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The Hirsch-Sotillo Conflict in Conrad's *Nostramo*

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Introduction

This paper is a comparison of Senor Hirsch and Colonel Sotillo, superficially two opposite types in Conrad's novel *Nostramo*. I hope to demonstrate that Conrad sets up a conflict between these two characters that invites the reader to compare them. On the surface, all the advantages seem to lie with Sotillo, who is a man of family, position, and a fine appearance. Hirsch is represented as unattractive from the beginning, and his cowardice is close to absurd. Yet by the end of the novel, Conrad has demonstrated that next to Sotillo, Hirsch is not so hopeless after all. Hirsch's superiority to Sotillo is moral.

Conrad once called Henry James the biographer of fine consciences. He was paying tribute to the austere moral concern with which so many of James's characters are imbued. Conrad might be described as the recorder of at least *one* fine conscience—that of the author. Hirsch and Sotillo are poles removed from the exacting consciences of James's characters, but even in them, the final superiority rests with the less morally objectionable character. In a thoroughly modern sense, Conrad is a moralist. And on the moral plane Hirsch's circle in hell—if, after all is told, we would even wish to assign him a circle—is shown to be farther from the center than Sotillo's. Conrad's method of demonstrating this is to enlist our sympathy on the side of Hirsch in his conflict with Sotillo and then, through all his misery, to give Hirsch the victory—a victory that even has a practical aspect.

The body of this paper is divided into two parts, one on our introduction to Hirsch, and the other comparing Hirsch and Sotillo. But some background will be provided

at the outset for those who have never read the novel or have forgotten much of it.

Background

Nostramo is set in a fictitious South American country called Costaguana — principally in its coastal state of Sulaco. Some years after the rule of the tyrant Guzman Bento, a young Costaguanan named Charles Gould returns to Sulaco from England with his English wife, Emilia, whom he has recently married.¹⁾ After much maneuvering, Gould manages to open a silver mine that had been granted his late father by the government of Costaguana (as a devious means of imposing further taxes on the elder Gould—the mine was thought to be untappable). With the help of an American financier and a British railroad magnate, Gould establishes a benevolent government in Costaguana, headed by an aristocrat named Riviera. However, the new government comes under attack from the Minister of War, General Montero, and his more evolved brother Pedro. These would-be tyrants start a revolution on the pretext that Riviera's promise to pay back foreign creditors is a betrayal of the people. As the Riviera government appears to be losing, the Montero brothers soon gain many converts, including Colonel Sotillo from the Occidental state of Esmeralda, who sends his regiment to join Pedro Montero; two of Sulaco's leaders, Gamacho and Fuentes; and the rabble of the Sulacan streets, for whom the populist rhetoric of the revolution provides a license to loot and vandalize.

The object of this revolution is, of course, the silver of the mine. In protecting it, Gould receives help from

a number of quarters. Gould's plan is to blow up the mine—he has a huge cache of dynamite stored there—before he lets it pass into Montero's hands. Both Don Pepe, an old general who governs the mining community, and Fr. Roman, the miners' pastor, make it clear that they will carry out Gould's will if he fails to return or if the rebels invade the mine. This slows Pedro Montero down enough to render his troops vulnerable to attack. In fact, the priest ends up guarding the mine and Don Pepe leads the miners into the city, where they not only defeat the Monterists but save Gould from the hangman's noose.

Much of the action referred to in this paper concerns the title character, Nostromo, and his antithesis, Martin Decoud. Nostromo is the man of action, Decoud the man of ideas. Both are crucial to the fate of Sulaco, and to the meaning of the novel. Nostromo is an Italian immigrant who distinguishes himself at every turn of the story. Captain Mitchell, steamship captain and local representative of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company (or O.S.N), has discovered him and has wisely made him the head of the dock workers. Mitchell regards him as his own protegee, but Nostromo takes an independent view of the matter. He loves publicity, and serving the wealthy Europeans seems the best way of getting it. Predictably, Nostromo is chosen to perform the exploit referred to in this paper, taking the first installment of Gould's silver in the middle of a completely dark night on a lighter, with the hope of secreting it out of Sulaco Harbor and ultimately delivering it to a British ship bound for the United States. Nostromo later passes through rebel lines and notifies the loyalist General Barrios that Sulaco is being attacked, thus ensuring the defeat of the Monterists.

Decoud's role is passive by comparison, but it is he who proposes turning Sulaco into an independent country (as Panama was created out of a northern strand of Columbia, though that secession was far too contemporary to be referenced in the novel). In terms of positive action, he comports himself admirably when the Blanco faction to which he belongs is besieged by government defectors and street rabble. But Decoud is a man of ideas, and he seems an unlikely choice to accompany Nostromo on the lighter with the silver. Ironically, he is on the lighter for his own safety. His send-off by the aristocratic well-

wishers turns out to be his last contact with them.

Hirsch's Day

Our first introduction to Hirsch shows him to be a distinctly unheroic figure. Most of the people who are admitted to the Casa Gould²⁾ and actually speak to Charles Gould are at least socially distinguished. Not so, Hirsch, who looks and sounds like an outsider and an inferior—someone whose petitions to the “King of Sulaco” would normally be filtered through servants. The tone of his drawing room interview with Gould is conveyed by the following passage:

He was very full of his journey, undertaken mostly for the purpose of seeing the Senor Administrador of San Tome [i.e., Gould] in relation to some assistance he required in his hide-exporting business. He hoped to enlarge it greatly now that the country was going to be settled. It was going to be settled, he repeated several times, degrading by a strange, anxious whine the sonority of the Spanish language, which he pattered rapidly, like some sort of cringing jargon.³⁾

Hirsch is a hide merchant from Esmeralda. He has endured considerable hardship to seek assurances from Gould that things are stable in Sulaco and he can safely sell his merchandise here. It is surprising how few critics have commented on the placid anti-Semitism of this portrait. Not only does Hirsch “degrade” with his presumably demotic “whine” the sonorous Spanish language—he is also described as “anxious” and “cringing.” The second word is especially common in anti-Semitic literature. Fagan, in *Oliver Twist*, is always cringing, even when he has the advantage. But while Dickens made amends in later life for this portrait by creating an exemplary Jew in *Our Mutual Friend*, Conrad seems content to write off Hirsch's cowardice to his race. And later we learn that he has a hook nose to go with his fat lips and greasy sweat. Nevertheless, even the Israeli critic H.M. Daleski, who eloquently objects to this portrait,⁴⁾ admits that someone like Hirsch is necessary to the action of the novel.⁵⁾

Having acknowledged the unfortunate undertone of the Hirsch portrait, we must proceed to excuse it henceforth. The portrait itself is convincing and vivid, its two points being that Hirsch is an outsider (probably Conrad's only motive, beyond a plausible mercantile association, for

making him Jewish) and he is a coward.

How abject a coward Hirsch is becomes clear when Nostromo and Decoud discover him on the lighter. The figure he presents is immediately revealing:

The light of the bit of candle fell upon a round, hook-nosed face with black moustaches and little side-whiskers. He was extremely dirty. A greasy growth of beard was sprouting on the shaven parts of the cheeks. The thick lips were slightly parted, but the eyes remained closed. Decoud, to his immense astonishment, recognized Senor Hirsch, the hide merchant from Esmeralda. Nostromo, too, had recognized him. And they gazed at each other across the body, lying with its naked feet higher than its head, in an absurd pretence of sleep, faintness, or death (p. 270).

Added to the note of vulgarity already mentioned, this portrait has more ominous implications. As mentioned, Nostromo and Decoud⁶⁾ are transporting the first shipment of Gould's silver out of Sulaco before Pedro or Sotillo, the converging enemies, can seize it. They are counting on the absolute darkness of the Golfo Placido to get them past any enemy troop ship that happens by. But along with the darkness there is a silence that threatens to amplify the faintest sound. A man capable of whimpering and feigning death, in Hirsch's manner, is also capable of crying out and giving away their position.

On another level altogether, as Leonard Orr helpfully notes, the description of Hirsch on the lighter prefigures his death: "Coming 200 pages before Hirsch actually dies, we see him again and again in his deathly aspect (limp, lifeless, silent as death); his body treated as a corpse and dehumanized (its naked feet, its head)."⁷⁾ The detail of Hirsch's feet lying motionless above his head is especially relevant: Hirsch dies during a session of torture called the *estrapade*, in which he is suspended by his hands and feet, with the bare feet taking the higher position. Orr also observes Conrad's ironic tendency to refer to Hirsch in the most dignified terms: "We can also see how inappropriate it is to constantly identify fully this lifeless figure as 'Senor Hirsch, the hide merchant from Esmeralda.'"⁸⁾

The story Hirsch tells of his day is enough to tempt Nostromo to murder him for the good of the lighter, as we soon learn. Staying with his friend Anzani, "the universal shopkeeper," when the rioting broke out in the

city, Hirsch rose before daylight "in such a hurry that he had forgotten to put on his shoes" (p. 271). He ran out of Anzani's house "in his socks" and hid himself in the garden of a convent of Franciscan nuns—more specifically, in the thorn bushes of the garden—all day long, "his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth with all the intensity of thirst engendered by heat and fear" (Ibid.). Though critics seem to have ignored this (or considered it too obvious to mention), there is a sly reference to Psalm 137 in the last-quoted sentence:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning, / If I do not remember thee, *let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth*; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. [Italics mine.]

Hirsch resembles the psalmist in Babylon: he is a despised exile, and he exhibits something like the brutal tenacity that ends this psalm:

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. / Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Only towards evening, when "he thought he would die from the fear of silence" (p. 271), did Hirsch untangle himself from the thorn bushes and move on. Happening by chance in direction of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company, Hirsch "crouched, crept, crawled, made dashes," and, perhaps, slithered, on towards the office of Captain Mitchell. But amongst the many dead bodies were the more frightening voices of the living, and after superhuman exertions, he found himself flattened out in the very lighter that Nostromo and Decoud intended to board with the silver. In fact, Hirsch could hear and fully comprehend the discussion of this project between Charles Gould and his fellow aristocrats, but he remained hidden because he was afraid they would not allow him to remain on the lighter. "His only idea at the time, overpowering and masterful, was to get away from this terrible Sulaco" (p. 273).

When Nostromo had heard this story (narrated by Hirsch with chattering teeth), he determined to stab Hirsch and throw him overboard. "There is no room for fear in this lighter," he tells Decoud "through his set teeth" (p. 274). Later, after it is definitely too late to silence Hirsch, because Sotillo's troopship is passing by, and any attempt to locate Hirsch in the dark would be sure to set

him screaming, Nostromo explains what stopped him:

“What! To silence him for ever! I thought it good to hear first how he came to be here. It was too strange. Who could imagine that it was all an accident? Afterwards, señor, when I saw you giving him water to drink, I could not do it Your compassion saved him then, Don Martin, and now it is too late. It couldn’t be done without noise” (p. 284).

Thus, Hirsch is a truly abject creature, seemingly incapable of dignity, and too given over to panic to be reasoned with. This explains why Nostromo, who is no cutthroat, had quietly contemplated murdering him for the sake of his own life and the success of his mission.

Hirsch and Sotillo

When Sotillo’s troopship passes, we are given a thumbnail sketch of his mission and character. Sotillo’s background and appearance seem to set him miles apart from Hirsch. He is a local aristocrat, rather popular with the ladies, and, though commander of the troops in the neighboring state of Esmeralda, a frequent visitor at the Casa Gould. He is considered something of a dandy, and when General Barrios, a rough but honorable soldier, had the task of selecting a new leader for the Esmeralda regiment, he chose Sotillo because Esmeralda seemed such an ineffectual post. He is handsome, as he well knows, and while Hirsch’s teeth always seem to be chattering uncontrollably, Sotillo likes to flash his.

However, it is quietly hinted that Sotillo has some connection with Hirsch after all. We know that Hirsch had been staying at the house of Anzani, “the universal shopkeeper” (p. 271). Though Conrad does not stop to remind us of this, it transpires that the name of the merchant from whom Sotillo borrows money is also Anzani — clearly the same Anzani, for he is “the universal shopkeeper.” In this flashback, Sotillo implies (outrageously, we already know) that he is as good as betrothed to the austere beautiful Antonia Avellanos. Sotillo’s drift is not outright deception because he is too vain to realize how ridiculous this suggestion is:

... his whole faculties were taken up with what seemed then a solid and practical notion—the notion that the husband of Antonia Avellanos would be, naturally, the intimate friend of the Gould Concession. He even

pointed this out to Anzani once, when negotiating the sixth or seventh small loan in the gloomy, damp apartment with enormous iron bars, behind the principal shop.... He hinted to the universal shopkeeper at the excellent terms he was on with the emancipated senorita, who was like a sister to the Englishwoman. He would advance one leg and put his arms akimbo, posing for Anzani’s inspection, and fixing him with a haughty stare (p. 285).

In this context it is amusing to observe that Antonia is all but promised to Don Martin Decoud (on the lighter beneath Sotillo’s ship, we remember). Furthermore, while Sotillo is a petty aristocrat, she is the *creme de la creme*, the only truly enlightened woman in the country, except for Mrs. Gould (“the Englishwoman”). Sotillo would have absolutely no chance with her. The implications of this passage force us to revise our estimation of Sotillo downward. While he must have a certain exterior charm, he obviously doesn’t have a firm grasp of his position. He is, after all, financially dependent on a man who does business in a squalid shop—the good friend of Hirsch. And his main collateral is his vanity. “He had no convictions of any sort,” the omniscient narrator comments, “upon anything except as to the irresistible power of his personal advantages” (p. 285). His way of manifesting these advantages is to strike a rather childish pose. Hence, Sotillo is seen to be financially insolvent, vain, fatuous, and even rather vulgar.

It now develops that since his promotion to command of the Esmeralda garrison, Sotillo has “governed with a repressive severity,” and recently, despite his frequent visits to the Casa Gould, has gone over to the Monsterist side: he is a traitor. His present mission is to remove the silver shipment from the Sulaco Custom House, where his informants have told him it is stored. Of course, Sotillo has no way of knowing that the silver is being spirited out of Sulaco almost under his nose.

But then something terrible happens: Sotillo’s ship brushes the lighter. What the crew on the ship hear is the screaming of Hirsch, who, by a miracle of tenacity, has seized the anchor of the ship with both arms and is being hoisted away by it. To Decoud, who can see nothing in the total darkness, this scene is surreal:

Senor Hirsch’s scream he had heard and recognized while he was regaining his feet, always with that mys-

terious sensation of being dragged headlong through the darkness. Not a sound, not a cry escaped him; he had no time to see anything; and following upon the despairing screams for help, the dragging motion ceased so suddenly that he staggered forward with open arms and fell against the pile of treasure boxes. He clung to them instinctively, in the vague apprehension of being flung about again; and immediately he heard another lot of shrieks for help, prolonged and despairing, not near him at all, but unaccountably in the distance, away from the lighter altogether, as if some spirit in the night were mocking at Senor Hirsch's terror and despair (p. 292).

This kind of description has been assiduously imitated, but in Conrad's time it must have been a real novelty. J.I.M. Stewart, while noting it is "sometimes maintained that he is seldom at his best in the direct description of action," observes that the forty pages presenting the scene in the gulf "constitute one of Conrad's greatest triumphs," and that "the art here is unerring."⁹ On first reading the passage, we are almost as in the dark as Decoud about what has happened. When we are informed that the anchor has momentarily jostled the lighter and then done a mechanical crane's work of carrying Hirsch away,¹⁰ we realize these would have been Decoud's precise sensations.

As it happens, the members of the crewship are submerged in relative darkness too, because a cretinous major, fearing a plot, has put out the binnacle light that the helmsman must steer by. If it is true that Conrad often falters in his action scenes—though I have the opposite impression and Stewart himself never endorses this view—at least no one should question his sense of irony. The following passage is hilarious, and yet it is more than that:

The old major of the battalion, a stupid, suspicious man, who had never been afloat in his life, distinguished himself by putting out suddenly the binnacle light, the only one allowed on board for the necessities of navigation. He could not understand of what use it could be for finding the way. To the vehement protestations of the ship's captain, he stamped his foot and tapped the handle of his sword. "Aha! I have unmasked you," he cried triumphantly. "You are tearing your hair from despair at my acuteness. Am I a child to believe that

a light in that brass box can show you where the harbor is I can smell a traitor a league off. You wanted that gleam to betray our approach to your friend the Englishman" Other officers, crowding round, tried to calm his indignation, repeating persuasively, "No, no! This is an appliance of the mariners, major. This is no treachery." The captain of the transport flung himself face downwards on the bridge, and refused to rise. "Put an end to me at once," he repeated in a stifled voice. Sotillo had to interfere (p. 289).

This revelation of the very depths of cloddishness is an echo of the only scene in the novel in which Pedro Montero's older brother, the general, appears. He is at a shipboard party to celebrate the just rule of the aging Don Vicente Ribiera, "a man of culture and of unblemished character" (p. 117), and the visit of Sir John, the English railroad magnate (guest of the Goulds), who is building a railroad in Costaguana, as an expression of confidence in the new government. (The scene is especially well-known because Leavis and others have singled it out¹¹ for its peculiar treatment of time: the celebration of Ribiera's success is presented *after* the scene in which he has already been deposed and barely escapes with his life.)

During the ... buzz of voices that followed the speech, General Montero raised a pair of heavy, drooping eyelids and rolled his eyes with a sort of uneasy dullness from face to face. The military backwoods hero of the party, though secretly impressed by the sudden novelties and splendours of his position (he had never been on board a ship before, and had hardly ever seen the sea except from a distance), understood by a sort of instinct the advantage his surly, unpolished attitude of a savage fighter gave him amongst all these refined Blanco aristocrats. But why was it that nobody was looking at him? he wondered to himself angrily. He was able to spell out the print of newspapers, and knew that he had performed the "greatest military exploit of modern times" (p. 119).

The obvious "echo" I refer to is of the observation that General Montero has never been aboard ship before—a fact which, though neutral in itself, becomes a symbolic link between him and the major. The major is a fool who makes the captain's job of finding Sulaco Harbor much more difficult. General Montero can barely read; he be-

believes his own ridiculous press (decidedly not the articles of Decoud, for which the Montero brothers will later want to execute the latter). And then, to crown the evening, the general proposes a toast to Sir John which is so crude and boorish that no one, including the railroad dignitary himself, acknowledges it.

Conrad had a profound insight into what it means to be without culture or education — an insight perhaps derived from the advantage of being an aristocrat, with friends in his own sphere, but whose travels had introduced him to lifestyles that most members of his class could only romanticize about. Though he had little experience in Latin America,¹²⁾ he was a close observer of primitives. The passage about the major is more than just funny because it dramatizes the theme of Mrs. Gould's loneliness (faced mostly with people who will never understand her) and the corresponding theme of the dangers of a return to the savagery that preceded Ribiera. Mrs. Gould's personal danger is what prompts Dr. Monygham to decisive action, and Costaguana's savagery is already abumbrated in the poverty, corruption, and shocking customs that appall Mrs. Gould.

This brings us back to the comparison between Hirsch and Sotillo. If having an officer like the major—who is next in command, at that—is what Sotillo's being a colonel amounts to, is he really superior to Hirsch? Granting, as we now must, that local valuations of status count for nothing, this becomes a question of how Sotillo behaves under an allotment of stress approaching Hirsch's. The remaining action—which spans much of the novel because of Conrad's inversions of time sequence¹³⁾—provides the answer. When the crew of Sotillo's ship finally discover who is making the noise and locate him, they take Hirsch to Sotillo's cabin, where he is interrogated by Sotillo himself in front of the other officers. Unfortunately for Hirsch, who naturally thinks that the lighter sank, no one wants to believe that the shipment of silver was lost, least of all, Sotillo. The latter is afraid of joining forces with, or even meeting, Pedro Montero without some lever like the silver with which to bargain for his share of the spoils and to ensure his personal safety. How Sotillo expects to make the exchange is never explained, but he clearly shuns a meeting without something to offer. Pedro is renowned—and highly respected by the locals—for his treachery.

At first Sotillo's soldiers treat Hirsch mildly, by their standards, only beating him slightly. But then two things happen. First, when Sotillo's troops have encamped outside the town, a very cavalier emissary from Pedro pays him a visit, inviting him to join the Monterists in town. Then Dr. Monygham, the faithful friend of Mrs. Gould and a wonderful judge of character, convinces Sotillo that Hirsch is lying, and the silver is near at hand. Dr. Monygham is a man of principle, but he has always been distrusted by the local people, and it is easy for him to play the role of a latter-day Judas. The assurance of the silver being readily attainable and Sotillo's terror of confronting the Monterists spur Sotillo on to try torturing Hirsch with the *estrapade*.¹⁴⁾

Sotillo's fright is a variation on Hirsch's. He is afraid of his own officers, who he (not unjustly) fears will turn on him; he is afraid of losing his chance at the plunder; and above all, he is afraid of Pedro Montero. The scene in which Sotillo pretends to be ill to avoid a meeting with Pedro's emissary is one of the funniest in the novel. Sotillo's inspiration is sudden:

The colonel, seizing his head in his hands, turned in his tracks as if struck with vertigo. A flash of craven inspiration suggested to him an expedient not unknown to European statesmen when they wish to delay a difficult negotiation. Booted and spurred, he scrambled into the hammock with undignified haste. His handsome face had turned yellow with the strain of weighty cares. The ridge of his shapely nose had grown sharp; the audacious nostrils appeared mean and pinched. The velvety, caressing glance of his fine eyes seemed dead, and even decomposed; for these almond-shaped, languishing orbs had become inappropriately bloodshot with much sinister sleeplessness (p. 442).

He then serves notice that he is too ill to leave his room for any meetings. The final version of this message recalls the run of demeaning verbs used to describe Hirsch's day ("crouched, crept, crawled," etc.). But in this case, the burlesque is Sotillo's own solemn invention:

He closed his eyes wearily and would not open them again, lying perfectly still, deaf, dumb, insensible, overcome, vanquished, crushed, annihilated by the fell disease (p. 443).

Given Sotillo's enormous advantage in comfort and available resources, this passage at least earns him parity in

cowardice with Hirsch. But since the two cowards do actually meet, and in the most hostile of modes (Sotillo being Hirsch's torturer), I believe we can go a step further and locate a genuine victory of one character over the other. The preference begins to emerge in a colloquy that ensues between the emissary and the major who has already "distinguished himself" by putting out the binnacle light on the troopship. "The intelligent old warrior," as Conrad calls him, concludes a panegyric on his colonel (Sotillo) with "an absurd colloquialism current amongst the lower class of Occidentals (especially about Esmeralda). 'And,' he concluded with a sudden rise in the voice, 'a man of many teeth—*hombre de muchos dientes*'" (p. 444). The major is so proud of this phrase that he repeats it and applies it to himself and the other officers as well. The emissary is about to leave, but before he does, he flourishes his hand to get everyone's attention and then does a catalogue, in turn, of his commander Pedro's perfections:

"'Generous, valorous, affable, profound'—(he snatched off his hat enthusiastically)—'a statesman, an invincible chief of partisans—'He dropped his voice startlingly to a deep hollow note—'and a dentist' " (p. 445).

It later becomes clear that Sotillo has witnessed this response, presumably by crouching at a window. Its hilarious impudence sends him into new agonies of fear and doubt. He decides to confront Hirsch again, this time with a whip, as if the estrapade were not torture enough. Hirsch screams horribly, added to which, as Arnold E. Davidson observes, he shows his mouth,¹⁵ unconsciously offering his own comment on the previous dental encomia:

He screamed with uplifted eyebrows and a wide-open mouth—incredibly wide, black, enormous, *full of teeth*—comical (p. 447).

Hirsch's gaping mouth is hardly "comical," which is precisely why the word conjures such an arresting image. It focuses our attention on the teeth, which in this context of dental references have a special import: Hirsch turns out to be a more formidable adversary than anyone would have guessed. When Dr. Monygham and Nostromo later¹⁶ find Hirsch's body—still strung up with the feet above the head, the hands behind, and the back raised above the shoulder blades—they discover that Hirsch has

been shot. Only Dr. Monygham has the insight to wonder why. His question is answered in the climax to this flashback. Sotillo is so desperate that he is almost ready to cringe before Hirsch:

For a word, for one little word, he felt he would have knelt, cringed, grovelled on the floor before the drowsy, conscious stare of those fixed eyeballs starting out of the grimy, dishevelled head that drooped very still with its mouth closed askew. The colonel ground his teeth with rage and struck And as Sotillo, staying his raised hand, waited for him to speak, with the sudden flash of a grin and a straining forward of the wrenched shoulders, he spat violently into his face. 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. He stood with drooping jaw and stony eyes. What had he done? What had he done? What could he say? How could he explain? 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 (p. 449).

There is more of the same, all of it parodying Hirsch's earlier panic, but the point is clear. Hirsch is shot for spitting on Sotillo, even though Sotillo's rash act is contrary to his own interests. He shoots Hirsch for demonstrating that no one, including Hirsch, is as abject as himself. An instant's reflection in the aftermath of the shooting deepens Sotillo's fear of being killed by his own officers. And, though he holds them off with a lie—that Hirsch told him where the silver was located—his fear is vindicated in the end. During the attack of General Barrios' troops, the imbecilic major, calling Sotillo a traitor, runs him through with his much-flaunted sword.

Finally, although Dr. Monygham planted the idea of delving in the harbor for the silver—the tactic that ultimately brings about Sotillo's death and the defeat of his regiment—it was the shooting of Hirsch that forced Sotillo to pretend he had learned the location of the silver. By spitting in Sotillo's face, Hirsch not only achieved a modicum of dignity—he produced the situation whereby Sotillo had to accept Dr. Monygham's word. Therefore, the fi-

nal revelation is that Hirsch has triumphed over Sotillo, not just symbolically—though he does die with a grin on his face—but practically. Hirsch has proven to be a man of *some* teeth after all.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to demonstrate how Conrad gradually asserts the moral order by suggesting that even the most abject character is far preferable to someone whose egoism extends beyond mere self-destruction. Though Sotillo comes from a “good family,” has position and a fine appearance, and Hirsch is pitiful in every manifestation, Hirsch is ultimately seen to be the less objectionable. His superiority is symbolized by his triumph.

Notes

- 1) Though Mrs. Gould does not play a direct part in this paper, she is a prime motivating force because it is for her sake that Dr. Monygham, the English physician who secretly adores her, intervenes in the action. It might be mentioned that she and the doctor are the two Jamesian characters in the novel—two genuinely “fine consciences.”
- 2) This is the name given to Charles Gould’s mansion. Just as Gould is bilingual, he really has two nationalities. He was educated in England, where his late father wished him to remain. His wife, Emilia, is English. And everyone thinks of him as English. Yet he was born in Costaguana, as he has occasion to remind Emilia. And he speaks Spanish with the accent of a Creole aristocrat. References to Gould are more often than not in Spanish too. He is usually called Don Carlos.
- 3) Joseph Conrad, *Nostrome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 200-201. Future references to the novel will appear in the text itself. All direct references to the novel will be to this edition.
- 4) H.M. Daleski, *Joseph Conrad: The Way of Disposition*. (Faber & Faber, London, 1977), p. 122: “He is a ‘little hook-nosed man from Esmeralda,’ the fact of his ‘hooked beak’ apparently being sufficient warrant both for his ‘mercantile soul’ and for his cowardice. His fear, we are to understand, is so deep-

- seated—racially innate, it would appear—that it even infects his speech under normal circumstances, for he speaks with ‘a strange, anxious whine,’ thus ‘degrading ... the sonority of the Spanish language,’ and the very ‘jargon’ he uses, for of course he does not speak Spanish like a Spaniard, is said to be ‘cringing.’”
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 121. Daleski explains that Hirsch’s presence in the lighter is “crucial.”
 - 6) Actually, Decoud is aboard because Pedro Montero will reach Sulaco with his troops in a short time, and, as the highly entertaining derider of Pedro’s pretensions in the local newspaper, Decoud would be sure to face the firing squad or worse. In light of what occurs, however, he would have been safer in Sulaco. As often in Conrad, a man’s worst enemy turns out to be himself.
 - 7) Leonard Orr, “The Semiotics of Description in Conrad’s *Nostromo*,” *Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad*, Ted Billy, ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1987), pp. 124.
 - 8) *Ibid.*
 - 9) J.I.M. Stewart, *Joseph Conrad* (London and Harlow: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1968), p. 124.
 - 10) One of the marvels of this description is that it preceded the kind of mechanical devices that would be expected to inspire such a scene. Out of something like the poet’s “airy nothingness,” Conrad had to imagine the consequences of a superior magnitude of force exerting itself in this way on two objects. He got little help from the current state of technology and none from the cinema.
 - 11) F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1948, 1972), p. 228; Stewart, p. 139. It is, in fact, Nostromo who, in that early scene, saves Ribiera. This is one reason he was asked to transport the silver in the present context.
 - 12) See Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad, The Three Lives: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), pp. 540-41. To put an end to the popular myth that he had spent no more than twelve hours on the whole South American continent, Conrad informed Richard Curle that he had spent about twelve hours in Porto Cabello, but also “2-1/2 to 3 days” in Caracas and “a few hours in a few other places on that dreary coast of Ven’la [i.e., Venezuela].”

13) Virtually every critic writing about *Nostromo* has a few words to say about these time inversions. They are only of incidental importance to this paper, but it might be noted that before Conrad, time inversions were known mainly through eccentric works like *Tristram Shandy*, and *Nostromo*'s inversions still impress readers today, both by their freshness and their brilliance of application. No writer in English has ever played with time in a more natural and effective way than Conrad does here. Orr, p. 117, calls forward-looking time inversions *cataphora* and backward-looking inversions *anaphora*. The reviews of Hirsch's and Sotillo's days, for instance, are anaphoric, while Captain's Mitchell's unexplained references to "poor Decoud"—when he hasn't died in the presented action—are cataphoric.

14) In Dr. Monygham's defense, he hadn't planned on Hirsch's murder. He merely wanted to buy time for Mrs. Gould, whom he secretly adores. However, his love for Mrs. Gould does have its ruthless side, and after Hirsch is murdered, he pursues the same course, convincing Sotillo that he is willing to betray the Gould faction for a portion of the silver. He has only to ask Gould where the silver is hidden and pass the word along to Sotillo. Later, on *Nostromo*'s advice, Dr. Monygham returns to Sotillo with the news that the silver was sunk in the harbor, to be retrieved later by divers. In the end, as it happens, Dr. Monygham's delaying tactics succeed in keeping Sotillo away from Pedro permanently: *Nostromo* has had time to warn the loyalist General Barrios, who speeds back to Sulaco and ambushes Sotillo's troops in the harbor.

15) Arnold E. Davidson, *Conrad's Endings: A Study of the Five Major Novels* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1976, 1984), p. 36. Davidson briefly mentions the colloquy leading up to this description as well, but that was impossible to miss. I am indebted to him for this final detail.

16) Later in the story, that is. For the natural reason that Conrad wishes to stress the death scene, he actually places it after the question of how it came about. This is a nice and simple example of Conrad's use of time inversion (anaphora in this case), not out of perversity but for effect.

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コンラッド作品「ノストロモ」における HirschとSotilloの対立

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(平成3年9月25日受理)

本稿は Joseph Conrad の作品 "Nostromo" に登場する二人の人物, Senor Hirsch と Colonel Sotillo を比較対照した研究である。ここで述べたいことは Conrad は Hirsch には明白な欠点があるにもかかわらず, Sotillo よりも優れた人物として表していることである。

本稿はまず, この作品における主題を概説することにより, 次に Conrad が Hirsch の日常を描写し, 彼の臆病さを披歴する所に従い, Hirsch に対する第一印象

を述べた。後半は, 表面的には Sotillo の方が Hirsch よりも長所の多いことを示し, Hirsch の臆病さを含めて彼の道徳的な短所を例証しながら, 両者を比較対照した。

結論は, その行動で明らかなように, Hirsch の方が Sotillo よりも尊敬に値するということであり, 誰の目にも欠点の多いことは明らかなが, Hirsch の方が Sotillo よりも優位にあるということである。