Variously described as Conrad's 'greatest achievement', 'the supreme effort of his imagination, his master work', *Nostromo*, comparable to Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, is the most complex and intricately wrought novel. As suggested in the author's note, the idea of writing the novel took over twenty years to mature. In this novel, Conrad concerns himself not only with individual and personal relations but extends his range to include the interaction of historical forces on the public plane. The political action, however, occurs "in the rear ground, as a shadow-play behind the personal action". The principal characters project ideals and attitudes which constantly acquire new significance through inter-relationship, especially through multiple and complex contrasts. Although the novel is situated in Costaguana (a country in Latin America) which is subject to continual revolutionary changes, the events which dominate the novel flow from the passions of various characters depicted as active agents in the story. As Conrad himself puts it, "I had the first vision of a twilight country which was to become the province of Sulaco, with its high shadowy Sierra and its misty Campo for mute witnesses of events flowing from the passions of men short-sighted in good and
evil. Such are in every truth the obscure origins of 
Nostrero - the book". Conrad shows us the interaction of 
Aristocracy and people, men and women, Latin and Anglo-
saxon, bandit and politician, caught up in the secret purposes 
of their heart, revealed in the bitter necessities of time.

In this most imaginatively conceived novel, Conrad 
deals with varied aspects of life. The conduct and actions 
of characters spell out various themes: "Many themes concerned 
Conrad deeply, the nature and the sources of the revolutionary 
action, ideals and illusions; justification of aims and action, 
scepticism; individual loneliness or isolation". The 
important characters in Nostrero are certainly lonely persons. 
They are lonely because each one is enmeshed in a private 
dream or in an ideal conception of himself; and each is 
betrayed by this ideal conception of himself. Each chara-
cter is isolated because he finds himself cut off from the 
community by his particular ideal, ambition or aspiration. 
They are unable to invest their particular forms of activity 
with the spiritual value; they are 'short-sighted in good 
and evil'. All of them become victims of isolation, not 
because they are fated, not because the external forces, 
past or present, are primarily causative of their fall, but 
because of their own passion or desire issuing in short-
sighted action which leads to far-reaching and over powering 
consequences. Charles Gould and Nostromo are not mastered 
by the Fates, nor Decoud by the whole scheme of things,
as are Hardy's Tess and Jude. The existing scheme of things renders individuals isolated and helpless, but as presented in the novel, it has not been created by a hidden process or by a march of blind historical forces, but generated primarily by the passions of men, their illusory ideals or egoism, unlit by any degree of self awareness. In Nostromo, history does not "escape man's intentions and his will". Loneliness and egoism, to a great extent, are inter-related because it is man's egoism which functions as a barrier between him and the community, which renders him lonely. The principal characters' short-sighted actions are externalized in overwhelming events which only add to the murky atmosphere of Costaguana.

The physical setting of the novel presages the intensification of darkness in Costaguana, both mental and moral, which leads to the isolation and estrangement of individual characters. The mental darkness is associated with the short-sightedness of the characters which disables them to see their aims and actions clearly; and moral darkness is associated with widespread corruption and lack of moral and spiritual values. Darkness is oppressive, naturalistically and metaphorically. The passions rather than the principles which govern most characters in Nostromo suggest inner emptiness. That is why the characters have no inner defence against the temptation or corruption which comes to possess them. For instance, Nostromo after his return from the
Great Isabel, moves like a pursued shadow. This recalls the spectral 'gringos'. Possessed, body and soul, by the material wealth of the stolen silver, Nostromo finds himself emptied of self-respect, peace of mind and his real identity, his existence, sundered from the people, becomes spectral.

With uncanny perceptiveness, Conrad traces the impact of inner spring of action on the individual characters, so that their ideals turn out to be illusions and their life becomes emptied of all meaning and significance. Naturally, it cuts them off from the community of man and they find themselves lonesome and desolate. Indeed, nowhere is the idea more impressively one with the image than in the 'darkness' which envelopes many scenes in the novel. The image of darkness signifies, in a symbolic manner, the inadequacy of all the ideals and illusions by which men see and live. In Sulaco, the streets are often dark, only under a street lamp does a figure become identifiable. By the dark roadside, frightened faces are lit briefly by the Gould carriage lamps. Nostromo clings to Giselle in darkness. In darkness, Giorgio shoots Nostromo. Decoud writes by the light of a candle. Significantly the light which symbolizes enlightenment does not ever dispel the cloud of darkness which hangs over the gulf and the country of Costaguana. The San Tomé mine is a bright treasure in contrast to the darkness, but it is unenlightening and corrupting. It leads to inner emptiness of characters who fall under its spell.
They become completely absorbed in money-making pursuits, oblivious of their obligations and responsibilities to the community at large. The silver whets their appetite for egoistic designs, so that they become blind to their legitimate responsibilities for the public good. "Clouds throughout the novel are opaque, blinding, oppressive, suggestive of storm and bloodshed; now they are one with the weighty mass of shining treasure which hangs over and dominates 'the Treasure of the world', cutting off its inhabitants from the true treasures of life". In its symbolic role, the physical setting of the novel does more than provide an area of action; it defines a level of awareness which views man against the darkness, a view permeated by "the crushing, paralyzing sense of human littleness". The world of Costaguana is created in such a manner that there always hangs over it the oppressive darkness of Gulf of Placido. This suggests that the characters in the novel cannot hope to acquire a positive self. In the words of Royal Roussel, Conrad, "sees that to attempt to win such an identity from darkness is, in fact, like 'attacking immensity itself' and it is against the vision of this immensity, imaged in the Sierras and Campos of Costaguana, that he frames the stories of the two principal adventureres in the novel, Charles Gould and Nostromo".

The epigraph to the novel (a quote taken from Shakespeare's King John), 'so foul a sky cleares not without a
storm holds a key to the significance of the setting of the novel. The foreign financial, capitalist and commercial interests have disturbed the natural calm of Costaguana. The political atmosphere remains charged with the revolutionary ferment on the one hand, and the grouping of political forces, on the other. Revolutions succeed one another in quick succession. The hunger for silver and political power vitiates the atmosphere. There is conflict and "a storm in the shape of revolution inevitably occurs, clears the air, but once again the sky becomes 'foul', bringing further upheavals,... The revolutionary changes are almost cyclical; from Separation to Federation, to Separatism, to the suggestion of Federation at the end". That is why the foreground characters are not only presented in relation to one another but also in relation to a middle ground subordinate figures of great variety, and to the background of an entire population. In such a situation "the individual sees himself as functional and anonymous". The individual citizen lives on the assumption that his ideals and dreams will bear fruit and bring about a quantitative change in the quality of life and the general atmosphere prevailing in Costaguana. However, the dreams and ideals prove illusory and the individual characters find themselves cut off from the mainstream of their community resulting in isolation and loss of identity.

The San Tomé mine which stands for the 'material interests' in the novel affects the fate of the entire
population. Everyone in the novel is affected by the magnetic power of the mine. The silver shadow falls between one man and another. It ignites the lust for money and success even at the risk of losing one's integrity and conscience as well as one's humanity. Even Nostromo, 'a man of the people,' falls a prey to the lure of silver. He sells his conscience, as it were, to Mephistopheles. The result is that Nostromo who wields power over the workers suddenly realizes that he has lost his place in the scheme of things and has lost his mysterious power over the people. Charles Gould, likewise, loses his humanity, so that even his wife becomes estranged from him. Even in the public sector the mine divides the people and brings civil war rather than progress. In the end, the mine on which Gould had staked his hope for security and order becomes a focus of hatred among the country's workers. Mrs. Gould experiences a terrible vision, a vision of nothing less than capitalism itself! "She saw the San Tomé mountain hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant, more pitiless and autocratic than the worst Government; ready to crush innumerable lives in the expansion of its greatness." Because of her complete disillusionment about the benefits of the silver mine, a wave of loneliness sweeps over her, making her extremely sad and deeply depressed. The larger implication is that the silver mine, or 'material interests' create schism in
the community and prove a divisive force. It alienates one individual from another and from the society as a whole.

As in *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, the main characters in *Nostromo* are involved in activities for the community as a whole. But as the story unfolds, we learn how each one of these characters gradually gets isolated from the people and the community indicating the lack of moral and spiritual concerns on the one hand and loss of self and identity, on the other. In the novel, Charles Gould begins his career in Sulaco with a view to bringing security, peace and progress to the community through the successful exploitation of the San Tomé mine. But as Conrad presents it, his ideals prove illusory, and year after year he finds himself more and more engrossed in the silver, so that the entire focus of his intention shifts from altruistic creed to selfishness and egotism. Like a man haunted by a fixed idea, Gould not only becomes estranged from his wife but acquires the inveterate tendency of moral nihilism which dries up the vitalizing springs of his self. He becomes subject to the obsessive pulls of egotism and irresponsibility.

*Nostromo* whom Decoud calls "the next great man of Sulaco after Don Carlos", is also engaged in the public task which Gould has undertaken in Sulaco. Although he is not a member of the San Tomé organisation itself, his authority and control
over the labour force of Sulaco make him an indispensable instrument of the mine. And Decoud ironically describes him, as "this active usher-in of the material implements for our progress". In his author's note, Conrad described Nostromo as "the Man of the People". But his story like that of Gould is also a story of "an assertion and loss of self". Though racially and socially contrasted, both Gould and Nostromo are "captured by the silver of San Tome Mine". Like Gould, Nostromo also becomes subject to material interests and corruption by silver. Towards the end of the novel, we discover how Nostromo becomes obsessed with silver and sells his soul and body to the devil. The words of Teresa, Giorgio viola's wife are the most suggestive: "Then God, perhaps, will have mercy upon me! But do you look to it, man, that you get something for yourself out of it, besides the remorse that shall overtake you some day". Teresa sees that Nostromo fails to put her first because he puts himself first and that behind his apparent concern for the silver, there lurks a compulsive egotism. In abandoning himself to popular fame and then later, corruptive pursuit of the treasure he had stolen, Nostromo isolates himself not only from the people but from the girl who loves him.

In contrast to Charles Gould, Conrad makes Nostromo a Southerner (he is an Italian) because he wishes to underscore the basic human features which distinguish him - namely directness of feeling and freedom from self-consciousness.
The fact that he also makes Nostromo "a man of people" serves to highlight these qualities. For Conrad, the essence of Nostromo's nature is his uncritical simplicity of spontaneity of being. He is in the pre-moral sense of the word, a supreme egoist. But he is no ordinary self-seeker. Even Captain Mitchell, his employer, is forced to acknowledge that his usefulness far out-weighs his wages. He does not care for prudential virtues and squanders all the money he earns. What he seeks from the people is a reflection of his own splendour, and what he requires of them is "that complex of responses - gratitude, respect, admiration, awe - which is the substance of a great reputation". His reckless generosity, whether to the pretty Mornita when he cuts off silver buttons of his coat in the full publicity of a fiesta, or to the aged crone who receives his last dollar in a city gate corner is nothing but the expression of raising his self-image to more-than-life size. Like Jim, he sets great store by his reputation. While Europeans consider Nostromo incorruptible, Decoud discovers that Nostromo's incorruptibility is founded on "his enormous vanity, that finest form of egoism that can take on the aspect of every virtue". Again, like Jim, Nostromo does not seem to realize that what really matters is not one's reputation but one's self-respect and identity. If one loses the latter, one gets isolated and lonely and loses one's peace of mind. Metaphorically speaking, one becomes spiritually dead.
In fact, it is Nostromo's career that uncovers the level of the novel's profound concerns. It is with Nostromo's dilemma (more than with that of Gould) which is occasioned by his responsibility of carrying the silver to a safe place that Conrad is concerned to unfold. In other words, 'a natural man' is involved in the dilemma of a moral universe. A product of nature, Nostromo is compelled to discover himself in terms of values that nature disregards. Metaphorically speaking, he will be a man awakening from a state of pre-moral innocence. He is faced with an unpleasantly problematic reality. He undergoes a metamorphosis from a state of 'natural man' into that of 'conscious man'. "Every human being, Conrad suggests, must be born twice; once out of oblivion into subjectivity, - into the amoral beauty of a natural paradise; and once again, out of subjectivity into consciousness - into the perplexing responsibilities of a moral existence. Not even Nostromo can escape this second birth". Like Jim before his jump from aboard the Patna, Nostromo remains in a state of unconsciousness, asleep as it were, in his thirst for reputation. But after the crisis, he awakens to a new realization of others. His awakening in the ruined fort after his return from hiding the silver on the Great Isabel, is described by Conrad through images of blood and darkness that have characterized the scenes of revolution in Costaguana:
The great mass of clouds filling the head of the gulf had long red smears amongst its convoluted folds of grey and black, as of a floating mantle stained with blood.... The little wavelets seemed to be tossing tiny red sparks upon the sandy beaches.... Nostromo woke up from a fourteen hours' sleep, and arose full length from his lair in the long grass. He stood knee deep amongst the whispering undulations of the green blades with the lost air of a man just born into the world. Handsome, robust, and supple, he threw back his head, flung his arms open, and stretched himself with a slow twist of the waist and a leisurely growling yawn of white teeth, as natural and free from evil in the moment of waking as a magnificent and unconscious wild beast. Then, in the suddenly steadied glance fixed upon nothing from under a thoughtful frown, appeared the man.

After he awakens, he discovers that his subjective self and his objective role, that is, what he is to himself and what he is to others, have drifted dangerously apart. The last act he had performed in Sulaco was in complete harmony with his vanity and as such perfectly genuine. He had given his last dollar to an old woman mourning with grief and fatigue - without witnesses. It was strictly in keeping with his reputation. It had the characteristics of splendour and publicity, but this awakening in solitude, except for the watchful vulture (a symbol of corruption and death) amongst the ruins of the fort, had no such characteristics and it made "everything that had gone before for years appear vain and foolish, like a flattering dream come suddenly to an end". For the first time in his life, he felt the humiliation of destitution. He found it no longer possible for him to parade the streets of the town where he
was hailed with respect in the usual haunts of his leisure. An utter sense of loneliness, abandonment and failure took possession of him. This discovery of the futility of his life so far lived makes Sulaco "appear to him as a town that has no existence", and overwhelms him by "confused and intimate impressions of universal dissolution". He feels absolutely pulverized. It signifies bad omen, and Conrad suggests it symbolically when an owl, "Whose appalling cry: 'Ya-acabo! Ya-acabo! - it is finished; it is finished' - announces calamity and death in the popular belief", drifts "like a large dark ball across his path". Without the public adulation and without the treasure of a good name (as Giorgio has called it), he feels 'destitute'.

To begin with, Nostromo is not obsessed with material interests, but, later, his decision to grow rich by appropriating the treasure of silver entrusted to him for safekeeping casts a taint on his character. His appointed task, to safeguard and deliver the cargo of silver, offers him his greatest chance of self-glorifying action, but at the same time, it presents him with a temptation which can spell his spiritual and moral ruin. As in the case of Charles Gould, it is the silver that precipitates his crisis; it becomes a moral problem for him even before he takes charge of it. When Teresa Viola at her sick bed requests him to fetch her a priest, he refuses, knowing fully well that for her it may mean the significant difference between salvation and
damnation. He leaves the house and rejoins Decoud at the harbour. When he realizes that carrying the silver cargo can prove most risky that he is compelled to distinguish between his interests and those of others, he is overwhelmed by a conviction that he has been betrayed. To be sure, making use of a man's qualities without taking thought for the man himself is, in a sense, to betray him. "The Capataz de Cargadores", writes Conrad, naming a role that no longer quite fits, "on a revulsion of subjectiveness... beheld all his world without faith and courage. He had been betrayed!". As a result, he experiences a bewildering sense "of having inadvertently gone out of his existence". It makes him acutely conscious of his solitude. But his consciousness of having been betrayed proves momentary; it does not signify illumination, a point of departure to lead his own life of integrity and uprightness. After the lighter is smashed by Sotillo's steamer, Nostromo makes his way back to Sulaco. He has failed in his mission, but, with the silver safely landed on the Isabel Island he makes up his mind that "the treasure should not be betrayed". The silver takes possession of him, which leads to his moral corruption. "This process, as in the case of Gould, is seen in terms of a demonic counter-possession, Nostromo's obsessive concern with reputation being transformed into an obsession with the six-month consignment of silver he has hidden on the island". Just as iron corrodes the human flesh, the
the silver corrodes one's moral being. As Nostromo tells Dr. Monygham later, "there is no getting away from a treasure that once fastens upon your mind". In a masterly fashion, Conrad shows how Nostromo's spiritual dissolution, his inability to keep hold of himself, is followed by the corruption of his moral being. As he succumbs to the temptations of the treasure, he lets go of his integrity in more than one sense. Not only does he become spiritually solitary but also becomes morally hollow. He abandons Decoud to his fate. As he recognizes later, "he wondered how Decoud had died. But he knew the part he had played himself. First a woman, then a man abandoned each in their last extremity, for the sake of this accursed treasure. It was paid for by a soul lost and by a vanished life". In this way Nostromo not only experiences loss of self but registers an unparalleled fall. "It is this moment of loss of self and counter-possession that is the turning-point in Nostromo's life - and that gives the lie to his deathbed justification of his theft of the silver: 'How could I give back the treasure with four ingots missing? They would have said I had purloined them'".

Just as Gould is consumed by the mine that takes possession of him and reduces him to a fortified hollowman, so is Nostromo eaten up by the criminality that takes hold of him. As Conrad tells us: "A transgression, a crime, entering a man's existence, eats it up like a malignant
growth, consumes it like a fever.... He felt it himself, and often cursed the silver of San Tomé. His courage, his magnificence, his leisure, his work, everything was as before, only everything was a sham". As Daleski puts it: "like Gould's, furthermore, Nostromo's obsession is seen in terms of a passion that is as insistent in its promptings as the most imperative sexual lust: 'He yearned to clasp, embrace, absorb, subjugate in unquestioned possession this treasure, whose tyranny had weighed upon his mind, his actions, his very sleep'". The silver not only cuts him off from the community, his 'people' but also sinks him in the utter oblivion of isolation and solitude.

His treasure of silver brings the moral darkness Conrad specifically associates with inner corruption. Although silver constitutes a tangible fortune and has come as a stroke of good luck it is destructive of everything of value. It signifies the impending spiritual emptiness leading to his isolation from life-giving forces. The 'incorruptible' Nostromo has become corrupt and the full ugliness of his corruption appears in the needless suffering of Linda Viola to whom he is engaged. This is the measure of his total degradation because of his ugly and insensitive betrayal of a loving girl. The prolongation of his corrupted life as the sole owner of the hidden treasure justifies by the way death is meted out to him.
The activities of his second life are those of a lost and spiritually dead self, because all are based on corruption and malpractices. He becomes rich enough to finance a conspiracy for the invasion of Sulaco. He goes often for trading to the gulf of California. Under guise of all these dark pursuits he makes love to the daughters of his foster parent, Giorgio Viola, but this is a sham love affair. Although he is betrothed to the elder daughter Linda, he begins secretly courting Giselle. Conrad invests this love affair with value through the images of wealth and fertility. Nostromo wishes to keep her beauty in a palace, 'like a jewel in a casket', there is the 'wealth of her gold hair'; her beauty has some of the splendour of sea and sky; her voice recalls 'the song of running water, the twinkling of a silver bell'; he longs to buy a gold crown for her brow, with its soft pure sheen of a priceless pearl and to give her "her own land fertile with vines and corn". However, not even the most vividly felt human passion could break the bonds of Nostromo's enslavement. He rejects real treasure, living and responsive. Conrad shows how selfless love for Mrs. Gould redeems Monygham. Similarly, love could redeem Nostromo if he were sincere and true and faithful to Linda or even to Giselle. His love-affair should be viewed in its proper perspective in order to understand Conrad's intention of suggesting that Nostromo is so deeply possessed by the silver that he does not avail himself of the most vitalizing
life-giving passion. Moser's evaluation that Conrad's handling of love affair between Nostromo and Giselle, "very nearly wrecks the last few chapters" 36 is unacceptable because it is very necessary for the development and denouement of the plot. His love affair serves as an objective co-relative of his inner emptiness, his non being. It results in manoeuvres which put an end to his life. His failure to strike a meaningful love relationship generates in Nostromo an increasing obsession with silver. This in turn sharpens his isolation, and thus accentuates yet further "the concentration of his thought upon the treasure".37 He gradually acquires a new, perverted kind of mentality. As Giselle chides him! "Your love is to me like your treasure to you. It is there, but I can never get enough of it".38 The lure of the treasure, symptomatic of self-destructive and death-inspiring activities isolates Nostromo, empties him of his capacity to respond even to genuine love and thus leads ultimately to his death. Warren puts it meaningfully when he says: "Nostromo too, commits a kind of suicide, he has destroyed the self by which he had lived".39

Nostromo's betrayal of Linda and Giselle suggests that his responses are contaminated at their source. Both girls are passionately in love with him, Linda loves him with uncompromising fidelity that will defy all time and chance. But her moral propensities fill him with dismay. He does not feel strong enough to reject her for fear that her
father will forbid him the island and cut him off from the
treasure. The spontaneous and amoral seductiveness of
Giselle has a strong appeal for his natural self, but he
cannot unreservedly give himself up to her without betraying
the secret of the treasure's hiding place. His love and silver
are located in the same spot. Unable to forego either, he
involves himself in a situation which ends in disaster.
Mistaken for an undesirable suitor of Giselle's (which
infact he is), he is shot down like a thief (which indeed
he is also) by her father and his patron. In the words of
Giorgio Viola (who had taken Nostromo for Ramirez), "like a
thief he came and like a thief he fell". It is an irony of
fate that even at the moment of his death he is unable to
free himself from the clutch of the hidden treasure.
"Mortally wounded, he makes a last attempt to liberate
himself from the curse of the silver. He summons Mrs. Gould
to his bedside - much as Teresa Viola, years ago, had
summoned him to hers - and tries to tell her where the
treasure is concealed. But, in accordance with the laws of
poetic justice, he is, in his turn, left to his fate"....
"No one misses it now. Let it be lost for ever". She
stops Nostromo from speaking and thus prolongs his silence
into eternity. His isolation from the community and the
estate of man comes full circle.

Much more than with Nostromo, silver is the contro-
lling principle and force of Charles Gould's adventure in
working the San Tome mine successfully. His father, he is convinced, was wrong in "wasting his strength and making himself ill by his efforts to get rid of the Concession", little realizing that the germ of his corruption lies in the use of immoral means to achieve his purpose. Conrad describes him in the Author's Note, as "the Idealist-creator of Material Interests". In the novel, each one of the main characters defines himself in relation to the San Tome mine and to the theory of material interests which it represents: "The silver, like a moral touchstone, tests each character, defines his beliefs, insidiously searches out his illusions, reveals his qualities". Gould begins by believing that he is under a moral obligation to make the mine a success because it will bring peace and security to the strife-torn country and lead to its prosperity. He aspires to "let some ray of hope fall through a rift in the appalling darkness of intrigue, bloodshed, and crime that hung over the Queen of Continents". That is, money making is justified, in the context of lawlessness and disorder prevailing in Costaguana for the welfare of the people. Gould is content to idealize his faith in material interests, because he believes that the security that they demand must be shared with the oppressed people:
ness and disorder... because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope.46

Gould is in this sense, an idealist and, like Kurtz, projects himself as an emissary of light in a land of darkness. As Decoud remarks, Charles Gould "cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement".47 Little does Gould realize that the mine will take possession of him and that gradually he will become involved in Costaguana politics which means he will use bribes to perpetuate his hold both on the mine and the government. He becomes a part of corruption which is at the heart of lawlessness of Costaguana. His complete absorption in 'material interests' becomes as potent and elemental evil as the wilderness in the jungles of Africa. No longer the means to a moral end, the mine becomes the end itself. As a consequence, he suffers a loss of self-identity. His moral integrity is in doubt; this inner emptiness leads him away from his wife and from his original dream of bringing peace and prosperity to Costaguana. As Royal Roussel puts it, "Gould's initial sophistication protects him from Lord Jim's sudden and destructive discovery of the darkness beneath his dreams".48 He begins keeping aloof and his wife, Emilia Gould dreads his silent 'fits of abstraction' as much as she is hurt when he refuses to discuss things, for they seem to her "energetic concentration of a will
haunted by a fixed idea. A man haunted by a fixed idea is insane. He is dangerous, even if that idea is an idea of justice." 49 This indicates how his obsession with the mine is consuming his self like a cancerous growth, it makes him feel lonely and ultimately proves self-destructive. In the words of Decoud "it is like madness. It must be - because it's self-destructive". 50 From an ideal conception of political order which was to be implemented through the mine, Gould's vision gradually contracts to an obsession with the security of the mine itself. The slow decay of idealism into irrationality is imaged by Conrad as a process of putrefaction in which spirit is gradually pulverized. Through absorption of his mind by matter Gould "becomes a figure of almost inhuman coldness,... the San Tomé mine is no longer the 'true expression' of Gould's self, but rather its tomb, a tomb in which he remains as fixed and immobile as one of Stein's butterflies". 51

Although Gould does win an early victory, "he does not escape the fundamental process of Conrad's world in which the source of life continually negates and reabsorbs its own creation". 52 The key to his degradation lies in the use of immoral means. From the vantage point of an Englishman's superiority he imagines that the ends justify the means. For instance, though he claims himself to be a costaguanoero, Charles Gould gives no indication of loving
or understanding the needs of the country (in fact it is Mrs. Gould who is genuinely interested in the people's well-being. When the Railway acquires land, Gould merely states that it will no longer be used for public fiestas. When all of Gould's servants take refuge in the patio of his mansion, Gould does not recognize them all, and he is surprised to see children. He remains a foreigner, despite his assertion to the contrary and the fact is that Gould's behaviour is not, as he sees, 'forced upon him'. "His methods themselves perpetuate the 'parody' of civilized institutions of which he is so scornful". To Gould the mine means silver. He does not think of the mine in terms of the people who work there and who live in the three neighbouring villages. Under the impact of the material interests Gould loses his rectitude, he acts for reasons of expediency, and fails to establish better justice or help the people. He becomes inhuman. His ideal proves illusory, it isolates him from the people of Costaguana. He becomes wrapped up in himself. Rightly does Dr. Monygham observe, "No! . . . There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle". The mask of public benefactor falls off and Gould appears in the true light of a foreign exploiter.
More than any other character in the novel, Charles Gould, though he has gained untold treasure, loses real treasure of love and peace of mind. His corruption is only a little less ugly than Nostromo's, but his life has been more empty, savourless and void of meaning. Ironically, it is just after Antonia has assured Gould that it is his character and not his wealth which is the inexhaustible treasure, that Gould muses on the cruel futility of what he has done and realizes he has something of an adventurer's 'easy morality'. Equating worth with success, Gould practises an insidious self-indulgence; he comes to believe, anything is permitted him - thereby "slipping in the mud from a position of moral relativism to one of moral nihilism". Whereas formerly he has used bribery to preserve Gould Concession, he is, in the face of Montero's invasion prepared to blow up the mine rather than surrender it. In this he becomes not unlike the bandit Hernandez. As in the encounter with Brown, the sea pirate, Jim is obliged to acknowledge the evil in him, Gould, likewise, recognizes that for all his pretensions, he is an adventurer in Costaguana;

After all, with his English parentage and English upbringing, he perceived that he was an adventurer in Costaguana,... For all the uprightness of his character, he had something of an adventurer's easy morality which takes count of personal risk in the ethical appraising of his action. He was prepared, if need be, to blow up the whole San Tome mountain sky high out of the territory of the Republic.
This indicates the extent of his moral degeneration. He is concerned with power rather than any principle for bringing justice and order for the people. As Conrad puts it, Gould is possessed "of the spirit of a buccaneer throwing a lighted match into the magazine rather than surrender his snip".57

In other words, Conrad underscores Gould's growing egotism and irresponsibility which lead to his aloofness and isolation. As Daleski remarks, "his moral nihilism not only links up with that of Kurtz, who contemplates the extermination of numberless brutes in Africa, but anticipates that of the Professor (in The Secret Agent), who is ready to blow himself up together with countless others rather than submit".58 For such a man as Gould, the defence of the common decencies of organized society is a mere facade. In political terms, Gould represents the capitalist exploitation of the national wealth of Costaguana. In the words of Conrad, "this weapon of wealth, (is) double-edged with the cupidity and misery of mankind, steeped in all the vices of self-indulgence as in a concoction of poisonous roots, tainting the very cause for which it is drawn..."59 Duplicity and cunning are considered virtues by the present day 'civilizers' of mankind. In the name of bringing light or peace and security to the under-developed regions of the earth, these 'civilizers' fleece the poor countries of their
natural wealth and spread the rein of suffering and disorder. In the process they become dehumanized hollow men - a Kurtz or a Gould.

The character of Charles Gould has its counter-point in the character of his wife Emilia Gould. Whereas, Charles Gould is obsessed by the 'material interests' and success mania, Emilia looks upon possessions as burdensome and meaningless. It is her intense love for Gould which prevents her from breaking free. In fact, it proves to be a wearisome subjection. Mrs. Gould finds her husband to be indifferent to her basic needs. It hurts her when he refuses to communicate with her, with the result that she feels lonely and troubled. Her possessions seem burdensome. The jewels she wears point to the contrast between the glittering appearance of her position and the lonely reality. She knows that her husband, though he is always courteous, even kind, is devoted to a different ideal and lives in a different world. He spends nights on the mountain looking after the mine, indicating that their conjugal life is completely emptied of human worth and affection. Their life is sterile; they have no children. On their return from Europe, when Mrs. Gould longs to have her husband to herself for the evening, she receives a telephone call from Gould saying that he would sleep in the mountain, and "she saw clearly the San Tomé mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds". It was the mine
that was her enemy and she knew it. In her heart of hearts she feels that the mine would drag him to disaster; she feels frustrated. As Decoud writes to his sister, her (Emilia's) "mission is to save him from the effects of that cold and overmastering passion, which she dreads more than if it were an infatuation for another woman". In the absence of love-life her suffering becomes intense and unending, her life is laid waste. At the same time, it results in the real diminution of Gould's personality. His character far from being inexhaustible treasure, shrinks in breadth. By shutting out love for his wife, Gould denies himself the life-giving source of a full and satisfactory existence. "A great emptiness grows within Gould. Pre-eminently, he is 'short-sighted in good'". This results in his moral degeneration and spiritual isolation.

In sharp contrast to her husband, Mrs. Gould has absolute integrity; her own ideal is genuine, for she consistently lives it. We learn about her good works in the service of the natives in an indirect manner from the effect her presence has on others. The Casa Gould takes on the real warmth when we see people expand in her presence. She makes them feel at home - people such as Don Jose, Captain Mitchell, Dr. Mønygham, the young home-sick engineers and many others. She evokes response from people outside her house as well. "Old Giorgio is austere and retiring, his daughters shy, but they love her and respond to her warmth". Even in the
absence of a harmonious conjugal life, when she experiences terribly lonely, she thinks of others. In her own quiet way she finds some consolation in doing social work, that is her way of beating back her loneliness. But she is not a bloodless saint as a suffering woman, she is compassionate to all those who grieve and sorrow. She is sensitive, humane, and gracious. Tenderness comes naturally to her. She feels as much concerned about Antonia as she is about Viola children, she thinks of the woes of the miners, she always thinks about everybody who is poor and miserable. As Dr. Manygham says: "she thinks of that girl... The Viola children... me... the wounded... the miners... everybody who is poor and miserable". But all this compassionate consideration and work for the poor and miserable offer her only a minor compensation. Her life narrows into a ritual of controlled deprivation. Since Mrs. Gould had confused her devotion to Gould with devotion as an ideal, her deepest loneliness comes when she finally realizes they are two separate things. As pointed out by Eloise K. Hay, she resembles Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's novel, To the Light House, "Mrs. Gould seems very much the earth-mother figure, providing relief rather than solution, warmth rather than light".

Her sense of isolation and loneliness is intensified by her realization that the mine will ultimately become a disruptive force in the land. Mrs. Gould is aware of the
corrupting effect of the silver on the emotional and moral lives (including her own) of those people who have no contact with it. When the dying Nostromo wishes to reveal to her the hiding place of the lost silver, she demurs with the passionate words: "Is not it lost and done with? Is not there enough treasure without it to make everybody in the world miserable?" She has realized the incompatibility of moral and material values. Material progress does not always bring about improvement in the quality of life, because real progress is to be measured in terms of moral and spiritual values. Her isolation becomes all-pervasive when she sees her ideal of life, of love, of work degraded by her husband's obsessive pursuits of material interests. As Conrad puts it:

With a prophetic vision she saw herself surviving alone the degradation of her young ideal of life, of love, of work - all alone in the Treasure House of the World. The profound, blind, suffering repression of a painful dream settled on her face with its closed eyes. In the indistinct voice of an unlucky sleeper, lying passive in the grip of a merciless nightmare, she stammered out aimlessly the words - 'material interests'.

Thus alienated, she feels utterly desolate.

As the novel studies the relationship between personal and social motives, between egoism and the urge for the community, it will be proper to analyze the character of Decoud as a parallel to Nostromo. Whereas Nostromo is a
man of action, Decoud is a man of intellect. Usually the man of action and the man of intellect are supposed to lead the country to progress but, as Conrad shows us in the novel, they are no patriots. Nostromo cannot free himself from selfishness and Decoud from his scepticism. Some critics regard him (Decoud) as the 'voice of the truth in the novel'. He analyzes Nostromo as well as himself most accurately when he says, "I am no patriot. I am no more of a patriot than the Capataz of the Sulaco Cargadores, this Genoese who has done such great things for this harbour - this active usher-in of the material implements for our progress,... His work is an exercise of personal powers; his leisure is spent in receiving the marks of extraordinary adulation". Similarly he exposes Charles Gould as the sentimental Englishman who idealizes every simple desire for achievement. He foresees Charles Gould, as Conrad presents him, to be a self-deluded idealist. The narrator describes him, "the imaginative materialist", who plays the role of an ideologue for the material interests as represented by Anglo-American finance Capital. It is he who originally moots the idea of an independent Suleco, to be separated from "The rest of the unquiet body" of Costaguana. The irony lies in this that the intellectual sceptic is motivated to act politically for a very personal reason;

"Separation, of Course", declared Martin. "Yes; separation of the whole Occidental Province from
the rest of the unquiet body. But my true idea, the only one I care for, is not to be separated from Antonia.™

His scepticism becomes as obsessive a passion to Decoud as that of the mine to Charles Gould. But when the test comes be fails, both his scepticism and professed love for Antonia become vulnerable in the face of the contaminating power of the silver. This leads to his loss of self, and results in his utter solitude. He is alienated not only from others but from himself. His sceptical cynicism makes him assume an arrogant intellectual superiority which cuts him off completely from the life-giving contact with the people. His alienation is one of his own making and in the end he pays heavily for it - with his own life. If we use the language of Stein in Lord Jim, Decoud immerses himself in the 'destructive element' of his intellectual arrogance, so that he has no will left to swim out of it.

Lack of faith in himself and others leads but to emptiness in Decoud which makes his survival impossible. It is not merely solitude itself to which Decoud succumbs, it is emptiness within, which proves destructive. Even his illusion of love for Antonia is insufficient to sustain him because he has no faith. Antonia may be the "only being capable of inspiring a sincere passion in the heart of a trifler",™ but it is a passion not strong enough to survive the test of solitude. He had recognized no virtue other
than intelligence and he had erected passions into duties. His declamatory language turns out to be empty eloquence which is shown to be insubstantial and positively pernicious, because with all his passionate eloquence he does not act out his resolve: "Both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith".  

His attitude of indifference and professed love for Antonia are put to test before the temptations of the material interests. Only when he allows himself to be enmeshed with affairs of Costaguana that the self-deceptive and self-corruptive attitude of his life begins to unfold. Once caught up in the web of material interests by non-challantly buying automatic rifles from Europe to the utter astonishment of his sister, he finds it impossible to refuse the war minister's call to join them in the resistance to Montero forces. His theory of human nature that "no one is a patriot for nothing" refutes the possibility of disinterested acts. The crucial questions (in regard to his conduct) that need to be asked are: what is the reason for his committing himself to the Sulaco Party; how does he justify his taking over as the editor of provincial daily published from Sulaco?; how does he argue for his political plan of separating Sulaco from the rest of Costaguana? He justifies himself by an appeal to the principle of love for Antonia: "she will not leave Sulaco for my sake, therefore Sulaco
must leave the rest of the Republic to its fate". He concedes to the idea of removing the silver and agrees to accompany Nostromo in the venture. It means, he fails the test and 'jumps' into a whirlpool of self-destruction, proving that what he had so far been professing did not signify his real identity; that his real identity has been bonded with the putrid silver, the cause of the material interests. A penetrating ironic intelligence and strong passions, when put to the test, are not enough for a man to live by.

It would be true to say that his agreeing to and going on board the wharf with Nostromo signifies an exact equivalent of corruption, that there is "marked discrepancy between what Decoud does and says and is, and what the narrator or omniscient author says about him". And, as the lighter collides with Sotillo's ship, Decoud turns out to be quite a different person; his bondage to silver is complete. All other considerations such as, "the removal of the treasure was a political move", and "it was necessary for several reasons that it should not fall into the hands of Montero", evaporate. Now that he is left alone, he seeks company and security of the silver, which ironically implies that he is completely possessed by the silver. Experiencing "the sensation of the snatching pull, dragging the lighter away to destruction", having "no time to see anything; and following upon the despairing screams (of
Hirsch) for help... he staggered forward with open arms and fell against the pile of treasure boxes. He clung to them instinctively...."78 The implication is, that he falls a prey to the corruptibility of the silver; he is on his way to regression and ruin. It pollutes him morally and saps away his spiritual being.

Alone on the Isababal island, Decoud finds it harder and harder to hold on to his identity. Conrad "brilliantly evokes in a series of nightmarish images the obsessional quality of Decoud's mood".79 The people with whom he has been working seem 'jibbering and obscene spectators, and even Antonia, 'gigantic and lonely like an allegorical statue', seems to look scornfully at him. The universe turns to 'succession of incomprehensible images'. He feels he has become an impalpable being. The solitude is a 'great void', externalizing emptiness within. The silence proves to be most terrible, he begins to feel it as a tense thin cord, from which he is suspended by both hands. Unable to bear his solitude, Decoud wishes he were dead. Evidently Decoud is not fit to grapple with himself. His failure may be, as Guerard puts it, "explicitly attributed to a failure of intellect",80 but it is a failure not of intellect alone. Because he does not act, he begins to entertain a doubt of his own individuality which seems to be engulfed in the indifferent scheme of things. As Conrad meaningfully comments: "In our activity alone do we find the
sustaining illusion of an independent existence as against the whole scheme of things of which we form a helpless part. Decoud lost all belief in the reality of his action past and to come.\textsuperscript{81}

As the days pass by, Decoud sits silently waiting for Nostromo's return; he is overwhelmed by the futility of his life; his personality begins to disintegrate - without the aid of any external beliefs, Decoud's scepticism turns inwards, until his very identity seems submerged in clouds and water; "life on the island becomes a terrifying analogy for life as a whole: isolate, meaningless, demoralizing."\textsuperscript{82} His despair at being isolated from all living beings is the despair of a sceptical mind. It preys on him mercilessly. He wishes to fall and sink into the sea. After some more days, he slowly rows out to see and puts four ignotes of silver in his pockets and shoots himself in the head:

A victim of the disillusioned weariness which is the retribution meted out to intellectual audacity, the brilliant Don Martin Decoud, weighted by the bars of San Tome's silver, disappeared without a trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things.\textsuperscript{83}

It is clear that Conrad quite explicitly repudiates the scepticism that Decoud represents. Lack of faith in oneself and others isolates a man resulting in his disintegration. "In the eye of the immensely indifferent universe, confronted with the undifferentiated emptiness of things,
his self-belief and at last his self crumble under the pressure of an insupportable nothingness".  

Solitude disintegrates his individuality. He slips into a state of soul in which the affectations of irony and scepticism have no place. Conrad makes a meaningful authorial comment: "the truth was that he... died from solitude and want of faith in himself and others". 

In Conrad's metaphysics of individuality and community, self when separated from others loses its identity. Reality consists of natural forces and historical action. "Belief in the reality of one's actions, faith in oneself and others (with its complementary scepticism) are predicated on political engagement in history, for all its brute awesomeness. Without that involvement, the individual returns to primal nothingness". This is in keeping with the Conradian myth that though the intellectual might give a new direction to the whole society, he resists his assimilation of his identity in the community; this often leads to his fall. Decoud's career dramatizes the Conradian view. It is his isolation that brings about his suicide. 

Dr. Monygham serves as a foil to Gould, Nostromo and Decoud. He is a broken and gloomy army doctor who has seen too much of Costaguana and its revolution to have any illusions left. He was tortured by dictator Guzman Bento with the result that he had betrayed many of his friends.
Obviously it was, he realizes, an act of 'bad faith'. Consequently, he acquired a kind of self-contempt. But his cynicism is essentially different from that of Decoud, it comes from his realization that in spite of his own high ideals, he has failed terribly. It is a sort of realistic disillusionment, summed up by his saying to Mrs. Gould: "Really, it is most unreasonable to demand that a man should think of other people so much better than he is able to think of himself".87

Like Decoud, Manygham also becomes at times 'The voice of truth'. It is he who administers a warning that material interests, unless they are guided by moral principle, will bring about the triumph of doom. In this he sounds prophetic. In the words of Conrad what Dr. Monyagham lacks was the polished callousness of men of the world, the callousness from which springs an easy tolerance for oneself and others; the tolerance wide as poles asunder from true sympathy and human compassion. This want of callousness accounted for his sardonic turn of mind and his biting speeches'.88 The doctor insists on speaking the truth as he sees it, even at the cost of hurting people's sentiments. He is frank enough to warn even Mrs. Gould that the mine will weigh heavily upon the people and provoke vengeance and bloodshed.

"I can say what is true", the doctor insisted, obstinately. It'll weigh as heavily, and provoke,
resentment, bloodshed, and vengeance, because the men have grown different. Do you think that now the mine would march upon the town to save their Senor Administrator? Do you think that?"

In saying all this Dr. Monygham shows his sound judgement and his correct assessment of the historical situation that obtains at the time in Costaguana.

In the course of the narration we never learn his christian name, it is a part of his loneliness. That is, before he was appointed the medical pastor at Casa Gould, he had been burdened with a sense of guilt because of his act of betrayal; he lived in a state of poverty and neglect for whom neither the Europeans nor the natives had any feeling of respect or consideration. As he once admits in a conversation with the chief engineer of railway, that he never attaches any spiritual value to his desires or to his opinions or to his actions. Because of the torture, he was physically handicapped, almost crippled. He walked with a limping gait with a bowed head. He was old and ugly-looking. Most people thought he was mad, and some even believed he has a sorcerer. Although, after he is rehabilitated by the Goulds, he regains his self-respect and a sense of his worth; still his ‘fidelity, rectitude and courage’ have in the past been in doubt.

While Nostromo idealized his success, Dr. Monygham idealized his failure. Like Jim he has failed to live up
to his commitment to the human community, but whereas Jim does not accept the weakness exposed by his betrayal, Dr. Monygham bases his future conduct on a severe judgement upon his own guilt. Like Martin Decoud, Monygham has no illusions about himself. In his rejoinder to the engineer-in-chief's assertion that life is meaningful only through the 'spiritual value which every one discovers in his own form of activity', he says: "Self-flattery. Food for that vanity which makes the world go round... I 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'." His subjugation has been so crushing and complete that it has resulted in the nullification of the self. "The nullity issues in a moral nihilism which regards 'truth, honour, self-respect and life itself' as 'matters of little moment'." He suffers a sort of physical paralysis of non-being, for he sits so motionless that the spiders attach their web to his hair, and a spiritual despair that makes him yearn for the release of death. He becomes an outcast spirit, a withered soul, he becomes completely a lonely figure, "hopping amongst the dark bushes like a tall bird with a broken wing".

However, what redeems Dr. Monygham is his selfless devotion to Mrs. Gould. The Doctor is regenerated by following a path which is the reverse of that taken by Gould, Nostromo, and Decoud. And if he is loyal to the mine,
it is because in his heart of hearts he has identified the mine with the admirable woman, Mrs. Gould. He is attracted not only by the delicate charm of Mrs. Gould, but more importantly, by 'her inner worth', "partaking of a gem and a flower, revealed in every attitude of her person".93

Evidently, the nature of his passion is notable. Since his love is unrequited, and since he accepts what is awful, it is essentially self-less and disinterested; it proves an inexhaustible treasure, a life-giving thing which corresponds exactly to what Nostromo has lost. It helps him regain integrity. Whereas the hidden treasure degenerates and corrupts Nostromo, Monygham's secret devotion exalts him and achieves for him spiritual poise. The doctor is even ready to risk his life. In attempting to deceive Sotilo, the doctor with justifiable pride says to Nostromo: "You are not the only one here who can look an ugly death in the face".94 It is because he is possessed by the exaltation of self-sacrifice that Monygham is ready to give "himself up for the lost".95 And such a readiness is quite different from the despair in which Decoud takes his life. Beneath his crabbed exterior and prickly temperament, Dr. Monygham has a loyal and sensitive nature. Perhaps this is Conrad's way of suggesting that love, if loyal and self-sacrificing, is the one sure remedy against loneliness and its attendant sense of despair and nihilism.
Love becomes a regenerating, redeeming force, provided it is genuine and passionate. It nihilates the sense of isolation.
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