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Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard

Joseph Conrad

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Nostromo (full title Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard) is a 1904 novel by Joseph Conrad, set in the fictitious South American republic of “Costaguana”. It was originally published serially in two volumes of T.P.’s Weekly.

In 1998, the Modern Library ranked Nostromo 47th on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century. F. Scott Fitzgerald said, “I’d rather have written Nostromo than any other novel."Nostromo is often regarded as Conrad’s best novel.

Conrad set his novel in the mining town of Sulaco, an imaginary port in the western region of the imaginary country of Costaguana. The book has more fully developed characters than any other of his novels, but two characters dominate the narrative: Señor Gould and the eponymous anti-hero, the “incorruptible” Nostromo.

In his “Author’s Note” to early editions of Nostromo, Joseph Conrad provides a rather detailed explanation of the inspirational origins of his novel. There he relates how, as a young man of about seventeen, while serving aboard a ship in the Gulf of Mexico, he heard the story of a man who had stolen, single-handedly, “a whole lighter-full of silver”. As Conrad goes on to relate, he forgot about the story until some twenty-five years later when he came across a travelogue in a used bookshop in which the author related how he worked for years aboard a schooner whose master claimed to be that very thief who had stolen the silver.

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