

Nostromo Study Guide

Nostromo by Joseph Conrad

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Plot Summary

Nostromo, or *Our Man*, is an Italian sailor whose personal charm and organizational powers make him the cherished pet of the aristocracy of a fictional Central American country called Costaguana. After risking his life repeatedly, Nostromo comes to realize that he is just a pawn in the political and personal struggles of this fictional land. His plans for revenge parallel the so-called democratic movement of the richest province of Costaguana to become an independent nation ruled by the same aristocratic elite that has used Nostromo for their own gain.

Sulaco is a port city in the fictional country of Costaguana. Costaguana has had a turbulent history, including long stretches of tyranny and dictatorship. President Ribiera is elected to a five-year term and secures a lot of foreign investment for the country. Because Sulaco is the industrial center of Costaguana, the aristocracy of the area supports Ribiera and his foreign connections. Some of the most influential supporters are Charles Gould, who owns a silver mine, and Captain Mitchell, who runs the local shipping company.

Captain Mitchell's foreman is called Nostromo, a corruption of the Italian for "Our Man." Captain Mitchell sends him out on personal favors for the aristocracy of the region. He counts on Nostromo's loyalty and treats him like a servant. Nostromo welcomes the attention and thinks that he is an important member of the community. However, his friends, the Violas, feel that the rich are using Nostromo and that he has degraded himself by serving them so loyally.

General Montero overthrows President Ribiera. The town leaders of Sulaco side with Ribiera and organize a military to defend him. They recruit Martin Decoud, a Costaguana native raised in Paris. Martin helps them write a revolutionary newspaper and arm the soldiers with modern weapons. While the town leaders are adamant about supporting Ribiera, Decoud suggests that the Occidental Province declare independence from Costaguana in order to protect its commercial interests.

At the approach of Montero's army, Sulaco is thrown into violent rioting. Mr. Gould is worried about a shipment of silver. Nostromo and Decoud are given the task of taking the silver on a secret boat to keep it out of enemy hands. They leave on this dangerous mission and end up on a small island. Nostromo leaves Decoud on the island with the silver and returns to Sulaco, where everyone thinks that they are dead and that the silver has been lost. Nostromo is now disenchanted with the aristocracy and makes plans to keep the silver. He takes on another dangerous mission to bring information to the silver mine that leads to the eventual independence of the Occidental Province.

The independence movement happens very quickly, and soon the Occidental Province becomes the Occidental Republic with the help of foreign investors and supporters. Nostromo keeps the secret of the hidden silver, slowly transferring it piece by piece. During this time, he also finds love with Giselle Viola, the daughter of his old friend and keeper of the lighthouse on the same island where the silver is hidden. A case of

mistaken identity results in Nostromo's death as he sneaks around the island visiting his new love, Giselle, and his old love, the hidden silver.



Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

Nostromo, or *Our Man*, is an Italian sailor whose personal charm and organizational powers make him the cherished pet of the aristocracy of a fictional Central American country called Costaguana. After risking his life over and over again, Nostromo comes to realize that he is just a pawn in the political and personal struggles of this fictional land. His plans for revenge parallel the so-called democratic movement of the richest province of Costaguana to become an independent nation ruled by the same aristocratic elite that have used Nostromo for their own gain.

The story begins in Sulaco, a seaside port in the fictional country of Costaguana. Sometime in the formation of this city, a group of American men cut their way through the jungle until they discover a hidden silver mine. After sending up smoke to confirm their location, the Americans disappear forever. Natives and sailors in the area tell this history of the place.

A long description of the area points out the town of Sulaco itself, as well as a group of small islands called the Isabels. These islands are uninhabited and remote, even though they are not far from the harbor of Sulaco.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

The disappearance of the American prospectors foreshadows the danger that is always present with regard to the silver mine. The silver mine promise great wealth, but it is continually a source of trouble for the owners. Because the mine represents great wealth, it triggers an inhuman amount of greed and possessiveness that drives people mad. The Gould family, the owners of the mine in the present story, are almost destroyed by their connection to the silver mine, as are many of their friends, including Martin Decoud and Nostromo.

The description of the area shows the reader that the islets offer a perfect hiding place for any person or thing. These descriptions will be crucial in later events as Nostromo chooses to hide the silver there and where he inadvertently leaves Decoud to die.



Part 1, Chapter 2

Part 1, Chapter 2 Summary

The Ocean Steam Navigation Company (OSN) is the only commercial presence in Sulaco. OSN has a good reputation as a merchant company. The Sulaco superintendent, Captain Joseph Mitchell, takes great pride in his company. The orderliness of the company is contrasted with the government of the country of Costaguana. Mitchell proudly recounts the time that he and his crew rescued President Ribiera during his flight from the capital.

Nostromo is introduced during the telling President Ribiera's flight. He is an Italian sailor hired as a foreman of the dockworkers and a general caretaker of the town of Sulaco. He is almost single-handedly responsible for saving Ribiera from the mob. He also shows a strong influence over the disenfranchised locals of mixed blood.

Part 1, Chapter 2 Analysis

Nostromo is a corruption of the Italian for "Our Man." This title is not given to him by his friends or his workers. Instead, in an ironic twist, it is given to him by his English overlords, who take advantage of his loyalty and hard work. In this first glimpse into Nostromo's relationship with the aristocracy of Sulaco, it is shown that he goes to dangerous lengths to impress his superiors and that they see him as their own personal property. Nostromo and his friends do all the work while the aristocracy, including Captain Mitchell, takes all the credit.



Part 1, Chapter 3

Part 1, Chapter 3 Summary

Giorgio Viola, an Italian hotelkeeper in Sulaco, is holed up in his hotel with his family trying to avoid the mob outside. His wife prays that Nostromo will rescue them from the mob. The group waits in frightened anticipation while the mob rages around their home. Giorgio compares this rioting with his own revolutionary experience fighting alongside Garibaldi in Italy. The looting and violence disgust him. They overhear rioters discussing whether they should burn down the hotel with the family still in it.

Part 1, Chapter 3 Analysis

Giorgio Viola presents an interesting contrast in the ongoing revolutionary trials of Costaguana. He had served with Garibaldi in Italy and associated revolution with high ideals of democracy and equality. His allegiance to Garibaldi rested on the idea that there would no longer be kings and queens, but instead a democratic government of the people. The ongoing cycles of revolution in Costaguana are very different from this idea of revolution. In Costaguana, the will to power is more important than the idea of democracy or equality. Giorgio recognizes this and is disappointed that he has become too old and too weak to do anything to change it.

The nation of Costaguana is not real, but the unification movement by Garibaldi is. In putting these two revolutionary models together, Conrad makes an interesting point about Central American politics, an area that is continually referred to in the novel as immature and lacking in sound principles. The character of Giorgio provides a human insight into the difference between the two. His own revolutionary youth focused on poverty toward a great cause, whereas the revolutions in Costaguana focus only on the tyrannical use of power for personal wealth.



Part 1, Chapter 4

Part 1, Chapter 4 Summary

Nostromo arrives at the hotel in time to stop it from being burned by a group of rioters. He rescues the Viola family and then leaves them to attend to other matters.

The Viola family's routine is described in more detail. This Italian family call Nostromo, "Gian Battista" and resent the amount of loyalty he shows to the English merchants in the area. They make fun of the way he allows the English to call him Nostromo. At the same time, all the members of the family greatly admire Nostromo.

Viola's hotel caters to the Italian workers and sailors in the area. He is disappointed to see that they, along with Nostromo, are not interested in pursuing equality and democracy. He recognizes that all they care about is wealth, power, and a good reputation in the community. He compares them to his own revolutionary youth, when he fought with Garibaldi. He accepts his position in the community, and even accepts the friendship of the English merchants, because he has positive memories of them during his many revolutionary campaigns in Italy and South America.

Part 1, Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter sets up the conflicting identities of the title character. His Italian friends call him by his real name, Gian Battista. They do not like how he allows the English merchants to call him by such a subservient name as "Nostromo." They argue that the name is not even truly Italian. Nostromo is torn between his own self-respect and heritage and the intense need he has to have good reputation in the community. He is willing to act as the servant in order to have nice things said about him in the town.

Nostromo's name is an ironic symbol of his attitude toward his own life and the greater world. He is content to be the servant of the aristocracy of Sulaco because it builds up his ego and makes him feel important. His Italian friends, the Viola family, try to convince him to be his own person and not let others control him in this way. The resentment of the Viola family, particularly Giorgio's wife, Teresa, foreshadows the more concrete choices that Nostromo will make regarding his loyalty.



Part 1, Chapter 5

Part 1, Chapter 5 Summary

This chapter recalls a happier occasion in Sulaco. A newly elected President Ribiera has an opening ceremony for the Central Railway Project. The leader of the foreign residents of Sulaco, Mrs. Gould, who is the wife of the owner of the silver mine, recounts the long history of Sulaco and how quiet and peaceful it is.

The chairman of the railway company complains about his problems convincing the local landowners to let him run the railway through their land. He is counting on Ribiera to make sure the deal works out. His surveying trip is assisted by Nostromo, who has been lent by the OSN for the trip. The surveying team is hoping to gain the support of Charles Gould, the owner of the San Tome silver mine, to convince the landowners to agree to his plan.

Part 1, Chapter 5 Analysis

Again, Nostromo is lent, much like an object, to assist in other projects in the region. Nostromo feels no resentment about his position and is proud to be used in this way. He feels important to have been included in these important projects for the region.

This chapter provides the first strong hints of the power to be wielded by the silver mine and whoever controls the mine. Though the railway chairman has a contract with the national government and the support of the president, he cannot get anything accomplished without the specific backing of Charles Gould, the owner of the silver mine.

The silver mine takes on a symbolism of its own. It represents the commercial future of the region and is the only stable element in various revolutions, dictatorships, and attempts at democracy. The silver mine is therefore shown as the backbone of the country and the true source of its power. The silver mine is also shown to be the most important feature in the overall development of the country. These powers, and the influence they have on the owner, Mr. Gould, will continue to be a problem.



Part 1, Chapter 6

Part 1, Chapter 6 Summary

The Gould family has lived in Sulaco for three generations but they have never truly assimilated into the general population. Mrs. Gould, brought by her husband from England, is the height of good society in Sulaco and always entertains foreign visitors. The Gould family has a position comparable with the Spanish aristocracy in the area, strengthened by their participation in the Bolivar revolution.

Charles Gould, though raised in the area, always stands out as a foreigner. His family's silver mine has a long and bloody history, including the deaths of many slave laborers. During one of the many changes in government, the mine was seized and then abandoned. Charles Gould's father is forced to buy it during another change in government. While this event is a disaster for Gould, Sr., the younger Charles Gould is inspired to learn all about mining. On one of his trips to visit European mines, he meets his future wife. The two of them decide to go and make a success out of the mining project. To develop the mine, they partner with the Holroyds, a rich and powerful San Francisco family.

Part 1, Chapter 6 Analysis

The Gould family connection to the silver mine is explained. The troubled history of the mine foreshadows the continual trouble associated with it. Charles Gould's discovery of his connection to the mine comes at a crucial time in his own emotional development. His relationship with his wife is linked to his relationship with the mine, and only one obsession can survive. Mrs. Gould goes to Costaguana thinking that she and her husband will work together to develop the mine. Though this is the case in the beginning, the mine quickly overtakes all of Mr. Gould's time and attention, leaving Mrs. Gould neglected in Sulaco. The silver mine, in this case, takes on a personal quality, as if it were another woman that Mr. Gould is having an affair with. Throughout the novel, Gould's obsession with the silver mine builds until it has the potential to destroy his relationship with his wife and endanger all the other people in the community.

Part 1, Chapter 7

Part 1, Chapter 7 Summary

On arriving in the country, Mrs. Gould accompanies her husband on a tour of the land and comes to know it very well. Gould goes through the motions of bribing local officials in order to get the mine functioning again. In the city of Sulaco, the Goulds and their neighbors, including Don Jose Avellanos, settle in to a quiet routine.

Part 1, Chapter 7 Analysis

The Goulds' initial contact with the mine is very positive. It seems, at this point, that their relationship and the silver mine will be able to coexist. However, this is also the beginning of the separation of the two Goulds, as Mr. Gould splits his time between the mine and the house in Sulaco, and Mrs. Gould develops her social circle in Sulaco. The silver mine is subtly driving them apart, a division that will continue to develop throughout the novel.



Part 1, Chapter 8

Part 1, Chapter 8 Summary

Nostromo is essential to the little port town of Sulaco. He keeps the workers on track so that OSN can keep its perfect record. The townspeople prosper during the reopening and peaceful operation of the silver mine. Don Pepe, a retired soldier, is the on-site manager of the mine. He comes to visit the Goulds often. Rumors about the reopening of the mine have brought many people in search of work and security. Don Pepe learns to know all the people who work and live near the mine.

Mrs. Gould is present as the mine is cleaned and restored. The success of the silver mine gives the Goulds great influence over the area. This encourages the chairman of the railway, Sir John, to seek their help in convincing the local landowners to let him put railroad tracks through their land. Mrs. Gould asks him not to touch the Violas' hotel in his railway construction plans.

Part 1, Chapter 8 Analysis

Nostromo's relationship with his superiors begins to develop with the reopening of the silver mine. The wealth in the area attracts danger, and this is where Nostromo is given a chance to shine. Nostromo takes on a variety of difficult tasks for the rich people in the area and is developing a reputation for loyalty and good work.

The Goulds' social position is assured by the continued output of the silver mine. They become the most influential couple in the area and all development goes through them. In this way, the silver mine begins to take on a symbolism of power and authority. Power of the mine implies power and influence over the region, and over the larger Costaguana.



Part 2, Chapter 1

Part 2, Chapter 1 Summary

Though the government has been overthrown, the commercial activities of the country continue, both at the isolated silver mine and at the harbor of Sulaco. The ongoing government turmoil, including the overthrow of the tyrant Guzman Bento, has shaped many of the political and social leaders of the town, specifically Don Jose Avellanos. Don Jose remembers the torture and humiliation he suffered under Guzman, and has retired to a quiet life in Sulaco with his daughter, Antonia. Don Jose gives his support to Ribiera, who was elected to a five-year term as president. Gould uses his influence from the silver mine to finance Ribiera's campaign and gain international support.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Analysis

Ribiera is the symbol of democratic stability for Costaguana. It is hoped that he will bring both long-term democracy to the country and international financial support. Because Ribiera is closely linked to business interests such as the San Tome silver mine, he is able to get large international loans for development. Similarly, large public works projects such as the railroad depend on Ribiera's international support. The industrialists of Sulaco are counting on Ribiera to assure their political future and encourage additional investment in Costaguana. Ribiera, however, is going to fail as all democratic movements in the area are doomed to fail because of the lack of patience and love of military pageantry in the region. Ribiera's failure is symbolic of the failure of the region to embrace a democratic future. His democratic principles are shown to be weak, especially in the face of a military challenge.



Part 2, Chapter 2

Part 2, Chapter 2 Summary

Problems for Ribiera begin with the War Minister, General Montero. Six months after Ribiera's visit to Sulaco, Montero and his followers revolt in the capital city. At first, the rebellion is suppressed, though Montero himself escapes. He and his followers continue plotting for Ribiera's overthrow. The country is ripped apart in the fighting. The town of Sulaco sides with Ribiera.

Nostromo assists the soldiers who are sailing away to other parts of the country to challenge Montero. Mrs. Gould, Don Jose, and Antonia all attend the ceremony in which the soldiers leave Sulaco to fight under General Barrios. Antonia, because of her foreign education, stands out in the group. She is passionate and intellectual about the conflict along with her friends and family.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Analysis

The weakness of democratic principles under Ribiera is shown in the way he allows the military wing of his party to take too much control. The attempted overthrow shows the division between the democratic government of the elite in the capital and the industrial centers and the poor farmers who live in the interior of the country. The leaders of Sulaco put forth a very strong front and are very comfortable boasting to each other about their power and importance. However, this attitude will quickly turn ironic when they are faced with real danger.



Part 2, Chapter 3

Part 2, Chapter 3 Summary

Martin Decoud is a native of Costaguana though he has spent most of his life in Paris. He has made a life out of his cross-cultural connections, though he, himself, has little or no real influence either in Costaguana or Paris. In Costaguana, the locals think he has high-level connections in European society that he does not really have. He looks down on Costaguana. He writes articles on European society for Costaguana and Costaguanan articles for Europe. One of these articles attracts the attention of the Ribiera party in Sulaco. They ask Decoud to come to Costaguana to accompany a donation of modern rifles to the Ribiera forces.

On arriving in Sulaco with the weapons, Decoud intends to return quickly to Europe. When he meets Antonia Avellanos, his plans change because he falls instantly in love with her. He takes an offer from Don Jose to write a political newspaper in support of Ribiera, and settles down in Sulaco.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Analysis

Martin Decoud does not fit in anywhere. Though he sees himself as European, he is not accepted as such by the Europeans he grew up with. He looks down on Costaguana but sees its usefulness in building his reputation abroad. Martin Decoud and Nostromo are parallel characters in the way that they attempt to build a positive reputation in a society that cares nothing about them while taking advantage of their connections to their own community to add to that reputation. Both men trust that others have their best interests at heart. In addition, both men only pretend to believe in many of the causes promoted by others.



Part 2, Chapter 4

Part 2, Chapter 4 Summary

General Barrios has had a long and distinguished military career. A long time gambler, he is always deeply in debt. He is given a high military post in the Ribiera government. As Barrios and his troops leave to fight, Mrs. Gould invites Decoud into the carriage with her and Antonia. They visit Giorgio at his hotel. Giorgio compares his own experience as a poor revolutionary to the wealth and ceremonies accompanying both sides in this current conflict. Decoud makes several jokes about the war preparations that offend everyone. These jokes bother many people who take the war seriously, including Mrs. Gould and Don Jose.

Part 2, Chapter 4 Analysis

Decoud's presence puts an ironic spin on all the war preparations. While the others treat the revolution like something special, Decoud treats it as one of many revolutions in the region, part of a never-ending cycle of violence. Decoud, as the outsider, does not bring the same feeling to the revolution, to Ribiera, or to any of the other concerns of the long time residents of Sulaco. His attitude angers many because it belittles a cause that they feel is righteous.

Part 2, Chapter 5

Part 2, Chapter 5 Summary

On the way home, Decoud makes several comments about plundering foreign interests in the country, which offends Mrs. Gould. Don Jose tells Decoud to write more articles to encourage supporters in Europe and the US. Decoud's opinion of the revolution has changed now that he is physically living through it. He is concerned that his own political views may have been compromised by his love for Antonia.

While at a party at the Gould house, he tries to talk to her to convince her that he is on her side, though he does not really believe in her cause. He asks her to come away with him to Europe and watch the revolution from a distance. She refuses and is angry that he disagrees so strongly with her father's idealism. She insists that the Ribiera cause will save the country while Decoud feels that it is just one of many civil wars that will never end in Central America. The two continue arguing despite the presence of many Ribiera political supporters.

Antonia withdraws for the night with the other women in the group, and Decoud is left alone with the men. One of the men is Padre Corbelan, who protests all politicians and cares only for the church. The room slowly empties out. The last to go is the fur merchant, Mr. Hirsch, who boasts that Nostromo once saved him from bandits. Mr. Gould is preoccupied, thinking about the effect of the civil war on his business interests.

Part 2, Chapter 5 Analysis

The party at the Gould house brings together all the elements in the civil conflict. On one hand are the idealists, including Don Jose and his daughter, who believe that they are working toward democratic principles. Then there are the pragmatists, such as Gould, who care most about how the conflict will interfere with the commercial interests in the area. Finally, there is Decoud, who stands back from the heated emotions in the group in order to come to a logical conclusion. None of these elements really hears each other or recognizes the real motivations behind their speech. The idealists, for example, are motivated more by the personal glory than the democratic principles, which will be shown later in the quickness of their surrender when they feel their cause is not worth their own personal honor. The pragmatist, Gould, because his motives are based on the silver mine, has the most to lose in letting the scheme fall.



Part 2, Chapter 6

Part 2, Chapter 6 Summary

Charles Gould returns to the silver mine in order to bring a shipment of six months' worth of silver to the harbor. He and his wife have an emotional conversation in which he assures her that he will do whatever is necessary to save the mine.

Decoud and Mrs. Gould discuss a telegraph that Decoud has just received about a defeat of Ribiera forces some weeks earlier. Decoud tells her about his plans for the separation of Occidental Province from Costaguana. He argues that his love for Antonia keeps him in Sulaco and that Sulaco must become independent. Decoud asks for Gould's support because of the silver mine and his overall influence in the area. He thinks they can also recruit Hernandez, a well-known bandit, to help. He also reassures Mrs. Gould that he has the friendship of Nostromo, who has vowed to be on their side.

Decoud asks Mrs. Gould to talk to her husband about the separation plan. She considers it with a deep foreboding about her husband and his single-mindedness about the silver mine.

Part 2, Chapter 6 Analysis

Decoud's plan for independence for the wealthiest province of Costaguana reflects his belief that the constant revolutions in the region will never end. The connection between this plan and the silver mine is clear to Mrs. Gould, even though Decoud does not mention it. Mrs. Gould is worried about her husband, and knows that he does not really care about the democratic principles of Ribiera, but is only looking for political stability for his silver mine. This is one of the first points in the story where Mrs. Gould directly confronts her husband's obsession with the silver mine and has a premonition that it will destroy them all.

Part 2, Chapter 7

Part 2, Chapter 7 Summary

Decoud writes his sister in Paris about his independence plans, recounting the arrival of Ribiera and his safe passage out of Sulaco along with the women and children of the wealthy families of Sulaco. He explains the actions that have followed the rioting in Sulaco, mentioning Nostromo for his assistance in saving Ribiera and trying to bring order to the town. Various factions try to gain control over the town.

Decoud goes to Giorgio's hotel. He describes tending to the wounded alongside Mrs. Gould. Decoud attends a meeting of the town leaders where he begs them not to surrender. He leaves them as they continue their plans to surrender. He tells Antonia what happened in the meeting. They both realize that her father is not well and will soon die. Decoud, Antonia, and the Goulds meet to discuss the situation. Decoud tries to convince Gould to get financial support from his partner, Holyrod.

Decoud makes plans to flee from Sulaco with the latest shipment of silver in order to protect it from the advancing soldiers in Pedro Montero's army. Nostromo is lent to pilot the boat. While on the boat, Nostromo explains how his one goal in life is to have a good reputation. Before they leave for the harbor, they stop in at the Viola hotel, where Mrs. Gould is attending to Mrs. Viola, who is dying. On her deathbed, Mrs. Viola tells Nostromo that he lets other people control him because he wants their praise even if they do not really care about him. She has hopes that Nostromo will marry her daughter. She asks him to get a priest to give her last rites before she dies, but he says that he cannot because he has to take care of the silver first. She warns him that his praise seeking will hurt him in the future.

Decoud and Nostromo take the silver out on the boat. Alone on the boat, Nostromo confesses that he refused to get a priest for Mrs. Viola. The two sail out toward the Isabel islets. They discover that they have a stowaway - the fur merchant, Mr. Hirsch.

Part 2, Chapter 7 Analysis

Nostromo comes to the defining moment of his life. Mrs. Viola confronts him about where his real loyalty lies. Mrs. Viola asks him to do her a personal favor, but he abandons her to pursue his love of fame. He lets her die without religious absolution because he wants to live up to his reputation for loyalty with the aristocracy of Sulaco.

The boat ride with the silver is an extremely dangerous undertaking. Nostromo feels that this adventure will earn him even higher praise from his superiors and he is willing to risk his life in order to do so. Decoud's motivations are more personal, including his love for Antonia.



Part 2, Chapter 8

Part 2, Chapter 8 Summary

Mr. Hirsch explains how he ended up on the boat. He has fled from the rioting in town and is unable to travel to his home until the violence stops. Decoud and Nostromo worry that he will be a burden to them on their mission. Nostromo hears the sound of the steamship that is transporting Colonel Sotillo's troops from Esmeralda. Decoud thinks about the town leaders and is disappointed because he is sure that they will surrender.

Nostromo explains that he had argued against Decoud's presence on the boat, but that the Goulds insisted, despite the danger of the mission. Nostromo tells Decoud that he knows how to sink the boat if they need to, in order to keep the silver out of the hands of the soldiers.

Sotillo, the commander of the steamship, is headed for Sulaco with a plan to marry Antonia and gain control of the silver in the Custom House. He is a recent convert to Montero and needs the silver to prove his loyalty to him. The owner of the boat shuts off the engine momentarily to protest the violent drinking of the soldiers on board. This moment allows Nostromo and Decoud to detect the boat.

Sotillo's boat collides with Nostromo's boat. Because Sotillo's boat is so much bigger, he feels no effects of the collision. Nostromo's boat, because it is smaller, takes the violence of the crash. During the collision, the anchor of Sotillo's ship swings over Nostromo's boat and Hirsch grabs on to it. Hirsch is pulled off of Nostromo's boat and onto Sotillo's.

Nostromo and Decoud continue to the islets. Nostromo explains how he uses his social position to learn anything. Decoud will stay on the islet with the silver while Nostromo returns to Sulaco. Nostromo leaves a small lifeboat with Decoud and sinks the main boat. He swims the long distance back to Sulaco.

Part 2, Chapter 8 Analysis

The two sides meet for the first time without knowing it in the waters off the coast of Sulaco. Though they are on opposite sides, both Sotillo and Nostromo are doing the same thing. The parallel between the two men extends to the lengths they are willing to go to preserve their positive public reputations. Sotillo risks his life to get the first chance at the silver in Sulaco in order to prove his loyalty to General Montero. Nostromo is also willing to risk his life in order to prove his loyalty to his superiors in Sulaco.

Part 3, Chapter 1

Part 3, Chapter 1 Summary

The town leaders of Sulaco disband as they wait for General Montero's soldiers to arrive. The townspeople are cleaning up from the rioting, including the chief engineer of the railway, who is trying to show his political neutrality. The engineer and the doctor discuss the prospects for the future of the area, including their guesses for what Gould will do to protect the silver mine. They also discuss the relative merits of Nostromo and whether he is trustworthy with the silver. The doctor explains that Nostromo is not wealthy and only has his good reputation.

Part 3, Chapter 1 Analysis

The town leaders of Sulaco have shown that their revolutionary sentiments were not trustworthy. When the Monteros were fighting in the capital and countryside, the town leaders were boasting about their democratic principles and bravery. Now that they know that Montero is close, the town leaders are afraid and easily abandon their democratic principles to save their own skins. Everyone in Sulaco is working to cover up the revolutionary sentiments in order to avoid punishment under the Montero regime.



Part 3, Chapter 2

Part 3, Chapter 2 Summary

Captain Mitchell watches Sotillo's ship dock in Sulaco. The soldiers capture the Captain. Sotillo takes over the Custom House and has the Captain brought to him to find out more information about the missing silver. The Captain is very angry and Sotillo orders him to be bound. Mitchell refuses to give him any more information about the silver. He sees Giorgio, Dr. Monygham, and the chief engineer are also prisoners. The four men are put together in a dark room. Dr. Monygham explains how the three men were taken prisoner together at Giorgio's hotel. They report that they had seen Hirsch, who is telling everyone that Nostromo and Decoud have drowned.

Part 3, Chapter 2 Analysis

Sotillo's takeover of Sulaco is quick and brutal. He wants to show the town leaders that he is in control now and that they must obey him. His disappointment over the silver is just beginning. His focus on the silver will grow throughout the remainder of the novel until it consumes him in obsession. The town leaders, on the other hand, are more worried about their wounded pride than anything else. Captain Mitchell, in particular, makes many grand shows about how he expects to be treated, seemingly unconcerned that he might be killed or otherwise punished.



Part 3, Chapter 3

Part 3, Chapter 3 Summary

Sotillo, in trying to locate the missing silver, is convinced by Dr. Monygham that it has been buried somewhere. Meanwhile, events seen through the eyes of other characters show that the bandit Hernandez plans to take over the area as a general. Gould and Antonia discuss this situation because they do not want to show how much they care about their personal stake. Antonia is concerned with the fate of Decoud while Gould is worried about the silver.

Part 3, Chapter 3 Analysis

The silver continues to play a huge role in corrupting those who search for it. Sotillo's obsession with the silver is new while Mr. Gould's obsession is old. The need for the silver, and the power it represents, overrides their other personal concerns. These initial concerns foreshadow the madness that the silver will drive both of them to.



Part 3, Chapter 4

Part 3, Chapter 4 Summary

Gould returns to town and sees the masses of wounded people there. He regrets letting his obsession with the silver mine make him get involved in politics and vows to destroy the mine before letting it be taken from him. He returns home to find all the town leaders ready to surrender. They ask him to lead the delegation to welcome the conquering general.

Dr. Monygham visits Gould in order to explain the events of the previous night. As he waits, he remembers that his own role in the tyranny of Guzman Bento, including torture. He recalls that his survival was a stroke of luck due to the sudden death of the dictator. Dr. Monygham tells the Goulds that Hirsch claims Nostromo and Decoud are dead. Everyone believes it. Gould considers how to get his American investors to help him with the independence movement. Mrs. Gould demands that Antonia not be told of Decoud's death out of fear that she might kill herself. The massive ringing of church bells welcoming Pedro Montero to the city interrupts the group.

Part 3, Chapter 4 Analysis

The town leaders are ready to give up the plan to protect themselves. Gould, however, is still motivated by the silver mine and is determined to do whatever he can to protect it. He begins to consider the independence plan proposed by Decoud as his only option at this point. He recognizes that the other town leaders are too afraid to go along with him right now and that he requires outside help.

The news of Nostromo and Decoud's supposed deaths show how their peers view them. Decoud is judged almost entirely in relation to Antonia, whereas Nostromo is dismissed as a lost servant who is not of much concern. This attitude foreshadows the feelings that Nostromo will feel on his return when he learns his real worth.

Part 3, Chapter 5

Part 3, Chapter 5 Summary

Pedro Montero's ragged army arrives in town, carrying the spoils of looting along the way. Pedro's career, ranging from a poor childhood to a lazy and uneducated adulthood, prepares the reader for how he will treat Sulaco. Montero's immature fantasies make him wish to establish a decadent royal court. Pedro is disappointed to see that all the expensive homes of Sulaco have been destroyed in the rioting. His army followers give long speeches about the great dignity and humanity of Pedro until everyone in the town falls asleep in the hot afternoon sun.

Part 3, Chapter 5 Analysis

Pedro's character is shown to be educated by low class literature and dreams of wealth and glory. Inside these dreams is a very weak man, similar to the town leaders, who is very brave when he feels in control but quick to give up when hard times come. It is ironic to compare the two sides of the revolutionary question. Pedro is from the lower class and uneducated, but he speaks the same empty promises and threats as the town leaders did. These two sides show the never-ending nature of civil war and revolution in the region, where no side is better than the other or has the needs of the common people in mind. Instead, the revolutionary cycles are shown to be immature and boastful on both sides.



Part 3, Chapter 6

Part 3, Chapter 6 Summary

Don Pepe, the manager of the silver mine, receives a letter from Pedro Montero asking him to turn over the silver mine to the new government. Don Pepe believes that the mine itself can be defended against attack but that the surrounding villages might be starved or burned by the invading army. Don Pepe and Mr. Gould have a long-standing plan for the possibility of blowing up the mine to keep it out of enemy hands. Don Pepe thinks that the people around the mine should form a military force and march against Montero. The only problem is choosing the right person to defend the mine so that Don Pepe can lead his troops to battle.

Part 3, Chapter 6 Analysis

Don Pepe is one of the few men prepared to back up his words with actions. Unlike the other notable male figures in the novel, Don Pepe refuses to surrender to the Monteros and is ready to die and destroy everything in order to defeat them. Don Pepe is a parallel to Nostromo, as another common man willing to sacrifice himself to the needs of his social superiors.

Part 3, Chapter 7

Part 3, Chapter 7 Summary

Gould threatens Pedro that the mine and all the future wealth it contains will be destroyed before it is turned over to him. Pedro does not want anything to happen to the mine and tries to convince Gould to go along with the Montero empire-building scheme. He says that imperial-democracy in the traditional of Napoleon is the only way to become a world power. He offers Gould a royal title for his allegiance. After the meeting, the group of town leaders gives official administrative power to Pedro. Gould meets with Dr. Monygham to discuss strategy for protecting the mine. Meanwhile, Nostromo wakes from an exhausted sleep on the coast of Sulaco, after having made the near impossible swim from the Isabel islets.

Part 3, Chapter 7 Analysis

The silver mine is the symbol of power for Costaguana. Pedro is careful not to damage anything relating to the mine. In this way, Gould is able to hold on to some of his power and influence. Pedro's immature royalist fantasies are not interesting to Gould, who is more interested in the possession of the mine, not simply the influence it provides.

Part 3, Chapter 8

Part 3, Chapter 8 Summary

Upon waking, Nostromo curses his fate, and particularly, his loyalty to an upper class that cares nothing for him. He regrets that he has worked so hard for those who could never appreciate him and who take his services for granted. Nostromo approaches the town cautiously, as he is unarmed and clothed in rags. He enters the damaged Custom House and happens to meet Dr. Monygham. Nostromo thinks that there is someone in the building, and the two men discover Hirsch's dead body in one of the rooms. Nostromo is resentful that Dr. Monygham is not concerned about the silver, for which Nostromo almost died. Dr. Monygham counts on Nostromo as a faithful servant to be used to save the silver mine. Nostromo lets Dr. Monygham continue believing that Decoud is dead and the silver is lost. Nostromo is deeply angry to see that no one thought of him or mourned his death. Dr. Monygham reveals his plans to keep Sotillo hunting for treasure. He also wonders why Hirsch was killed.

Part 3, Chapter 8 Analysis

Nostromo is shocked by what he learns. He had put his life on the line for the silver and learns that his superiors did not really care about what happened to it. He is resentful of the possessive attitude of the doctor, who assumes that he will continue to risk his life for the whims of the aristocracy. One ironic twist is Dr. Monygham's assumption that Decoud is dead and the silver is lost despite having learned that Nostromo is alive. Nostromo does not have to tell this lie because Dr. Monygham's own perspective provides it. Nostromo simply goes along with this story, and begins to see how he can take revenge on the rich people who took his life so cheaply.



Part 3, Chapter 9

Part 3, Chapter 9 Summary

Sotillo's goals are disappointed. He has not conquered the city or secured the silver. Pedro and his followers want to take over the harbor and want to meet privately with Sotillo. Sotillo tries to avoid surrender while still searching for the silver. He pretends to be sick and sends for Dr. Monygham in order to learn more about where the silver may be hidden.

Sotillo arranges a meeting with the doctor at the Custom House. He also turns to Hirsch in search of more information. He orders Hirsch tortured and Hirsch's screams are heard throughout the building. In a burst of anger, Sotillo shoots and kills Hirsch. He lies to his troops, telling them that Hirsch made a full confession. The soldiers and Sotillo leave. The soldiers think that Sotillo is taking them to the silver.

Hirsch's body is left in the Custom House where Nostromo and Dr. Monygham find him. The doctor suggests that Nostromo hide out at Giorgio Viola's hotel. Nostromo argues that the doctor might expose him. Nostromo is angry and does not want to be used by the rich anymore. Nostromo convinces the doctor to tell Sotillo that the silver has been sunk near the coast where divers can retrieve it.

Nostromo goes to hide out at the hotel. Giorgio is overcome with grief at his wife's death. As he gets Nostromo something to eat, he discusses his intentions to seek refuge for himself and his daughters with the Goulds.

Part 3, Chapter 9 Analysis

Nostromo is beginning to show how he has changed his attitude toward his life. His conversation with the doctor shows a new distrust, particularly when Nostromo suggests that the doctor might betray him for petty reasons. The silver remains a strong symbol of wealth and power, though it has switched hands. Nostromo realizes that this symbol is only publicly appropriate for the established aristocracy and that if he wants to profit from it he must keep it a secret.



Part 3, Chapter 10

Part 3, Chapter 10 Summary

Several years in the future, Captain Mitchell is an unofficial tour guide to Sulaco. The events of the story are told in retrospect. In the many tours of Sulaco that Captain Mitchell gives in the future, he mentions Nostromo's ride to the silver mine that leads to the independence of the Occidental Republic. He recounts the battle between Pedro's troops and General Barrios. He shows the monument erected by Antonia to Decoud. Mitchell describes Nostromo's daring adventure to secure independence for the province.

The narrative then details Nostromo's discovery that Decoud has disappeared from the islet along with some of the silver. This discovery is explained in Decoud's experience. Decoud remains alone on the islet for weeks, losing all motivation to do anything. Finally, he takes some of the silver and boards the little lifeboat. Nostromo assumes that Decoud has died and that the secret of the silver is safe.

Part 3, Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter 10 dips in and out of chronological time. The style of the chapter confuses the reader throughout because it shifts character perspective many times in addition to shifting through several years of time. Nostromo's defining adventure is not described through his own perspective, but instead through the very aristocracy that he has rejected.

At the same time, Decoud's true character is shown in his island inactivity. Decoud is truly urban, and is not able to function away from people. His social personality falls apart within days on the island. He is unable to take care of his most basic needs, including feeding himself.



Part 3, Chapter 11

Part 3, Chapter 11 Summary

Sulaco grows rich from the silver mine and establishes international ties with the US and Europe. The Goulds return from a long diplomatic trip abroad. Mrs. Gould and Dr. Monygham discuss Nostromo and his marriage plans with Linda, Giorgio's daughter. Nostromo has been out sailing for many months in order to have a cover story for his new wealth from the hidden silver. He also arranged for Giorgio and his family to take possession of a lighthouse built on one of the Isabel islets. The younger daughter Giselle has a romantic crush on Ramirez, the young man who took over Nostromo's old job as foreman at OSN. Because Ramirez goes to the islet to court Giselle, he sees Nostromo there at night.

Part 3, Chapter 11 Analysis

Nostromo's plan develops without arousing suspicion from the people of Sulaco. Because the aristocracy of the community thinks of him as a servant, they do not suspect that he has kept the silver hidden. The attitude of the higher class enables Nostromo to go through with all of his plans because they do not think he is important enough to deceive them.

While the construction of the lighthouse is a surprise for him, Nostromo shows a high level of craftiness in making sure that the Viola family is in charge of it. The rumors swirling about both of the Viola daughters foreshadow many future misunderstandings regarding their love lives, particularly in relation to Nostromo.



Part 3, Chapter 12

Part 3, Chapter 12 Summary

Over time, Nostromo slowly moves the silver in secret. While everyone assumes that Nostromo is courting Linda, he is actually attracted to Giselle because he feels she is more trusting and would not discover his secret. He has to travel far to sell the silver so he is often away from Sulaco. By this time, he is known as Captain Fidanza. He continues to have a strong reputation in the community that is enhanced by his new wealth. A misunderstanding leads him to propose to Linda when he really prefers Giselle. He confesses his love to Giselle. To convince her that they cannot run away together, he tells her about the hidden silver. She joins in the secret and agrees to wait for him to move all the silver before they can get married.

Part 3, Chapter 12 Analysis

The hidden silver has taken on the same symbolic meaning for Nostromo as it previously did for Mr. Gould. The silver has become an obsession for Nostromo, leading him to risk everything in order to protect it. His relationship with Giselle is hampered by the secret of the silver and he is willing to put their relationship on hold while he takes care of the silver. The silver, and the greed and obsession that it represents, threatens to ruin the other parts of his life.

Part 3, Chapter 13

Part 3, Chapter 13 Summary

Nostromo assures Linda that he wants to marry her while at the same time assuring Giselle that he loves her. Linda realizes that Nostromo and Giselle are together. One night, Linda is in the lighthouse and hears a gunshot. She runs to the house to discover that her father has shot Nostromo after mistaking him for Ramirez, one of the suitors of Giselle. Nostromo is near death when he is transported to the mainland. He requests a meeting with Mrs. Gould. He confesses his plans to run away with Giselle. He wants to tell her about the silver but she does not want to know about it. Nostromo dies and the doctor returns to the island to tell the Viola family.

Part 3, Chapter 13 Analysis

The hidden silver has finally destroyed Nostromo. It is especially ironic given how close he was to creating a better life for himself. Mrs. Gould recognizes the evil power of the silver and does not want to know anything about it out of fear that her husband will be driven to even further obsession. In the end, the silver remains hidden and forgotten, despite all the pain it caused to everyone who came in contact with it.



Characters

Nostromo

This Italian sailor has settled in Sulaco on the advice of his friend, Giorgio Viola. He is known among the Italian community as Gian Battista, but is known among the English merchants and sailors as Nostromo, a corruption of the Italian word for "Our Man." His official position is the Capataz de Cargadores, or the foreman of the dockworkers, with the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company. Through this position, he is often doing dangerous favors for the aristocracy of the area.

Nostromo cares only for his reputation in the community and he is very proud that the elite of the area trusts him. He chooses this reputation above all his other loyalties, including those to his close friends, as well as his personal interests. His friends try to warn him about taking this path, but he disregards their warnings.

One dangerous mission he is given is to take a shipload of silver out of the harbor. On returning from this mission, Nostromo realizes how cheaply the elite hold his life and loyalty. Nostromo goes on another risky mission to protect the silver mine in the event that Sulaco declare itself independent. During this time, Nostromo reconsiders his place in the community and sees his true position. He is angry with the aristocrats who have played with his life. His revenge plans involve stealing the silver for himself. These plans are complicated by his romantic feelings for Giselle Viola, and are ended when he dies because of a case of mistaken identity.

Captain Joseph Mitchell

Captain Mitchell runs the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company's operations in Sulaco. He takes great pride in his work and in the reputation of his company. He hires Nostromo to be his foreman and lends him to his rich clients to perform various dangerous tasks. The most important thing for him is his own honor, and he is quick to take offense when he feels he has been dishonored. He takes the credit for all of Nostromo's actions and gives very little thought to Nostromo's safety.

During the dangerous times of the revolution, Mitchell is imprisoned by Sotillo and fears he will be punished for aiding in the removal of the silver. After the dangerous stage is passed, however, Mitchell gets great pleasure in showing tourists around the town and making a big show of his sacrifices and bravery during the revolution. Mitchell never truly understands Nostromo or what has happened to him. He settled into a privileged retirement in Sulaco.



President Ribiera

President Ribiera comes to power during a brief peaceful and idealistic moment of Costaguana history. He follows a line of evil tyrants and is expected to bring democracy to this troubled country. He is highly respected abroad and manages to win a lot of overseas investment in his country. His strongest supporter is Charles Gould, the owner of the silver mine, who hopes that his leadership will protect Gould's commercial interests in the area.

Ribiera is overthrown by his military leader, General Montero, and flees to safety in Sulaco. The aristocracy of Sulaco protect him and help him escape from the country. These same town leaders design a political campaign against General Montero using the overseas donations of money and weapons. After several changes in their political position, including welcoming the Montero regime, they abandon the Ribiera cause in favor of independence for the province.

Giorgio Viola

Giorgio Viola spent his youth fighting with Garibaldi for the unification of Italy. He holds Garibaldi in high esteem and worships him and the ideals of democracy and equality. After Garibaldi is defeated in Italy, Giorgio is exiled in Central America. After traveling throughout the region, Giorgio and his family settle in Sulaco and open a hotel that caters to the Italian workmen in the area.

Giorgio is broken by the emotional torment of his wife's death during the revolution, and goes to raise his two daughters alone at the lighthouse that is built on one of the Isabel islets. His friend, Nostromo, visits him there often. Giorgio thinks that Nostromo will marry his daughter, Linda, but actually, Nostromo begins a relationship with Giselle. Giorgio is worried that Giselle has too many admirers in the town. One night, he mistakenly shoots Nostromo, thinking it is one of Giselle's other admirers sneaking around the house.

Charles Gould

Charles Gould is born and raised in Costaguana, the son of an English family that has lived in the area for generations. Though Gould was raised in Costaguana, all of his habits and personality traits are solidly English and he is always considered a foreigner. Gould leaves Costaguana to study in England, and meets his future wife while traveling in Europe.

Gould's father was forced by one of the Costaguana governments to buy an inactive silver mine. The transaction breaks him, but his son is determined to make a success of the mine. Gould spends his youth traveling Europe, learning about mines in order to open up the Costaguana silver mine when he returns home. He brings his new bride



with him, and they are both excited about the prospects of opening the silver mine and having it earn them a lot of money.

The silver mine becomes an obsession for Gould. He thinks of nothing but the mine, leading him to neglect his wife and make poor decisions. He supports President Ribiera because he feels it will be good for the mine. This puts him, his wife, and their friends in jeopardy when Ribiera is overthrown. Finally, he takes on the idea of gaining independence for the province and uses his silver mine to make international contacts. Eventually, he leads an independent republic that centers exclusively on his silver mine.

Mrs. Gould

Mrs. Gould meets her husband while traveling in Italy. She is interested in his dreams of reopening the silver mine. She marries him and goes with him to Costaguana. After arriving, she settles into a quiet social life. She realizes that the silver mine has pulled her husband away from her, but tries to make the best of it.

Don Jose Avellanos

Don Jose lives with his daughter, Antonia. They are one of the most prominent families in Sulaco. When Ribiera loses power, Don Jose helps organize the town's military resistance to General Montero. His bravery is short lived, however, and he becomes ready to surrender to Montero. During the night when Sotillo and Pedro Montero arrive in Sulaco, Don Jose dies.

Guzman Bento

Guzman Bento is the tyrant who rules Costaguana in the years before Ribiera or Montero rise to power. Guzman's time is the darkest in Costaguana history, and many people were tortured or killed during his paranoid reign of terror. Dr. Monygham is one of many who was tortured and broken during Guzman's time in power.

General Montero

General Montero worked with President Ribiera to secure his power of Costaguana. Unlike Ribiera, though, General Montero is not of the upper class. He is of the working class and uses his provincial ties to create a group of military and peasant supporters to overthrow Ribiera. His brother, Pedro, returns from Europe to help him organize the takeover. Eventually he is defeated by the Sulaco soldiers, and is forced to grant them independence.



Pedro Montero

Nicknamed Pedrito in the popular press, Pedro Montero is the brother of General Montero, and has returned from Europe to help his brother take over Costaguana. Pedro is uneducated and fueled by a love of Napoleonic adventure stories. He is interested in taking all the wealth and power of Sulaco and becoming rich and powerful in the region.

Antonia Avellanos

Antonia Avellanos comes to live with her father in Sulaco after being educated in Europe. Her European education has given her the intellectual skills to speak with many of the revolutionary men who surround her father. Her education sets her apart from the other girls in Sulaco and she is often ridiculed for taking too large a part in the affairs of men. She meets Martin Decoud and falls in love with him despite his superficial appearance. She believes in his plan for independence for the Province. After his death, she erects a statue in his honor but does not kill herself from grief, as her friends thought she might.

Martin Decoud

Martin Decoud is born in Costaguana but spends most of his life in Paris. He considers himself a European, but uses his connections to Costaguana to make a career as a journalist. One of his articles in Paris catches the attention of the aristocracy in Sulaco, who ask him to come and write a revolutionary newspaper for them. Upon his arrival, he falls in love with Antonia. He does not believe in the cause, but continues to stay because of Antonia. Eventually he comes up with the idea of complete independence for the province. He works with the town leaders to develop this plan. When he leaves to take this message to Europe with Nostromo and the silver, the plan falls apart.

He suffers a great deal during his time with Nostromo on the boat. When they make land in the islets, he stays behind with the silver while Nostromo goes back to Sulaco. The loneliness of the islet attacks Decoud's mind and he is unable to take care of himself. Finally, one day he takes a few of the ingots of silver and attempts to leave the island by himself. No one ever sees him again, and it is assumed that he died while trying to leave the island alone. Antonia erects a statute of him in the town square after his death.

Mr. Hirsch

Mr. Hirsch is a fur trader who has come to Sulaco to work out a deal with Mr. Gould. On his way out of town, he is delayed by the rioting. He goes back into town and hides in the boat that Nostromo takes to hide the silver. Nostromo and Decoud discover him in the boat and are not sure what to do with him. When Sotillo's boat passes by, Hirsch



grabs hold of the anchor and is swung onto that ship. He assumes that Nostromo and Decoud have died and tells this to Sotillo. Sotillo is driven insane looking for the silver and tortures and kills Hirsch for not telling him where the silver is.

Colonel Sotillo

Colonel Sotillo heads a military command in Esmeralda, a city up the coast from Sulaco. During the initial revolution against General Montero, Sotillo supported the rebels in Sulaco. He quickly feels that he chose the wrong side. He decides to sail to Sulaco and take possession of the Custom House, where he thinks the silver is kept. Unknown to him, his ship passes Nostromo and Decoud in the water, and he arrives in town thinking that Nostromo and Decoud are dead.

He learns that the silver was moved from the Custom House and is very anxious for its recovery. He worries that without the silver he will not have any bargaining power when Pedro Montero arrives to take over the town. He interrogates all the local officials. Dr. Monygham convinces him that he can give him clues about the silver. Sotillo is not sure what to do. He orders his men to torture Mr. Hirsch to discover where the silver is. In a moment of anger, he shoots Hirsch and has to lie to his soldiers that Hirsch revealed where the silver was. He then goes mad in his search for the silver in the sea.

Dr. Monygham

Dr. Monygham has lived in Costaguana for a long time. During the rule of Guzman Bento, he occupied a high position. Later during the same regime, he was tortured and betrayed many friends. After Guzman is overthrown, Dr. Monygham is rejected by Costaguana society until Mrs. Gould feels sorry for him and restores him to a high social position. No one really likes or trusts him except for Mrs. Gould. He is guilty over what he did under Guzman and can never overcome this feeling. He tries to buy Sulaco some time by tricking Sotillo into searching for the silver in the sea. Later, he gets the top medical position in the new independent province.

Don Pepe

Don Pepe is a retired soldier who is put in charge of the San Tome silver mine. After the Ribiera revolution fails, Don Pepe is ready to blow up the mine rather than let them fall in Montero's hands.

Linda Viola

Linda Viola is the older daughter of Giorgio Viola. She is smarter and more reliable than her sister Giselle. She wants to marry Nostromo, but he falls in love with her sister instead.



Giselle Viola

Giselle Viola is the younger daughter of Giorgio Viola. She is prettier and has more male admirers than her sister. She and Nostromo plan to marry each other. However, one night when he goes to visit her secretly, her father kills Nostromo.



Objects/Places

Costaguana

Costaguana is a fictional Central American country going through a series of governmental changes. The silver mine at San Tome is the only commercial interest in the country. The owners and the local aristocracy declare independence for their province, the Occidental (Western) province.

Sulaco

Sulaco is a port city in the fictional country of Costaguana where the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company has its regional office.

The San Tome Mines

The San Tome mine controls the region, though only modern mining techniques seem to be able to bring the silver out of the mine. Without foreign investors, the mine sits abandoned. Charles Gould grows up with the obsession of vindicating his father by making a success of the mine. This obsession with the mine separates him from his wife and friends and eventually leads him to support independence.

Azuera

Azuera is the name of the spot in the mountains where the original American prospectors find silver near Sulaco and then disappear. It represents mystery and obsessive greed.

The Isabels

The Isabels are a series of three small islands off the coast of Sulaco. They are both close enough to be easily accessed from Sulaco, but are generally uninhabitable. Eventually, the Violas operate a lighthouse on one of the islands.

The Oceanic Steam Navigation Company

The Oceanic Steam Navigation Company, OSN, operates direct contact between Sulaco and Europe. It is the major transportation route for the country. Captain Mitchell runs the regional office and takes great pride in the punctuality and good reputation of his company.



Esmeralda

Esmeralda is a nearby city in Costaguana. Sotillo has a military post there and sets out after receiving a telegram about Montero's victory. Sotillo sails across the bay to reach Sulaco by nightfall.

Garibaldi

Garibaldi is a nineteenth century Italian revolutionary who leads various attempts to unify Italy, which at the time was made up of individual nation states.

Casa Viola

Giorgio Viola and his family settled down in Sulaco after wandering throughout Central America. They set up a hotel that caters to the Italian population in the area. The hotel is often the setting of important meetings and conversations between characters, including the deathbed scene in which Nostromo denies Mrs. Viola's request for a priest.

The Lighthouse

After independence has been assured, the people of the Occidental Province build a lighthouse on one of the Isabel islets. This frightens Nostromo because his silver is hidden there. He arranges for the Viola family to live in the lighthouse in order to protect his silver.

The Railroad

The railroad represents modern progress in Costaguana. It is very difficult to finish because so many traditional interests in the area are trying to stop it from happening. The chief engineer tries to stay politically neutral during the various revolutions, but there is little hope that the railroad, and its modern promise, will ever be completed.

The Gould House

Mr. and Mrs. Gould live in a prominent house in Sulaco where many meetings take place. Decoud and Antonia have their longest political discussion in which he reveals his plans for independence at a part at the Gould house.

Occidental Province

Sulaco and the silver mine are located in the western, or Occidental, province of Costaguana. The Occidental Province is the province that declares independence from Costaguana because of the wealth from its silver mine.

Social Sensitivity

Capitalism as it corrupts the volatile republics of South America, which were established with the demise of the Spanish Empire, forms the basis of a social criticism in *Nostromo* that encompasses a host of social concerns. Conrad's first extended venture into the political world, *Nostromo* captures a spirit of political upheaval and revolution. Conrad explores the effects of counterrevolution, national policy, political corruption, and armed insurgency on the lives of the wealthy hidalgos, the new economic imperialists, the workers and the poor, and the assorted Europeans caught up in the coastal town of Sulaco, famed for its San Tome silver mine in the Republic of Costaguana. The effects of progress in the shape of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company, the reopening of the silver mine by Charles Gould against his late father's wishes, and the work-in-progress of the National Central Railway destined to link Sulaco with the Republic's capital are forces which will inextricably alter the lives of the townspeople and the campesinos who eventually populate the new towns built up around the mine. Conrad is as concerned with the victims of prosperity as he is with those whose idealism has been exploited in the name of progress.

He also explores characters who submit to the slavery of "material interests" and, in that surrender, lose themselves and live out a mechanical existence.

This clearly is the case of Charles Gould, a Costaguanan of English origin and heir to the Gould mining concession, whose obsession with the mine leaves no room in his life for anything but that material interest.



Techniques

Nostromo is Conrad's ultimately impressionistic novel, modeled upon his earlier experiment with form in *Lord Jim* (1900). Here the chronology is jumbled as he introduces characters whose roles in the events of Sulaco's stormy history during revolution are gradually revealed, sometimes through the actions and speech of others, sometimes in recollections after the fact, once in a letter, but principally by an anonymous narrator whose point of view moves between a third person who could plausibly reconstruct events and an omniscient narrator who reveals the emotions and unspoken thoughts of the characters. This gathering of impressions — providing knowledge of outcomes before events are described, distorting the reader's sense of time and place — reflects the act of the mind remembering events, moving from incident to incident, piecing together meaning as the memory does, not chronologically but topically. In deed Conrad's technique is similar to the stream of consciousness which would be developed in following decades by Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce. Although the disjointedness that would characterize the works of these later practitioners is smoothed over, the sequence of memory remains subject to its own laws and not to the laws of linear storytelling. It has been suggested that readers begin in the middle of the novel and then read backwards to its opening and then forward to its close to help get the sequence of events clearly in the mind.

Conrad also uses a highly wrought system of symbols, once again based upon the oppositions of light and darkness but more specifically upon the color of silver and the darkness its light brings. This ironic treatment of light as darkness reinforces the ironies of narrative presentation wherein, for example, the reader learns from the outset that a revolution has taken place, only to learn later of the great, failed hopes of the prior mine owners establishment and current hopes for order and security in Sulaco. A further ironic technique Conrad employs is to have several of the characters condemn themselves by the ignorance, venality and foolishness of their speech.



Themes

Democracy and Revolution

Costaguana is a fictional country, but it represents the turbulent political history of many countries in Central America, both in Joseph Conrad's time and the present. These nations suffer through continuous cycles of revolution and oppression, which never seem to end. Martin Decoud acts as the outside observer of Costaguana's troubles. From his perspective, the Central American nations continue the cycle of civil conflict without any chance of developing a stable democracy. He argues instead, that the nation cannot be saved, and should be divided among people with similar interests.

Democratic ideals are debated throughout the novel, though this discussion occurs only among the upper classes. The town leaders of Sulaco design newsletters proclaiming their democratic plans for Costaguana and denounce the military leaders for abandoning democracy. At the same time, they rely on their wealth and position abroad to guarantee their democratic aspirations. Decoud, however, sees their proclamations of democracy as being just another phase in the cycle of civil conflict in the region.

The continual revolutions and the subsequent military dictatorships make the attainment of stable democracy seem impossible. During the conclusion of the novel, Sulaco seems to experience a peaceful stability, though this is not based on free elections. Instead, it is clearly bought about by the profit of the silver mine and the influence of outside investors.

Servant and Master

Nostromo is "Our Man," because he is owned both in body and soul by his aristocratic superiors. In the opening chapters of the novel, he is proud of his servant relationship and feels that those above him truly value his services and trust him with important missions. He chooses his loyalty to them over his loyalty to his friends.

The dangerous mission with the silver convinces Nostromo that he was mistaken about his choice of loyalty. In taking this dangerous mission, Nostromo thought that he was part of something important and that his superiors would be extremely grateful for his services. When he returns to Sulaco and discovers that no one cares about the silver or about him, he is immediately resentful and angry that he allowed them to play with his life this way. He is given no credit for the danger he faced for them, and is instead treated as a servant and given another dangerous task to accomplish.

The master class of Sulaco is shown through the novel to underestimate the lower class members around them. Though they speak of democracy, they have very strong feelings about the inability of poor people to decide their own fate. Instead, they take advantage of Nostromo and use him without really understanding the services that he performs for them. He fulfills their simple whims and they dismiss him as unimportant



after he has sacrificed himself for them. Nostromo takes advantage of their short-sightedness to keep the silver. He is able to accomplish this because the rich people do not consider him important enough to be a threat to them.

Greed

The silver mine and the wealth that it represents affects all the characters and sets them on the path to political independence from Costaguana. Beginning early on, the silver mine becomes an obsession of Mr. Gould; not for the influence and wealth it provides, but for the gratification of possessing such an important thing. This obsession with the silver mine separates Mr. Gould from his friends and family, particularly his wife. The silver mine, in many respects, becomes like a romantic affair that pulls him away from his wife.

Greed also takes over Nostromo. At first, his greed is for public approval. This greed almost destroys him before it is transferred to the hidden silver. The silver becomes an obsession for him as it was for Gould. The secrecy of transferring the silver from the island, combined with his secret relationship with Giselle, eventually leads to Nostromo's death.

Sotillo is also plagued by greed. The silver represents his own intentions for power and wealth in the region. He feels that the silver is key to establishing his own importance. His search for the silver leads him to murder, and eventually drives him insane in his fruitless searches for the silver up and down the coast.



Themes/Related Titles

In this highly complex novel the theme of work touched upon in "Youth" is examined not as a personally redemptive element but as a destructive one for Charles Gould, who carries it to excess, and a sterile one for his wife Emilia. Likewise, the theme of personal integrity which Conrad explores earlier, notably in *Lord Jim*, is again probed in the character who lends his name to the novel's title, Nostromo, the Magnificent Capataz of Cargadores, Gian Battista Fidanza.

Nostromo's pride and sense of self-importance and self-esteem, his fidelity to a concept of self based upon personal integrity and capacity for honest work and his sense of honor in respect to his fiancée all disappear when he executes a fortuitous plan to steal a boat-load of silver he is hiding from the rebels about to invade Sulaco. As a moralist Conrad carries on an attack begun by Charles Dickens in *Dombey and Son* (1848) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and examines the fatally contaminating power of the desire for wealth. In many respects the effects of political, social, personal and corporate fanaticisms form the basis of a major theme of this novel.

Style

Point of View

Nostramo is told as a third person omniscient narrative. Scenes are crafted through the perspectives of various characters, and often the same scene is replayed through the different points of view. This allows the reader to get multiple perspectives on an event. Seeing the same event from different class perspectives reinforces the thematic message of the novel. The working class perspective of Giorgio contrasts with the perspective of the town leader, Charles Gould. By giving the reader both sides, the narrator allows the reader to develop a personal interpretation of how the characters relate to each other. No character or class perspective dominates the narrative, giving the reader a complete picture that reflects the interlocking class structure of the characters.

In some ways, this narrative voice resembles an historian or travel guide for Central America. The narrator often concentrates on physical features of the landscape as closely as the thoughts of the characters. The narrator gives extensive historical and geographic information about the area, allowing the setting to almost become a character in itself. In doing so, the landscape takes on the same perspective as the narrative voice because it treats all the other characters equally despite their wealth or power. All the character perspectives relate a different view of their natural environment, giving the reader more clues to understand how characters fit into the overall class structure and how that class structure is deeply affected by the natural environment.

Setting

The setting is the fictional country of Costaguana in Central America. There is a high level of descriptive detail about the port city of Sulaco and the surrounding sea and islands. From the location of houses, hotels, and businesses, the reader is able to develop a clear picture of the area, and understands where all the locations are in relation to each other. The narrator explores the various regions of the country that are required for the narrative to provide the reader with an exact location for each event. In this way, the reader gains information about the country of Costaguana, including Sulaco, the capital city, and the various areas along the coast. The narrator goes to great lengths to make sure that readers can follow the paths of each character as they travel from the town to the silver mine and through the islands.

While Costaguana is fictional, it represents a wide selection of Central American countries and their problems. The historical situations outside of Central America, such as the Bolivar Revolutions, the Napoleonic Empire, and the various Central American exiles who reside in Europe, all contribute to a very realistic setting, despite the fact that Costaguana is not a real country. Combined with the strong focus on geographic detail, these historical details allow Costaguana to feel like a real country.



Language and Meaning

While the narrative voice is simple for much of the novel, characters often speak, at least partially, in foreign languages, such as Spanish, French, and Italian. Usually these small foreign language phrases do not interrupt the narrative and most readers should be able to figure them out from context. Some longer passages in French, particularly with the character Martin Decoud, can be difficult to understand. Readers without knowledge of French are not missing vital information, however, and can still understand how the French phrases fit into the plot without knowing the word-for-word meaning.

Aside from these language issues, there is also a strong historical context that can often confuse a reader not familiar with these events. The biggest points in this regard are Garibaldi in Italy and Napoleon in France. Both of these historical figures are discussed in some length by various characters and an understanding of them is crucial to understanding many of the underlying motivations of those characters. While Napoleon is generally well known, his place in the story relates more to his style of government rather than to his style of war. Essentially, his role as an elected dictator is a model for the Central American democratic movements. Garibaldi, on the other hand, is less well known to most readers. His role in uniting Italy is explained in detail by the character Giorgio, so the reader is able to learn more about him from the context of the story. However, the reader might still be interested in looking up specific information about Garibaldi in order to have a full picture of his role in the narrative.

Structure

The novel is written out of time order, which can often confuse the reader. The story jumps to the future or the past in order to give more explanation about some event or character. Often the narrative abruptly stops following one character and shifts to another character or another period. For this reason, the reader often feels some initial confusion during the opening sentences of a new section, but usually the section is put in context at some point and the reader can better determine where in the narrative stream they are. At many points, the reader needs to reevaluate the plot to make sure that they have followed the sequence of events correctly.

The most difficult leap is when the narrative jumps several years into the future, passing by the important events of the independence of the Occidental Republic. At the same time, this narrative trick allows the novel to explain a large amount of plot information in a short amount of space. The suspense that builds throughout the earlier part of the novel is cut short in the very straightforward explanations regarding the fates of the silver mine and Martin Decoud. These events are accomplished without the detailed information that accompanies so many of the other events of the novel. After this explanation chapter, the reader is again confronted with day-to-day events for which the reader is often unprepared.



Quotes

"These, then, are the legendary inhabitants of Azuera guarding its forbidden wealth; and the shadow on the sky on one side with the round patch of blue haze blurring the bright skirt of the horizon on the other, mark the two outermost points of the bend which bears the name of Golfo Placido, because never a strong wind had been known to blow upon its waters." (Part 1, Chapter 1)

"He resumed it in a saying which was very often on his lips, 'We never make mistakes.'" (Part 1, Chapter 2)

"Born in the country, as his father before him, spare and tall, with a flaming moustache, a neat chin, clear blue eyes, auburn hair, and a thin, fresh, red face, Charles Gould looked like a new arrival from over the sea." (Part 1, Chapter 6)

"Worked in the early days mostly by means of lashes on the backs of slaves, its yield had been paid for in its own weight of human bones. Whole tribes of Indians had perished in the exploitation; and then the mine was abandoned, since with this primitive method it had ceased to make a profitable return, no matter how many corpses were thrown into its maw." (Part 1, Chapter 6)

" 'It amuses me,' he had explained, briefly. 'I am beset by a lot of swindlers trying to sell all sorts of gaspipe weapons. They are charming; they invite me to expensive luncheons; I keep up their hopes; it's extremely entertaining. Meanwhile, the real affair is being carried through in quite another quarter.'" (Part 2, Chapter 3)

"This was a tkte-a-tkte of extreme impropriety; something of which in the whole extent of the Republic only the extraordinary Antonia could be capable--the poor, motherless girl, never accompanied, with a careless father, who had thought only of making her learned." (Part 2, Chapter 5)

"The mere presence of a coward, however passive, brings an element of treachery into a dangerous situation. Nostromo's nervous impatience passed into gloomy thoughtfulness. Decoud, in an undertone, as if speaking to himself, remarked that, after all, this bizarre event made no great difference. He could not conceive what harm the man could do. At most he would be in the way, like an inanimate and useless object--like a block of wood, for instance." (Part 2, Chapter 8)

" 'His Excellency Don Vincente Ribiera,' he used to say, 'whom I and that fellow of mine, Nostromo, had the honor, sir, and the pleasure of saving from a cruel death, deferred too much to his Congress. It was a mistake--a distinct mistake, sir.'" (Part 3, Chapter 2)

" 'Well, well!' he muttered to himself, but he had not the heart to voice his thoughts. They were swept away by others full of astonishment and regret. A heavy sense of discomfiture crushed him: the loss of the silver, the death of Nostromo, which was really quite a blow to his sensibilities, because he had become attached to his Capataz as



people get attached to their inferiors from love of ease and almost unconscious gratitude." (Part 3, Chapter 3)

"Only a few scattered knots of revolutionists stood in the vast space, all looking one way from under their slouched hats for some sign of news from Rincon. The largest of those groups turned about like one man as Charles Gould passed, and shouted, 'Viva la libertad!' after him in a menacing tone." (Part 3, Chapter 4)

"We have changed since. The use of intelligence awakens little wonder and less respect. But the ignorant and barbarous plainmen engaging in civil strife followed willingly a leader who often managed to deliver their enemies bound, as it were, into their hands. Pedro Montero had a talent for lulling his adversaries into a sense of security. And as men learn wisdom with extreme slowness, and are always ready to believe promises that flatter their secret hopes, Pedro Montero was successful time after time." (Part 3, Chapter 5)

"He cursed the foreigners; then he reported Montero's entry and the rumors of the town. The poor were going to be made rich now. That was very good. More he did not know, and, breaking into propitiatory smiles, he intimated that he was hungry and thirsty." (Part 3, Chapter 6)

"Charles Gould on going out passed his hand over his forehead as if to disperse the mists of an oppressive dream, whose grotesque extravagance leaves behind a subtle sense of bodily danger and intellectual decay." (Part 3, Chapter 7)

" 'There is no mistake. They keep us and encourage us as if we were dogs born to fight and hunt for them. The vecchio is right,' he said, slowly and scathingly. He remembered old Giorgio taking his pipe out of his mouth to throw these words over his shoulder at the cafe, full of engine-drivers and fitters from the railway workshops." (Part 3, Chapter 8)

Adaptations

Please see the biographical entry on Conrad for an accounting of the adaptations of Conrad's films.



Topics for Discussion

Nostromo goes by many nicknames. What is the significance of each nickname, both for Nostromo and for the people who call him that name?

How does Decoud's position as outsider help him to put in perspective the politics of Sulaco?

Describe the effect of the silver mine on various characters. In what ways does it change the people who come into contact with it?

Despite the democratic ideals that are often discussed by the characters, there is very little time devoted to the common people of Sulaco. Do they have a place in the story? Should they have commanded more attention?

Consider Dr. Monygham's social position. How has the torture he suffered under Guzman Bento affected him? How does this affect the other characters?

Compare and contrast General Montero, his brother Pedro, and the elected president, Ribiera. Though they are shown as political opposites, how are they the same or different?

Giorgio Viola fondly remembers his time with Garibaldi in Italy. Compare and contrast his experience of revolution with the revolutions that occur in Costaguana.

Charles Gould is born and raised in Costaguana but seems more like an Englishman. How does this affect his own allegiances throughout the novel? His political ambitions? His commercial ambitions?

Literary Precedents

While the political novels of Anthony Trollope may serve as remote backgrounds for Conrad's attempt to explore in novelistic form the effects of a revolution upon people of various social strata, his most proximate source was Frederick Benton Williams' *On Many Seas: The Life and Exploits of a Yankee Sailor* which contains the story of a single-handed theft of a boat-load of silver ingots during a Latin-American revolution, a story Conrad had himself heard on his voyage in the Gulf of Mexico in the mid 1870s. Stylistically his own *Lord Jim* is the precedent for *Nostromo*; both works are boldly experimental in this regard. For background Conrad read several studies of Latin America to supplement his own brief experience. Like many of his other works, *Nostromo* both shares and contributes to the armchair adventure into foreign lands.



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