the circle, 'what trash these people are though', articulates precisely the same emotion as that which Razumov came to feel, and which Conrad clearly intended the audience of both his novels to feel too. See *D*, p. 9.

[129] Dostoevsky's use of the demonic theme in *The Devils* gives his novel a critically different edge when compared with Conrad's. For the latter, terrorism was defined by its ordinariness. Dostoevsky's demonism, however, has a distinctly metaphysical inflection. In his study of Dostoevsky's composition of *The Demons*, Joseph Frank discusses Bakunin's well-known 'letter' on Nechaev, in which he sought to warn erstwhile fellow political travellers that the newer breed of revolutionary, like its most famous protagonist, were dangerous precisely because they were 'devoted fanatics'. As far as possible, Bakunin suggested that it explained what might otherwise seem to be incomprehensible violence. Whether or not Dostoevsky was aware of this letter at the time of composing his novel is uncertain. See Frank, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 439–43.

[130] Stepan Trofimovich idealizes himself as an 'ancient pagan', like Goethe. See *D*, p. 37. For Verkhovensky as Nechaev, see Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 251–2, Frank, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 238–44 and Scanlon, *Terrorism*, pp. 96–7.

[131] *D*, p. 11. For Trofimovich as a 'representative of the good', and a supremely human incarnation, see R. Davison, 'Dostoevsky's *The Devils*: The Role of Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky', in Leatherbarrow, *Critical Companion*, pp. 124–5, 130–1.The classical interpretation sees Stepan Trofimovich as most immediately modelled on Timofei Granovsky, a leading liberal professor at Moscow University, and someone whose work fascinated Dostoevsky. See Leatherbarrow, 'Life and Work', pp. 33–4, and Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 269–71 appraising one of the most memorable and deeply-layered of all his creator's characters, and also pp. 288–9 emphasizing the extent to which Trofimovich's 'aesthetic convictions' are Dostoevky's.

only result in a spiralling urge to self-destruction and the murder of the unfortunate Shatov.[132]

The Demons confirmed Dostoevsky's turn away from politics, his abjuration from the kind of radicalism which had resulted in his own exile to a penal colony in Omsk in 1850, and his desire to argue the case for a revitalized sense of Russian cultural identity, and theology, against what he perceived to the demonic inflection of western ideology.[133] It also attracted the visceral condemnation of the younger generation; one not dissimilar perhaps, though altogether more robust, than the condemnation which Coetzee attracted as a result of a perceived refusal to engage with antiapartheid politics in his native South Africa.[134] For Coetzee, the responsibility of the author, particularly the post-colonial one, has always resisted an easy political determination. His novel *The Master of Petersburg* is a multilayered exploration of this responsibility; one which carries an ultimate, and itself chilling, ethical charge.[135] The writer, and by implication the audience, Coetzee insinuates, are complicit in terror, whether it be the kind visited by anarchists like Nechaev or by apartheid racists. They are partners in a process of textual 'negotiation.' In chronicling terror, they attest to it and confess to it too. Coetzee's Dostoevsky does precisely this. So, too, does his creator.[136]

Coetzee's novel is about Dostoevsky and his demons, those which possessed him and those he wrote about. Ultimately *The Master of Petersburg* concludes with the blurring of Dostoevsky's own identity, as he becomes, not just his progenitor, the author of *The Demons*, but his own dead son too.[137] It describes Dostoevsky's journey to Petersburg to try to understand the death of his stepson, Pavel. It is rumored that Pavel, who associated with radical groups, and was implicated in certain terrorist activities, was murdered, either by the police or by his fellow conspirators. The plot

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[132] See Head, *Coetzee*, p. 145, suggesting that the demons of ideology and impulse align to present a peculiarly volatile impulse.

[133] During the late 1840s, Dostoevsky had become part of the Petrashevsky 'circle'. Its eponymous leader was an eccentric socialist intellectual, who rather vaguely argued the case for social and legal reform. The 'circle' was broken up in 1849, and its members convicted of subversion and sentenced to death. At the last minute, their sentences were commuted to hard labor and exile. In later correspondence, Dostoevsky referred back to the experience and confessed 'I was a man with a spiritual illness (I admit that now) before my journey to Siberia, where I was cured'. See Leatherbarrow, 'Life and Works', pp. 6–8.

[134] See Scanlon, *Terrorism*, p. 95.

[135] A novel of supreme 'metafictional complexity' according to Dominic Head. See his *Coetzee*, p. 144.

[136] For an exploration of this thesis, see Jones, *Coetzee*, pp. 5, 10–12, 18–20, 157–8. The charge carries a particular pertinence for students of contemporary terrorism, especially those who accept the argument that roots of this terrorism can be traced to a globalization which is itself a kind of post-colonialism. For a similar statement regarding the 'implied contract' that the presence of a narrator creates in *The Demons*, between author and audience, see M. Jones, 'The Narrator and the Narrative Technique in Dostoevsky's *The Devils*', in Leatherbarrow, *Critical Companion*, p. 102. The same, of course, holds for the role of the narrator in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*.

[137] J. Coetzee, *The Master of Petersburg* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 250 [hereafter *MP*].

clearly echoes the real Dostoevsky's own personal anxieties regarding his own son, and his own earlier associations with radical groups, as well as the narrative which he crafted and which runs through *The Demons*. It also resonates, very obviously, with the particular tradition of 'father and son' novels, of which *The Demons* was a foremost satiric repost.[138]

Demons are pervasive; demons that haunt grieving fathers, devils that possess deluded revolutionaries, spirits of dead children.[139] Coetzee's Nechaev, the radical for whom Pavel appears to have sacrificed his life, is possessed by a 'demon,' by a 'dull, resentful and murderous spirit.' It is this dullness, this acute ordinariness, which indeed makes him so demonic.[140] Much the same is true of Verkhovensky in *The Demons*, a character so attracted to disguise and dissimulation as to seem essentially vacant in himself. Pyotr Verkhovensky is dull to the 'point of satanic flatness,' his fascination with a prospectively Nietzschean 'man-God' clearly generated by this sense of inner, existential absence.[141] It is the realization of his own ultimate emptiness, his almost de-human existence, which finally propels Stavrogin to take his own life in the final passages of *The Demons*.[142]

As physically degenerate as Verloc, as deluded and empty as Verkhovensky, it is, once again, the acute ordinariness of Coetzee's Nechaev that is so terrifying. And his childishness. Coetzee's Dostoevsky recalls an earlier observation. Nechaev 'may be the *enfant terrible* of anarchism, but really, he ought to do something about those pimples.'[143] The same is true of the young Kerri, another who is deluded into sacrificing her life for an ideology that she barely seems to comprehend, a 'child in the grip of the devil,' possessed of a demon 'inside her twitching, skipping, unable to keep still.'[144] The image of a child possessed, as Conrad repeatedly noted, intensifies the sense of horror.[145] 'A child can kill as dead as a dead man can, if the spirit is in him.'[146] There is a terrible childishness about terror, and terrorism; the innocence and the

[138] The character of Karmazinov in *The Demons* is a very obvious caricature of Turgenev, whose novel *Fathers and Sons* is commonly presented as the founding contribution to the genre. For this theme in *MP*, see pp. 189–90, 239. Stepan Trofimovichmuses on Turgenev, and the theme of 'father and sons', in *D*, at p. 215. See also Scanlon, *Terrorism*, pp. 7–8, Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 248–9 and Frank, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 453–8 and 463–5 discussing the 'father and sons' genre in Russian literature, and suggesting that *The Demons* represent perhaps the supreme satiric respontse.

[139] As, of course, they are in Dostoevsky's novel, wherein the deployment of diabolic metaphors is even more striking. See Leatherbarrow, 'Life and Works', pp. 36–42.

[140] *MP*, p. 44, and also pp. 112–3.

[141] *D*, pp. 220–1, 238, and also p. 527 appraising an image of 'one splendid, monumental, despotic will'. For the reference to his 'satanic flatness', see Jones, *Dostoevsky*, p. 251.

[142] *D*, pp. 674–8. See Offord, 'Context', pp. 86–7, and also Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 255–7 revealing the extent to which Dostoevsky was determined to portray this emptiness in the notebooks which charted the composition of the novel.

[143] *MP*, p. 101.

[144] *MP*, p. 92.

[145] See also Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 247–8 identifying the theme of childishness in *The Demons*.

[146] *MP*, p. 112.

unpredictability, and the apparent lack of witting evil. The responsibility of society, of previous generations, seems all the greater. Stepan Trofimovich at least dimly comes to this realisation.[147] And it is this guilt that terrifies Coetzee's Dostoevsky, more than anything.

The relation of the guilt-ridden father and his dead child is the central theme of Coetzee's *Master*. As is the case in *The Demons* or Conrad's political novels, moments of terrorist violence are incidental, levers with which to stretch the essential tension between protagonists and victims, sons and fathers. The fact that Coetzee's Dostoevsky emerges as the most tortured victim of his son's violence gives the tension an added dimension. Trofimovich's same agonies provided the literal, as well as metaphorical, heart of *The Demons*. It is the primary means by which both Dostoevsky and Coetzee can stress the intensely personal, and human, nature of this kind of horror. When Coetzee's Dostoevsky lies on his dead son's bed, and realises that he is 'the one who is dead,' the full depth of this horror is apparent.[148]

The identification of language as an instrument with which, perhaps, to ameliorate terror is central to Coetzee's endeavor. His Dostoevsky is, of course, a writer, and he clings to the hope that 'Poetry might bring back his son.'[149] It is not, however, that simple. For language is the recourse of the forger and the dissimulator, as well as the truth-seeker. Any writer, as Coetzee's Dostoevsky acknowledges, is a practitioner of these darker arts, of the 'sensual pleasure' that comes with the 'dance of the pen.'[150] Dostoevsky's Stepan admits precisely this, teasing the narrator of the novel, 'My friend, the real truth is always implausible, did you know that? To make the truth more plausible, it's absolutely necessary to mix a bit of falsehood with it. People have always done so.'[151]

And so language carries a destructive potential too; as readily an instrument of value to the terrorist as it is one that might be used to counter terrorism, or to comprehend it. Pavel, as his father comes to realize, had drafted a novel; the existence of which, according to the police, clearly implicated him in revolutionary activities.[152] The desire to narrate appears to be the one thing that father and son had in common. But the draft serves to condemn Pavel, not because of what it says, but because of what it does not say. It is for this reason that Dostoevsky can barely bring himself to read it. Deep down, Coetzee's Dostoevsky is haunted by the suspicion that terrorists are possessed by personal demons, not ideologies; demons, moreover, that might have a familial,

[147] See Offord, 'Context', pp. 79–80.

[148] *MP*, p. 19, and perhaps most poignantly reaffirmed in the agonies he experiences in visiting his son's grave. See Scanlon, *Terrorism*, p. 99.

[149] *MP*, p. 17.

[150] *MP*, pp. 200–1, 236, 245. For a commentary on this irreducible ambivalence, see Scanlon, *Terrorism*, pp. 104–5 and Head, *Coetzee*, p. 146, quoting John Bayley's review of *The Master*, in which he argued that Coetzee's novel reinforces the view that 'whatever truth the writer utters can be twisted'.

[151] *D*, p. 216.

[152] *MP*, p. 40.

even genetic, root. The unthinking, and unfeeling nature of the terrorist enterprise is admitted by Nechaev: 'We aren't soft, we aren't crying, and we aren't wasting our time on clever talk ... We don't talk, we don't cry, we don't endlessly think on the one hand and on the other, we just do!'[153] Dostoevsky's Nechaev, Pyotr, articulates the same desperate justification. His dismissal of 'too much goodness' in liberal politics is equally chilling.[154]

Language carries this innate ambivalence; a medium of redemption as well as tool of destruction. It charts the 'dark places' of the 'heart,' as well as the lighter.[155] It is the failure of literature to effect social reform which haunts the author of *The Demons*. When Stepan is dragged off the stage at Yulia's fete, his defence of literature howled down by an audience whose faith in rioting is now greater than its faith in the power of poetry, it presages the bombing of the town and the deaths that follow.[156] Shatov's final musings, as he prepares to venture out to his unknowing death, betray his realization that literature provides both the germ of terror, and its antidote.[157] The innate paradox of language describes the essential, defining ambivalence of those who seek to deploy it, including, of course, Dostoevsky and Coetzee.

Language permits remembrance. In this it provides a measure of redemption. The author of *The Demons* was famously entranced by the idea of redemption. Stepan Trofimovich's final hallucinatory moments are devoted to the possibility.[158] And it allows Coetzee's Dostoevsky to remember, and in doing so, perhaps, to exorcise some of the demons, of guilt and failure, that possess him.[159] But language also raises spectres. It possesses Coetzee's Dostoevsky, luring him into contributing to Nechaev's radical presses.[160] And it confirms his deepest horror, his own guilt, as the inspiration, according to Nechaev, for much of what he, and by implication Pavel, believed should be done.[161] The father raised the demon which possessed his son.

And it confirms, necessarily, Pavel's guilt too. There is nothing in Pavel's novel, or indeed in the chronicle of his final weeks, days and hours, which can explain, still

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[153] *MP*, p. 104.

[154] *D*, p. 316. See Frank, *Dostoevsky*, p. 447 discussing the portrayal of Nechaev as one of 'total negativism'.

[155] *MP*, p. 144. As Dominic Head suggests, Coetzee's Dostoevsky is driven to the edge of madness by the realization that everything he writes, everything he seeks to chronicle as a truth, 'contaminates' itself. See his *Coetzee*, pp. 148–9

[156] *D*, pp. 487–9, and also p. 508 for an ironic dismissal of the 'quadrille of literature' which had been brought to such an abrupt and violent end. For a discussion of the quadrille, and Dostoevsky's use of the metaphor to ridicule the pretences of liberal aesthetics, see Offord, 'Context', pp. 74–5.

[157] *D*, pp. 578–9.

[158] For Dostoevsky, and Stepan Trofimovich, the redemption is more obviously theological, of course. But that did not make its consideration any less textual. See Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 262–3.

[159] *MP*, pp. 5, 14–5.

[160] *MP*, pp. 181–2, 197–8, 201–2.

[161] Ibid.

less justify, what he did. The 'same demon,' Dostoevsky admits[162], must have been in Pavel.' 'It's nice to think that Pavel was not vengeful. It's nice to think well of the dead. But it just flatters him. Let us not be sentimental.'[163] Pavel was a human being, a flesh and bones person, albeit one infected, apparently, with a barely comprehensible demonic impulse to destroy. 'By giving him labels,' calling him an anarchist or a nihilist or a terrorist, 'you miss what is unique about him,' and you fail to comprehend the demons that possessed him.[164] Ultimately Stepan Trofimovich comes to realize the same about his own son.

Dostoevsky's *The Demons* closes with Trofimovich's lingering death, his final delirious thoughts oscillating between moments of high optimism and deep despair, between the thought that his body might be purged of its own 'demons,' and the horrific realization that it might not, and that the demons will devour his own being.[165] There is to be no ultimate purgation, no final consolation. Like Conrad and Dostoevsky, Coetzee's *Master of Petersburg* must deny this too.[166] There is no resolution to the lesser questions, how did Pavel die and who killed him?[167] And there is no resolution to the more important one either, why did he die? The only truthful account, Coetzee's Dostoevsky realizes, is the one he prefers. The search for greater certitude is itself a kind of demonic possession, a 'plague of devils.'[168] The more he searches for explanations, the greater the 'perversion' that seems to possess him, and all those whom he encounters.[169]

There is no end to terror; except in the fantastical rhetoric of those who pretend that such demons might be defeated in some sort of 'war.' Nechaev's uncompromising nihilism leaves us with a similar image as that which closed Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. More sons will be deluded by idealism, more will be killed, and more parents will grieve. Coetzee's Dostoevsky is haunted by thought that his son killed other sons, or at the very least was prepared to do so.[170] There is no end to the sorrow and the guilt, and to sense of abandonment. 'Mourning for a dead child has no end.'[171]And no meaning

[162] *MP*, pp. 183–4, 186, 189, and at 201, with Nechaev suggesting that he has taken Raskolnikov, the protagonist of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* as a precise inspiration.

[163] *MP*, p. 113.

[164] *MP*, pp. 113–4.

[165] *D*, pp. 654–5. For a commentary, see Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 274–5.

[166] See Scanlon, *Terrorism*, pp. 86–7, 91, 107. Coetzee is not of course alone, amongst more recent contributors to the genre, in denying closure. The end of Doris Lessing's *Good Terrorist* has a decidedly ambivalent, almost Beckettian, feel about it. Just as Conrad's Professor roams the streets with his bombs, Lessing's protagonist just drifts away, her personal confusions and anxieties no more resolved than they were at the outset of the novel.

[167] *MP*, pp. 122–3.

[168] *MP*, p. 125.

[169] *MP*, p. 235. The realization comes shortly after the famous scene in which Dostoevsky 'possesses' his son's landlady. At 'the instant at the onset of the climax when the soul is twisted out of the body and begins its downward spiral to oblivion', she whispers 'devil'. *D*, pp. 230–1.

[170] *MP*, p. 99.

[171] *MP*, p. 75.

either. Coetzee's Dostoevsky struggled to comprehend, but could only conclude 'God said: Die.'[172] So did the author of *The Demons*, whose Kirillov kills himself because he realises that God does not care whether he lives or dies.[173]

Death, as the narrator of *The Demons* concludes, is the 'measure of our absurdities.'[174] Shatov's death, like that of the Lebyadkins, and even Nikolai Stavrogin, is horrific, precisely because it seems so ordinary and unremarkable and unnecessary, a minor paragraph in the deeper recesses of a morning paper; which is, of course, where the author of *The Demons* first encountered the reported murder of an obscure agriculture student by a bunch of shadowy terrorists.[175] It is, famously, this absurdity that characterizes the existential genre with which Dostoevsky, and to a degree Conrad and Coetzee, are so readily identified.[176] And terrorism, an expression of ultimate, seemingly incomprehensible destruction, is the compelling metaphor. 'Death is a metaphor for nothing,' as Coetzee's Dostoevsky realises with an ultimate horror, 'Death is death.'[177] It is his sickness, as it was Stepan Trofimovich's. It is the final 'darkness'; terrorism an ultimate expression of the humanity which suffers it.[178]

IV. Stark Humanity

The value of literature as a medium with which to explore the deeper ethical questions that surround political and legal issues is, as suggested at the outset, a primary assertion of poethics or 'law and humanities' scholarship. Of course, there are detractors, those who prefer to limit literature to cosy bedtime reading, and who cling to the delusion that law is a self-contained discipline which needs no 'supplement,' textual or otherwise. When faced with an experience such as terrorism, and with a jurisprudence that seems unable to comprehend it, the detractors tend to fall silent. Suddenly the need for the supplement becomes compelling. As Coetzee confessed in his lecture *The Novel Today*, 'in times of intense ideological pressure,' the novelist has responsibilities. One is 'supplementarity.' Another is 'rivalry.' Literature should supplement political discourse, at the same time as it provides a critical alternative. Presenting this alter-

[172] *MP*, p. 75. A conclusion that has a resonance in the context of Dostoevsky's own struggles with religion, and a collateral, and corrosive, sense of abandonment. In correspondence, an agonised Dostoevsky later wrote, 'The Antichrist is coming among us! And the end of the world is close – closer than people think!' The observation, from 1873, is quoted in Leatherbarrow, 'Life and Work', p. 42.

[173] *D*, pp. 618–9. See Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 280–1, arguing the critical view that Kirillov kills himself in revenge for God abandoning him. In killing himself, the putative Nietzschean presumes that he can kill God in return. There is as Jones suggests, a distinct 'whiff of Kafka'.

[174] *D*, p. 610.

[175] See Jones, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 245–6.

[176] For an identification of Coetzee's post-modern textuality with the existential tradition, see Jones, *Coetzee*, pp. 6–7, 148–9, 154–6.

[177] *MP*, p. 118.

[178] *MP*, pp. 234–5.

native, to the privileged narratives of presumed historical 'truth,' is a primary ethical responsibility for any writer.[179]

The simple affinity is irreducible. Literature and radical, even revolutionary, politics; both are innately revolutionary activities. Given the innately spectacular aspirations of the modern terrorist, from Nechaev to bin Laden, it could, moreover, hardly be other.[180] Lacqueur's injunction, that literature is a primary medium for understanding the 'terrorist phenomenon' reinforces Nussbaum's. At a remove, similar sentiments can be found in Slavoj Zizek's suggestion that the real terror of terrorism lies in its denial of a clean distinction between 'real' and 'virtual.' The experience of terror seems, horrifyingly, to be both.[181] Margaret Scanlon describes a 'paradoxical affiliation' between literature and terrorism, between 'actual killing' and 'fictional construct,' between what is apparently fictional and what seems to be chillingly real, and cites *Under Western Eyes* and *The Demons* as exemplars of this relation.[182]

Certainly, within the genre of terrorist literature, Conrad's novels remain perhaps pre-eminent. In the 1970s, a U.S. Congressional committee urgently advised that all police officers in America should be made to read *The Secret Agent*.[183] A similar injunction was placed on the FBI officers who sought the notorious Unabomber Theodor Kaczynski, between 1975 and 1998. Kaczynski was himself fascinated by the novel, and used it as something of a terrorist handbook.[184] Of course, there is a pragmatic edge to such injunctions, and the idea that counter-terrorists might be able to brush up their skills by reading Conrad says little about the quality of the novels, or their capacity to nurture our ethical, or poethical, responses.

But literary critics have been equally impressed. *The Secret Agent* is commonly presented as the first literary account of terrorism; or at least the first to be found in

[179] For a discussion of these unpublished comments, see Head, *Coetzee*, pp. 10–12, and also p. 162 suggesting that *The Master*, was composed as an expression of a potentially liberating 'idea of literariness', something designed to 'create an alternative expressive space' which is somehow supremely 'human' in its 'claim to independence, non-conformity, alterity'.

[180] Scanlon, *Terrorism*, p. 6.

[181] See S. Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, (London: Verso, 2002), p. 16, commenting on the spectacular impact of 9–11. The 'fantasmatic screen apparition' entered 'our reality' and thereby denied any ready distinction between the two. For similar observations, see also pp. 5, 9–10, 32. Two decades ago, Jay Martin made similar observations regarding the 'brutal fictions' of modern terrorism. See J. Martin, 'The Fictional Terrorist', *Partisan Review* 51 (1988), pp. 70, 81.

[182] Scanlon, pp. 2–3, 155–62. See, also A. Teraoka, 'Terrorism and the Essay: The Case of Ulrike Meinhof', in R. Boetcher Joeres & E. Mitman, eds., *The Politics of the Essay: Feminist Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), p. 220.

[183] Lacqueur, *Terrorism*, pp. 3, 173.

[184] The extent to which the still–unidentified Kaczynski drew from *The Secret Agent* in his 'Manifesto' led the FBI to consult Conrad experts in their increasingly frantic investigation. It was surmised that Kaczynski modelled himself upon the Professor in Conrad's novel. Of course, Kaczynski was also, at least until his capture, a figure of myth and fetish. According to the *New York Times*, on his capture, he was suddenly demoted from 'brilliant' if evil genius to 'nut'. See J. Guimond & K. Maynard, 'Kaczynski, Conrad and Terrorism', *Conradiana* 31 (1999), pp. 3–25, and also Houen, *Terrorism*, pp. 14–16, and Scanlon, *Terrorism*, pp. 159–62.

what we can loosely term canonic literature. And it is equally often credited with being one of the most perceptive and nuanced; according to F.R. Leavis an 'unquestionable' classic, for Thomas Mann, a 'thrilling' example of Conrad's 'narrative genius,' and critically, a 'passionate' one.[185]Conrad, famously, found the writing of it excruciating.[186] It is, at once, both comic and tragic, a tale of deep pathos and simple horror. And it carries with it, as a contemporary reviewer noted in the *New York Review of Books*, a stunningly 'stark humanity.'[187] Conrad, famously, was a writer of pessimism; and anarchist terrorism, as he opined in correspondence, represents a 'general manifestation of human nature.'[188] But as a 'general manifestation' it is also an intrinsic expression of human nature, albeit an extreme one. Conrad's humanism has a melancholic tenor; but it is a humanism all the same.[189]

Praise for Dostoevsky's *The Demons*, at least in the west, has been equally positive, though the novel has fought for attention amidst its author's entire corpus.[190] A century ago, a reviewer in *The Athenaeum* applauded an 'extraordinary handling of psychological abnormality.'[191] More recently, the novel has been reappraised as a critical statement in Dostoevsky's later metaphysical study of human alienation and anxiety, and more particularly the role of public ideas in the contagion, and corrosion, of the human spirit.[192] Of course, its publication comfortably predated Conrad's novels. Conrad articulated a loud contempt for Dostoevsky's writings, and singularly refused to acknowledge any inspiration.[193] Critics have, however, redressed the obvious injustice. The similarity between the two, their shared fascination with violence, and its ability to act as a litmus test of human emotion, is, as Ralph Matlaw affirms, 'patent.' Conrad must have been aware of novels such as *Crime and Punishment* and *The Demons*, and despite himself, perhaps, must have written *Under Western Eyes*

[185] According to Barbara Arnett Melchiori, it is 'exquisite in its varying layers of subtlety'. See her *Terrorism*, p. 74. See also Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, pp. 47, 137, and the various modern reviews cited in Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 66–85, 118–19, as well as Mann's observation, cited at p. 101.

[186] Just as he found writing *Under Western Eyes*, and pretty much everything he wrote at the time. For an account, see I.Watt, 'The Composition of *The Secret Agent*', in Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 13–25.

[187] In Watt, *Conrad*, p. 56. Albert Guerard described the novel as both a 'macabre comedy' and a 'tragedy'. See his 'A Version of Anarchy', quoted in Watt, *Conrad*, pp. 151 and 154. See also Melchiori, *Terrorism*, pp. 74–5, and Kim, 'Violence', pp. 75–97.

[188] Quoted in Berthoud, '*The Secret Agent*', p. 100.

[189] See Kim, 'Violence', at p. 93 concluding that Conrad 'yields ultimately to a faith in humanity'.

[190] Given its vitriolic denunciation of revolutionary idealism, it enjoyed a somewhat subdued reception in Soviet Russia.

[191] In Leatherbarrow, 'Life and Works', p. 55.

[192] See generally, Leatherbarrow, 'Life and Works', pp. 3–59.

[193] 'I don't know what Doestoevsky stands for or reveals, but I know he is too Russian for me', Conrad wrote, commenting more precisely on *The Brothers Karamazov*, 'It sounds to me like some fierce mouthings from prehistoric ages'. See R. Matlaw, 'Dostoevskii and Conrad's Political Novels', in W. Leatherbarrow, ed., *Dostoevskii and Britain*, (New York: Berg, 1995), p. 230.

and *The Secret Agent* in their wake.[194] The homage may not have been as overt as Coetzee's. But it must be all the same.[195]

As for Coetzee, the importance of Dostoevsky is pervasive. Moreover, as Margaret Scanlon confirms, the debt is more widely owed. All contemporary contributions to the genre of modern terrorist literature, of which *The Master of Petersburg* is merely pre-eminent, owe an undeniable debt to the 'master' and his founding narrative, *The Demons*. The context may have changed, from one kind of spectacular act of terrorism to another, but the experience of terrorism has not, and neither have the narratives which can be written around it. Dostoevsky was the 'tormented prophet' of the 'coming apocalypse,' modern terrorism its devastating realization.[196]

So what can literature, novels such as *The Secret Agent* or *Under Western Eyes, The Demons* or *The Master of Petersburg* do? How can they serve as necessary supplements to the supposedly primary texts of international law and order?

First they can help us to strip away the mythologies and the fetishes, to remove what Shelley termed the 'masks of anarchy' which the perpetrators of violence, terrorist and counter-terrorist alike, invariably assume.[197] In simple terms, they can help us pick our way through the crap. As Conrad confided in correspondence, the characters he presented in novels such as *The Secret Agent* were not 'revolutionists' or counter-revolutionists, the 'true anarchists' as he abruptly termed them; but just 'shams.'[198] The same is just as true of Dostoevsky's Pyotr Verkhovensky and Coetzee's Nechaev. The mythic engagement of 'martyrs and monsters' benefits the terrorist and the counter-terrorist alike; but no one else.[199] The conclusion is immediate. The pressing need is not to pursue a 'war' against terrorism, a war that will never, by definition, actually be 'won.'[200] It is, rather, to engage a process of 'demythification' or 'decanonization,' to shatter the ring of enchantment.[201] This is what Conrad and Dostoevski and

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[194] Matlaw, 'Dostoevskii', pp. 231–3, 243–5.

[195] John Jones inverts the attribution, describing *The Demons* as a 'Conradian narrative'. See his *Dostoevsky*, at p. 295.

[196] Scanlon, *Terrorism*, p. 98.

[197] See P. Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', in P. Shelley, *Complete Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 338–9 insinuating the jurisprudential nature of this enterprise at lines 30–7.

[198] Correspondence with Cunninghame Graham. In Watt, *Conrad*, p. 230.

[199] See Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, p. 119, and in the specific context of Conrad's novels, W. Moseley, 'The Vigilant Society: *The Secret Agent* and Victorian Panopticon', *Conradiana* 29 (1997), pp. 59–78, suggesting that Conrad shrouded *The Secret Agent* in a pervasive, ultimately corrosive, atmosphere of suspicion and counter-supervision.

[200] See V. Lowe, 'The Iraq Crisis: What Now?', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 52 (2003), p. 871, expressing his concern that 'some of the exceptional powers now claimed by governments and justified by the rhetoric of the 'war' against terrorism carry the risk of a serious and indefinite erosion of fundamental legal rights, and indeed erosion of the Rule of Law itself'. For a similar sentiment, see Conor Gearty's warning regarding the 'counter-terrorist juggernaut' and its propensity to cut down our most 'basic human rights', in 'Terrorism and Morality', *European Human Rights Law Review* 4 (2003), p. 383.

[201] See Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, pp. 150, 226, 239.

Coetzee, in their different ways, endeavor to do, to reach past the politics of 'hyperbole' and nurtured fear.[202] If we can do this, we might just make a first step towards countering the inherent inhumanity that terrorism, and indeed counterterrorism, represents and nourishes.

This is the second aspiration of a poethical strategy. Behind the rhetoric of the terrorist zealot, and the counter-rhetoric of the public official, there will always be human tragedy. It is important that this simple truth is not forgotten. There will always be troubled children and haunted parents. It is for this reason that 9–11 is indeed an 'event of historical importance'; not just because of its scale, or because of its impact upon public consciousness, but because it devastated thousands of lives and affronted the ethical pretences of those it left behind.[203] Writing in 1971, George Steiner asked 'How is one to address oneself without a persistent feeling of fatuity, even of indecency, to the theme of ultimate inhumanity?' The more immediate focus of his reflection was, of course, genocide. But the question loses nothing of its pertinence in the context of mass terrorist atrocities. And neither does his sorry conclusion; that whilst we might have acquired the 'technical competence to build Hell on earth,' we have lost the capacity to 'bring sweetness and light to men.'[204]

The echo of Natalie Haldin's closing observations in *Under Western Eyes* is immediate; as is that of the skepticism which Dostoevsky had his narrator articulate in response. According to critics such as Zdizislaw Najder, novels written in the tradition of Conrad and Dostoevsky, a tradition that might be loosely termed existential, are best understood as exercises in 'unabashed emotionalism.' The politics that they portray is one in which the central struggle is not legalistic or even rational, but is, instead, intensely emotional; the struggle between 'hatred' and 'compassion.'[205] As Razumov came to realize, the 'real drama' is 'not played on the great stage of politics,' but in private lives, in the ordinary struggles of ordinary people against the innately destructive ravages of those who represent the State, and those who seek its dissolution.[206] And it is defined by its ambiguity; for humanity is defined by its contradictions. As Conrad wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* in 1901, 'The only legitimate basis of creative work lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so fascinating, so dangerous – so full of hope.'[207]

The aspiration was fully appreciated in an early review of *The Secret Agent* published in the *Times Literary Supplement*:

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[202] Houen, *Terrorism*, pp. 5–7.

[203] See Chomsky, *9–11*, p. 119, and also M.Ignatieff, *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 125–8.

[204] G. Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle: or Some Notes Towards a Redefinition of Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), pp. 17–18, 31–2, 47–8, 64–5, 105.

[205] Najder, *Conrad*, pp. 110–11, 117.

[206] *UWE*, p. 238.

[207] In Carabine, '*Under Western Eyes*', p. 122.

> To show how narrow the gulf is fixed between the maker of bombs and the ordinary contented citizen has never before struck a novelist as worthwhile, the subterranean world in which the terrorists live having up to the present been considered by him merely as a background for lurid scenes and hair-raising thrills. And then comes Mr Conrad with his steady, discerning gaze, his passion for humanity, his friendly irony, and above all his delicate and perfectly tactful art, to make them human and incidentally to demonstrate how monotonous a life can theirs also be.[208]

The precise theme of the review focussed on the familiar Conradian juxtaposition of extraordinary circumstance and ordinary people. The same theme, of course, pervades *The Demons* and *The Master of Petersburg*. Those who perpetrate terrorist acts, like those who suffer and experience them, do so emotionally, even viscerally. The terrorists who populate these novels, and their victims, are defined, not by their ability to reason, but by their capacities for pain and fear, love and compassion. So are we. The morality that counts, in this analysis, is the morality identified by Martha Nussbaum as a 'morality of compassion,' and by Richard Rorty as a morality of 'feelings and ideas,' of 'cruelty' and 'kindness,' rather than presumed absolutes of truth and falsehood, right and wrong.[209] Here, as Dostoevsky's Stepan Trofimovich confirms, can be found the 'real fruit of all mankind,' its capacity to express love and compassion for the fate of others.[210]

The fashioning of a 'morality of compassion' is made possible only if the truly human, even existential, nature of terrorism, and our experience of it, is properly appreciated. A law of terrorism, if such a thing might be discerned, can help little here. It might allow us to detain suspects for longer. It will not help us make any more sense of what terrorism is, how it impacts upon our lives, and how we can come to live with it, and perhaps even overcome it; not overcome it in the sense of somehow winning a 'war' against it, but in the sense of countering the desire, shared by terrorist and counter-terrorist alike, that we should live our lives in a state of perpetual terror.

We need to cling to Natalie Haldin's hope. Half a century or more ago, Camus sensed that the twentieth century would be chronicled as 'the century of fear.' 'We live,' he projected, 'in terror because dialogue is no longer possible,' because we can no longer discern 'beauty in the world and in human faces.'[211] The 'revolutionist and reactionary,' both must be 'pitied and forgotten; for without that there can be union and no love.'[212] In the context of the contemporary crisis which appears to beset the 'new world order,'

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[208] In Watt, *Conrad*, p. 33.

[209] See R. Rorty, 'Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality', in S.Shute and S. Hurley eds., *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 130, and also *Philosophy and Social Hope*, (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 96–7, 122.

[210] *D*, p. 485. See also Frank, *Dostoevsky*, p. 460.

[211] A. Camus, *Between Hell and Reason* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), pp. 117–8.

[212] *UWE*, p. 248. Inevitably, Conrad casts an ironic sheen over Natalie's observations, insinuating their naivety. But the suspicion remains, as critics have alleged, that Conrad betrays a certain grudg-

this means that the idea of a inter-national or trans-national community must be recast, along the lines perhaps advanced by John Kenneth Galbraith in his plea for a 'coalition of the concerned and the compassionate,' or by Robert Falk, in his equally impassioned injunction, that 'only by reconstructing intimate relations on a humane basis can the world move toward the wider public and collective realities of human community.'[213]

Law and politics have a role to play here, one captured by the U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the immediate aftermath of 9–11:

> We should remember that, in the fight against terrorism, ideas matter. We must articulate a powerful and compelling global vision that can defeat the vivid, if extreme, visions of terrorist groups. We must make clearer, by word and deed, not only that we are fighting terrorists, but that we are also standing, indeed fighting, for something – for peace, for resolution of conflict, for human rights and development.[214]

Like it or not, as Frederic Megret concludes, it was 'something specifically and radically human' that led to 9–11, and if lawyers are properly to understand the implications of that event, it will be at least important to understand the 'human' as it will the law.[215] If the terrorist impulse is to be countered by deed, the deed in question will not be carpet-bombing or even targeted assassination, but the acknowledgement of human rights, the promotion of tolerance and dignity, the distribution of wealth, the resolution of political and cultural grievances.[216] At its most prosaic level, terrorism will be most effectively countered, as German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer noted, not by 'repression,' but by making sure everyone has enough to eat.[217]

Law is an instrument only; and a blunt one. It will achieve nothing, not just in countering terrorism, but in mitigating its causes, unless we can reinvest what Vaclav Havel has termed our trans-cultural 'moral sensitivity.'[218]And it is here, as Havel reaffirms, that literature is so vital, not just the supplement, but the necessary supplement. Writing again in the immediate wake of 9–11, Jacques Derrida invoked a prospective spectre, of a 'democracy to come,' a 'cosmopolitan' democracy of 'justice' founded on effective and compassionate engagement across increasingly porous and ultimately

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ing sympathy for the sentiment. For a commentary, using this passage as an exemplar of Conrad's determination to set in stone the dynamic 'confrontation' between 'autonomous reason' and 'dependent suffering', see Berthoud, '*The Secret Agent*', p. 119.

[213] See J. Galbraith, *The Good Society,* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996), p. 143, and R. Falk, *On Humane Governance: Toward a New Global Politics,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 69.

[214] In McGoldrick, *9–11*, p. 197.

[215] Megret, 'Justice', p. 344

[216] See M.Drumbl, 'Judging the 11 September Terrorist Attack', 24 *Human Rights Quarterly* (2002), p. 360.

[217] In S. von Schorlemer', 'Human Rights; Substantive and Institutional Implications of the War Against Terrorism', *European Journal of International Law* 14 (2003), p. 267.

[218] V. Havel, *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice,* (New York: Fromm International, 1998), particularly pp. 74, 100–1, 125–7, 166–9.

meaningless state boundaries. At the heart of such an idea of justice, as we have seen, lies the idea of simple friendship and association, of reciprocal kindness and respect and 'unconditional hospitality.'[219]

The stakes are indeed high, even if not quite so high as the more hyperbolic would have us believe. The taking of life indiscriminately is an evil, 'immoral,' an affront to the moral idea of humanity.[220] It is also an affront to political principles of toleration and democracy; it is meant to be.[221] If terrorism, the terrifyingly indiscriminate taking of life, is to be countered, we need to engage more nuanced debate as to what it is, and why it is. And it must be an aesthetic and poethical, as well as political or legal, debate. On the one hand it must carve out a space for human engagement. 'Contemplating, literally and figuratively, the faces of the effaced activist and his or her intimates,' it is rightly urged, 'becomes a condition for understanding the inferno of action.' Such a 'confrontation rescues us from obfuscating allegory and representation.'[222] On the other, it must also press the case for an ethics that properly understands the vitality of human emotions. Poethical strategies can do this. Time and again in his *Terrorism and Humanity*, Ted Honderich urges us 'keep in view the human fact of the victims of political violence,' and to keep in view too, the fact that victimhood can take many forms. 'No breath of apology,' he rightly declares, 'is owed to those who may say to themselves that they do not expect to find emotional matter within serious reflection.' It is emotion, far more than cold juristic reason, which takes us 'closer to the reality' of our 'experience' of political violence, in all its forms.[223]

We need to contemplate an alternative ethics, and an alternative jurisprudence, one that owes at least as much to feeling and compassion as it does reason and the pretences of certitude. We have far less need of a 'law' of terrorism than we do a better developed sensitivity to the tragedies that it engenders. Referring to his canon as a whole, D.H. Lawrence famously observed, 'I can't forgive Conrad for being so sad and for giving in.'[224]Sometimes, though, sadness is appropriate. The events of 9–11 should invoke feelings of sadness, as well as compassion. So must the myriad other terrorist tragedies that came before, and which have come since. But Lawrence is right in condemning the 'giving in'; the giving in to hyperbole and vitriol, and to fear and despair, and to the simplistic supposition that the writing of a 'law' of terror or the winning of a 'war' against terror will somehow obviate our collective need to think and to care. This is the 'crap' to which we must not give in.

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[219] Derrida, 'Dialogue', pp. 120, 128–30, 133.

[220] Gearty, 'Terrorism', p. 378.

[221] As John Gray confirms, there 'cannot be tolerance so long as terrorism goes unchecked'. See Gray, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 115. A sentiment which finds an echo in Derrida, 'Dialogue', pp. 125–8.

[222] Zulaika & Douglass, *Terror*, p. 217.

[223] T. Honderich, *Terrorism and Humanity: Inquiries in Political Philosophy,* (London: Pluto, 2003), pp. 4, 13–14.

[224] Quoted in J. Lyon, 'Introduction', to *SA*, pp. xxxiv.

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