

The Narrative Impasse in *Nostromo*

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As Kiernan Ryan claims, we cannot understand *Nostromo* without realizing the function of its oscillation between revelation and repression.⁽¹⁾ The novel certainly discloses some hypocritical aspects of society, such as the enslavement of a developing country by expanding capitalism. On the other hand, however, it can be said that *Nostromo* is defending such problematic social activities from criticism by writing them down. In this essay, I shall try to elucidate this oscillation through the investigation of the novel in relation to historical discourse.

But my essay does not aim to decide whether *Nostromo* is a hypocritical novel or, on the contrary, a novel protesting in the cause of justice. Rather, I am interested in the discontinuity in the novel which makes the oscillation so complicated and virtually interminable. I shall argue that the novel transforms its sceptical mode of discursive speculation into a quite disparate, sentimental one in the middle of its course, and that the transformation results from a serious impasse inherent in the novel.

The novel's subject matter is not so much the life of a person as the life of a society or one phase of it. In the first two sections, *Nostromo* is almost entirely the chronicle of Sulaco that focuses on its secession from Costaguana. In spite of its title, the novel is hardly a fictive biography of Nostromo; he is not the dominant protagonist, and the Goulds and Decoud seem little less important

than he. In addition to this balance among these main characters,⁽²⁾ we notice that each of the main characters represents a fairly distinctive social or political class:⁽³⁾ Charles Gould is a capitalist entrepreneur, Nostromo a hero of the working class, and Decoud one of the intelligentsia in Sulaco, who despises all political activities in his home country. Sulaco has oligarchs like Avellanos, militarists like the Montero brothers, and foreigners coming from various countries as well. The balanced and decentered account of these characters has the effect of giving attention to social developments in Sulaco; the story about Charles Gould, from his rehabilitation of the San Tomé mine to the establishment of the mine's dictatorship over Sulaco and himself, can be read as a story about the transformation of a society: a proletariat comes into existence, and union organizers and strikers are created. The narrator tells us:

[B]efore the first advent of the railway . . . [n]obody had ever heard of labour troubles. . . . The material apparatus of perfected civilization which obliterates the individuality of old towns under the stereotyped conveniences of modern life had not intruded as yet; but over the worn-out antiquity of Sulaco . . . the San Tomé mine had already thrown its subtle influence. (108-09)

We are to see the effect of that subtle influence. In this way, the novel is historical rather than heroic. If we seek to identify the subject matter of the first half of the novel,⁽⁴⁾ the history of Sulaco and Costaguana is the most suitable for it.

Then, the question is how the novel presents that subject. We notice that *Nostromo* shares a distinctive feature with historical discourse: the existence of numerous seemingly insignificant digressions.⁽⁵⁾ When considering the function of those apparently insignificant description, Roland Barthes' consideration of 'useless details' in the text is helpful.⁽⁶⁾ The word 'useless' does not mean

the absolute lack of significance, but it suggests that a certain part of the text contributes very little to the formation of its logical sequence. The presupposition of significance urges the reader and the author to find some justification for such luxurious description, and verisimilitude has been the dominant excuse for it, in addition to the rhetorical and aesthetic ones. And these useless details characterize the discourse of history; it is, Barthes says, "in fact the model of those narratives which consent to fill in the interstices of their functions by structurally superfluous notations."⁽⁷⁾ This is not surprising because the value of historical discourse entirely rests on its verisimilitude.

In *Nostramo*, such seemingly unnecessary description for the most part take the form of comical profiles of minor characters. The narrator indulges in the detailed descriptions of Bonifacio, a muleteer employed by Charles Gould (107), "the widowed Señora Gavilaso de Valdes" (171), and "the grave *alcalde*" of the San Tomé mine (336), to name only a few. All of them are unnecessary in terms of the novel's plot sequence,⁽⁸⁾ but they make the novel seem to be a realistic account of life. In this respect, the novel's form has a close affinity with historical discourse.

Nostramo has another effective device which increases its verisimilitude: the mention of Garibaldi and Bolívar. In *S / Z*, Barthes also gives us a good explanation of the function of historical characters in a narrative:

It is precisely [its] minor importance which gives the historical character its *exact* weight of reality: this *minor* is the measure of authenticity . . . for if the historical character were to assume its *real* importance, the discourse would be forced to yield it a role which would, paradoxically, make it less real. . . . Yet if they [historical characters] are merely mixed in with their fictional neighbors, . . . their modesty, like a lock between two levels of water, equalizes novel and history . . . they give the novel the glow of reality . . . they are superlative effects of the real.⁽⁹⁾

This is true of *Nostramo's* use of such names as Garibaldi and Bolívar. The portrait of the Italian democratic leader adds a great deal of reality to the novel, perhaps much more than if Garibaldi himself appeared and acted in the novel; we can say the same thing about the novel's mention of the South American revolutionary leader's name (71). The verisimilitude of the novel derives from history itself.

Nostramo's subject matter is historical, and it strives towards verisimilitude. Consequently, the novel tends to imitate the discourse of history. Before taking up the investigation of the novel's inclination which opposes historical discourse, two features of historical discourse should be noted here.

First, the verisimilitude which historiography usually needs is that grounded on the illusory identification of the sign with the referent. Since the notion of the perfect correspondence between the referent and the signifier is imaginary, the assumption that 'useless details' produce verisimilitude is also fictive and artificial. When discussing verisimilitude of literary text, one must begin with the acknowledgment that, as Todorov puts it, "discourses are not governed by a correspondence with their referent but by their own laws"; laws of signification which are based on the tripartite system of the sign.⁽¹⁰⁾ Even if one uses such seemingly realistic details for verisimilitude, what they really signify, in other words the signified of those details, is their own pretension of verisimilitude. Then the apparently insignificant descriptions in historical discourse, as well as those in *Nostramo*, should be regarded as the pretension of the text to be realistic or its desire for verisimilitude, not real verisimilitude.

Second, historical discourse is in fact only the signifier of the speech-act as an act of authority. The discourse of historiography assumes reality and truth; in order to be historical, all it maintains must be true. It does not permit any negation. This assumption of truth leads to the pretence of authority and power. But historical discourse can be no truer than any other discourse that is

employed for understanding or explanation. Whenever we try to understand something, we must consider it in terms of its relations to other things. These relations are rarely fixedly defined so that the definition endures for centuries; almost all conceptions repeatedly and incessantly undergo reconsideration and alteration. This means that the definition of these relations is at least to some extent arbitrary. If it were true that we always find out natural relations among things when we think that we have understood something, there would be no progress in any study. Revolution in the understanding of a certain thing is the reconfiguration of its relations to other things; since those relations are rather arbitrary, we can improve our understanding, or make it regress.⁽¹¹⁾ To put it another way, we always invent a fiction when we want to understand something. This is true of historiography. To understand or explain something, we need a story: a structure that gives significance to a certain event or person. Without this structure, no events could be historic, and nothing would make sense to us.⁽¹²⁾ No explanatory discourse is true in the final instance. Thus historical discourse, which in principle always asserts its absolute rightness, is intrinsically deceptive.

Since historical discourse is not a perfect representation of reality, it cannot help containing speech-act signs that connote its own fictiveness. One of the most conspicuous is, in Barthes' terms, "the conflict of two time spans; the time of speech-act and the time of the material stated" (*RL* 129), and this is quite relevant to *Nostramo*; the first section of the novel is full of confusing chronological distortions. I shall examine them, arguing that they point to the inclination in the novel towards the negation of its own historicity.

The most outstanding feature of Part One is the mixing up of iterative actions and those which happen only once.⁽¹³⁾ When the reader is reading an account of a particular event, the narrator suddenly begins to describe a different action which occurred several times before, often leaving the previous topic unfinished. As a result, the distinction between repeated and isolated actions

becomes blurred: the former lose its iterativeness, and the latter its particularity. We find a good example of this in chapter 4, where the novel is depicting Giorgio Viola. His family has just been saved from the mob by Nostromo:

Meantime Giorgio, with tranquil movements, had been unfastening the door; the flood of light fell on Signora Teresa, with her two girls gathered to her side. . . .

Old Viola, at the door, moved his arm upwards as if referring all his quick, fleeting thoughts to the picture of his old chief on the wall. Even when he was cooking for the '*signori inglesi*' . . . he was, as it were, under the eye of the great man who had led him in a glorious struggle. . . . When sometimes a frying-pan caught fire during a delicate operation with some shredded onions, and the old man was seen backing out of the doorway, swearing and coughing violently in an acrid cloud of smoke, the name of Cavour . . . could be heard. . . .

Then Signora Teresa, all in black, issuing from another door, advanced, portly and inclining her fine, black-browed head, opening her arms, and crying in a profound tone—

'Giorgio! thou passionate man! *Misericordia divina!* In the sun like this! He will make himself ill.'

At her feet the hens made off in all directions, with immense strides; if there were any engineers from up the line staying in Sulaco, a young English face or two would appear at the billiard-room occupying one end of the house. . . .

Signora Teresa, after an impressive pause, remonstrated:

'Eh, Giorgio! Leave alone and take care of yourself now . . . (53-54)

Through Giorgio's recollection, the novel describes iterative actions. The above quotation shows us three important features. First, the shift from the

day of the riot to the indefinite past time is implicit. When the novel says, "Then Signora Teresa . . . advanced, " we are not sure whether that paragraph refers to her action following Nostromo's rescue, or to her past repeated actions; we have to read on to know that the latter is the case. Second, the description of iterative actions in the above quotation is quite long; actually, chapter 4 for the most part consists of such accounts of repeated actions. Third, the accounts of past iterative events take the form of the descriptions of the isolated actions which are thought to be typical. It is unthinkable that Teresa should always say exactly the same phrases that she said in the above quotation; rather, they represent other similar phrases which may be uttered by her in similar situations.⁽¹⁴⁾ Even within the account of iterative events, iterativeness and particularity are mixed up. These three features are characteristic of the novel's account of repeated actions, and they all make it difficult for the reader to find a definite chronological point of reference.

This mixing up of iterative and non-iterative actions leads to the chronological deviation in terms of sequential ordering. Every time the account of past iterative actions intervenes, it causes a retroversion, an anachrony by which the novel goes backwards in time.⁽¹⁵⁾ Since such accounts happen in Part One so frequently, the chronological order of events in the story differs very much from their sequential order in the novel. In terms of the former, the latter order of Part One is not even a zigzag; indeed, it is fragmented. In addition to the fact that each description of iterative actions tends to be quite long, the novel often does not return to the chronological point at which it deviates. For example, after the above quotation, the novel returns to the day of the riot (56-58), but it soon begins another account of Giorgio's recollections, and finally selects a different chronological point, eighteen months before the riot, as a new point of reference (61). Consequently, the reader may have the impression that the episode of the Violas on the day of the riot is left unfinished and fragmented.

Now let us consider what functions this chronological distortion can assume

in *Nostromo*. White asserts that "histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of *mere* chronicles" (*TD* 83). Distortions of the chronological order of events are inevitable when we try to represent and to discuss any kind of history. In this sense, the novel's distortion of the Sulaco chronicle is not peculiar. What is really interesting about it is that the distortion seems to lessen the novel's explanatory effect; it seems to exist in order to create confusion.

Moreover, the chronological distortion indicates a particular theory of causality: the negation of temporal elements in a cause-and-effect relationship. This does not mean the abandonment of the notion of causality, though it is certainly opposed to "a principle of fiction: that a cause-and-effect relationship links the temporal elements in any narrative sequence."⁽¹⁶⁾ This principle is based on the logical fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. It is a fallacy, because we often, or perhaps always, make up the cause for an effect; effects come first, and then causes.⁽¹⁷⁾ What the distortion in the novel implies for the question of causality is the separation of temporality from causality, rather than the absence of causality. This separation itself is a specific kind of plot structure; that is to say, what makes it possible to formulate an explanatory fiction necessary for understanding.⁽¹⁸⁾ The harmony between temporality and causality is not indispensable to plot structure, which can be seen as the true causality in a fiction of understanding.⁽¹⁹⁾

This separation of temporality from causality forms a cyclical notion of history in *Nostromo*. First, the Sulaco chronicle presented by the novel is anti-climactic. The novel informs the reader of the destiny of Vincente Ribiera, dictator of Costaguana, almost as soon as he first appears; the reader learns about Decoud's death long before reaching the detailed description of his suicide. In addition to these proleptic anti-climaxes concerning the principle of suspense during reading, the Sulaco chronicle is anti-climactic as a type of history. In the novel's representation of the Sulaco secession, the last of each series of

events is rather forcibly deprived of its final position. For this reason, we must be cautious when we try to read an apocalyptic social vision in *Nostramo*. Similarly, the chronicle is not a "deterministic" history which "endows any putatively original event . . . with the status of a decisive factor . . . in the structuration of the whole series of events following after it" (*TD* 93). The novel's account mixes up the first events with the last; in other words, the novel's conception of history is cyclical and repetitive, not linear and chronological.⁽²⁰⁾

The most obvious embodiment of this repetitive nature is found in the history of the Goulds. Charles "was like his father" (321); although in a slightly different way, he is certainly destroyed by the mine, just like his father. In addition, Charles resembles his uncle. They both fight against the absurdities prevailing over Costaguna: the elder was executed by the dictator Guzman Bento, and the younger is "led out to be shot—like his uncle many years ago" (397). The absurdities characteristic of the country also recur through autocrats such as Guzman Bento, General Montero and the San Tomé mine. The history of the Goulds repeats itself, and the history of autocracy and revolution as well.

Thus in the novel's version of the Sulaco chronicle, the distinctions between the future, the present, and the past are rather obscure. To put it another way, in Barthes' terms, the distortions of temporal order "'de-chronologize' the historical 'thread' and . . . restore, if only as a reminiscence or a nostalgia, a complex, parametric, non-linear time whose deep space recalls the mythic time of the ancient cosmogonies" (*RL*130). The cyclical nature of the novel's representation and the timelessness caused by it render the series of events taking place during the Sulaco secession not so much historical as mythical. The cyclical conception of time is significantly ritualistic;⁽²¹⁾ and in the world where time continues to repeat the same cycle, the governing principle is cosmic rather than human. Cosmic means unvarying; without a continuous progression of time, or clear distinctions between the past and the future, things never change.⁽²²⁾ In such a changeless world governed by the cosmic law, supernatural and theological ele-

ments prevail; everything can be explained by referring to a particular superstition or doctrine. The novel's structure fosters these thematic implications and presents the Sulaco secession against a background of mythical stagnation.

We have examined how the Sulaco chronicle is represented in the novel mainly from the point of view of historical discourse. In brief, it can be said that the novel is oscillating between the desire to be historical and the opposite thrust to be antihistorical and mythical. This oscillation throws light on another oscillation which has been an important topic in Conrad criticism; oscillation between revelation and repression. On the one hand, the novel exposes the false and inhuman motives underlying the supposed social virtues; at the same time, however, it tries to represent reality as beyond our understanding, as unintelligible. The second inclination easily leads to the tacit consolidation of the hypocritical social activities which the first is criticizing.⁽²³⁾

The analysis of these contradictory impulses can be elaborated by the investigation we have made concerning the novel's historicity, particularly due to the notion that the discourse of historiography can deceive us. First, the desire for verisimilitude, or the desire to be historical, is itself ambiguous: on the one hand, it suggests the novel's attempt to reveal some historical and social facts, especially inhuman social activities that have not been correctly recognized so far. On the other hand, however, it suggests that the novel pretends to be a historical discourse in order to justify these activities as history: historical discourse apparently denies any negation, and justifies itself with authority, though what it really signifies is the perverse denial of the fictiveness inherent in discourse. Historical discourse is based on hypocrisy, which may work with the novel's impulse for repression; *Nostromo* might conceal in the name of history a variety of corruption. In this process of concealment, historical comes to mean supernatural and what is beyond the control of human beings. Consequently, historical is not distinctively separate from mythical.

The inclination towards fiction and myth in the representation of the Sulaco

chronicle is ambiguous as well as its opposite desire to be historical. The confusing distortion of chronological order forces the reader to recognize that the novel's quasi-historical discourse is nothing but a fiction. This produces the opposite effect to the hypocrisy of historical discourse; as Ryan remarks (48), the conspicuous sign of fictiveness deconstructs the serene objectivity of history. Thus the move to fictiveness in the novel can be considered to be for the purpose of revelation. At the same time, the temporal distortion causes the Sulaco chronicle to be mythical. Myth is against revelation: unlike the pretence of invulnerability in historical discourse, its invariability truly rejects any questioning. The chronological distortion implies that the novel may attempt to shut up certain social or historical facts in a mythical eternity. The hypocritical transformation of social into supernatural also works here.

The novel's oscillation between revelation and repression is thus quite complex and evasive. The opposition between the two terms is the opposition between the notion of history as produced and as given, or nature as produced and as given. When *Nostramo* has a revealing effect, it represents history or nature as produced out of particular systems; on the other hand, when it has a concealing effect, it takes them for granted as already established, regardless of human activities.⁽²⁴⁾ Then, for which inclination does the novel work ultimately? I am not ready to answer the question in this essay; as the discussion above shows, the categories of revelation and repression, or historical and anti-historical, tend to fuse into one, and a further investigation of the novel's oscillation brings us to the question of broader implications of the novel in its context. Without stepping into that immense and difficult project, all I can say from the general and deductive analysis of the novel in relation to historical discourse is this: the oscillation in the novel is so complicated that we should not think that it could settle on either side. Ryan rightly concludes:

Nostramo's convergence of critical revelation and mystifying closure

has the effect of a continuous suppressed explosion. . . . [T]he central structure of feeling organizing *Nostramo* is that of radical impasse, of deadlocking self-cancellation. (54)

For the opposition between disclosure and concealment, the novel remains experimental and uncertain rather than accomplished and transcendent. I have been discussing the novel, drawing various insights from the nature of discourse, and if *Nostramo* does not allow my argument to resolve its uncertainty, it is precisely because that uncertainty originates in the nature of discourse itself. In this sense, I hope that my analysis has succeeded in establishing the relationship of *Nostramo* to the differential process of signification.

Although my investigation may seem to be useless in settling the dispute about the novel's oscillation, it enables us to recognize correctly another distinctive feature of the novel. This is already partly suggested by Ryan's word 'self-cancellation' in the above quotation; what Ryan does not point out is that the novel does not only fall into an impasse of continual oscillation and uncertainty but also tries to erase, or cancel, this very uncertainty in the second half. There is an obvious discontinuity in the novel, and it can be observed on several levels. When it is seen in terms of the novel's relation to historical discourse, the disjunction indicates that the novel has abandoned its sceptical, critical mode of speculation, defeated by the impasse of uncertainty. In this sense, *Nostramo* really contains a self-cancellation, which comes out as an analyzable flaw in structure.

The novel's cancellation of its own undecidability is done through the perverse linear-biographical inclination of the ending. *Nostramo* has a quite different story from the Sulaco chronicle. The difference between the first two sections, which mainly focus on the Sulaco chronicle, and the last, which focuses on Nostromo's life after the revolution, is evident. To Guerard, the last part evinces the decline of the novel; he sensitively points out "the diminished

seriousness and dwindling creative energy, "the *as, as to* constructions" which "suggest a weary gathering up of discrete materials," and Conrad's loss of the "touch with English idioms" (204-05). In addition to these differences in style, what is surprising is that the distortion of chronological order becomes much less intense than that in the previous sections, and in the last chapters featuring the relationship between Nostromo and Viola's two daughters, the order of the narrative almost always obeys that of the story. The novel has radically transformed its mode of narrative from cyclical into linear progressive.

In terms of the content, it is also evident that the novel has considerably changed. The novel has persistently refused to give precedence to one of the characters in the first half. This lack of priority, effected partly by the dislocation of chronological order, ⁽²⁵⁾ has been important in making the novel historical rather than biographical. The novel casts off this historical indifference, and takes up a biographical sentimentality.

The novel's characterization of Nostromo undergoes a big change at the end of Part Three, chapter 7. After he leaves Decoud on Great Isabel, Nostromo swims back to Sulaco harbor and lands at the ruined fort. He sleeps there for fourteen hours and wakes up like "a man just born into the world" (347). It is true that the chapters following this scene indicate that the protagonist realizes what he missed before, and comes to have a quite different idea of himself and others. But what the fort scene really tells us about is not his rebirth but the virtual beginning of the process by which the novel becomes much more personal. Nostromo is the character who marks such a structural change in the novel, and is nothing more than a product of this change.

The novel transplants complex feelings from other characters to Nostromo, as it considerably alters the character of the protagonist.⁽²⁶⁾ class-consciousness is transplanted to him from Giorgio (352-53). Teresa's fear of unfair exploitation is reincarnated in the Capataz de Cargadores, along with her dislike of the nickname 'Nostromo' (357). Even Dr Monygham's scepticism captures him; he

cannot confide in anyone: These facts suggest that Nostromo after the change closely relates to surrounding elements in the novel, not so much to what he used to have before the change.

In brief, Nostromo's radical psychological development is a result of the novel's attempt to enclose social motifs such as the class struggle or imperialism in a proper name. These problematic social issues are organized into the story of a man who is charmed and destroyed by silver. Fredric Jameson remarks that "*Nostromo* is not a political novel in the sense in which it would allow . . . political ideals to fight it out on their own terms."⁽²⁷⁾ This non-political nature of the novel is caused by the fact that the novel persists in questioning the validity of certain social systems by means of ethical terms; the novel tends to present social problems in the form of struggles of the individual subject. The two strategies of concealment in the novel which Jameson defines as metapsychical and melodramatic respectively (266-69) result from this tendency. In this process of individualization, to borrow Benita Parry's words, "a history of 'oppression and brutality' rooted in a colonial past and an imperialistic present becomes a story of racial failure and cultural deformity," and "is redefined as a contest . . . between the rational faculties of the Ego and the passionate energies of Id."⁽²⁸⁾ This is highly deceptive in that the novel gives up questioning the validity of the present social systems, and instead comes to distract the reader's attention.

This misleading tendency takes the form of nostalgia. In *Nostromo*, the future rarely appears except as absence. The cyclical nature of the Sulaco chronicle operates on the assumption that the future is locked in the past. Characters such as Mrs Gould, Nostromo, and Antonia are depressed with a sense of loss, and their views of the future strongly suggest extinction or the repetition of suffering. Moreover, the novel tries to connect the past with morality; when we think of Mrs Gould, this desire of the novel emerges most clearly. Mrs Gould, who enjoys the morally supreme position in the novel, eagerly longs

for the age before the silver mine began to work. The novel's moral-temporal coordinates tell us as follows: the past is generous; the present is getting corrupt; the future is invisible, or just like the past, but without the past's generosity.

With the decrease of chronological deviations, the conventional excitement of the reader is revived, and the episode of Nostromo's death is narrated in a climactic fashion,⁽²⁹⁾ the death of the protagonist is the most suitable ending for a biography. The novel's fragmentary decentralizing mode moves to the biographical linear one, which culminates in the melodramatic death of Nostromo. Thus we notice that the account of Nostromo after the revolution, especially of his courtship and death, is inharmoniously grafted onto the account of the Sulaco chronicle. This biographical ending, as C. B. Cox puts it, "gives a false appearance that the story is concluded, the clash of values resolved."⁽³⁰⁾

This pretence of resolution should be interpreted as the sign of the impasse which the novel contains, rather than as the evidence of the novel's strong support for the view of history or nature as already established. It is true that the novel's way of ending tries to conceal the interminable oscillation itself and the problems which the novel has sometimes revealed and sometimes concealed in the first half; but we should not ignore the novel's painful uncertainty in the first half just because the second casts it off. Indeed, precisely because of this fact, the oscillation increases its importance, and its undecidable nature is confirmed. The sudden interruption of the critical and sceptical mode of questioning about social values points to the deadlock in *Nostromo*.

The ending's cancellation of the former uncertainty or oscillation is a self-cancellation in that it is self-referential; the radical move to the biographical story of Nostromo draws attention to the experimental account of the Sulaco chronicle in the first half because of the great gap between them. This disharmony between the first half and the second is analogous to the warps or dislocations that a text produces when it attempts to frame itself.⁽³¹⁾

The chronological distortion in the representation of the Sulaco chronicle is the attempt of the novel to create the definite view of history or of some social fact; that is to say, the attempt to find out an ideological or ethical solution to problems in society. The oscillation in the novel between disclosure and concealment reflects this painful process of speculation. Then, the novel tries to cancel this attempt itself by its ending. What that self-cancellation connotes is the failure of the former attempt to resolve the oscillation, the despair resulting from the failure, and the absence of the unrealized resolution. As mentioned above, we need a story in order to explain something. Since the configuration of the story cannot help being arbitrary to some important degree, there always remains the possibility of making the story in a different but not irrelevant way out of the same series of events.⁽³²⁾ In the case of *Nostramo*, it is not just the fragmentation of the Sulaco chronicle which clearly indicates that the representation of the constituent events could be formulated in different ways besides the novel's version;⁽³³⁾ but also the novel's discontinuity and self-cancellation refer to the unrealized different configuration of the chronicle which could offer the final solution to the problems which the novel has tried to reveal, only to find itself caught up in the interminable oscillation.

The novel cannot propose a vision of the future that solves the present social problems; hence, only the past is left. From this impasse, *Nostramo's* inharmonious grafting of the individual-moral-past aspects onto the social-capitalistic-present aspects arises. In Parry's words (15), this grafting is the "transposition of the dreams of tomorrow to distant yesterdays."

I am deeply indebted to Professor B. S. M. Horne, the University of Nagoya, for checking my English. I will, of course, take the responsibility for any errors that remain.

Notes

- (1) Kiernan Ryan, "Revelation and Repression in Conrad's *Nostramo*," *The Uses of Fiction: On the Modern Novel in Honor of Arnold Kettle*, eds. Douglas Jefferson and Graham Martin (New York: Open UP, 1982), rpt. in *Joseph Conrad's Nostramo*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987). For the novel, page references are given in the text to the following edition: Joseph Conrad, *Nostramo: A Tale of the Seaboard*, ed. Martin Seymour-Smith (1963; Harmondworth: Penguin, 1983).
- (2) Bruce Johnson remarks that the "keynote of this novel" is "a kind of relativity": Bruce Johnson, *Conrad's Models of Mind* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971) 111. I agree with Irving Howe that this relativity, which reminds us of Bonapartism, "emerges not from an equilibrium of strength but from the mutual lassitude of exploiters and exploited": Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (1957; New York: NAL, 1987) 103.
- (3) See Robart Penn Warren, Introduction, *Nostramo*, by Joseph Conrad (New York: Modern Library, 1951), rpt. as "On *Nostramo*," *The Art of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Symposium*, ed. R. W. Stallman (1960; Athens: Ohio UP, 1982) 221; and Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1971) 139, 172.
- (4) For the notion of subject matter, see Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 15.
- (5) See Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958) 179-82.
- (6) Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989) 141-48; henceforth cited as *RL*. See also Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) 165.
- (7) Barthes, *RL* 146; see also 127-40.
- (8) It is virtually impossible to say that a certain part of a fiction is not necessary, especially considering its thematic aspects. Therefore all that I mean by 'unnecessary' is the fact that the plot of the novel would hardly change without those profiles of minor characters.
- (9) Roland Barthes, *S / Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1974) 101-02.
- (10) Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 81; for verisimilitude, see Todorov 80-88, Genette 164, and Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 3. Hereafter White's book will be cited as *TD*.

- (11) See Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1976) 35.
- (12) See White, *TD* 1-25; he states that "[W]hat is involved in the rendering of the unfamiliar into the familiar is a troping that is generally figurative" (5) . See also Jonathan Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) 201-16.
- (13) See Ian Watt, *Joseph Conrad: Nostromo* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 33.
- (14) See Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985) 65.
- (15) See Bal 51-56.
- (16) Robert Scholes, *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982) 62. See also Bal 42.
- (17) See Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982) 86-87.
- (18) See White, "Value" 9, 13-14; and Hayden White, "The Narrativization of Real Events," *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Michell (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981) 251.
- (19) See White, *TD* 93. Guerard points out that "[t]he chronological distortions and almost insoluble complications of the first part of the novel . . . dramatize a theory of causality, " observing that "since one manifestation is much like the next one, it little matters which 'came first'" (195-96) . But he tries to explain this problem of causality from the point of view of the unconscious and of the opposition between rationality and absurdity (177-78).
- (20) The cyclical nature of the novel's configuration of the chronicle has already been observed by critics. For example, see T. McAlindon, "Nostromo: Conrad's Organicist Philosophy of History," *Mosaic* 15, 3 (1982), rpt. in *Joseph Conrad's Nostromo*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987); and Stephen K. Land, "Nostromo," *Conrad and the Paradox of Plot* (London: Macmillan, 1984), rpt. as "Four Views of the Hero," *Joseph Conrad's Nostromo*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987).
- (21) See Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford UP, 1966) 219-221.
- (22) Dorothy Van Ghent maintains that "the dramatic action of the book is correlated with cosmic law, apprehended in the unvarying cycles of nature": Dorothy Van Ghent, Introduction, *Nostromo*, by Joseph Conrad (New York: Holt, 1961), rpt. as "Guardianship of the Treasure: Nostromo," *Joseph Conrad's Nostromo*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York:

Chelsea House, 1987) 33.

- (23) Ryan focuses on this oscillation in the novel between revelation and repression, as the title of his essay indicates. In his argument, the words 'realistic' and 'historical' are used in the same sense as 'revealing,' but their implications are more complex.
- (24) See Culler, *Framing* 154-55; White, *TD* 22; and Culler, *On Deconstruction* 82.
- (25) Jakob Lothe remarks that "the numerous time-shifts and changes in authorial focus . . . both concatenate the various facets of action in the novel and enrich its thematics by indicating and exploring this action from a variety of temporal planes and personal angles": Jakob Lothe, *Conrad's Narrative Method* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989) 206. See also Bal 53, and Watt 36-37.
- (26) See Johnson 114.
- (27) Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981) 270.
- (28) Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers* (London: Macmillan, 1983) 112.
- (29) Land sees in the way Nostromo dies the familiar pattern employed earlier for Willems and Kurtz (100-01).
- (30) C. B. Cox, *Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1974) 61.
- (31) See Culler, *On Deconstruction* 204-05.
- (32) See White, *TD* 90-92; and White, "Value" 19.
- (33) I do not mean to say, as Lothe does (204), that the time-shifts and the extended re-troversion in Part One draw the reader's attention to the continuity of the chronicle that might otherwise have been overlooked. Rather, what the distortion really leads us to look at is the inevitable incompleteness of narrative realization of non-verbal objects.