

## STUDYING A LINK BETWEEN MASCULINE MATERIALISM AND FEMININE FRUSTRATION FROM JOSEPH CONRAD'S NOSTROMO

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### **Abstract:**

*Joseph Conrad's fictional venture is open to different critical perspectives. It has been proved that Conrad's fictional text replete with the postcolonial aspects, especially in African territories. Nostromo slightly stands apart from the colonial plot. It exhibits the theme of politics, materialism, the impact of ambition, human mechanical mindset and also it speaks much about the suppressed voices of womenfolk. This paper would focus on man's uncontrolled ambition and how they willingly or unwillingly exploit feminine feelings.*

**Keywords:** *Materialism, feminine, passion, frustration, deception*

Although it is admitted frankly that materialism is an evil practice spiritually or in the view of religious dogmas, but he runs after material means throughout his life. Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo: A Tale of Seaboard* digs this issue thoroughly and brings out the suppressed emotions behind the sparkling image of a prosperous future. The woman always sacrifices her pleasure for a man's material success.

In the primary description, we have learnt that Tome Silver Mine has been a haunted place that carries extreme negative impulses. Charles Gould who has studied mining engineering from England aspires to re-open the mine despite warnings of his father who had died, hating this concession forced upon him by a corrupt political regime. Mining works is a burning passion for him at the age of twenty. Therefore, he consciously chooses to re-open the mine. He argues that the establishment of mine would provide him with time and freedom. Gould's youthful idealism convinces him that silver can be extracted from the mine and can be used for the welfare and development of society. It will bring order, stability, peace and prosperity to a land of poverty. He is conscious of the precarious nature of its existence and the consequences of its failure—his father had died directly as a result of the burden of the intolerable political interferences.

But he wants to turn the “absurd moral disaster” of mine into “a serious and moral success” (Conrad, *Nostromo* 48).

Gould is haunted by the passion of opening mine to the point of insanity: “A man haunted by the fixed idea is insane. It is dangerous even if that idea is an idea of justice” (273). Having become his unswerving passion, it corrupts him in the due course of time. He does not understand how the mean becomes the end and spoils all the human virtues of his personality. He becomes an embodiment of brutal coldness. His passion alienates him from his wife, his supporters and workers and himself too.

Although Mrs Gould initially supported wholeheartedly her husband's idealism and dreams of her future; but as the mine-work progresses, she learns that it is “mere insignificant—vestiges of the initial aspirations” (159). Gould is completely devoted to his sense of integrity towards mine, but he lacks the imaginative insight that is a prerequisite to becoming a good husband. She realizes that her husband loves mine rather than her. This creates the wall between the two and their relationship turns into nothingness.

Gould's overnight stays at the mine are the symbol of physical isolation from his wife. When Mrs Gould tries to share her plight with him, Gould says, “I thought you had understood me perfectly from the first... I thought we had said all there was to say a long time ago. There is nothing to say now” (148). Both husband and wife are separated by a wall of silver bricks. She knows very well how the rich exploit the poor and the needy; the big enterprises stand on the dead bones of the poor people.

Emilia, a sympathetic person, steadily works for the poor, sick and lonely: She protects Giorgio Viola's home from the intrusion of the railway, shelters the outcast Dr Monygham and tries to humanize the evil effect of the mine; counteract the materialistic interest of her husband. These social and philosophical activities cannot shield her from disillusion and alienation. She feels

nervous and pathetic because her husband has turned into an unresponsive machine with whom she cannot communicate in a way a wife would like. She wished to be with her husband in almost every activity, but now she is alone with her crushed ideals. Dr Monygham does not like Gould's attitude toward his wife. He expressed his feeling: "Was it for this that life had been robbed of all the intimate facilities of daily affection which her tenderness needed as the human body needs air to breathe?" (367).

The crisis in her life is the outcome of Sombre Solitude: "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" (375).

Although Joseph Conrad treats Mr Gould as a central figure, Nostromo and Decoud also occupy a great premise in the storyline. Gould has deep trust in these two men for any business assignment. He gives them the responsibility of transporting a vast quantity of silver ingots, the six-month output of the mine. This responsibility changes their attitude, idealism and the way to look at life. They are conscious of the enormity of risks evolved and the fact that they might not come back. Before leaving, Decoud leaves his pocketbook with Emilia Gould with the request to send it to his sister: "Perhaps my last words to her" (187). On the other hand, Nostromo finds a trip as an occasion for doing great deeds and becoming a hero.

The time spent on the complete obscurity of the gulf separates Decoud from the life of Sulaco. Exhausted with rowing, he longs desperately for his civilized life. His isolation in the gulf intensifies his scepticism. He understands the hollowness of his earlier life. All appears meaningless that one day will end into darkness:

*Like a man lost in slumber, he heard nothing, he saw nothing. Even his hand held before his face did not exist for his eyes. The change from the agitation, the passions and dangers, from the sights and sounds of the shore, was so complete that it would have resembled death had it not been for the survival of his thoughts. (188)*

The darkness seems to contemplate upon him, like a stone. He feels that time and space have stopped permanently. When he asks his partner, Nostromo whether they are moving forward, Nostromo answers: "Not so fast as a crawling beetle tangled in the grass." (189). They both are facing alienation and an utter sense of frustration. They

are helpless in front of the hostile nature. Nostromo notices his blunder by accepting the assignment of silver transportation in the hostile atmosphere all around. He shares his feeling with Decoud, "[...] this silver in our position is to run the naked breast against the point of a knife" (190). Decoud undergoes an impediment and possesses no hope for any material gain or emotional attachment that he had once for his beloved Antonia.

When Nostromo comes back from Sulaco to the same spot where he has left Decoud, he observes the boat, he used for transportation of the silver, abandoned in the bay. He searches the vessel, but he discovers nothing except a bloodstain. He finds nothing but a mystery—Decoud is gone along with four bars of silver.

Nostromo recognizes his real value and realized how he has been used by people of sound financial status. When he, in the action of prodigious heroism, swims to shore, leaving Decoud to guard the silver treasure, he encounters alienation: "No one waited for him; no one thought of him; no one expected or wished his return. "Betrayed! Betrayed! he muttered to himself. No one cared" (302). Frustrated by the trials of his isolation, Nostromo longs for understanding. He gets no one to admire, to take care of him and to listen to the terrible and exceptional adventure he has undertaken. He asserts to Monygham that no one at least he will have sympathy with him.

When Nostromo is dead, Mrs Gould tells his sweetheart Giselle: "Console yourself, child. Very soon he would have forgotten you for his treasure" (403). When Giselle protests that Nostromo loved her "as no one had ever been loved before", Mrs Gould replies: "I have been loved too" (403). The corrupting power of the mine had driven Mrs Gould to cynicism. Her frustration with material interest which has made her married life unhappy is genuine. Conrad tries to resolve the problem of belief in an illusion through the characters of Mrs Gould, Dr Monygham, and to a lesser extent Father Corbelan. All three have submerged their egoistic desire in their commitment to something or someone outside themselves. And all do something for that outside cause sometimes at the risk of their own lives and reputation. Mrs Gould devotes herself to the unfortunate, but her greatest moral triumph is her lie to Dr Monygham. She refuses to disclose Nostromo's guilty secret about the silver and thus preserves his reputation for him after his death.

Self-deception is not a state of consciousness - it is a willing state of acceptance of what one knows is

objectively misleading. Similarly, Sartre tells, “A person can live in self-deception, which does not mean that he does not have an abrupt awakening to cynicism or good faith, but which implies a constant and particular style of life” (qtd. Kaufman 244).

Like the previous stories, Nostromo is the next in the series which addresses Conrad’s conception of modern materialism and conflicts that emerge out of it.

In all his writings, one feels that his problem has been the revelation of the soul wrestling with or sinking beneath its own weakness, the elemental force of nature or the mysterious force of circumstances—struggling, yielding, suffering, but always solitary, individual, isolated. It is not, indeed, that he bungles the relationship of his figures to each other—he is too sure in his grip of character for that. It is that character is for him an essentially individual creation, separate from, comparatively untouched by ordinary human relationships. (qtd. in Sherry 110-111)

Mrs Gould’s love for her noble but misguided husband is discouraged by his consumed attachment to his mine. By the time of the riot, she realizes the darker side of their mistake of re-opening the mine. She has her moments of the recognition of the utter futility and unhappiness in the pursuits of material interest. She sees her marital relationship has been ruined and her life slipping into nothingness. Their self-deception leads them to the confusion between the private good with the public good, with the inevitable destructive results. But Conrad also insisted on the requirement of illusions to make life endurable. Things barren of illusion are devoid of truth and sentience:

*But reason, [...] all reasons man insists, as man, on creating and trying to live by certain values. These values are, to use Conrad’s word, illusion; but the last wisdom is for man to realize that though his values are illusions, the illusions are necessary, is infinitely precious, is the mark of his human achievement, and is, in the end, his only truth. From this notion springs the*

*motif of the ‘true lie’, as we may term it, which appears several times in Conrad’s fiction.” (Warren 377)*

Conrad expresses the universal truth of the destructiveness of self-aggrandizement: “Dramatizing human existence as a competitive struggle to survive, Nostromo demonstrates that the greatest enemy comes from within, from each character’s innate selfishness, pride or greed” (Billy 155-56).

**Conclusion:**

Nostromo does not talk about "Savage and superb" women, contrast other female characters, the fiction presents very sensible and self-sacrificing women who remain behind the curtains and keep their feeling hidden too. It causes a sense of solitariness and frustration. Mr Gould, Nostromo and Decoud run after material gain. Being haunted by the passion, they forget the existence of these women in their life- they give secondary importance to feminine feelings. Men force them to bear inessential crises. Therefore, they encounter frustration in their lives.

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