

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

MORAL MEANING IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S NOSTROMO:

A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF MRS. GOULD

by

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## ABSTRACT

Nostromo is Joseph Conrad's most ambitious novel. Many believe it is also his finest achievement, for in it he has created an imaginative world of landscape, history, and a volatile people struggling to achieve political identity in post-colonial South America. Against this rich backdrop an intense and dramatic story is told, a story that is inseparable from the larger context of politics and revolution, but one that is shaped, nevertheless, by the personalities of the major characters involved. One such character is Emilia Gould. This thesis is a study of the role of Mrs. Gould in Nostromo. She figures significantly in all aspects of the work, and through a close analysis of her role much can be learned about the novel. In this study, moreover, the view is taken that Mrs. Gould is of special interest to the critical reader of Nostromo, for she is seen standing at the centre of the moral world of the novel, the exemplar of positive moral values Conrad himself revered. Through an understanding of her character and function, one can achieve an understanding of moral meaning in Nostromo. In three chapters this study is undertaken.

Chapter One is a study of Mrs. Gould in relation to the narrative of Nostromo. It is shown, through the

examination of certain key episodes, that she plays a vital role in moving the plot forward. Moreover, it is shown that an examination of her personal story in its movement from youthful illusion to disillusionment provides the reader with a way of interpreting the broader movement of the narrative as a whole. Treated in this manner, her story also allows the reader to perceive more fully the irony of Conrad's portrayal of the world of Nostromo.

Chapter Two is a study of Mrs. Gould's relationship with other major characters in the story. Particular emphasis is placed on her relations with Don José and Antonia Avellanos, Dr. Monygham, and her husband, Charles Gould, in an effort to understand her role as the moral centre of the work. It is argued that a close examination of these relationships reveals the moral worth of each of these characters, and, further, it is shown that, in the moral presence of Mrs. Gould, Conrad creates an alternative to a wholly pessimistic reading of Nostromo.

Chapter Three works from the ground established in the first two chapters. It is a study of the moral world of Nostromo in its entirety. In contrast to Mrs. Gould's disillusioned but humane view of the world, the morally imperfect individuals in the novel are seen living constantly in a world of illusion characterized by a romantic self-conception and a penchant for morally ambiguous, "audacious" action. In Nostromo, Conrad has created a landscape,

history, and people that are broad enough and rich enough to provide the foundation for his complex narrative design with its many plots and subplots. This thesis attempts to show that he has also created an intricate moral world in the novel in which can be discovered a personal moral vision and a portrayal of the human condition as he saw it.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the role of Mrs. Gould in Joseph Conrad's Nostromo. On one level it is an investigation of how Mrs. Gould functions in the novel. Attempts are made to discern her role in the development of the narrative of Nostromo, her role in bringing out aspects of the characters in the story, and her role in the expression of the important themes of the work. As a major character she is clearly involved in all these aspects of the novel, and a close study of her portrayal will reveal much about each of these aspects and about the work as a whole. But, in addition, the view is taken that Mrs. Gould is of special interest to the critical reader of Nostromo. She is a character whom Wayne C. Booth might well put on his list of fictional persons who involve the reader emotionally in their stories:

In most works of any significance, we are made to admire or detest, to love or hate, or simply to approve or disapprove of at least one central character, and our interest in reading from page to page, like our judgement upon the book after reconsideration, is inseparable from this emotional involvement. We care, and care deeply, about Raskolnikov and Emma, and about Father Goriot and Dorothea Brooke.<sup>1</sup>

Mrs. Gould does serve a specific artistic function in the

artifact Nostromo, but she is also a character through whom we can perceive Conrad's central concerns for the human condition as they are expressed in that novel.

Clearly the critical reader, being interested in Conrad's art of the novel, is interested in Mrs. Gould as an aesthetic creation. But, if he responds to her - as Booth would have him respond - on more than aesthetic grounds, this implies a "moral" interest on his part, as well. Much more importantly, however, the creation of a character such as Mrs. Gould implies a moral concern on the part of the artist. The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to try to discover through a close study of the role of Mrs. Gould, these moral concerns of Joseph Conrad as they are revealed in Nostromo. By examining her function in the novel, her aesthetic role, we can hopefully attain an appreciation of the moral vision underlying the work. But phrases such as "moral concern" or "moral vision" immediately raise questions of definition. The discussion of aesthetic functions can be handled with relative precision; the consideration of moral elements in art is a task fraught with difficulties. In specific reference to Conrad criticism one can find in nearly every study of the novelist's work some recognition of the importance of his moral vision to his fiction. Many of these references are illuminating and of great value in any effort to ascertain the nature of the vision, but to date only two full-length

studies have been written that deal with this moral aspect of Conrad's work as their main concern.<sup>2</sup> These two facts - the general recognition of a moral vision in Conrad, and the relatively small amount of criticism devoted to exploring this vision - attest to the difficulty of the task. Nevertheless, it remains that attempts should be made to deal with this vital aspect of Conrad's work.

Christopher Cooper's Conrad and the Human Dilemma is a treatment of the three "political" novels: Under Western Eyes; The Secret Agent; and Nostromo, the works that followed Lord Jim and the "Typhoon" collection in Conrad's career. In his study of Nostromo Cooper sees the silver of the mine, particularly the shipment of silver that Decoud and Nostromo bury on Great Isabel, as the centre of both the narrative development and the "moral patterns" of the work. He studies the responses of the various characters to the silver in order to ascertain their moral values. Further, his approach allows him to make judgements on the various human relationships in the work on the basis of how they are affected by the presence of the silver. Cooper's approach is an interesting one, and many of his conclusions coincide with those of this thesis. He has found one way of dealing with the moral elements in the novel in a concrete fashion. The latest works to explore the moral theme in Conrad are John Saveson's two short books: Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Moralist and Conrad, The Later Moralist. His thesis is that Conrad knew,

understood, and used the various psychological theories that were in vogue at the end of the nineteenth century. Saveson examines the moral actions of characters in terms of their relation to the models found in the psychologies of Herbert Spencer and others. He believes that by examining Conrad's fiction in the light of these systems one can come to an understanding of the moral world created in the novels. It is an interesting theory, but Saveson has failed to include a significant treatment of Nostromo in either of his volumes, a surprising omission.

Despite these previous efforts on the part of other scholars, the question of moral meaning in Nostromo remains challenging, and studies that particularly engage themselves with it are yet needed. It is clear from this brief appraisal of the two works that do attempt to deal with the moral aspect of Conrad's fiction, however, that an approach must be adopted by which the discussion can remain firmly rooted in the text. Cooper's positing of the silver as the defining point of moral action in Nostromo and Saveson's relating of moral action to certain psychological models are certainly two such approaches. Implicit in both methods is the belief that through a full treatment of the aesthetic creation one can arrive at an understanding of moral meaning in a given work, and thereby, an appreciation of Conrad's moral concerns. In other words, one cannot separate the aesthetic and moral elements in works of art; rather, it is only through investigation of

the aesthetic that one can achieve a true understanding of moral vision that underlies the creative act. In this thesis the means of defining these moral and aesthetic elements, while maintaining a steady focus on the text of Nostromo, is the close analysis of the role of Mrs. Gould. By studying her aesthetic function in the novel we can come to an understanding of her moral function, as well.

The thesis will take the form of three chapters. Chapter One is a study of Mrs. Gould in relation to the narrative of Nostromo. It will be shown through the examination of certain key episodes that she plays a vital role in moving the plot forward. Her actions and, in some cases, the mere force of her personality provide the impetus for many of the significant developments that can be discerned in the novel. Moreover, it will be shown that an examination of Mrs. Gould's personal story in its movement from youthful illusion to disillusionment provides the reader with a way of interpreting the broader movement of the narrative as a whole. Her story typifies the development of the whole narrative, and, when treated from this perspective, it allows the reader to perceive more fully the irony of Conrad's portrayal of the world of Nostromo. Her growing disillusionment cannot be separated from Conrad's ironic intention in the novel.

Chapter Two is a study of Mrs. Gould's relationship with other major characters in the story. Particular emphasis will be placed on her relations with the Avellanos, Don José and Antonia, with Dr. Monygham, and with her husband, Charles Gould, in an effort to understand her role as the moral centre of the work. It will be argued that a close examination of these relationships reveals the moral worth of each of these characters; their response to Mrs. Gould is that by which we can ascertain this moral worth. In the process of this investigation it will be further shown that in the moral presence of Mrs. Gould Conrad creates an alternative to a wholly pessimistic reading of Nostromo, that in her character exists a kind of "moral refuge" from a basically amoral world. Moreover, this examination of Mrs. Gould's moral function in the novel will entail some delineation of the essential attributes of Conrad's moral vision as it is embodied in her character.

Chapter Three will work from the ground established in the first two chapters. It will be a study of the moral world of Nostromo in its entirety, for Conrad's concern is not simply to portray the morally strong individual such as Mrs. Gould, but to examine the morally imperfect man as well. By comparing his portrayal of Mrs. Gould with his treatment of Charles Gould and Nostromo in particular, we can achieve an understanding of how he views that morally imperfect man. In contrast to her disillusioned

but humane view of the world, the morally imperfect individual is seen as one who lives constantly in a world of illusion characterized by a romantic self-conception and a penchant for morally ambiguous, "audacious" action. Some startling similarities of treatment emerge in this study. It will become apparent that Conrad has portrayed the morally imperfect characters in Nostromo with as much skill as he has demonstrated in his portrayal of the morally strong Mrs. Gould. In Nostromo Conrad has created a landscape, history, and people that are broad enough and rich enough to provide the foundation for his complex narrative design with its many plots and subplots. This thesis will attempt to show that he has also created an intricate moral world in the novel in which can be discovered a personal moral vision and a portrayal of the human condition as he saw it.

## CHAPTER ONE

In this chapter the discussion will focus on Mrs. Gould in relation to the narrative of Nostromo. Basically, the chapter will take the form of an examination of Mrs. Gould's personal story, for through close scrutiny of that specific aspect of the novel both the development of the narrative and the nature of that development will be revealed. On the one hand it will be shown that she plays an essential role in moving the plot forward at certain critical stages. On the other hand her personal story, treated as a movement from youthful illusion into disillusionment, will serve to illuminate a similar movement in the story as a whole. Conrad's ironic intention in Nostromo will become apparent by treating the narrative in this fashion and, moreover, it will be shown that his achievement of an ironic portrayal of the world of the novel is intimately linked with and dependent upon his portrayal of the character of Mrs. Gould. Her personal story is a significant way by which Conrad reveals the story in an ironic light.

Though it presents an almost impossible task, a brief summary of the plot of Nostromo is in order. In essence, the first half of the novel is concerned with the

working of the Gould Concession, a silver mine overlooking the coastal town of Sulaco in Costaguana, an imaginary South American republic. The work is undertaken by Charles and Emilia Gould upon their arrival from Europe. As the name would imply, the mine is a concession that has been granted by the government to the Gould family, long time residents of Costaguana. With the backing of an American capitalist, Holroyd, Charles Gould is able to turn the mine into a financial success that has the effect of stabilizing the economy of the whole country and creating political peace where previously there had been civil strife. Through the efforts of Mrs. Gould this economic success is further translated into many social improvements, particularly for the region around the mine - Sulaco and the outlying areas. In the first part of the novel, all the people, regardless of colour, creed, or economic background, are seen achieving a higher standard of living in every sense. This successful working of the mine, however, is threatened by an insurrection led by General Montero. It is a conflict drawn along racial and economic lines, which tends to break up the fragile union of various social groups created by that very success. The only alternative to a return to political chaos, and an abandoning of the Concession, is the secession of the Occidental Province, its capital city, Sulaco, and the mine from the rest of the republic - and this is what happens.

The Goulds, of course, are central to the story throughout, but particularly so in the first part where the transformation of the mine into a success leads to a revitalization of the country. In the turmoil of the Monterist insurrection, other characters come to the fore, either in support of the aristocratic Blanco party, the political representatives of the mining interests, or against it, basically for the reason of self-aggrandizement. Among the Blanco allies are: Martin Decoud, an expatriate Costaguanero who initiates the plan of secession; Dr. Monygham, an eccentric European living in Costaguana whose devotion to Mrs. Gould leads him to perform courageous acts that save both her and her husband, as well as Sulaco, in general, from destruction; and Nostromo, "a man of the People," whose renowned courage in the field of action makes him the choice of the Blancos whenever a dangerous mission must be entrusted to one man. It is one such mission - the removal, by lighter, of a load of silver ingots from Sulaco - that is the single most significant act in the last half of the novel. The silver is removed in order that it not be captured by the enemies of the Blancos who flock to Sulaco during the insurrection, and in order that it can be used to finance the planned secession. As it turns out, the silver is buried on an island in the Sulacan harbour and forgotten in terms of its public significance. The successful secession of the province and

the industrialization which follows, centred as it is around the silver mine, are achieved anyway. The buried silver is not a factor in the political, social, and economic developments, but it does become the vital "fact" in the private stories of the major characters in the novel.

Of vital interest in the relation of Mrs. Gould's personal story to the story of Nostromo as a whole is the fact that one aspect of her character undergoes a profound change from her first appearance in the novel to its conclusion, while another equally important aspect remains relatively unchanged throughout. At the beginning of the novel, Mrs. Gould's conceptions of the nature of men's actions in general are largely based on the illusion of a universal moral concern shared by all men. As the narrative unfolds, this illusion is continually exposed to the brutal realities of experience; slowly and painfully it is discarded. Despite her growing disillusionment with the way of the world, however, Mrs. Gould retains, throughout the work, the moral qualities that informed her early years, qualities which Conrad continually brings to our attention through his many descriptions of her compassion and understanding. These moral qualities will be the primary subject of Chapter Two. In the present context of a discussion of narrative, a recognition of the moral aspect of Mrs. Gould's character is essential in the delineation of her

movement from illusion to disillusionment. The constant nature of her moral outlook throws into relief that movement into disillusionment.

The story of Nostromo can be divided into three entwined, but nevertheless distinct, sections. The first section treats the success story of the Gould Concession. The creation of the Ribiera regime, the coming of the railroad, and the million and a half pounds mark the ascendant side of this first section. Essentially, it is the story of 'The Silver of the Mine', though the descendant<sup>1</sup> side that begins with the Montero rebellion lingers on until Decoud announces the news of Ribiera's defeat to Mrs. Gould. The second section is the story of Decoud's attempt to create a separate Occidental Republic. It might be argued that it begins with the first appearance of Decoud himself, but a more likely beginning point for the ascendant action is Chapters Five and Six of 'The Isabels', Decoud's revelation of his scheme, first to Antonia, then to Mrs. Gould. In the main, the second section takes place in 'The Isabels', but, as with the first section, the descendant side lingers on into the following part of the novel, 'The Lighthouse'. The apparent failure of Decoud's plan to utilize the silver, the threat to Charles Gould's life, and his counterthreat to blow up the mine mark the descendant side of the second section. The final section is that of the apparent success of the Occidental Republic.

Mitchell describes it to us in Chapter Ten of 'The Lighthouse', but its origins can be traced back to Dr. Monygham's attempts to salvage something out of the wreckage of Decoud's scheme for separation early in 'The Lighthouse'. One is given some indication of the public shape which the descendant side of this section will take in the references to labour unrest and in the plans of Corbelan and Antonia Avellanos for future armed conflict. One sees the descendant side, however, in the private fates of the individual characters: in the degradation of Nostromo; in the aloofness of Charles Gould; in the cynical insights of Monygham; and, most poignantly, in the loneliness of Mrs. Gould.

Each of these sections is characterized by a similar line of development. Any number of terms could be used in describing this development, but illusion and disillusionment seem to be the most helpful. They serve both to clarify the nature of each section and to link them to the character of Mrs. Gould. In each section the initial, ascendant actions are closely related to illusion. As each develops, these illusions produce an effect on the protagonists approximating euphoria, attended by beliefs that order is being created on moral, political, social and economic planes. As disillusionment sets in, a corresponding descendant movement begins in each section. Euphoria is replaced by despair, by a realization that all former

feelings were illusory. The former beliefs in an apparent progress give way to admissions of an apparent determinism. Of primary importance to this discussion is the realization that Mrs. Gould is central to the narrative of the novel when it is viewed in terms of a movement from illusion to disillusionment in three stages that show that movement in miniature. Not only does her own personal disillusionment relate her to the narrative pattern as a whole, but, as an important figure in each of the sections, she is vitally related to each new set of illusions that arises and bears the brunt of the disillusionment that inevitably follows.

In 'The Silver of the Mine' one is confronted with two distinct impressions when assessing the story. On the one hand, one is aware of the sunny, bright world of success and prosperity that attends the Goulds' triumph in the working of the infamous Concession. Their ardent belief in the inevitable success of their endeavours permeates the atmosphere of the narrative that takes place wholly in the sunshine of the Sulacan day. On the other hand, from as early as Chapter Two, one possesses the knowledge that the Ribiera regime, the political extension of this new found prosperity, will be toppled from power, leaving Sulaco in a state of civil war. Both these impressions must be kept in mind when coming to terms with this portion of the story, for it is by striking this balance that Conrad achieves the ironic effect he wants

in the first part of the novel. One can watch the follies of man, exemplified in the illusory hopes of the Goulds and their supporters, as they seem to reach fruition. The perspective on the action is almost Olympian and is enhanced by Conrad's unceasing desire to describe the grandeur of the Sulacan landscape and to view scenes from afar as if perched on some high promontory in the Cordillera. One is distanced from the action of the narrative almost literally, and, as a result, the illusory nature of the Goulds' apparent success in the first section becomes more readily apparent than it would otherwise. But neither this success, nor those who seem to partake of it, are made to seem ridiculous. Conrad is not heavyhanded in his ironic treatment of them, and, even from the advantageous perspective he has, the reader can feel the seductive nature of those illusions.

The illusions that predominate in the Gould Concession success story can be seen in a few passages where Conrad describes what seems to be at the heart of those illusions. The passages can, and indeed must, be read from an ironic perspective as well, but taken at face value they provide the rationale behind the ascendant action of 'The Silver of the Mine'. The first short selection is found in the description of the Goulds' courtship in Chapter Six. In it is implied the union of morality and action that informs the endeavours of the Goulds in the first section

of the novel. Upon hearing the news of his father's death, Charles Gould's immediate reaction is anger, an anger which will find an outlet in action. It must be action, however, with a specifically moral purpose: "The mine had been the cause of an absurd moral disaster; its working must be made a serious moral success."<sup>2</sup> The motives of the Goulds are elaborated upon a little further on in Chapter Six. Once again morality and action are described as coequals:

These two young people remembered the life which had ended wretchedly just when their own lives had come together in that splendour of hopeful love, which to the most sensible minds appears like a triumph of good over all the evils of the earth. A vague idea of rehabilitation had entered the plan of their life. That it was so vague as to elude the support of argument made it only the stronger. It had presented itself to them at the instant when the woman's instinct of devotion and the man's instinct of activity receive from their strongest of illusions their most powerful impulse. The very prohibition imposed the necessity of a success. It was as if they had been morally bound to make good their vigorous view of life against the unnatural error of weariness and despair. (Pt. I, Ch. iv; p. 74)

A distinction is drawn in the passage between Charles Gould's "instinct of activity" and his wife's "instinct of devotion". Throughout the course of the novel both are true to these instincts. He transforms the mine into an unqualified success, in material terms; she is shown throughout the work as being devoted not only to her husband, but to other major figures in the novel, and to people in general. This combination of morality and action proves untenable,

however. The "powerful impulse" that gave rise to the initial successes of 'The Silver of the Mine', and to the narrative development of that section must, of necessity, dissipate and eventually cease to be a factor in that development. As it does so, the Gould's marriage itself fragments in all but name only.

Through her actions, it is Mrs. Gould who gives true expression to the belief in moral progress. What is, in fact, Charles Gould's single-minded concern with the mine is balanced by her concern for the mine's workers and the people of the province. Under her auspices her three "ministers": Don Pepe, the governor; Father Roman, the priest; and Dr. Monygham, the physician, care for the people, and her own small acts of kindness such as the preservation of Viola's inn, or the perhaps more apt, symbolic gesture of giving the old Italian a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles, attest to her benevolence. But both the belief in moral progress and the actions stemming from it are characterized by an innocence of the ways of the world, and this innocence, as much as anything else, characterizes the illusions of 'The Silver of the Mine' and distinguishes them from the sets of illusions found in the rest of the novel. The relatively central position of Viola and Don José Avellanos in this portion of the narrative is in tune with the innocent belief in moral progress associated with Mrs. Gould. Monygham and Decoud,

the two skeptics of the novel, are of relatively little importance in the first section. Even the villain of the piece, Montero, is a sort of naive bully, dressed up in uniform.

As a final demonstration of the kinds of illusion found in the first section of Nostromo, particularly in their relation to Mrs. Gould, the passage describing the stamping of the first ingot will serve:

... She had laid her unmercenary hands, with an eagerness that made them tremble, upon the first silver ingot turned out still warm from the mould; and by her imaginative estimate of its power she endowed that lump of metal with a justificative conception, as though it were not a mere fact, but something far-reaching and impalpable, like the true expression of an emotion or the emergence of a principle. (Pt. 1, Ch. viii; p. 107)

Though he outwardly aligns himself with the forces of moral progress, for Charles Gould the production of the silver is fulfilment in itself (Pt. 1, Ch. viii; p. 105). For his wife, the "mere fact" of production is not enough. The silver must be made to work for moral ends which the diction of the passage alone seems to deny. The ironic juxtaposition of "lump of metal" with "justificative conception", of "mere fact" with "emotion" and "principle", though they do not detract from her innocent sincerity, highlight the illusory nature of Mrs. Gould's hopes and the hopes of the Blanco party for peace and prosperity in Costaguana.

In the vignette with which he ends 'The Silver of the Mine' Conrad ironically undercuts the scene discussed above of Mrs. Gould and the first silver ingot. Nostromo, waylaid by his Morenita, delivers the silver buttons of his coat into her very mercenary hands in a cavalier expression of his love. The scene underlines the illusory nature of Mrs. Gould's hopes for the future of Costaguana and it prepares the way for the more sombre atmosphere of doubt and skepticism that pervades 'The Isabels'. With the focus on Don José Avellanos, the opening chapters deal with the creation of the Ribiera regime. One is already prepared for the imminent defeat of the Ribierists, but, in dwelling on the figure of Don José, Conrad stresses the pathetic side of that defeat. The reader can intuit, and soon will see, the crushing effect it will have on him. The inevitable failure of the movement for progress, known by the reader since the second chapter, looms over the action as the first section moves into its descendant phase. Into this darkening world Conrad introduces two characters, Antonia Avellanos and Don Martin Decoud, who are vital to the rest of the novel and who fit the sombre mood the work takes on at this point. Antonia will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter. It suffices to state here that she is a mysterious character, not as fully drawn as the other major figures. This mysterious aspect seems to fit more readily the atmosphere of the final two parts than the first. Decoud is the skeptic,

ostensibly the rational man untrammelled by illusion. As this he is well-suited for his role as harbinger of defeat for both the Ribiera regime and the illusory hopes upon which it rested.

In Chapter Six of 'The Isabels', Decoud announces the news of Ribiera's defeat to Mrs. Gould. It is a defeat that signals the apparent end of her own aspirations, and those of the Dictatorship's other supporters, for the connection of the Gould Concession with the regime through the Blanco party in Sulaco is undeniable. The Dictatorship was the political manifestation of the economic security derived from the Concession. Decoud's visit confirms more than the destruction of the public manifestations of Mrs. Gould's hopes, however. As he expands on his own scheme of separation he lays waste to her private hopes as well by exposing the illusory nature of her belief in her husband as a practical man of action bent on achieving the same moral ends she herself desires:

She had a great confidence in her husband; it had always been very great. He had struck her imagination from the first by his unsentimentalism, by that very quietude of mind which she had erected in her thought for a sign of perfect competency in the business of living. (Pt. I, Ch. vi; pp. 49-50)

To her dismay, Decoud describes Charles Gould as a sentimentalist, who:

"... cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale. The earth is not quite good enough for him, I fear." (Pt. II, Ch. vi; p. 215)

The whole basis for the Goulds' marriage was the union of Charles Gould's instinct for action with his wife's instinct for devotion that gave rise to a desire to effect moral change in Costaguana. Decoud's assertion that this instinct of Charles Gould is itself based on a conception of life akin to a fairy tale, on sentiment rather than fact or moral principle, exposes to her the illusory nature not only of their actions in Costaguana but of their love itself. It is at this point that one receives the first indications of Mrs. Gould's loneliness, a condition that she cannot escape throughout the remainder of the novel.

Mrs. Gould is dismayed at Decoud's revelations, but she is not shocked. The truth has been evident to her for a long while. The distinction noted earlier between Charles Gould's involvement with action and his wife's involvement with morality has developed into a separation on similar lines. The scene preceding the entrance of Decoud in Chapter Six is an indication of their estranged condition. Her inability to understand his motives along with his lack of compassion for her are evident. The marriage of the Goulds was the overriding illusion of 'The Silver of the Mine', giving impetus to all the others.

Mrs. Gould's disillusionment with the marriage itself, therefore, marks the end of the first section of the novel. As Decoud acutely perceives, she is left with her moral concern for the people of Costaguana, but the illusion of alleviating their misery with the help of her husband has all but vanished:

The fact of the San Tome mine was lying heavy upon her heart. It was a long time now since she had begun to fear it. It had been an idea. She had watched it with misgivings turning into a fetish, and now the fetish had grown into a monstrous and crushing weight. It was as if the inspiration of their early years had left her heart to turn into a wall of silver-bricks, erected by the silent work of evil spirits, between her and her husband. He seemed to dwell alone within a circumvallation of precious metal, leaving her outside with her school, her hospital, the sick mothers and the feeble old men, mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration. "Those poor people!" she murmured to herself. (Pt. II, Ch. vi; pp. 221-2)

The first stage in Mrs. Gould's movement from illusion to disillusionment, mirroring, as it does, a similar movement in the narrative as a whole, is completed with this first admission of her loneliness, the fate that she cannot escape.

Mrs. Gould is not as active in the second section as she is in the first, but she does play an instrumental role in the initial stages of the action for she has to make the vital decision of whether or not to let the silver come down from the mine. Decoud shrewdly attempts to play on her moral concern for the Costaguanan people. He succeeds in winning her approval not through the stratagem of

appealing to her conscience, but by confirming her impression of the true nature of her husband, of his incapacity for true moral action. That variety of action is left to her, but even in this most significant act one can see her reticent, almost passive nature: "Mrs. Gould glanced along the corridor towards the door of her husband's room. Decoud, watching her as if she had his fate in her hands, detected an almost imperceptible nod of assent" (Pt. II, Ch. vi; p. 221). Without the silver Decoud's plan cannot succeed, or even begin; therefore, one can see the essential nature of Mrs. Gould's action to the development of the plot at this point. After helping Decoud to get his plan underway, however, she moves into the background until the news of its failure is brought by Monygham. Seen from this essentially passive point of view, she almost becomes a victim of the narrative action, a pathetic figure. The ironic effect of the novel does depend to some extent on this rendering of man's helplessness in the face of large, inhuman forces. But Conrad's intention is not limited to a depiction of human weakness and insufficiency. The moral certitude of Mrs. Gould, even at the blackest moments, is an assertion made against these forces that threaten to degrade and belittle man.

If one can imagine the relative degree of experience among the characters measured on a continuum, with innocence

at one end and experience at the other, it could prove to be a useful device in discussing the second section of the narrative, particularly in its relation to the first. Illusion and disillusionment have been used as terms to discuss the narrative development of the novel. They are appropriate to that discussion and, moreover, are derived from the text itself. Innocence and experience, however, are equally useful terms and very adaptable to a discussion of illusion and disillusionment in this context. Mrs. Gould's movement from illusion to disillusionment is related to her movement from innocence into experience, and one can see her, through the course of the novel, gradually moving along this continuum toward the extreme of experience. The male protagonists in each of the three sections are situated at intervals along the continuum. Charles Gould, like his wife, is a relative innocent at the beginning of the novel, but as she moves steadily along the continuum towards experience he tends to remain in a relatively static position, trying, at least, to maintain this innocence. In the second section the focus of the action shifts from the "innocent" Gould to the apparently experienced Decoud. He is responsible for revealing Mrs. Gould's disillusionment during his early morning visit to Casa Gould, and he is also the man who supplies the illusions which take hold after the failure of the success story.

Decoud is relatively free from illusion, but he is not as free as his speech would lead us to believe. Comparing himself to Gould, he asserts his practical side, his "sane materialism" as it is called elsewhere:

"... I am not a sentimentalist, I cannot endow my personal desires with a shining robe of silk and jewels. Life is not for me a moral romance derived from the tradition of a pretty fairy tale. No, Mrs. Gould; I am practical. I am not afraid of my motives." (Pt. II, Ch. vi; p. 218)

This statement has the merit of being true as far as it goes. But the narrative voice earlier has informed us, in a tone that approaches moral censure, of Decoud's distinct lack of self-knowledge. Dilettantism and skepticism have obscured this apparent understanding of personal motives:

He imagined himself Parisian to the tips of his fingers. But far from being that he was in danger of remaining a sort of nondescript dilettante all his life. He had pushed the habit of universal raillery to a point where it blinded him to the genuine impulses of his own nature. (Pt. II, Ch. iii; p. 153)

Neither Decoud's personal fate nor the outcome of his scheme is told to the reader in advance. In the initial description of the 'boulevardier', however, one finds statements that indicate what shape his story will take. The desire to romanticize Decoud's story, to see him "make good", must be tempered by the realization that the eventual disintegration of his personality, first on the

gulf and later on Great Isabel, is in accord with the character described earlier.

Decoud becomes the male protagonist in the second section for a number of reasons, but mainly because of the seductive quality of his intellect. As the events of the first section run their course, his skeptical appraisal of the Gould Concession, and all that is related to it, proves to be correct. He emerges as the obvious alternative to complete surrender and disillusionment. Mrs. Gould and the others turn to him, as it were, on the rebound for the solution to their difficulties, and, on the basis of his intellectual analysis of the situation, their choice of him as a leader is a good one. The eventual success of the Occidental Republic, superficial as it may be, attests to his perceptive grasp of the political situation. His equally perceptive understanding of people is demonstrated in his analysis of the Goulds. His understanding of Charles Gould has been shown above. In the letter to his sister he captures the essence of the Goulds' whole relationship:

A passion has crept into his [Charles Gould's] cold and idealistic life. A passion which I can only comprehend intellectually. A passion that is not like the passions we know, we men of another blood.

His wife has understood it, too, that is why she is such a good ally of mine. She seizes upon all my suggestions with a sure instinct that in the end they make for the safety of the Gould Concession. And he defers to her because he trusts her perhaps, but I fancy more rather as if he wished to make up for some subtle wrong, for that sentimental unfaithfulness which surrenders her happiness, her life, to the

seduction of an idea. The little woman has discovered that he lives for the mine rather than for her. (Pt. II, Ch. vii; p. 245)

The extent of Decoud's intellectual understanding seems unbounded. Even the shadowy figures of Nostromo and Antonia Avellanos are seen with a perspicacity unmatched in the novel. But behind this veneer of the intellect lies an essential emptiness that renders many of his ideas and perceptions illusory at the profoundest level.<sup>3</sup>

'The Silver of the Mine' takes place almost wholly during the day. A relationship is struck between the hopes and the illusions of that part of the narrative and the sunny, daytime world of Sulaco. The opposite effect is achieved in 'The Isabels'. Decoud announces his plan of separation to Antonia at dusk by the windows of Casa Gould, and later in the same night he meets Mrs. Gould in order to further his plan of separation. The events of the next two days are summarized in the letter to his sister so that when the action begins again, with the removal of the silver from Sulaco, night has fallen once more. Obviously the darkness is closely linked with the situation of the Blanco party, with a continuation of the process of disillusionment already noted. It is a further comment, however, on the nature of Decoud's illusory hopes, for as he is enveloped in the darkness of the gulf with the desperate Nostromo, he becomes estranged from society, his natural element, and susceptible to the disintegration of

character that will follow. Suffering from overexhaustion in the impenetrable blackness, even his apparent love for Antonia begins to lose its sense of reality:

All his active sensations and feelings from as far back as he could remember seemed to him the maddest of dreams. Even his passionate devotion to Antonia into which he had worked himself up out of the depths of his scepticism had lost all appearance of reality. For a moment he was prey of an extremely languid but not unpleasant indifference. (Pt. II, Ch. vii; p. 267)

These feelings culminate in his sense of disillusioned lassitude on Great Isabel:

Not a living being, not a speck of distant sail, appeared within the range of his vision; and, as if to escape from the solitude, he absorbed himself in his melancholy. The vague consciousness of a misdirected life given up to impulses whose memory left a bitter taste in his mouth was the first moral sentiment of his manhood. But at the same time he felt no remorse. What should he regret? He had recognized no other virtue than intelligence, and had erected passions into duties. Both his intelligence and his passion were swallowed up easily in this great unbroken solitude of waiting without faith. Sleeplessness had robbed his will of all energy, for he had not slept seven hours in the seven days. His sadness was the sadness of a skeptical mind. He beheld the universe as a series of incomprehensible images. (Pt. III, Ch. x; p. 498)

The blackness of the night impinges on the hopes that attend the removal of the silver. The sombre atmosphere undercuts Decoud's ideas, exposing their illusory nature, even on the ascendant side of the section in which he plays such a key role. When the narrative takes another downward turn with the arrival of Sotillo and Pedrito Montero, with the apparent failure of the silver escapade, the

focus shifts from Decoud, the protagonist who is essentially alone on the gulf, to the Goulds in Sulaco. Decoud, as has been mentioned, suffers a very severe disillusionment while isolated on the island. Nostromo, as will be seen, suffers from a disillusionment of sorts related to the affair of the silver. But in the descendant action of the second section in particular, Charles Gould and his wife bear the brunt of the failure of Decoud's scheme. In the rush of events that include a very real threat to his own life as well as his own, equally real, counterthreat to blow up the mine, Charles Gould comes to a shocking realization that he has been unable to avoid the corruption around him, unable to avoid staining his innocent self-image: "It was impossible to disentangle one's activity from the debasing contacts. A close-meshed net of crime and corruption lay upon the whole country" (Pt. III, Ch. iii; pp. 360-1). And a little further on:

He was like a man who had ventured on a precipitous path with no room to turn, where the only chance of safety is to press forward. At that moment he understood it thoroughly as he looked down at Don Jose stretched out, hardly breathing, by the side of the erect Antonia, vanquished in a lifelong struggle with the powers of moral darkness, whose stagnant depths breed monstrous crimes and monstrous illusions. (Pt. III, Ch. iii; pp. 361-2)

The depth of this insight into the inefficacy of moral action in the public sphere cannot be denied, but it also marks the extent of Charles Gould's self-knowledge. From

this point on he adopts an aloof attitude which, in the face of this experience, amounts to a callous disregard of others.

As must be apparent by now, the descendant side of one section and the ascendant side of the following section are not easily separable from one another. Decoud's conversation with Mrs. Gould in Chapter Six of 'The Isabels' marks both the end point in the success story of the Gould Concession and an important incident in the ascendant action of the section that relates his attempt to found a new Occidental State. Likewise, the second and third sections overlap a great deal. If a beginning can be found for the third section it would probably be Dr. Monygham's reaction to Mrs. Gould's disillusioned but undaunted concern for others, even in the face of such a palpable threat as exists to her own person:

"She thinks of that girl," he said to himself; "she thinks of the Viola children; she thinks of me; of the wounded; of the miners; she always thinks of everybody who is poor and miserable! But what will she do if Charles gets the worst of it in this infernal scrimmage those confounded Avellanos have drawn him into? No one seems to be thinking of her."  
(Pt. III, Ch. iv; p. 380)

With Mrs. Gould's safety as his sole reason to act, a reason sanctioned by her moral concern for others, Monygham becomes the protagonist in what might be called the ironic success story of the Occidental Republic. By returning to the idea of the continuum, one can see the shift in the

role of male protagonist from Decoud to Monygham as a further movement towards experience, away from innocence. Monygham's experience, though, is real, not apparent. Once again, we can see the importance of Mrs. Gould to the development of the plot. As in the case of her marriage in the first section and her meeting with Decoud in the second, we see her actions and the force of her moral personality providing the impetus for development. Neither Decoud's scheme nor Monygham's heroics, nor the working of the mine itself can be separated from her presence in the novel.

This development is related to another movement toward disillusionment in this part of the narrative of Nostromo. It is primarily achieved by a concentration on those episodes in the narrative which hold the most potential for ironic portrayal, and the choice of Monygham as the chief protagonist provides the clearest indication of Conrad's focus in 'The Lighthouse'. The Occidental Republic's brief war of independence is replete with acts of heroism and the heroes who perform them: Don Pepe and the army of Indian workers who come down from the mountain to rescue Charles Gould; Hernandez and his cavalry; Barrios, whose final victories over Sotillo and Pedrito Montero lead directly to the secession; Nostromo's ride to Cayta. All demand a treatment in an heroic mode, but all receive only brief mention in the breezy narration of

Captain Mitchell. It is Monygham's "game of betrayal" with Sotillo which is given the primary emphasis, along with the incidents related to that action such as Monygham's discussion with Nostromo and Sotillo's gruesome interrogation of Hirsch. It is quite clear that Conrad's priorities lie in the portrayal of the ironic nature of man's actions, especially as they relate to his illusions. Even Monygham's dissimulation, carried out for the noble end of saving Mrs. Gould, lends weight to the general feeling of disillusionment and irony.

The ironic nature of the final section of the narrative is further enhanced by Conrad's own brand of macabre humour that confronts one at every turn. The instances of it are too numerous to mention but the extent to which this humour pervades the atmosphere of the final part of the book can be demonstrated in the interrogation scene between Hirsch, the coward, and Sotillo, the bully, that ends in the former's murder. Hirsch is treated largely as a buffoon throughout the work, and even as Sotillo's soldiers apply the 'estrapade' to him he retains his clownish aspect: "He screamed with uplifted eyebrows and a wide-open mouth - incredibly wide, black, enormous, full of teeth - comical" (Pt. III, Ch. ix; p. 447). The irony of the situation is compounded by the fact that Hirsch has no information to give, that all his pain and suffering is for naught. Conrad shifts the focus from

pathos, to sheer ugliness, to a kind of heroism in Hirsch's final act of defiance, but with Sotillo's almost slapstick reaction to this defiance the tone becomes comic, in a very dark way:

The uplifted whip fell, and the colonel sprang back with a low cry of dismay, as if aspersed by a jet of deadly venom. Quick as thought he snatched up his revolver, and fired twice. The report and the concussion of the shots seemed to throw him at once from ungovernable rage into idiotic stupor. What had he done . . . Ideas of headlong flight somewhere, anywhere, passed through his mind; even the craven and absurd notion of hiding under the table occurred to his cowardice. (Pt. III, Ch. ix; p. 449)

In scenes such as these the brutal absurdity of life is shown and the stark contrast between these amoral acts and the morality of Mrs. Gould and Dr. Monygham is emphasized. They show clearly the difference between the moral understanding of Mrs. Gould and what is called the "moral stupidity" of the others (Pt. III, Ch. iii; p. 350).

On the public level, Nostromo ends on the upbeat with an apparent affirmation of progress. As has been previously mentioned, in various public ways, progress has been made, though even there the future appears not so rosy. There are hints of labour unrest for the future, and, in the intention that Antonia Avellanos and Cardinal-Arch Bishop Corbelan disclose, there is a strong suggestion of further armed conflict with Costaguana. The real descendant action of the final section is played out in the private

fates of the individual characters, however. Two distinct parts of the narrative emerge in Chapter Eleven, and through the continuing action of Monygham they are brought to a final coalescence at the end of the novel. On the one hand there is the melodramatic love story of Nostromo and the Viola sisters that wends its inevitable way to a bloody climax. The other part of the narrative concerns Mrs. Gould herself, especially in her relationship to her husband and Dr. Monygham.

By the end of the novel Mrs. Gould has moved from a position of youthful illusion through the experiences that make up the vast narrative of Nostromo to a condition of profound disillusionment. Monygham's theory of the unrelenting nature of material interests that move continuously forward regardless of moral principle, gives voice to the general reason for that disillusionment:

"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 moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back. (Pt. III, Ch. xi; p. 511)

In an interesting parallel to the earlier scene of Decoud's discussion with Mrs. Gould, the personal aspect of her disillusionment - her relationship with her husband - again remains unvoiced though understood by both parties.<sup>4</sup> She

suffers alone, her condition only obliquely mitigated by Monygham's sympathetic presence:

An immense desolation, the dread of her own continued life, descended upon the first lady of Sulaco. 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. (Pt. III, Ch. xi; p. 522)

A strain of imagery grouped around the figure of the good fairy epitomizes the story of Mrs. Gould and provides a succinct summary for the whole movement of Nostromo's narrative. In 'The Silver of the Mine' Conrad associates Mrs. Gould with the good fairy. Her moral concern and benevolence as expressed in her hospitality take on a magical aura and a lyric beauty:

The stateliness of ancient days lingered between the high smooth walls, tinted a delicate primrose-colour; and Mrs. Gould, with her little head and shining coils of hair, sitting in a cloud of muslin and lace before a slender mahogany table, resembled a fairy posed lightly before dainty philtres dispersed out of vessels of silver and porcelain. (Pt. I, Ch. vi; pp. 51-2)

This conception of her corresponds to the illusory condition of youth and innocence, to the belief in a moral rectitude that expresses itself through action and results in the improvement of all men at all levels of existence. As has been shown, the movement of the narrative, with Mrs. Gould as its focus, is one from illusion to disillusionment. By returning to the image of the good fairy once more, near the end of the novel, Conrad stresses her disillusionment:

The half-light under the thick mass of leaves brought out the youthful prettiness of her face, made the clear light fabrics and white lace of her dress appear luminous. Small and dainty, as if radiating a light of her own in the deep shade of the interlaced boughs, she resembled a good fairy; weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labours, the powerlessness of her magic. (Pt. III, Ch. xi; p. 52)

The moral concern of the good fairy remains, but the magical world of the "moral romance" can no longer be believed in. The last benevolent act of the novel, Mrs. Gould's visit to the dying Nostromo and her protection of Giselle, are done not in the spirit of the good fairy, but of the monk or priest hearing confession, "cloaked and monastically hooded" (Pt. III, Ch. xiii; p. 558). The quality of her moral concern has remained essentially unchanged, but through the process of disillusionment she has been reconciled to a world of inevitable death and decay where progress is minimal and action is unaffected by moral principles.

## CHAPTER TWO

Chapter One has dealt with Mrs. Gould's twofold relationship to the narrative of Nostromo. She was seen as playing a vital role in the development of the plot at certain critical points, and the movement into disillusionment of her personal story was seen as typifying the movement of the whole novel. It was noted during this examination, however, that while one aspect of her character, her innocent belief in the efficacy of moral action in the public sphere, does undergo a profound change in the novel, another aspect of her character, her moral concern for others, remains essentially unchanged. It is this moral concern that will be the focus of Chapter Two. Once again, the investigation will have two parts. An attempt will be made to discern precisely what Mrs. Gould's moral qualities are, what constitutes the moral individual in Conrad's vision. An attempt will also be made, however, to ascertain Mrs. Gould's function as the exemplary moral individual in the novel. In other words, the present chapter will be concerned not only with Conrad's conception of morality as expressed in his portrayal of Mrs. Gould, but with his use of her as a means by which to delineate the moral worth of other

characters as well.

A further refinement of the critical perspective is required before this discussion can continue, however. By concentrating solely on the pessimistic aspect of Nostromo as it is revealed in the novel's narrative development, one becomes committed to an interpretation of the work that is essentially deterministic. One must follow the lead of influential critics, such as Guerard and Baines, and admit that, as it is filtered through Conrad's ironic vision, the world of the novel is wholly unredeemable:

The history of Costaguana is the sum of its inhabitants' follies: their self-bemusing idealism and self-intoxicating manifestoes, their vanities, greeds, cowardice, deceptions, and self-deceptions. And it is little more than this sum. Certain institutions or instruments (notably capitalism, imperialism, revolution, political discourse itself) are regarded as inherently destructive or feeble. In Nostromo the unconscious (given a little less than its due in the stories of individual men and their close relationships) finds in history its stunning revenge. For this history escapes very far the puny<sup>1</sup> wills of men and their intention either good or bad.

Thus idealism and scepticism, faith and want of faith, both seem to lead to disaster. Nostromo is an intensely pessimistic book; it is perhaps the most impressive monument to futility ever created. Apart from Captain Mitchell with his comfortable old age secured by his seventeen shares in the San Tome mine, no one achieves satisfaction ....<sup>2</sup>

In terms of this thesis, such an interpretation would involve a concentration on Mrs. Gould's disillusionment, which is a very real aspect of the novel, to the exclusion of her moral nature, which is equally real. By focusing on this moral nature as a thing essentially unsullied by

the process of disillusionment, one can attain a perspective on the novel from which positive human values can be seen counterbalancing a more deterministic view.

Though Conrad's ironic vision cannot be denied, though it remains essentially pessimistic throughout, it is a vision in which human dignity is not wholly surrendered to the relentless sequence of events. It is in the moral concern of Mrs. Gould for others in the novel that this human dignity chiefly resides. At an early point in Under Western Eyes, the protagonist, Razumov, is described as searching for a "moral refuge".<sup>3</sup> The phrase, with its connotations of sanctuary or retreat from the basically amoral world, may best describe the relatively unobtrusive nature of Mrs. Gould's own moral quality. It is not characterized by the missionary zeal of a Holroyd who desires, much to Mrs. Gould's chagrin, to impose his brand of salvation on the people of Costaguana. Such an imposition has all the traits of the broader activities of material interests that are treated with consistent irony throughout Nostromo, and, as in the case of material interests, it will lead to man's degradation, not his betterment. Mrs. Gould's offer of a moral refuge, on the other hand, is marked by a reticence that resembles her essentially passive role in the narrative, particularly towards the end of the novel. The onus is placed on other individuals to recognize her positive moral qualities, and

to accept them as the only real things of value in the world of Nostromo. Through the force of her moral nature each individual with whom she comes in contact is offered an alternative to the rigorously deterministic world depicted in the narrative. An opportunity to perform meaningful, moral acts is presented to those individuals, and the performance of those acts constitutes an assertion of an inherent human dignity on their part.

Obviously the most important aspect of the discussion in this chapter will be the treatment of the relationship between Mrs. Gould and the other major characters in the novel. But Conrad reveals her moral outlook not only through these intimate relationships but also in descriptions of various incidents and attitudes of a more tangential nature. Her relationship with the two major social groups in Sulaco, the People and the Aristocracy, serves in this way. Seeing her in the role of benefactress to the former and hostess to the latter strengthens the reader's conception of her as the moral centre of the work, for her moral concern can be seen pervading the novel, particularly in the first part, spreading out beyond the limits of personal friendship into Costaguana as a whole. Moreover, this recognition of a distinction between her relations with the People and with the Aristocracy serves to bring forth the essential attributes of this moral concern. By examining these relationships we can discover

the precise qualities of Mrs. Gould's moral outlook before moving on to an investigation of her moral role in relation to the other major characters of the novel.

As benefactress to the common people Mrs. Gould demonstrates an unceasing sympathy for their wretched condition and an equally unceasing desire to lessen their burden. The examples of this sympathy are far too numerous to mention. In the first part of the novel, 'The Silver of the Mine', they abound. The description of the Goulds' journey through the Occidental Province shows Mrs. Gould's moral concern in relationship to the concerns of her husband. While Charles Gould tends to the affairs of the Concession, his wife becomes involved with the people of the country themselves:

Men ploughed with wooden ploughs and yoked oxen, small on a boundless expanse, as if attacking immensity itself. The mounted figures of vaqueros galloped in the distance, and the great herds fed with all their horned heads one way; in one single wavering line as far as eye could reach across the broad 'potreros'. A spreading cotton-wool tree shaded a thatched ranche by the road; the trudging files of burdened Indians taking off their hats, would lift sad, mute eyes to the cavalcade raising the dust of the crumbling 'camino real' made by the hands of their enslaved forefathers. And Mrs. Gould, with each day's journey seemed to come nearer to the soul of the land in the tremendous disclosure of this interior unaffected by the slight European veneer of the coast towns, a great land of plain and mountain and people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future in a pathetic immobility of patience. (Pt. I, Ch. vii; pp. 87-8)

The crowning expression of this sympathetic response to the plight of the Costaguanan people is the designation,

by Decoud, of the officials in charge of the miners' welfare as her "three ministers". Under her auspices Father Roman and Dr. Monygham attend to the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the miners while Don Pepe takes charge of the temporal affairs in general. The arrangement asserts the true quality of her sympathy and initially reinforces the unfortunately illusory notion that a beneficial alliance of moral principle and material interests can be achieved.

Christopher Cooper has chosen Mrs. Gould's understanding of the bandit, Hernandez, as the best example of her sympathy with the common people:<sup>4</sup> "If it had not been for the lawless tyranny of your Government, Don Pepe, many an outlaw now with Hernandez would be living peaceably and happy by the honest work of his hands" (Pt. I, Ch. viii; p. 109). The eventual rehabilitation of Hernandez and his whole band certainly attests to her perspicacity, but perhaps a better example of Mrs. Gould's sympathy with the People can be found in her relationship with the Viola family. They are not of the circle that frequents the salon of Casa Gould, but they receive the benefits of Mrs. Gould's sympathy, nevertheless. The gift of the spectacles and the preservation of the inn have already been mentioned. Coming as they do, in times of prosperity and success for the Goulds, they might be somewhat suspect. During the strife that strikes Sulaco following the Montero insurrection, however - a time of great personal crisis



for Mrs. Gould - she still finds time to care for the Viola girls after the death of Teresa. Further evidence of her sympathy is provided in her arranging for the purchase of a yacht for Nostromo, and, finally, in her visit to his death bed where she once more takes Giselle Viola into her care. To the people of Costaguana, Mrs. Gould's moral concern takes the form of a constant sympathy with their suffering and a willingness to alleviate it.

As the hostess at the salon of Casa Gould, Mrs. Gould demonstrates another attribute of her moral nature, a kind of understanding informed by sympathy, that expresses itself in a discreet compassion for others. When Dr. Monygham begins to wear his "little white jacket" to the Casa Gould in deference to Mrs. Gould, she recognizes the concession but is too discreet to comment upon it (Pt. I, Ch. vi; pp. 45-6). This is only a particular instance of her general treatment of the visiting English engineers and the Blanco aristocrats:

She kept her old Spanish house (one of the finest specimens in Sulaco) open for the dispensation of the small graces of existence. She dispensed them with a simplicity and charm because she was guided by an alert perception of values. She was highly gifted in the art of human intercourse which consists in delicate shades of universal comprehension. Charles Gould ... imagined that he had fallen in love with a girl's sound common sense like any other man, but these were not exactly the reasons why, for instance, the whole surveying camp, from the youngest of the young men to their mature chief, should have found occasion to allude to Mrs. Gould's house so frequently amongst the high peaks of the Sierra. She would have protested that she had done nothing for them, with a low laugh and a surprised

widening of her grey eyes, had anybody told her how convincingly she was remembered on the edge of the snow-line above Sulaco. But directly, with a little capable air of setting her wits to work, she would have found an explanation. "Of course, it was such a surprise for these boys to find any sort of welcome here. And I suppose they are homesick. I suppose every body must always be just a little homesick."

She was always sorry for homesick people.

Pt. I, Ch. vi; p. 46)

Among the common people, as the 'never-tired Senora', she is depicted as a shining example of moral concern; among the company of officials who are deciding Costaguana's fate, in her initial appearance in the novel, she is the equally shining focus of the reader's attention: "... Mrs. Gould alone had appeared, a bright spot in the group of black coats behind the President - Dictator ... and her clear dress gave the only truly festive note to the sombre gathering in the long, gorgeous saloon of the 'Juno'" (Pt. I, Ch. v; p. 35).

The sympathy Mrs. Gould demonstrates in her relations with the People and the discreet understanding that characterizes her relations with the Aristocracy are the essential qualities upon which her moral concern for others is based. Each tempers the other and, in combination, they form what may be described as her moral intelligence:

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Gould's mind was masculine. A woman with a masculine mind is not a being of superior efficiency; she is simply a phenomenon of imperfect differentiation - interestingly barren and without importance. Dona Emilia's intelligence, being feminine, led her to achieve the

conquest of Sulaco, simply by lighting the way for her unselfishness and sympathy. She could converse charmingly, but she was not talkative. The wisdom of the heart, having no concern with the erection or demolition of theories any more than with the defence of prejudices, has no random words at its command. The words it pronounces have the value of acts of integrity, tolerance, and compassion.

(Pt. I, Ch. vi; pp. 66-7)

The vital aspect of Mrs. Gould's moral concern, as a whole, is the reticence which holds in check an apparently unbounded compassion. It has the effect of forcing others to recognize her moral values and to make choices based on those recognitions. It is a moral outlook that requires the assertion of the individual's own moral intelligence, of his or her own worth and dignity as a human being, in other words.

It is in the more intimate relationships with other major characters that one can best perceive Mrs. Gould's moral nature, for it is in those relationships that her "moral intelligence" truly comes to the fore. Moreover, it is in those relationships that one can see Conrad's use of Mrs. Gould as a moral standard against which those other major characters can be measured. This is not to say that she is simply an allegorical figure embodying the acceptable standard of rectitude among men; rather, moral principle is given a palpable human form in her. Characters respond to her emotionally and intellectually and one's moral judgement of them is based on their whole

response to her. Our understanding of their moral worth is intensified in this way. It is to these more intimate relationships that we shall now turn.

Mrs. Gould's relationship with the Avellanos, Don José and his daughter Antonia, is a case in point. The reader regards the elder statesman of Costaguana with sympathy throughout the novel. As the defeat of Ribierism becomes apparent in the opening chapters of 'The Isabels', the portrayal of Don José tends towards pathos, but when he is seen in Casa Gould one never loses sight of his graciousness or his desire for the political legitimacy of Costaguana. This positive portrayal of him is accentuated by his warm relationship with Mrs. Gould. In a very touching scene the true nature of this relationship can be perceived:

In the afternoon the news of that vote had reached Sulaco by the usual roundabout postal way through Cayta, and up the coast by steamer. Don José, who had been waiting for the mail in the Gould's drawing-room, got out of the rocking chair, letting his hat fall off his knees. He rubbed his silvery, short hair with both hands, speechless with the excess of joy.

"Emilia, my soul," he had burst out, "let me embrace you! Let me—"

Captain Mitchell, had he been there, would no doubt have made an apt remark about the dawn of a new era; but if Don José thought something of the kind, his eloquence failed him on this occasion. The inspirer of that revival of the Blanco party tottered where he stood. Mrs. Gould moved forward quickly, and, as she offered her cheek with a smile to her old friend, managed very cleverly to give him the support of her arm he really needed.

(Pt. II, Ch. i; p. 141)

In the presence of Mrs. Gould, in the salon, he is a man of respect who Conrad calls, in his note, "my venerable friend". Away from the salon he is the mere husk of a man Charles Gould sees lying in the carriage, wasted by age and disappointment. It is through his close relationship with Mrs. Gould that our positive judgement of him is assured, for he recognizes her moral worth and accepts her as a source of strength for himself, while she supports and defends him at every turn.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Antonia Avellanos is essentially a mysterious character. She seems to be a woman of great potential in terms of both passion and intellect: "The other young ladies of Sulaco stood in awe of her character and accomplishments. She was reputed to be terribly learned and serious" (Pt. II, Ch. i; p. 140). Elsewhere one is given indications of her passionate love for her father, her country, and Don Martin Decoud. But the narrative voice never offers the kind of insights into her character that are given, for example, of Charles Gould, Dr. Monygham, or Martin Decoud. No accounts of her innermost thoughts and feelings are given as they are for Mrs. Gould. She is most often seen in the novel with Mrs. Gould, and even in these brief comparisons of the two women one is struck by Antonia's great potential:

Antonia, the beautiful Antonia, as Miss Avellanos was called in Sulaco, leaned back, facing them; and her full figure, the grave oval of her face with full red lips, made her look more mature than Mrs. Gould, with her mobile expression and small, erect person under a slightly swaying sunshade.

(Pt. II, Ch. ii; pp. 149-50)

A comparison of Mrs. Gould and Antonia, however, serves also to reveal a possible limitation in Antonia. Significantly, the scene in question here is the last appearance of Antonia in the novel; the last impression we will have of her emerges in the presence of Mrs. Gould. In that scene she comes to Mrs. Gould with her fanatical uncle, Corbelan, to advocate a war of annexation. The whole development in the narrative from illusion to disillusionment has resulted in the recognition of a separation between moral principle, on the one hand, and material interests, on the other. One can see the younger woman perpetuating the illusions with which the story began. She states that the annexation "was from the first poor Martin's intention" (Pt. III, Ch. xi; p. 509), whereas the reader knows that it was nothing of the sort. She remains caught in the pale of material interests, within the condition which Conrad has treated with merciless irony throughout, and, therefore, she is cut off from the understanding that disillusionment brings to Mrs. Gould, and from the moral refuge offered to her by the older woman. By measuring her against the standard of Mrs. Gould we can see precisely where Antonia falls short on the moral level.

From an examination of Mrs. Gould's relationship to the Avellanos one can understand, to some extent, her moral nature and how it operates within the context of an essentially ironic work. The amoral world of material interests cannot be denied. It affects every person in Costaguana in one way or another, but through a recognition of the moral values represented in the character of Mrs. Gould, and through an active nurturing of those values, the deterministic possibilities inherent in such an ironic vision can be avoided. The assertion of moral principle, despite the disillusionment entailed in the development of material interests, is tantamount to an assertion of human dignity, and the extent to which this principle and this dignity are operative can be seen in the response, or lack of response, of the various characters to Mrs. Gould. Hence the distinction that can be drawn between Antonia Avellanos and her father. Hence the sharper distinction that can be drawn between Charles Gould and Dr. Monygham who are on even more intimate terms with her. Once again, one can see the positive response to her virtues, in the character of Monygham, leading to a relatively positive judgement of his character while Charles Gould's distinct lack of response leads to a corresponding negative judgement.

The relationship of Charles and Emilia Gould was traced to some extent in the discussion on narrative in

Chapter One. The whole movement from illusion to disillusionment is captured in miniature in the development of their marriage from youthful exuberance and illusory hopes to the estrangement at the end of the novel. For the reader, one of the most frustrating aspects of this relationship is that if anyone should recognize and care for the moral values that Mrs. Gould embodies, and if anyone needs the moral refuge she can provide, it is her husband. He, however, does not respond to her on this level. This frustration is compounded by the impression one receives that Charles does, to some extent, recognize those values in his wife but that even that recognition does not significantly affect his actions in the novel. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he does undergo a disillusionment of his own after the apparent victory of the Monterists. But this disillusionment does not result in any lessening of his obsession with the mine, a realization one comes upon near the end of the novel that is morally shocking despite its half-expected nature. He confronts the "moral darkness" of his situation in Chapters Three and Four of 'The Lighthouse', but there is no indication in the following chapters of what effect this confrontation may have had. His immediate return to the mine upon landing in Sulaco makes painfully obvious the fact that he has, if anything, grown more callous, more aloof, and has utterly abandoned his wife.

The judgement of Charles Gould, on the basis of his response to his wife, should be unreservedly harsh. But Conrad plays with the feelings of the reader in this instance, creating a tension between a negative response bordering on rejection and a more positive response of pity that is derived largely from Mrs. Gould's own sympathy. Her attitude, at once compassionate and understanding, forces us to consider the pitiable aspect of his condition, despite the effects it has on her own situation:

Incorrigible in his devotion to the great silver mine was the Senor Administrador. Incorrigible in his hard determined service of the material interests to which he had pinned his faith in the triumph of order and justice. Poor boy! She had a clear vision of the grey hairs on his temples. He was perfect - perfect. What more could she have expected? It was a colossal and lasting success; and love was only a short moment of forgetfulness, a short intoxication, whose delight one remembered with a sense of sadness, as if it had been a deep grief lived through. There was something inherent in the necessities of successful action which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea. She saw the San Tome 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. He did not see it. He could not see it. It was not his fault. He was perfect, perfect; but she would never have him to herself. Never; not for one short hour altogether to herself in this old Spanish house she loved so well!!... she saw clearly the San Tome mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Costaguana Goulds; mastering the energetic spirit of the son as it had mastered the lamentable weakness of the father.

(Pt. III, Ch. xi; pp. 521-2)

The moral distinctions in Nostromo are not simple ones of black and white. One cannot condemn Charles Gould easily

even though his actions are largely reprehensible in their results. But the relationship between him and his wife does heighten our appreciation of her moral worth. As has been shown in Chapter One, the cruelest blows for Mrs. Gould in her gradual disillusionment are on the personal level in respect to her husband. That she can suffer them yet remain magnanimous in spirit attests to this worth.

Dr. Monygham is the most bitterly pessimistic figure in the novel. Through the process of his torture he has become a true Costaguanero in his understanding of the basically amoral rhythms of life in the country, a condition epitomized in his enslavement to the ghost of Father Beron, his torturer (Pt. III, Ch. iv; pp. 374-5). He is bound to the land by a belief in his own worthlessness; his self-degradation and cynicism are the logical extensions of this condition. His saving grace lies in his ability to recognize Mrs. Gould as a person worthy of the "great fund of loyalty" he possesses and in his willingness, despite his own opinion of himself, to make an effort at preserving her from the life which binds him. Her mutual acceptance of him as an intimate, despite his shabby past and cynical outlook, results in his rehabilitation. Eventually he makes his career in the new Occidental Republic as Inspector-General of State Hospitals, a personal success which is accompanied and, in a sense,

legitimized by a freedom from the ghost that has haunted him. Father Beron has "almost completely" disappeared from his dreams (Pt. III, Ch. xi; p. 508).

As in the case of Charles Gould, however, one must guard against extremes in the moral judgement of Dr. Monygham. Cooper regards him as a wholly positive figure, the good-hearted man whose evil appearance belies the reality of his inner self.<sup>5</sup> There is some evidence for such an evaluation. Certainly, in *Monygham*, Conrad provides the finest example of the positive effect of Mrs. Gould's moral concern for others, for, by the end of the novel, he is a man who can live with himself, to some extent, having found a worthwhile reason for living in the person of Mrs. Gould. But in his actions at the time of Nostromo's death there is no evidence that he has completely freed himself from this sordid attachment to the country. His morbid curiosity about the death of Nostromo and his bitter reaction to the rebuff he receives from Mrs. Gould attest to his lingering cynicism:

Outside the door of the sickroom Dr. Monygham, excited to the highest pitch, his eyes shining with eagerness, came up to the two women.

"Now, Mrs. Gould," he said, almost brutally in his impatience, "tell me, was I right? There is a mystery. You have got the word of it, have you not? He told you--"

"He told me nothing," said Mrs. Gould, steadily.

The light of his temperamental enmity to Nostromo went out of Dr. Monygham's eyes. He stepped back submissively. He did not believe Mrs. Gould. But her word was law. He accepted her denial like an inexplicable fatality affirming the victory of Nostromo's genius

over his own. Even before that woman, whom he loved with secret devotion, he had been defeated by the magnificent Capataz the Cargadores, the man who had lived his own life on the assumption of unbroken fidelity, rectitude, and courage!

(Pt. III, Ch. xiii; pp. 560-1)

Monygham's personal story is yet another reflection on the moral nature of Mrs. Gould. With her patience throughout and her final refusal to confirm his suspicions of Nostromo, she has preserved Monygham from moral self-destruction as much as he has preserved her from physical abuse by the likes of Sotillo.<sup>6</sup>

Charles Gould and Dr. Monygham are the two characters who clearly must be studied in terms of their relationships to Mrs. Gould. In both cases we can see examples of her moral concern for others and we can judge the moral natures of those other individuals by examining those relationships. But perhaps the best example of her moral concern in a single incident is her visit to the dying Nostromo. As mentioned in the previous chapter, she comes to him dressed as a priest or monk, and clearly the priestly function she performs is that of confession. In his enslavement to the silver Nostromo appears to be the most unredeemable character in the novel. His whole personality is engaged by its spell, a spell which he cannot break even for the love of Giselle. Nostromo painfully confesses his bondage to the silver, and the secret of its whereabouts dies with him, undisclosed either to Mrs. Gould who refuses to hear of it,

or to the Marxist photographer, the representative of material interests in all their sordid and amoral potential, who ardently desires to locate it. As in the case of Monygham, one is not justified in talking of Nostromo's "redemption". His suffering seems to be relieved by her presence but he cannot wholly break free of the spell he feels holding him, despite the concern of his comforter.

The development of the narrative in Nostromo, as shown in Chapter One, is essentially pessimistic. On the level of individual relationships, however, moral concerns come into play through which this pessimism can be tempered somewhat. In Nostromo, the figure of Mrs. Gould is most closely related to these moral concerns and by concentrating on her relationships with others one can discern not only the precise qualities of her moral nature, but the moral worth of others as well. The individual cannot divorce himself from the world, however. This is what both Razumov and Heyst try to do in later novels of Conrad, and both fail in their attempts. The value of the moral concerns represented by Mrs. Gould is not in any escape from the world it may provide, but in the understanding of the world it makes possible. Taking the two in balance, the inevitability of disillusionment and the moral understanding of a Mrs. Gould, what Conrad seems to offer is not a mitigation of human suffering so much as rendering comprehensible the otherwise baffling, omnipresent reality.

## CHAPTER THREE

In the previous two chapters the focus has been largely on Mrs. Gould, and much has been learned about her role in relation to the narrative as a whole in Chapter One and to the moral sphere of the novel in Chapter Two. On the one hand her gradual movement into disillusionment has been shown; on the other, this movement has been shown to be balanced by a constant moral concern for others. In both cases, as well, specific functions have been discovered that relate directly to those qualities of her character. In the final analysis, however, these two aspects of her character and these corresponding functions are not easily separable. One should not speak of Conrad's moral vision in Nostromo, for instance, without regarding the generally pessimistic nature of the book, and vice versa. By taking these two aspects together, however, we go a long way towards understanding Conrad's overall moral vision in the novel. Having established the more affirmative side of his moral outlook by examining the character of Mrs. Gould in all its complexity, we can now shift the focus from her to the morally imperfect individuals in the story. The purpose of this chapter, then, will be to examine Conrad's portrayal of these

morally imperfect individuals and to see how he brings the polarities of the moral world together in Nostromo.

The penultimate scene of the novel has already been discussed in terms of the light it sheds on the characters of Mrs. Gould and Dr. Monygham, both individually and in relationship to one another. An examination of the same scene, with emphasis on the conversation between Mrs. Gould and the dying Nostromo, will quickly and sharply bring into focus these polarities spoken of above. It brings together Mrs. Gould, whose moral nature has already been seen, and Nostromo whose moral nature, as will be shown, has been corrupted through the course of the narrative. The characteristics of Mrs. Gould, the discreet expression of compassion and understanding, are fully in evidence during the scene. The constancy of her moral concern is tried by Nostromo but remains firm throughout the confrontation. Nostromo, likewise, remains essentially in character, evincing especially his attachment to the treasure that has been evident in the final chapters along with the incessant subjectivity that has been evident throughout the novel. To Mrs. Gould's question on the fate of Decoud he gives a characteristic reply:

"Who knows! I wondered what would become of me. Now I know. Death was to come upon me unawares. He went away! He betrayed me. And you think I have killed him! You are all alike, you fine people. The silver has killed me. It has held me. It holds me yet. (Pt. III, Ch. xiii; p. 559)

He raves before the silent figure of Mrs. Gould like a man insane, caught in the throes of death and the spell the silver has cast on him. The contrast between the two figures is unmistakable.

This scene illustrates, in miniature, both the moral world of the novel and the way in which Conrad portrays it. In the opening paragraphs we see the discreet, silent figure of Mrs. Gould set against Nostromo, convinced of his own greatness, even in death. But this difference between two personalities is given broader symbolic significance by Conrad's diction and imagery drawn from the fairy tale for the purpose characterizing Nostromo's condition. In his own words he is caught in a "spell" (Pt. III, Ch. xiii; p. 558) cast by the "accursed treasure" (Pt. III, Ch. xiii; p. 559). One is given a view of Nostromo as a figure in a romance, a view which, given his obsession and his subjectivity, almost becomes a self-image, as well. On the other hand, the disillusioned Mrs. Gould, notwithstanding her moral nature, seems rooted in reality. A wide gap is created between them. The scene has the aspect of two fundamentally different perceptions of reality coming into contact, and conflict, with one another.

In the novel Conrad employs the diction and imagery of fairy tale, folklore, and romance to characterize the condition of the morally imperfect man, to illuminate the

condition itself, and to heighten the contrast between it and the moral nature of a Mrs. Gould. The one example of such imagery that has been mentioned already, however, relates to Mrs. Gould herself. At the end of Chapter One reference was made to the good fairy image. It was seen in its development, as an epitome of the development of her personal story from illusion to disillusionment. A brief re-examination of the image, in the light of the present discussion, will clear up any apparent contradiction in the argument at this point. Moreover, the treatment that image receives is indicative of Conrad's conscious intention to use such imagery for a specific purpose in Nostromo.

By the end of the novel Mrs. Gould has reached a point where any view she may have had of herself as a figure in a romance has vanished. This state of disillusionment is enhanced, as has already been mentioned, by the description of her as a "good fairy, weary with a long career of well-doing, touched by the withering suspicion of the uselessness of her labours, the powerlessness of her magic" (Pt. III, Ch. xi; p. 520). At the beginning of the novel Mrs. Gould was as much a part of the "moral romance" described by Decoud as was her husband (Pt. II, Ch. vi; p. 218). The image of the good fairy places her firmly in such a world. The process of her disillusionment, however, while leaving her moral

nature intact, destroyed the illusions of romance. It is a development opposite to that of Charles Gould who sacrifices his moral being in order to perpetuate his romantic conceptions. Like Nostromo, he becomes a man obsessed, and, again like Nostromo, obsession and a self-image bound up in a romantic conception of reality go hand in hand. If one's sympathy continues to be with Emilia Gould throughout the novel, then one must, with her, eventually reject this world of romance as being basically illusory and harmful. To put it succinctly, the diction and the imagery of romance serve an ironic function in Nostromo.

Claire Rosenfeld has argued that Nostromo is essentially a confusion of the genres of novel and romance. She claims that Conrad has tried to harmonize the two distinct strains and that, magnificent as his effort is, he fails to bring it off. However, the matter could be seen another way, if it is possible that Conrad is using one of the genres, romance, in an ironic way within the structure of his novel. To argue in this fashion would assert the existence of a highly conscious intention in the creation of the work and will require considerable demonstration. But it seems best to argue for such an intention rather than against it if the material seems to justify the effort. Therefore, this question of genre will continue to crop up when it appears to shed light

on the primary topic of discussion, Conrad's portrayal of the morally imperfect individual.<sup>1</sup>

A minor but most illuminating instance of Conrad's portrayal of the moral condition that plagues most of the characters of Nostromo can be seen in the unfolding of the character of Pedrito Montero. He has parlayed the ability to read and a penchant for light, romantic literature into a world of personal fantasy and illusion. The success of his brother, the general, provides him with the means of translating these dreams into opulent realities, and, in the pursuit of these "realities", he plays a key role in plunging the country into civil war:

... at first sight the agent of the Gould Concession in Sta. Marta had credited him [Pedro Montero] with the possession of sane views, and even with a restraining power over the general's everlastingly discontented vanity. It could never have entered his head that Pedrito Montero, lackey or inferior scribe, lodged in the garrets of the various Parisian hotels where the Costaguanan Legation used to shelter its diplomatic dignity, had been devouring the lighter sort of historical works in the French language .... But Pedrito had been struck by the splendour of a brilliant court, and had conceived the idea of an existence for himself where like the Duc de Morny, he would associate the command of every pleasure with the conduct of political affairs and enjoy power supremely in every way. Nobody could have guessed that. And yet this was one of the immediate causes of the Monterist Revolution. (Pt. III, Ch. v; p. 387)

It would almost be crass to point out the difference between this perception of the world and that of Mrs. Gould. Nevertheless, Pedrito's image of himself as romantic

hero, able to command reality as if it were identical to the fictional world of the books he reads, is fundamentally the same as the self-image of many of the important characters in the moral framework of Nostromo.<sup>2</sup> They, too, are victims of obsessive illusions that affect their actions.

The case of Pedro Montero brings to mind Charles Gould's father who also had a lively interest in light literature:

He became at once mine-ridden, and as he was well read in light literature it took to his mind the form of the Old Man of the Sea fastened upon his shoulders. He also began to dream of vampires. (Pt. I, Ch. vi; pp. 556)

The two are not exactly identical. Pedrito consciously attempts to make reality conform to illusion while Gould Sr., in despair, has reached into the realm of light romance to find suitable expression for his malady. But this despair itself is symptomatic of a more basic condition, of an inability to act in the world as it is. It is a condition which he shares with his son, and in this similarity a key to understanding the nature of Charles Gould, and the morally imperfect man in general, can be found:

It might have been an unfortunate affair for his poor dad, and the whole story threw a queer light upon the social and political life of Costaguana. The view he took of it was sympathetic to his father, yet calm and reflective. His personal feelings had not been

outraged and it is difficult to resent with proper and durable indignation the physical or mental anguish of another organism, even if that other organism is one's own father. By the time he was twenty Charles Gould had, in his turn, fallen under the spell of the San Tome mine. But it was another form of enchantment, more suitable to his youth, into whose magic formula there entered hope, vigour, and self-confidence, instead of weary indignation and despair. (Pt. I, Ch. vi; pp. 58-9)

Because Gould Sr. is portrayed as a pathetic, slightly deranged figure who cannot act while his son is portrayed as a robust, rational man who is very successful, their similarity is not readily apparent. But Charles too must romanticize his relation with the mine. Once one becomes aware of the "enchanted" aspect of Charles Gould's character, much of what, at first, appears contradictory or unusual in his behaviour becomes understandable.

The use of the word "enchantment" recalls the diction of romance used to describe Nostromo in the final chapters of the novel; and, indeed, it is the best word to describe the condition of the morally imperfect man in Nostromo. It is a condition in which the individual is wholly consumed by an interest in one object to the exclusion of all other objects and people. It is an obsession that reaches the extreme point at which all reality is coloured by it. Enchantment is the correct term in Nostromo, for Conrad associates this state of obsession with a perception of the world as romance, a perception that estranges the individual from reality.

Opposite to this condition in the moral world of Nostromo is the disillusioned view of Mrs. Gould who has seen the magic go out of her world. She is involved with others morally. Her priorities, where people take precedence over things, and where an action must be judged by its morality as well as its efficacy, are very different from those of her husband. It is this difference in perception that defines the moral world of the novel.

Decoud's statement on Charles Gould's living in a "moral romance" in which all his actions are based on sentiment can be more fully appreciated when the latter's enchantment with the silver mine is understood. One can put into perspective the pronouncements on material interests and the frequent references to Charles' aloofness, both of which create an impression of rational reserve, and see his condition, particularly as it relates to his wife, in strictly moral terms. Charles Gould's enchantment with the mine has confused any true moral concern on his part. If the basic function of a moral code is to allow the individual to make distinctions between good and bad actions, it becomes apparent that the enchanted individual is incapable of making such distinctions. All his actions are devoted to the creation of this illusory world, and, if they are in accord with acceptable social standards, the romance remains hidden from all but the more insightful and skeptical intelli-

gences - Decoud or Monygham in this story. As the romance begins to bump against reality, however, as the pleasant dream gives way to nightmare, the desire to perpetuate the illusory world at all costs results in the kinds of aberrations apparent in both Nostromo and Charles Gould.

All the apparent moral concern attributed to Charles Gould and all the reasonable talk on material interests, then, are part of an elaborate facade behind which lies the obsessed individual. One cannot jump to the conclusion that this is a consciously constructed facade, for the statements have a ring of sincerity, especially on first reading. They are the expression of the creed which informs the illusions of the success story:

"What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Any one can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your way of hope" . . . "And who knows whether in that sense even the San Tome mine may not become that little rift in the darkness which poor father despaired of ever seeing?" (Pt. I, Ch. vi; p. 84)

This statement has often been taken at face value as being Conrad's expression of the theme of the work. However, it is Charles Gould's enchantment, and the enchantment of man in general, especially as an expression of moral imperfection, that is the basic theme of the work, a

theme to which "material interests" and such can be seen as ancillary.

From minor characters such as Sotillo and Pedro Montero to the most important characters in the novel, among them Charles Gould, Decoud, and Nostromo, the silver of the mine is the object which enchants, which apparently casts the spell over their personalities. But one must guard against imputing to the silver itself, or material interests, any sort of corrupting power distinct from the men who are corrupted. To evaluate a metal in this way would admit into Conrad's vision an inordinate degree of determinism as well as violate some rather basic views on the nature of material objects which seem to hold true in Nostromo. The silver is a "fact" in the novel and, as such, plays an important role in the narrative itself. But the reason for the enchantment of Charles Gould and the others is not to be found in the silver but in themselves. With the examples of Mrs. Gould and, to a lesser extent, Dr. Monygham and Don José Avellanos, with Don Pepe and Father Roman at a lower level of self-consciousness, Conrad seems to assert a capability inherent in all men to act morally, even in the most trying situations. The failure of others to do so cannot be blamed on the inanimate silver, but must rest with the individuals themselves. The utter subordination of man to material objects or material interests is not a concept to

be found in Conrad. His ironic vision entails some subordination of this sort. Man is, to some extent, a victim of the world in which he lives, but in Nostromo the focus remains intensely human throughout. To accept an utter subjugation to the world and circumstance, to attribute to the silver a corrupting power of its own, and to man a helplessness in the face of that power, is to accept Nostromo's own assessment of his enchantment, that he has been "betrayed", that a spell has been cast on him. What Nostromo never sees, but what the reader must see, is that the fault lies within the individual, not without. Each person must take responsibility for his own actions.

In the description of the enchantment of Decoud and Nostromo one receives a further indication of the nature of this condition which afflicts Charles Gould and which stands in opposition to the moral nature of Mrs. Gould:

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 silver, disappeared without a trace, swallowed up in the immense indifference of things. His sleepless, crouching figure was gone from the side of the San Tome silver; and for a time the spirits of good and evil that hover near every concealed treasure of the earth might have thought that this one had been forgotten by all mankind. Then, after a few days, another form appeared striding away from the setting sun to sit motionless and awake in the narrow black gully all through the night, in nearly the same pose, in the same place in which had sat the other sleepless man who had gone away for ever so quietly in a small boat, about the time of sunset. And the spirits of good and evil that hover about a forbidden treasure understood well that the silver of San Tome was provided now with a faithful and lifelong slave.

The magnificent Capataz de Cargadores, victim of the disenchanted vanity which is the reward of audacious action, sat in the weary pose of a hunted outcast through a night of sleeplessness as tormenting as any known to Decoud, his companion in the most desperate affair of his life. And he wondered how Decoud had died. But he knew the part he 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. The blank stillness of awe was succeeded by a gust of immense pride. There was no one in the world but Gian Battista Fidanza, Capataz de Cargadores, the incorruptible and faithful Nostromo, to pay such a price. (Pt. III, Ch. x; pp 501-2)

Each man asserted himself in the world of Sulaco, Decoud through intelligence, Nostromo through action, and, with the apparent loss of that world, only the silver seems to offer an alternative to their variety of devotion to self.

A key word in the passage quoted above, one which draws both men into close association with each other, is audacity. The concept of audacity is very important in the novel in its relation to the enchanted condition, and in the way that it corresponds to the moral action of Mrs. Gould. It has been shown that the moral nature of Mrs. Gould manifests itself in acts of compassion and understanding performed with discretion. The thoughts and actions of Decoud and Nostromo, of Charles Gould and numerous minor characters in the novel are not characterized by reticence, but by audacity.<sup>3</sup> These men attempt to impose their wills on the external world and on other people in a manner quite the opposite of Mrs. Gould's, and, in the ironic world of Nostromo where men are fallible and

often misguided, these attempts necessarily end in failure. A distinct lack of moral discretion leads the enchanted man into situations where the results of his actions are disastrous for all concerned. It is vital to note that the fundamentally moral individuals in Nostromo - Mrs. Gould, Monygham, Don Pepe, Father Roman - are never described as being audacious.

The diction and imagery of the passage describing Decoud's and Nostromo's enslavement to the silver are largely drawn from romance literature and the fairy tale, and, when read ironically, they clearly indicate the dissolute state of mind of both men. In the final chapters of Nostromo Conrad frequently draws on the romance, particularly in the description of Nostromo's love affair with Giselle, in order to define clearly the contrast between the enchanted condition of the Capataz and the disillusioned but perceptive state of Mrs. Gould. By using two opposite styles of writing he can juxtapose the two conceptions of reality represented by those figures. These final chapters have often been castigated by critics as being excessively melodramatic, as being "magazinish" and hastily written. It has been claimed by Guerard, among others, that Conrad had lost both interest and control in his novel at this point and that these chapters constitute the most serious flaw in the whole work.<sup>4</sup> If they are seen in the way put forward here,

however, if Conrad is granted a conscious intention in their creation, they become not a serious flaw, but a fitting, indeed, an ingenious ending to the book in which style, theme, character and narrative are successfully brought together in resolution.

The scenes involving Mrs. Gould in the final chapters are characterized by the sophistication and urbanity of the aristocratic world, but, in keeping with disillusionment and loneliness of the woman, wit has been replaced by the silent commiseration of Monygham and by an overriding sense of weariness and time passing:

His pitying emotion at the marks of time upon the face of that woman, the air of frailty and weary fatigue that settled upon the eyes and temples of the "Never-tired Senora" (as Don Pepe years ago used to call her with admiration), touched him almost to tears. (Pt. III, Ch. xi; p. 506)

Mrs. Gould sighed. And as two friends, after a long separation, will revert to the most agitated period of their lives, they began to talk of the Sulaco Revolution. (Pt. III, Ch. xi; p. 509)

Had anybody asked her of what she was thinking, alone in the garden of the Casa, with her husband at the mine and the house closed to the street like an empty dwelling, her frankness would have had to evade the question. It had come into her mind that for life to be large and full, it must contain the care of the past and of the future in every passing moment of the present. Our daily work must be done for the glory of the dead, and for the good of those who come after. She thought that, and sighed without opening her eyes - without moving at all. Mrs. Gould's face became set and rigid for a second, as if to receive, without flinching, a great wave of loneliness that swept over her head. And it came into her mind, too, that no one would ask her with solicitude what she was thinking of. No one. No one, but perhaps the man who had just gone away. No; no

one who could be answered with careless sincerity  
in the ideal perfection of confidence.

(Pt. III, Ch. xi; pp. 520-1)

Compared to the above scenes at the Casa Gould in the final chapters, the scenes of love and passion on Great Isabel are remarkable for their violent emotional nature, for their melodramatic intensity that is direct and unsubtle. Particularly in the figures of Giselle and Nostromo one feels this unchecked emotion, and it gives rise to dialogue that is, at some points, utterly ridiculous by the standards set in the scenes involving Mrs. Gould, a quality which they have by design:

He broke out -

"Your hair like gold, your eyes like violets,  
and your lips like the rose, your round arms,  
your white throat". . .

Imperturbable in the indolence of her pose, she blushed deeply all over to the roots of her hair. She was not conceited. She was no more self-conscious than a flower. But she was pleased. And perhaps even a flower loves to hear itself praised. He glanced down, and added, impetuously -

"Your little feet!" (Pt. III, Ch. xxi; pp. 535-6)

But besides these more ludicrous passages that accentuate Conrad's ironic intention in writing them the lovers also express their passions and desires in the imagery of romance that fits very easily into the melodramatic rendering of their story:

He would cherish her, he said, in a splendour as great as Dona Emilia's. The rich lived on wealth stolen from the people, but he had taken from the rich nothing - nothing that was lost to them already by their folly and their betrayal. For he had been

betrayed - he said - deceived, tempted. She believed him . . . He had kept the treasure for purposes of revenge; but now he cared nothing for it. He cared only for her. He would keep her beauty in a palace on a hill crowned with olive trees - a white palace above a blue sea. He would keep her there like a jewel in a casket. He would get land for her - her own land fertile with vines and corn - to set her little feet upon. (Pt. III, Ch. xii; pp. 540-1)

In keeping with the nature of the enchanted condition, diction and imagery drawn from the romance play a dominant role in the scenes on Great Isabel, and in their audaciousness one can see them in contrast with the more self-conscious scenes of disillusionment in the garden of Casa Gould.

Nostromo becomes the counterpart of Mrs. Gould in the novel which bears his name. Unlike Charles Gould he experiences a real sense of disillusionment, though it is called, significantly, disenchantment. Like Mrs. Gould's, his former illusions, related to his public position as the Capataz de Cargadores, are exposed and ruined. But, in his case, his moral nature is not of sufficient strength to withstand disillusionment, and one kind of enchantment is simply replaced by another. Therefore, the bringing together of Nostromo and Mrs. Gould in the scene studied at the beginning of the chapter is the true culmination of Conrad's portrayal of the moral world of the novel. Nostromo himself sees the nature of the scene in terms of the reputations of himself and his comforter: "Senora, cast on her the eye of your compassion, as famed from one

end of the land to the other as the courage and daring of the man who speaks to you" (Pt. III, Ch. xiii; p. 559). The contrast of "compassion" and "courage and daring" is reminiscent of the opposition noted above between moral action and audacious action, the public manifestations of the inner natures of morality and enchantment.

It has been shown that Mrs. Gould continues to assert her moral nature throughout the novel. Though it may be that Nostromo dies easier because of her presence, it cannot be affirmed that he has broken free from the "spell" entirely. Once again, it must be said that the vision of Conrad is pessimistic. In the final scene one sees the senility and death of Giorgio Viola, the bitter incomprehension of Linda whose passion for Nostromo remains strong despite his infidelity, and the inability of even Monygham to understand fully the situation. In a way the ending is profoundly ironic, for in refusing to hear of the treasure's location, thereby burying it forever, Mrs. Gould has preserved forever the false, public reputation of Nostromo. Ignoble in life, a slave to the inanimate silver, he becomes magnificent in death. Linda Viola's cry from the lighthouse marks his final triumph:

She stood silent and still, collecting her strength to throw all her fidelity, her pain, bewilderment, and despair into one great cry.

"Never! Gian' Battista!"

Dr. Monygham, pulling round in the police-gallery, heard the name pass over his head. It was another of Nostromo's triumphs, his greatest, the most enviable,

the most sinister of all. In that true cry of undying passion that seemed to ring aloud from Punte Mala to Azuera and away to the bright line of the horizon, overhung by a white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver, the genius of the magnificent Capataz de Cargadores dominated the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love. (Pt. III, Ch. xiii; p. 566)

Nevertheless, despite all that is pessimistic in the novel, Mrs. Gould's presence does alleviate that pessimism a great deal. An attempt has been made to show that Conrad sees a potential in man for good and evil, that he is not a mere slave to external forces of history and nature, and, in the assertion and portrayal of this potential, human dignity, at least, is salvaged. By far the greatest fund of that dignity is found in Mrs. Gould. Without her the final vision of Nostromo, pessimistic as it is, would be immeasurably bleaker. Given the breadth of the work, it would be a pessimistic view deeper even than the work which followed it, The Secret Agent. In Conrad's treatment of the character of Mrs. Gould, however, the vision approaches the tragic, where man, assailed by external forces greater than himself, still asserts his worth in the face of those forces and preserves his dignity, even in defeat.

## N O T E S

### INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 129-30.

<sup>2</sup>These two works are: Christopher Cooper, Conrad and the Human Dilemma (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), and two short books by John E. Savesen, Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Moralizer (Amsterdam: Rodopi NV, 1972) and Conrad, The Later Moralizer (Amsterdam: Rodopi NV, 1974). Both of these works are discussed in the following paragraph.

### CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>"Ascendant" and "descendant" are not used here as technical terms to describe plot development as they sometimes are in drama. They are linked, rather, with the movement from illusion to disillusionment that can be discerned in the novel. The following paragraph will offer a description of these sections in general and the use of the terms should become apparent there.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Conrad, Nostromo, ed. Norman Sherry (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1974), Pt. I, Ch. vi; p. 66. All

further references to this work appear in the text.

<sup>3</sup>It may be simply conjecture, but perhaps this emptiness is the same thing that F.R. Leavis perceived but attributed to the whole novel in F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972) pp. 229-30:

At any rate, for all the rich variety of the interest and the tightness of the pattern, the reverberation of Nostromo has something hollow about it; with the colour and life there is a suggestion of a certain emptiness.

That Leavis endows the whole novel with this quality may be explained by his assertion that Decoud is the central figure in the story and, on the whole, a positive one.

<sup>4</sup>In the following, and final chapter of the novel, Conrad makes explicit the comparison between Dr. Monygham and Decoud in this regard:

From the similarity of mood and circumstance, the sight of the doctor, standing there all alone amongst the groups of furniture, recalled to her emotional memory her unexpected meeting with Martin Decoud; she seemed to hear in the silence the voice of that man, dead miserably so many years ago, pronounce the words, "Antonia left her fan here." (Pt. III, Ch. xiii; pp. 555-6)

## CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup>Albert J. Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 177-8.

<sup>2</sup>Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 373.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Conrad, Under Western Eyes (London: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>Christopher Cooper, Conrad and the Human Dilemma (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 142.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, pp. 110-15.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction" to Nostromo, Modern Library Edition, 1951, rpt. in R.W. Stallman, ed., The Art of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Symposium (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1960), p. 219.

### CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>Claire Rosenfeld, "An Archetypal Analysis of Conrad's Nostromo", Texas Studies in Language and Literature, 3 (1962), 510-34.

This article also appears as a chapter in Claire Rosenfeld's Paradise of Snakes: An Archetypal Analysis of Conrad's Political Novels (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>The term "self-image" has been defined and explored in its relation to Conrad by Bruce Johnson in Conrad's Models of Mind (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971). Concerning Nostromo he says:

Nostromo is a study of identity and self-image as a source of value, and as such the novel has deliberately been made pseudopolitical. Political maneuvers and ideals, so apparently the source of value for many men, are here seen as masks consciously and unconsciously used to disguise and reveal simultaneously the true

source of value... (p. 106)

Johnson's primary concern is for the individual's achievement of self-image in Conrad's works. Conrad, he claims, is interested in the existential problem of the unbridled ego let loose in the world. Johnson never really takes his arguments into the ethical areas that are the focus of this thesis, but the insights into the psychologies of individual characters are very helpful.

<sup>3</sup>Some of the references to audacious action are:

... it came to his heart with the peculiar force of a proclamation thundered forth over the land and the marvellousness of an accomplished fact fulfilling an audacious desire. (p. 105, in reference to Charles Gould)

He used to ride, single-handed, into the villages and the little towns on the Campo, driving a pack mule before him, with two revolvers in his belt, go straight to the shop or store, select what he wanted, and rode away unopposed because of the terror his exploits and his audacity inspired. (p. 108, in reference to Hernandez)

What an audacious spitfire she was! (p. 129, in reference to Nostromo's Morenita)

Suddenly she seemed to divine, she seemed to see Decoud's tremendous excitement under its cloak of studied carelessness. It was, indeed, becoming visible in his audacious and watchful stare, in the curve, half-reckless, half-contemptuous, of his lips. (p. 212-3, in reference to Decoud)

His desire to make his fortune at one audacious stroke of genius had overmastered his reasoning faculties. (p. 328, in reference to Sotillo)

<sup>4</sup>Albert Guerard, Conrad the Novelist (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 204:

It is better to state frankly that the third part of Nostromo is for the most part good intelligent popular fiction on a quite different level from the first two parts. The diminished seriousness and creative energy is accompanied by much technical clumsiness and by lapses into a kind of phrasing characteristic of Conrad's last books.

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