Chapter-IV

THE COSTAGUA NAM REPUBLIC
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A STUDY OF NOSTROMO

In regard to the development of Conrad's cultural and political thought, Nostromo is the most significant work in the early phase. It is much more ambitious than either the Malayan novels or the African tales. The canvas here is enormously large and the narrative extremely convoluted. It weaves a complex pattern in which public life seriously impinges on and is inextricably mixed up with the fate of the private individuals. It presents us with a view of history in which hope for a better future has constantly been belied. Conrad's discerning eye looks into the actual workings of mass movements and revolutions with an insight both mature and deep and his generalisations, with very minor qualifications, hold true even today in developing and underdeveloped countries. Conrad wrote: "Costagu-
ana is meant for a S. American state in general."\(^1\) He also meant *Nostromo* to be a study of "the passion of men short-sighted in good and evil."\(^2\) The novel's relevance to the twentieth century thought is so striking that V.S. Pritchett rightly remarks: "...it might have been written in 1954 and not, as it was, in 1904."\(^3\)

Walter Allen observes:

*Nostromo* is a political novel in the profoundest meaning of the word and this is the index of Conrad's achievement — it may stand as a picture of the modern world in a microcosm.\(^4\)

*Nostromo* is the first of the great novels in the writing of which Conrad depended more on the information provided by books than on his personal maritime or land experience. Costaguana is a developing country, but it is different from the Malay Archipelago or Congo. The latter were colonies whereas the former was politically independent while belonging to the financial 'empire' of the Holroyds and Sir John. The fictional realities of Costaguana are established with such convincing use of realistic details that one is surprised at the discovery that Conrad actually saw pretty little of the Latin American province. In 1876, he briefly visited

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\(^2\) Ibid.
the ports of Cartagena in Colombia and Puerto Cabello and La Guaira in Venezuela while serving as a steward on the bark Saint Antoine. As Najder says, "several days on land provided Conrad with the visual material for Nostromo." Of course while Conrad was working on the novel, there was great ferment in the world of politics. Imperial power itself was dwindling and changing its shade and implications -- from martial to economic. The British Empire was facing serious crises and its powers were being challenged by newly emergent rivals, particularly The United States and Germany. Around the turn of the century, Central and South American affairs were the frontpage stuff in newspapers: there was the Spanish American war in which Spain had to part with the Phillipines and Cuba and there was the U.S. intervention in Columbia resulting in the secession of Panama in 1903. The story of Costaguana exhibits, as Irving Howe has shown, the typically Latin American cycle of revolution and counter-revolution which is not social or utopian but neo-colonial and militaristic.

Conrad's friend Cunningham Graham who travelled extensively in South America and evinced a keen

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interest in South American affairs was also a source of inspiration to him. During 1903, the year Conrad devoted to *Nostromo*, he wrote at least two letters to Cunningham Graham specifically on this. The first, written on 9th May, contains the following: "I want to talk to you on the work I am engaged on now. I hardly dare allow my audacity — but I am placing it in Sth America in a republic I call costaguana....But you must hear the subject and this I can't set down on a small piece of paper." 7 His second letter, written on July 8, shows the need for further assistance:

    I am dying over that cursed Nostromo thing. All my memories of central America seem to slip away. I had just a glimpse 26 years ago. That is not enough pour batir un roman dessus.

There must have been several discussions with Graham on the subject. In the 'Author's Note', Conrad also acknowledges his debt to the book in which he came across the 'vagrant anecdote' about the stolen lighter of silver. The book has now been identified as *On Many Seas: The Life and Exploits of a Yankee Sailor* (1897). The other book he acknowledged a debt to is, *Seven Eventful Years in Paraguay* (1869). These books were helpful inasmuch as they supplied Conrad with names, incidents, topography, hints for characters etc.. Conrad's art

8 Ibid., p.315.
absorbed all these bits of information and his extraordinary power of visualisation played its magic on them to create a unique effect.

The central theme of the novel may be pinned down as the evil effects of economic imperialism. It is true that Conrad did not use the term 'economic imperialism' because it did not gain currency till then. But there is no denying the fact that Conrad was surely contemplating about it in *Nostromo*. Conrad's term for it is 'material interest', and it is the silver--be it in the untapped form in the San Tome mine or the lighterful which Nostromo and Decoud take to safety and which, after the death of Decoud, becomes the sole possession of Nostromo and takes the dimension of a stolen treasure, is the pivot round which the action of the novel revolves. The San Tome silver mine with its brooding presence vitiates the personal life of almost all the major characters. It stood as a wall between individuals eager for communication and establishing a healthy and meaningful human bond. Conrad himself indicates as much when he writes to Ernest Bendz: "I will take the liberty to point out that Nostromo has never been intended for the hero of the tale of Sea-board, Silver is the pivot of the moral and material events effecting
the lives of everybody in the tale."\(^9\)

Conrad's treatment of material interests is to be judged by his developing attitudes towards imperialism. In his terms, the ascendency of foreign material interest is a form of conquest. Gould, though a domestic entrepreneur, has foreign (English) affiliations and he needs the support of a foreign investor, Holroyd (American) to extend him capital needed for the mining activity. The economic enterprise, the mine, needs a political agent at Sta Marta; it tactfully and extensively bribes those with political influence to be left in peace. These insights into the 'real politik' of the developing world are authentic. They have direct parallel to the European and American commercial and political intervention in Spanish American affairs. Towards the end of *Nostromo*, the Occidental province of Sulaco gets separated from Costaguana as a result of the counter-revolution. This secession is in the interest of American capital in that it secures, for the time being and with Holroyd's approval, the wealth of the mine, Holroyd's investment. As happened in Panama, in Costaguana also, the secessionists got an edge over their enemies by the arrival of the U.S. navy:

An international naval demonstration ... put an end to the Costaguana-Sulaco war. ... The United States Cruiser, Powhatan, was the first to salute the Occidental flag.10

That the mine is not going to be a harbinger of peace is hinted at the very beginning when the first consignment of silver is brought down to Sulaco. On that occasion, 'the charge of the San Tome silver escort' through the city suggests "the reckless rush and precise driving of a field battery hurrying into action."11 And for the Europeans, "each passing of the escort under the balconies of the Casa Gould" is "like another victory gained in the conquest of peace for Sulaco."12 The ironical tone here clearly implies that the Goulds' habitual assumption of progress as a concomitant of material advancement is open to question. This is an issue on which most of the critics seem to be at cross-purposes. Robert Penn Warren, for instance, maintains that Albert G.Guerard's view that instead of progress, the mine brings civil war is, 'far too simple'. He maintains an optimistic view of the political development: "We must admit that the society at the end of the book is preferable to that at the beginning."13 In the novel and in the essays written

11 Ibid., p.114.
12 Ibid., p.115.
about that time, Conrad leaves no doubt that the ways of material interests are extremely dubious. The first part of the novel, 'The Silver of the Mine' contains ample suggestive passages indicating that the advancement of modern capitalism has robbed the country of its picturesque landscapes, its repose, its tranquility. Mrs. Gould feels sad at the thought that the wind of change would obliterate the small, beautiful things:

... I will confess that the other day, during my afternoon drive when I suddenly saw an Indian boy ride out of a wood with the red flag of a surveying party in his hand, I felt something of a shock. The future means change - an utter change. And yet even here, there are simple and picturesque things that one would like to preserve.  

The sparse row of telegraph poles which are the external signs of material progress are, "waiting outside for a moment of peace to enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land."

The hidden treasures of the earth on which the country grows rich are "hovered over by the anxious spirit of good and evil," and that the new life to which it has led is full of "unrest" and "toil". It is difficult to maintain Warren's views in the light of Mrs. Gould's practical experience. Her remark is indicative of the deep communal bonds and perfect harmony between native life and Nature.

14 Nostromo, p.120.  
15 Ibid., p.166.  
16 Ibid., p.504.
that would be snapped by the onslaught of industrial-economic-materialistic changes.

That Conrad was seriously contemplating about growing industrialism, material progress and political philosophies is evident from at least three essays written around the time he was engaged on *Nostromo*. They are 'The Crime of Partition', 'Anatole France' and 'Autocracy and War'. In Richard Curle's copy of *Nostromo* Conrad wrote that it was his ambition 'to render the spirit of an epoch in the history of Sth America', and significantly, the epoch of Costaguana which he wanted to articulate, was one bristling with constant war, violence and bloodshed. In 1905, Conrad, in his 'Autocracy and War' remarked about Germany that, "Germany's attitude proves that no peace for the earth can be found in the expansion of material interests which she seems to have adopted exclusively as her only aim, ideal and watchword." In the same essay, he gives his unequivocal judgement on the workings of material interests:

Industrialism and commercialism... stand ready, almost eager, to appeal to the sword as soon as the globe of the earth has shrunk beneath our growing numbers by another

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The same strand of logic pervades through the novel in Conrad's treatment of the implications of the San Tome silver mine on the politics of Costaguana. Towards the end of *Nostromo*, Dr. Monygham, an otherwise eccentric character, makes a remark which has obvious Conradian overtones that there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interest:

They have their law and their justice. But it is founded on expediency and inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty and misrule of a few years back.

The novel recreates the past of Costaguana and that of the Gould family by means of flashbacks. It is through this technique that we come to know that the past history of Costaguana is a series of ideologically tenuous revolutions, oscillating between the tyranny of popular dictatorships and the rule of a partly enlightened, but self-centred, aristocracy. We also

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19 *Nostromo*, p.511.
know that Charles's father was a wealthy merchant who had to put up with the frequent exactions of forced loans by successive governments. It is during the regime of such a government that the heavily taxed San Tome silver mine was arbitrarily wished on him. Having had no knowledge of mining and no experience in the field, he tried all possible means to waive it, but in vain. He took his life to be doomed and in fact "the mere vision of it arising before his mind in the still watch of the night had the power to exasperate him into hours of hot and agitated insomnia." 20 Even his letters to Charles, then a student in England, were filled up with practically nothing but the mine. He implored his son never to return to Costaguana, never to claim his inheritance there because it was tainted by the infamous Gould Concession -- "never to touch it, never to approach it, to forget that America existed ...." 21 Eventually the father dies -- a disappointed man, trying in vain to make the mine a working concern. The Concession is thus posited at the very beginning of the novel as something supremely challenging and dangerous which Charles Gould may either take up or leave alone.

Charles Gould qualifies as a mining engineer in

20 Nostromo, p.154.
21 Ibid., p.57.
England. During his holiday in Italy, he meets Emilia, an orphaned English girl who was staying with her aunt. They fall in love and on the day of their engagement, Chales receives the news of his father's death. Contrary to his father's wishes, Charles decides to reopen the silver mine. His decision is prompted on the one hand, by the wish to redeem his father's failure and on the other, by a vigorous impulse to contain the political corruption that has been the cause of his undoing. Charles gives Emilia to understand the pattern of the life she would be subjected to as his wife in the remote state of Costaguana. Emilia accepts it and shares his enthusiasm in righting what they thought a grievous wrong. Both of them return to Sulaco.

Costaguana is politically unstable. The San Tome mine itself contributes to its instability. It could have as many as four governments within a span of six years. The tyranny of Guzman Bento was followed by a 'fatuous turmoil of greedy factions' and it is during this turmoil that Gould reopens the mine and tries to develop it. According to Gould, the development of the mine holds out great social promise. At this stage, his views of wealth are necessarily bound up with social upliftment and political stability:
What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get firm footing, and they are bound to impose conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. that is how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards....

Gould is a materialist who believes in the primacy of materials over mind. Material progress, according to him, is the first prerequisite to the stability of an equitable social order. The nineteenth century myth of progress in Europe was inevitably linked with material-scientific advancement. Conrad subjects this myth to searching scrutiny in Nostromo through a powerful analysis of the dynamics of power and politics in Costaguana.

As pointed out before, Gould begins with the assumption that in developing the mine, he would be fulfilling a moral obligation to his father and help establishing a 'better justice'. He decided to pursue a policy of neutrality towards the internal affairs of Costaguana. His only object is to develop the mine as an "imperium in imperio", an autonomous multi-national

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22 Nostromo, p.22.
organisation. It is only gradually that he comes to realise that the material progress has its own demands which are both ruthless and immoral or amoral. He is constrained to make all sorts of compromises. He has to give his reluctant assent to intrigue, to bribe, to acquiesce silently in various abuses. His willingness to compromise and stoop for his weapons paves the way for his eventual participation in the political conflicts of the country and support the dictatorship of Don Vincente Ribiera:

What was currently whispered was this - that the San Tome Administration had, in part, at least, financed the last revolution.... Serious, well-informed men seemed to believe the fact, to hope for better things, for the establishment of legality of good faith and order in public life.23

Gould's object to ensure political stability within which the mine can operate stands to reason, but the danger lies in his alignment with Ribiera, the new head of state and General Montero, Minister of War. Ribiera is physically a cripple and politically impotent. Montero is an unscrupulous power-grabber and a brazen mercenary. His brusque toast to Holroyd, the American investor, "to the health of the man who brings us a million and a half of pounds"24 embarrasses everyone

23 Nostromo, p.117.
24 Ibid., p.120.
in the assembly. The alliance with Ribierism is more
dangerous than that with Holroyd, "precisely because
Holroyd is less unlike Gould than is Ribiera and is not
dependent upon a Montero." The paradox of Ribierism
is that Montero unavoidably comes with it. Gould's fi-
nal compromise comes when he puts himself at the head
of a separatist movement. The objective of the moveme-
nt was to secede from the Costaguanan province and es-
tablish an independent state. The idea of secession is,
however, originated by Decoud, in conjunction with Emi-
lia, each of whom has his own motives for separation.

The degradation of Gould's professed ideal is un-
derlined by the growing disgust at the methods which he
is constrained to go on using. His wife Emilia had an
abiding faith in her husband's mission because it was
in line with her own ideal of improving the condition
of the poor people. But after a time she is totally
disillusioned. She slowly comes to recognise the sub-
tle transformation in Chales's nature. She realises
that the public mission of material progress is incom-
patible with her private world of utilitarianism. She
is more discerning and humane than her husband. When

25 Stephen K. Land, Conrad and the Paradox of Plot
p. 116.
she realises that the mine is not going to play its expected role and is becoming a rallying force for selfish intrigues, she withdraws her support from it while her husband pursues success blindfolded. Thus happens a parting of ways between the husband and the wife.

Violence and disorder in Costaguana, to a large extent, spring from motives which are fundamentally materialistic and predatory. Moreover, political regimes in Costaguana change with astonishing rapidity. This entails shifting of loyalties and allegiances by politicians and generals, all in the name of 'democracy' and progress, though in fact, to achieve personal power and wealth. Fredric Jameson rightly points out that Nostromo is about the coming of capitalism in a world which is not prepared for it.\(^{26}\) The native culture was in a fluid state and could not develop any mature or comprehensive political sense and an appreciation of national problems around which debates and discussions might take place. The result is a brand of politics which is unashamedly opportunistic. Thus, for instance, General Montero who pledged support to the Goulds, readily abandons the Ribierist cause at the first sign of

popular uprising. He aligns himself with his bandit brother Pedro and leads the opposition against the very people who invested him with the highest military power. Sotillo is mortally afraid of General Montero's imminent descent on Sulaco that must rob him of his position of power. Gamacho's demagogic declamations are a parody of political propaganda. The ideal of democracy finds its degraded adherent in none other than Don Juste Lopez.

Gould's assumption that he could use wealth "as a means, not as an end"\(^\text{27}\) gave him strength and drive to overcome the heavy odds in the way of the development of the mine. But by the end of *Nostromo*, this assumption lends itself to substantial doubt. We have the strong impression that for him silver became an end in itself and that he ended being used up by it. He is extremely taciturn, often seems afraid of having to face his own thoughts and his "silent fits of abstraction" seems, as Conrad points out, "the energetic concentration of a will haunted by a fixed idea."\(^\text{28}\) Gould's only fault is that he makes his ideal an obsession and being obsessed by the ideal, he is totally indifferent to the sufferings of the people around him, particularly that of his wife. He idealises the mine to such an extent that it

\(^{27}\) *Nostromo*, p.75.
alienates him from his near and dear ones. With his sceptical probity, Decoud brings this fact home to Mrs. Gould:

'Mrs. Gould, are you aware to what point he has idealised the existence, the worth, the meaning of the San Tome mine? Are you aware of it?'

It is only towards the end of the novel that Gould realises that he has 'something of an adventurer's easy morality'. As Juliet McLauchlan points out: "Gould's gradual corruption results in a real diminution of what he is." He loses in stature and his personality shrinks to a degree. A great emptiness grows within him. The abiding impression is that he is preeminently "shortsighted in good."

The Ribierist party whose watchwords were "Honesty, Peace and Progress" is typical of an economic colony. It is represented by the Europeanised aristocratic upper class, the Blancos. The ordinary people are illiterate, poor and politically immature. They have no political clout and are left entirely without a say in the formation of governments. The inevitable process

29 Nostromo, p.214.
31 'Author's Note', Nostromo, p.IX
32 Nostromo, p.121.
of change of power is revolution. Revolution in Costa-
guana needs the help of the army chief, General Montero
-- a crude, deceitful manipulator. There is dearth of
leadership and drive. Don Jose Avellanos, 'the life
and soul' of the party looked "so frail, so weak, so
worn out." He is prevailed over by the pretentious
Don Juste Lopez in the council that was contemplating
surrender. Ribiera is a constitutionalist of sorts and
he tried to give Costaguana a semblance of constitution
and establish law and order in the country. But he is
a man of "delicate and melancholy mind physically almo-
ast a cripple." He proves himself incapable of rising
to the occasion. His government is overthrown by the
military revolt engineered by General Montero and his
brother Pedro. It is a sad commentary on Costaguanan
politics that it is tyrants and freebooters who always
gain an upperhand in the governance of the country and
the people who are enlightened look towards England and
America for guidance and help. An absurd man like Barri-
os leads the Ribierist army and but for the super-human
feat of Nostromo in calling back the forces from Cayta,
all the Europeans would have been summarily executed by
Montero brothers and the separation of Sulaco could ne-
ever have been a reality.

33 Nostromo, p.235.
34 Ibid. p.233.
Antonia and her father, Don Jose Avellanos represents selfless and enlightened patriotism. Don Jose has fought, suffered and kept up his faith. He did not succumb to the pressure of Don Juste Lopez who was impatient to wean him over to capitulation with Montero and negotiate surrender. He has an abiding faith not in any political institution but in a political code permeated by an awareness of the values on which it is based and of the people it is expected to serve: "The old idea of feudalism had disappeared .... For his part he did not wish to revive old political doctrines. They were perishable. They died. But the doctrine of political rectitude was immortal." He encouraged Decoud to go on with his programme of the separation of Sulaco. He himself has become almost a spent force, an anachronism in an epoch of treachery, hypocrisy and demoralisation of all human values. We last see him, "stretched out, hardly breathing, by the side of the erect Antonia, vanquished in a life-long struggle whose stagnant depths breed monstrous crimes and monstrous illusions."26

Antonia inherited her father's patriotism and her life is dedicated to the establishment of a better government that will look after the cause of the poor

26 Ibid., p.362.
people. She is not outraged by the amoral politics of Costaguana and looks upon the compromises her uncle and father are constrained to make as necessary evils. Her really emancipated and enlightened ways, her concern for the Goulds, her passionate idealism set her apart from other characters in the novel. She is the focus of Decoud's passion and the spur of his action. She adapts herself all too admirably to the prevalent Costaguanan belief in violent social change and justifies her continued support of the people, whatever their inadequacies:

How can one abandon groaning under oppression those who had been our countrymen only a few years ago, who are our countrymen now? ... How can we remain blind and deaf without pity to the cruel wrongs suffered by our brothers?37

After the separation of Sulaco, Antonia's endeavours are directed towards annexing the rest of Costaguana to the order and prosperity of Sulaco. With this end in view she, in conjunction with her uncle, Father Corbelan, makes plans to form a coalition with various societies based in Sta Marta. She, in her optimism and naivete, looks forward to another revolution in the vain hope that a peace will finally be realised that will endure. She is incapable of grasping the ways in which Sulaco's material prosperity has adversely affected

37 Nostromo, p.509.
both the tradition of the people and the lives of many of the characters in the novel.

One of the important motifs in *Nostromo* is scepticism. This is an inevitable product of the cultural and political environment. The chronic political instability makes the Costaguana society a loose rather than a cohesive one where each individual works to satisfy some passion of his own, each person is a victim of his own obsessions. Absence of any common central organising principle in the lives of the main characters makes them work in different directions, weakening the society and the state. The social environment is vitiated by an all-pervading cynicism and each successive government brings with it its own brand of corruption and a cynical disregard of all patriotic impulses. Martin Decoud best exemplifies this attitude of scepticism. Decoud is personally an outsider, a man of European culture and racial background though he has, like Gould, a family history of settlement in Costaguana. He is first introduced to us as a sterile dilettante frequenting the Boulevards in Paris. He allowed himself to be drawn into the affairs of Costaguana by nonchalantly agreeing to bring out a consignment of automatic rifles to Sulaco. The Avellanos expect him to participate in the movement to suppress Montero and to his utter surprise, Decoud finds it
impossible to refuse. But he is no believer in disinterested human actions and he justifies it through a 'sane materialism': his love for Antonia and a desire to satisfy her patriotic zeal. He becomes a Blanco journalist, the editor of Porvenir, the mouthpiece of the Ribierist party. Having compromised himself for Antonia, Decoud gets gradually involved in the local affairs.

As a sensitive person, he is disturbed by the strife and suffering of the people though he does not admit it. The reality of Costaguanan politics seems closer to him because of Antonia's unwavering belief in the cause. "I suppose I am more of a Costaguanero than I could have believed possible"³⁸, he says to himself. He develops a deep insight into the history of the sub-continent ravished by persistent barbarism, a series of civil wars, conspiracies, revolutions and counter-revolutions. To explain this generic Latin American defects, he propounds a racial theory accounting for the chaos that is Latin American history:

There is a curse of futility upon our characters: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption. We convulsed a continent for our independence only to become the passive prey of democratic

³⁸ Nostromo, p.176.
parody, the helpless victims of scoundrels and cut-throats, our institutions a mockery, our laws a farce.

The second part of Decoud's analysis is immensely relevant today, not only to the newly emergent states of Latin America, but also to those in Africa and South-east Asia. Further, the idea of secession which was entirely Decoud's own seems to adumbrate prophetically the secessionist tendencies inherent in multi-cultural and multi-lingual nations as are so evident today.

Dr. Monygham, apart from Nostromo, is the most forceful political actor in the novel. Like Decoud, he shakes off his political detachment and plunges into the political conflict. Like Jim, his past life is tainted by an accidental weakness and the ghost of the past continues to haunt him. During the regime of Guzman Bento when, severely tortured by father Beron, he betrayed a group of friends. The doctor, too, is severely sceptical about human nature though his scepticism is experiential rather than assumed. The semi-colonial situation has maimed him in several ways. Monygham's obsession with his disgrace drives him to a self-imposed isolation from European society after another revolution has brought his unexpected release. Nevertheless, he is a man of great compassion,

39 Nostromo, p.171.
deeply sensitive to the sufferings and misfortunes of others. His love of the people is shown in the conscientious performance of his medical duties and, in particular, by his care of such individuals as the Violas. It is therefore, natural that he should be drawn towards Emilia, the only character of uncompromising humanity in the story and one who shares his concern for the basic welfare of the common people. Like Decoud, Dr. Monygham has no illusion about himself. He reacts nonchalantly to the chief engineer's assertion that life can be meaningful only through the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity. He says:

Self-flattery, food for that vanity
which makes the world go round.... Put
no spiritual value into my desires, or
my opinions or my actions. They have not
enough vastness to give me room for
self-flattery.40

But the embittered doctor has discovered his social commitment through the benign association of Mrs. Gould. His love for Mrs. Gould is expressed in thoughtful action and it may be pointed out that Monygham's love is the truest shown in the novel. He lands up in a dangerous game with Sotillo to buy time for the arrival of Barrios' forces. He misdirects Sotillo's energy by giving him

40 Nostromo, p.318.
the impression through various arguments and innuendoes that the silver is hidden either on the shore or buried in the sea. The suspense which turns on whether Monygham will be able to persuade Nostromo to recall the Cayan regiment, is sustained through Conrad's wonderful narrative skill. When the doctor makes his loyalty to Mrs. Gould an obsession, he becomes potentially dangerous. We see him utterly indifferent to Decoud's fate. He never inquires what actually happened to Decoud and never bothers what a shock Decoud's death would be to Antonia. When he confronts Nostromo who has just returned after the sinking of the lighter, he does not think of him humanely, as a fellow creature just escaped from the jaws of death but merely as a tool to use in his scheme to save Mrs. Gould. His idea is, no doubt, selfless, but he is not free from passion ('the fanaticism of his devotion') which obsesses him and which produces events, which are supremely important. Sometimes he displays wonderful insights which makes F.R.Leavis regard him as the 'voice of sanity' in the novel. Years later when Mrs. Gould wearily asks, "Will there never be any peace?", the doctor replies prophetically that there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interest because it is amoral, "founded on expediency and is inhuman."  

42 Nostromo, p. 511.
In a society in pervasive economic and political disarray, the novelist creates an upright and dignified man in Nostromo—a man who can be called the finest flower of the proletariat. The 'incorruptible capataz de Cargadores' cares for nothing except his own reputation. "He is content to feel himself a power within the people." He neither longs to possess silver as Sotillo does, nor does he have a taste for luxurious living. The Costaguanan society gives him a good name and appreciates his valour and he always acts up to his reputation and always satisfies the expectation of his capitalist employers. His reckless generosity whether to the pretty Monerita for whom he cuts off the silver buttons of his coat in the full publicity of a fiesta or to the aged crone who receives his last dollar in the obscurity of the city corner, is nothing but the expression of his longing for the lustre of a prestigious name. This urges him to do wonderful feats. He is no ordinary self-seeker. Even his employer, Captain Mitchell, is forced to acknowledge that his usefulness far outweighs his wages. When he first leaves Decoud and is faced with the problem of resuming his life, he feels desperate because he has lost the reputation for which he lived. He realises for the first time that his

43 'Author's Note', Nostromo, p.Xii
capitalist exploiters have constantly disregarded Nostromo the man in favour of his reputation. George Viola's words flash through his mind and illuminate the exploitative relation:

What he heard George Viola say was very true. Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general kept the poor in poverty and subjection. They kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service.

Abruptly cut off from the applause that had sustained his identity, he can only conclude, true to his own subjectivity, that this applause has been false, and the applauders traitors. This makes him conscious of his solitude; he becomes an alien in his own culture and among his own people. Where he had once transformed the whole population of Sulaco into a crowd of dazzled spectators, he is unable to seek the simple advice and reassurance he needs.

However, from the very beginning Nostromo's estrangement from his native society and culture is highlighted. His authority is devoid of any ethical sanction inasmuch as it does not represent the aspirations of his community. He does not realise that in serving the cause of the European imperialists, he is acting directly against the interest of his own people. His unreflective commitment to his capitalist masters indicates the

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44 Nostromo, p.415.
way in which modern economic imperialists lure the best talents from underdeveloped communities and alienate them from their own culture and people. S.Raval explores this aspect of Nostromo's character and points out:

Prior to his disintegration Nostromo's ethic is simply a moralistic appearance buoyed up by the network of political-economic interest he serves. The power of this network is in its ability to create a man of the people, for the people, and to make him serve values and interests neither the people, nor he, their idealised representative, would support.

Thus, Nostromo is a hollow man; his being so is the price of his talent in his society at its particular moment in history. His disintegration brings knowledge to him and an awareness of the true nature of his relation with his masters. However, Nostromo's new knowledge does not bring in the necessary enlightenment which could have sent him to stand by his own people and defend his culture against the barbaric onslaughts both from inside and outside Costaguana. Rather it engenders corruption in him. Having withdrawn his trust in those people who have exploited him, he decides to keep the secret of the silver to himself and grow rich slowly. He becomes 'corruptible'.

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The scene of his death is highly suggestive with a "knot of night-prowlers -- the poorest of the poor"\textsuperscript{46} hanging about the door of the hospital, and, with a pale Marxist photographer, "small, frail, blood-thirsty, the hater of capitalists"\textsuperscript{47} watching him and trying to fish out from him secret information about the treasure to be brought again into the service of popular revolt.

Mrs. Gould is the embodiment of the human and humane principles in \textit{Nostromo}. In her simplicity, she believes that the development of the mine is inevitably bound up with the amelioration of the people's woes. She likes to preserve the "simple and picturesque things"\textsuperscript{48} in native society and culture but does not know how the conflict between tradition and technology could be resolved. She is saddened by the vision of a future in Costaguana stripped of its native traditions. She sardonically refers to the "religion of silver and iron"\textsuperscript{49} in the very beginning of the actions in the novel and anticipates the ways in which economic interests are going to erode the quality of life in Costaguana. The new settlements have no individuality of their own; they are named Village One, Village Two and Village Three. The cultural life of the people has been

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Nostromo}, p.459.
\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Ibid.}, p.120.
\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}, p.71.
thoroughly disturbed: "There will be no more popular feasts held here." The miners at the Campo have gained a secure way of life, but looking at their "flat, joyless faces" dressed and housed identically, Mrs. Gould asks herself if they are really more happy now than when they were illiterate and impoverished peasants but, nevertheless, part of an intensely vital and throbbing human tradition.

Mrs. Gould, like her husband, began with the assumption that the material and moral successes are not only compatible, but necessarily related. Only slowly does she come to realise the dehumanising effects of silver on various characters. She sustained her faith in her husband's integrity and unerring instincts for as long as was possible, but the gradual transformation in his nature pained her greatly. She is jolted by the discovery that there is something inherent in the necessities of "successful action" that carried with it the "moral degradation of the idea." Without any grumble, she withdraws herself from the public world of material interest and political intrigue to the private world of "her schools, her hospital, the sick mothers and the feeble old men, mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration." She is universally loved and

50 _Nostromo_, p.102
51 _Ibid._, p.100.
52 _Ibid._, p.521.
53 _Ibid._, p.347.
admired. In the Casa Gould all the warmth of welcome is hers, and it takes on real warmth when time and again we see people expand in her presence -- Mitchell, Sir John, Dr. Monygham, the young homesick engineers and many others. She looks after the old Georgio Viola and her daughters like a Guardian Angel. When the rabble broke out and the life of all Europeans were at stake, Dr. Monygham observes:

She thinks of the girl (Antonia)... the the Viola children ...me...the wounded ...the miners...everybody who is poor and miserable...No one seems to be thinking of her.54

In the early scenes, we see Mrs. Gould's unquestioning commitment to what she thought to be a shared ideal. Chales's gradual alienation drove her to the limits of despair. It was no small disenchantment to her to find that for Gould, loyalty to the silver mine has taken precedence over his social or domestic responsibilities. "She saw clearly the San Tome mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Goulds...."55 Her repeated efforts to restore the initial rapport which could surely have been the basis of a meaningful relationship were thwarted by her husband's nonchalance and unwillingness to communicate with her.

54 Nostromo, p.380.
55 Ibid., p.522.
The silver alienates Gould both from his wife and the people.

The ending of Nostromo is marked by an impression of futility and collective and individual losses and failures. Pursuit of material interest has destroyed the fabric of rich and vital native tradition and substituted for it neither stability nor a commitment to the basic human values. The history of 'oppression and brutality' rooted in the colonial past of Costa-guana and its imperialistic present becomes, in the ultimate analysis, a story of racial failure and cultural immaturity. At the end, the radicals are preparing for another revolution that they expect will usher in an era of justice and democracy. But the overwhelming impression is that unless the people are enlightened and initiated into the norms of democracy and decent life, every popular movement will continue to be tainted by the same defects and the prosperity of the land will ever remain a distant dream.