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"The Imaginary Lines of a Twilight Country": Fiction as Enclave in Conrad's *Nostromo*

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In this paper, I will try to show that Conrad's use of a fictional enclave in *Nostromo* dramatizes both the political view he entertained of his own modernity and the ontological nature of his fiction. To do so, I will start by showing that in *Nostromo* the enclave is presented as an artificial construct which synthesizes different places and becomes a shifting figure. In fact, this fictional geopolitical enclave bears similarities with the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia and mirrors how fiction and reality are articulated in a fin-de-siècle European world that is constantly shrinking in an era of dawning globalisation.

Nostromo is Conrad's famous South-American novel, published in 1904. It is set in the fictional isolated coastal province of Sulaco, in the independent, also fictional state of Costaguana, and it presents the history of the province as it goes through a post-independence revolution and eventually secedes from the rest of the country for material interests. Indeed, a handful of European and American investors in the silver mine—the most productive source of income in the province—decide that rather than letting their mine fall into the hands of the new government they would proclaim the independence of the province of Sulaco and finance their coup with the silver extracted from said mine. *Nostromo,* therefore, can be read as the genesis of a political enclave.

Sulaco as geopolitical and metatextual enclave

Sulaco's political independence is encouraged by its geographical isolation from the rest of the world. The setting of *Nostromo*, like that of all Conrad's novels before *The Secret Agent* (1907), proved to be quite foreign—almost exotic—to Conrad's contemporary British audience. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator describes the province as quite remote from the modern British world. The places are made foreign to an Anglophone readership by the recurrent use of Spanish names like "Golfo Placido", "Punta Mala", "the peninsula of Azuera". These names are in fact remnants of "the time of Spanish rule" (*Nostromo* 7) which from the start the narrator opposes to the reader's assumed modernity. Even by sea, Sulaco is difficult to reach: "[t]he clumsy deep-sea galleons of the conquerors that, needing a brisk gale to move at all, would lie becalmed where your modern ship built on clipper lines forges ahead by the mere flapping of her sails, had been barred out of Sulaco by the prevailing calm of [the Golfo Placido]" (*Nostromo* 7). Communication and technology—embodied here by ships—are the two aspects of modernity that allow the invasion of the "inviolable sanctuary" of Sulaco.

On its continental side, Sulaco is protected from the turmoil of the revolution raging in Costaguana by a chain of mountains with steep hills, "a wild chaos of sharp rocks and stony levels cut about by vertical ravines" (*Nostromo* 7) that prevent communication by land. *Nostromo*'s opening chapter provides the reader with one of Conrad's best hypotyposes even though in a letter the seaman turned writer claimed that he did not remember his trip in South America: "All my memories of South America seem to slip away. I just had a glimpse 25 years ago—a short glance. That is not enough *pour bâtir un roman dessus*" (Watts 145). The metaphor of the novel as an edifice is reminiscent of *A Personal Record* in which Conrad claims that "there was not a single brick, stone or grain of sand of its soil I had not placed in position with my own hands" (Conrad 277–278). In fact, these authorial comments are consistent with the way Conrad flaunted the artificiality of the contours of his fictional South American landscape.

Indeed, the incipit of *Nostromo* features many metatextual hints, such as: "On crossing the imaginary line drawn from Punta Mala to Azuera, the ships from Europe bound to Sulaco lose at once the strong breezes of the ocean" (*Nostromo* 9). This reference to "imaginary lines" maintains the difference between the artificial boundaries of the map (especially since here the line is drawn in the sea) and the actual geological shape of the territory. However, it is to be noted that the artificiality of the lines does not, in any event, diminish their symbolical power, as here, they clearly mark the entrance to a new, different, and enclosed world, i.e. an enclave. Later in the chapter the rock-solid chain of mountains surrounding one of the islands located in the middle of the Golfo Placido is "as if chopped with an axe" (*Nostromo* 11). The chimeric metaphor— "as if chopped with an axe"—easily turns mountains into timber, and presents them as being hand-made, carved—thereby emphasizing their arbitrary and artificial nature. Even though at first sight the incipit of *Nostromo* seems ordinary because it sets the stage for the action as it should, the flaunting of the artificiality of that setting metatextually draws our attention to its fictionality, thereby making us aware that as we enter the artificial land of Sulaco, we also enter the novel that describes it. The self-conscious parallel thus established between entering the land of Sulaco and entering the novel finds an echo in Conrad's mention of *Gulliver's Travels* in the preface.

In the preface, Conrad jokingly equates the writing of the novel with going on a long journey to the other end of the world:

> Often, also, when I had thought myself to a standstill over the tangled-up affairs of the Republic, I would, figuratively speaking, pack my bag, rush away from Sulaco for a change of air […]. But generally […] my sojourn on the continent of Latin America, famed for its hospitality, lasted for about two years. On my return I found (speaking somewhat in the style of Captain Gulliver) my family all well, my wife heartily glad to learn that the

> fuss was all over, and our small boy considerably grown during my absence. (*Nostromo* xl)

The analogy between reading fiction and going on a voyage and entering a different place—sometimes called "the realm of fiction"—is a commonplace which is not without some theoretical grounding. In *Fictional Worlds*, Thomas Pavel summarizes the issue: "rather than assuming that the readers of *Anna Karenina* contemplate a fictional world from some privileged vantage point outside it, Walton[1] insists that the readers are located *within* the fictional world, that, for the duration of the game, is taken as real" (Pavel 55). Reading fiction means entering the world of fiction consciously. Joseph Conrad actually dramatizes this metaphysical experience of the ontology of fiction. He does so by introducing the reader to Sulaco *in situ*, as if the reader was taking a tour of Sulaco. The hypotyposis we mentioned above is actually presented as if the narrator was guiding the reader through the landscape: "The cordillera is gone from you as if it had dissolved itself into great piles of grey and black vapours […]" (*Nostromo* 9). The description adopts a horizontal perspective, as if the landscape was seen from some point *within* the fictional world, not from a vantage point outside it (to paraphrase Pavel): "From the middle of the gulf, the point of the land itself is not visible at all […]. On the other side, what seems to be an isolated patch of blue mist floats lightly on the glare of the horizon. This is the peninsula of Azuera" (*Nostromo* 7). The narrator seems to be giving directions as to where the reader should look, and constantly refers to any possible defects in our perception ("not visible", "what seems to be"). After many references to sight, the subjectivity of the description is then transferred on how the reader gets to know the folklore of the land. The narrator pretends that his knowledge of the land is second-hand. A flurry of expressions hints at local rumours like, "the poor […] will tell you" (8), "the story goes also that […]" (8), "Tradition has it" (8), "when the Placido—as the saying is—goes to sleep under its black poncho" (10). These pseudodiegetic rumours which constitute the description of Sulaco spring from the very people that inhabit the land. The last example goes as far as to use a completely fictive expression to describe the fictional land of Sulaco.[2] In other words, the novel *Nostromo* is generated from the inside. This self-generative, or autopoietic, process at work in *Nostromo* is such that the process of reading mirrors the process of accessing the enclave of Sulaco.

Yet, even though Sulaco is artificial and self-generative, it is represented as very real for its inhabitants. It constitutes their world, as if it had no boundaries: "Men ploughed with wooden ploughs and yoked oxen, small on a boundless expanse, as if attacking immensity itself"

[1] Pavel refers to Kendall Walton's "Do We Need Fictional Entities? Notes Toward a Theory."
[2] To our knowledge, Conrad's expression "to go to sleep under a black poncho" has no Spanish equivalent and is probably a forgery. It may however be a reworking of the French expression: "sous son manteau blanc," which means that something (quite often a landscape) is covered in snow.

(*Nostromo* 82). The simplicity of the polyptoton of "plough", the mention of raw material, coupled with the scaling effect between "small" men and "boundless expanse" create a strong sense of belonging.[3] Men seem to be part of the scenery, and as such, their perspective turns the small region of Sulaco into an infinite space because they know nothing of what is beyond the borders of Sulaco. The world outside the enclave of Sulaco is barely described: it seems to be an inaccessible, remote territory, the kind of which we hear about in stories. One of the characters, Father Romàn, fails to account for what is beyond the borders of Sulaco:

> But when once an inquisitive spirit desired to know in what direction Europe was situated, whether up or down the coast, Father Romàn, to conceal his perplexity, became very reserved and severe. "No doubt it is extremely far away. But ignorant sinners like you of the San Tomé mine should think earnestly of everlasting punishment instead of enquiring into the magnitude of the earth, with its countries and populations altogether beyond your understanding." (*Nostromo* 96-97)

Though we may laugh at Father Romàn's ignorance, we quickly understand that the whole world is too big, too large for the writer to represent it by simply carrying a mirror along the road, as Stendhal would have it, or by pretending that language is but a house made of glass, as Zola suggested. [4] Instead, Conrad's approach is a step away from the naturalist or realist tradition. For him, the enclave of Sulaco is a different place, a deterritorialized place, a place that is actually no longer a place where you can belong and assert your identity, or even define its own identity, but a non-place—or rather a site for fiction bearing many similarities to fiction itself. In fact, it strongly resembles Michel Foucault's definition of heterotopias : "Ces lieux, parce qu'ils sont absolument autres que tous les emplacements qu'ils **reflètent** et dont ils **parlent**, je les appellerai, par opposition aux utopies, les hétérotopies |...]" (1575).[5] Foucault's choice of words to explain the functions of heterotopias suggests that his concept bears strong similarities with Conrad's enclave of Sulaco. And since we have seen that this enclave embodies the concept of fiction within fiction itself, we will see if we can go as far as to say that not only Sulaco but the whole of Conrad's fiction can be considered as a heterotopia.

The enclave of Sulaco as heterotopic space

Foucault first identifies two kinds of heterotopias: heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation. The latter aim at harbouring individuals who "deviate" from established norms, whose behaviour proves to be too different from the common lot. As for heterotopias of crisis,

[3] Ironically enough, Simon Bolivar is reported to have said "America is ungovernable. Those who worked for her independence have ploughed the sea" (*Nostromo* 172).
[4] "Je voudrais la phrase de cristal, claire et si simple que les yeux ingénus des enfants pussent la pénétrer de part en part, s'en réjouir et la retenir. Je voudrais l'idée si vraie, si une, qu'elle apparût, transparente elle-même, et d'une solidité de diamant dans le cristal de la phrase" (Zola 92-94).
[5] Emphasis is mine.

they feature individuals at odds with their environment. "Il y a une certaine forme d'hétérotopie que j'appellerais hétérotopies de crise, c'est à dire qu'il y a des lieux privilégiés, ou sacrés, ou interdits, réservés aux individus qui se trouvent, par rapport à la société, et au milieu humain à l'intérieur duquel ils vivent, en état de crise" (1575-1576). Such a definition could apply to any fictional narrative in which a character has to face an ordeal, overcome an obstacle, or live through a *peripetaeia*, in the broad sense of the term. Of course, the pattern of a protagonist who has a conflictual relationship with the world, and tries to recognize his/her place in it is typically Conradian. But is seems even more relevant with *Nostromo*. In the light of Foucault's definition, the enclave of Sulaco can be considered as a heterotopia of crisis in which characters literally face a collective crisis in the shape of a war for independence which reaches its climax when characters secretly hide and denounce each other while standing armies clash in the background. It is significant that in this heterotopia, Conrad's state of crisis is in fact the crisis of a state—that of Sulaco. Implicit to Foucault's definition is the idea that these heterotopias are transitory for they aim at resolving the crisis. The fictional pendant to this resolution is Aristotle's *anagnorisis*. And indeed the epigraph of *Nostromo* seems to imply that the novel will go down the road most novels seem to go and eventually resolve the crisis. The epigraph is borrowed from Shakespeare's *King John*: "so foul a sky clears not without a storm". This epigraph, for all its teleological promises of resolution, is misleading, for despite its romanced ending *Nostromo* provides no sense of closure. The revolution we are reading about is not the first, and we get the feeling that it will not be the last. As such, *Nostromo* presents a novel in a perpetual state of crisis.

These repeated revolutions do not undermine Foucault's second principle of heterotopia, on the contrary : "Une société peut faire fonctionner d'une façon très différente une hétérotopie qui existe et qui n'a pas cessé d'exister [...] la même hétérotopie peut, selon la synchronie de la culture dans laquelle elle se trouve, avoir un fonctionnement ou un autre" (1576). Sulaco started as an appendix to the Spanish empire, a mere colony. After Costaguana's war of independence, it became part of the federal state of Costaguana. Then, after seceding from Costaguana, Sulaco acquires its own political independence but is turned into a capitalist stronghold for American investors. Of course, as an enclave, Sulaco's function is always in relation to the territory surrounding it. Interestingly enough, it is precisely the modality of Sulaco's independence from its surroundings that changes in degree and nature. If we keep the analogy between fiction and the enclave, it should be mentioned that Pavel notices that fiction as an institution "pursues families of goals with uneven and ever-changing determination, switching emphasis from one aim to another, abandoning projects before completion, succeeding in secondary areas just when it fails in more important endeavours, obtaining by luck what had been denied to labor" (144).

Foucault adds that heterotopias have the possibility to juxtapose several spaces and several timeframes simultaneously. These are his third and fourth principles of heterotopia. The third principle focuses on space. “L’hétérotopie a le pouvoir de juxtaposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles" (1577). *Nostromo* has a specific way to bring together remote places of the world, in an environment that feels like South America but is nowhere to be located on a real map. Conrad described Sulaco as “a synthetic construct” (*Nostromo* xix). Unhappy with this statement, critics have tried to actually locate the real counterpart of Sulaco. Some notice that its history echoes that of Paraguay (Vidan), some that its geography resembles that of Panama (Greiff and Greiff), others believe the San Tomé mine is presumably the fictional counterpart of a real slave island owned by the Portuguese (Winter). In itself, these dis-locations create a composite patchwork map, supposedly standing for a generic South-American country. Some critics have tried to draw maps of Sulaco, despite some others[6] claiming that several inconsistencies ruled out the possibility of Conrad ever using a premade map for his fictional province as Faulkner did for his Yoknapatawpha.[7] In fact, Conrad believed that maps were not necessary for the understanding of human stories. In an essay called “Geography and Some Explorers” Conrad borrows from Shakespeare to explain his vision of cartography: “The earth is a stage,[8] and though it may be an advantage, even to the right comprehension of the play, to know its exact configuration, it is the drama of human endeavour that will be the thing, with a ruling passion expressed by outward action marching perhaps blindly to success or failure […]” (“Geography and Some Explorers” 274). In that essay, Conrad shifts the emphasis to characters. But in *Nostromo*, we will see that it is not that simple, because his characters are often exiles that bring with them a part of their place of origin, further complicating the “map”.

We have Giorgio Viola, the Italian innkeeper who is nicknamed “the Garibaldino”, because he displays a portrait of his hero Garibaldi in his establishment whose name is a tribute to the dream of the Italian politician *The albergo de Italia Una*. This creates more than just a mere superimposition of place, for Garibaldino brings to Sulaco his politics as he is the one defending an old—and racist—continental vision of a federal state, that is to say the antithesis of the secession process of Sulaco as Christopher GoGwilt notices (198-211). The old Italian warrior even brings his own mythology as he calls Nostromo by the name of the patron saint of Italy: Gian’ Batista. He is therefore a representative or rather a miniaturized version of Garibaldi, as if the smaller world of the fictional enclave could not hold the full-size version.

[6] See Kimpel, Ben and Duncan Eaves, T. C. “Geography and History in *Nostromo”*.
[7] Faulkner himself drew a map of his fictional county for the first edition of *Absalom Absalom*. It is generally included in all editions of his novels.
[8] Interestingly, Foucault’s example for the third principle is that of the theatre stage, in which the floorboard can stand for any space. “Le théâtre fait succéder sur le rectangle de la scène toute une série de lieux qui sont étrangers les uns des autres” (1577).

He embodies a foreign political philosophy that does not have its roots in South America, but is present like a distant echo of Garibaldi's politics.

Then, we have Charles Gould, the English life-long owner and manager of the silver mine of Sulaco, who "looked in his English clothes and with his imported saddlery as though he had come this moment to Costaguana at his easy swift *pasotrote*, straight out of some green meadow at the other side of the world" (*Nostromo* 48). Gould is like a displaced image. Here, the figure of a single English rider summons at once the whole of England's green and pleasant land through association, and we may recognize here the part/whole relation associated to the figure of speech known as synecdoche. These characters are not symbols, for they do not only stand for something greater than themselves. They are representatives of a greater idea, but they are also individuals, agents whose idiosyncrasies make them whole nonetheless, following a typical Conradian paradox.

These displaced images used as synecdoches are the most useful tool to represent something within an enclave as the world outside—or at least its representation—necessarily remains incomplete. Contrary to the metaphor, the synecdoche does not nullify the meaning of its vehicle, on the contrary. The presentation of these meaningful parts-for-wholes allows the writer to assemble within an enclave (i.e. a microcosm of manageable size) characters, epochs, events, histories, discourses as disparate as they are remote.

Foucault's fourth principle stipulates that heterotopias are also heterochronias. "L'hétérotopie se met à fonctionner à plein lorsque les hommes se trouvent dans une sorte de rupture absolue avec leur temps traditionnel" (1578). It is true that Sulaco seems to be a place from another time. Before the revolution it is said that nothing has happened in Sulaco in the last hundred years. But the enclave of Sulaco does not simply live in the past, like some lost world, ready to be discovered and civilized by the ticking of the factory clock. As Bruce Henricksen remarks, *Nostromo* actually condenses several chronotopes into a single space-time continuum. He remarks that historical change is embedded in the architecture of the city of Sulaco, which is mainly "a collage of residual and emergent styles" (125). Thus *Nostromo* manages to superimpose different time-frames that are still untouched by modernity's global temporality. At the start of the novel Sulaco lies outside the reach of the railway, and modern means of telecommunication in the enclave are seriously impeded by Sulaco's characteristic isolation from the rest of the world.

At the beginning of the novel we are made aware of a legend about the ghosts of two greedy "gringos" who haunt the misty peninsula of Azuera, for ever looking after a treasure. This seemingly unrelated legend eventually gets an echo in the misadventures of two main characters—Nostromo and Decoud—who are supposed to prevent the production of silver from

falling into the wrong hands by safely hiding it on a desert island. But their selfishness turns them into thieves: Decoud, the artisan of Sulaco's independence, is marooned on the desert island. Unable to cope with an absolute sense of isolation and loneliness, he shoots himself in the chest and drowns in the Golfo Placido. As for Nostromo, the incorruptible factotum, he is haunted by his guilty conscience until he dies alone. Unlike the archetypal Ivanhoe whose fate coincides with that of his nation, these two men supposed to make history end up taking different paths. But while Nostromo and Decoud meet their ends, the story of their romantic quest actually gets back on a loop and re-joins that of the mythical or folkloric eternal quest for silver embodied by the ghosts, and on a historical level, that of the colonialist plunder of material resources of the so-called new world. What is more, these different time frames are not presented in a linear manner. Many anachronies partake in the disintegration if not of time, at least of the sense of progress. Bruce Henricksen also noted that Conrad's extensive use of analepses and prolepses in *Nostromo* is a way to compare the pre-revolutionary Sulaco with its post-revolutionary state only to find out that nothing has changed but the main actors. This allows the superimposition of mythical, individual, and historical time, and puts all these chronotopes on a loop, only to conclude on the nature of neo-colonial capitalism: "There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interest" (*Nostromo* 463).

Then, at the crossroads of time and place lies this date: the 3rd of May (unknown year). It is on the 3rd of May that the fate of Sulaco is decided. Robert Hampson concurs with Keith Carabine who noted that the 3rd of May (1791) marks the day of Poland's first constitution. Consequently, he sees similarities between the fate of Sulaco and that of Poland. However, the *Tres de Mayo* is also a significant date in Spanish history—*The 3rd of May 1808* was immortalised by Francisco de Goya in a painting that shows the revolution of the people of Madrid. Therefore, it is not only the "ghostly presence of the suppressed and yet to be reborn Polish nation" (Hampson 64) which hides behind 3rd of May, but also the memory of a crushed rebellion in Madrid, that is to say another potential outcome for the rebellion in Sulaco, in fact a whole new possible world.

The fifth principle has already been considered. For indeed, both Sulaco and fiction obey Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopia: "Les hétérotopies supposent toujours un système d'ouverture et de fermeture qui, à la fois, les isole et les rend pénétrables" (1579). This definition adds the notion of seclusion to heterotopias and by way of consequence clearly mirrors that of an enclave.

The sixth and last principle has also been considered in relation to the second one: "Elles ont par rapport à l'espace restant, une fonction. […] Ou bien elles ont pour rôle de créer un espace d'illusion qui dénonce comme plus illusoire encore tout l'espace réel, […] ou bien, au contraire, créant un autre espace, un autre espace réel, aussi parfait, aussi méticuleux, aussi bien arrangé

que le nôtre est désordonné, mal agencé et brouillon" (1580). For the latter case, Foucault gives a striking example: that of the British colonies in America. Of course, as a former colony, Sulaco does meet the requirement. We will see later that fiction can also be considered as a "colony", an appendix to reality.

We understand now that Sulaco corresponds to Foucault's heterotopia precisely because it is an enclave. But in the end, the sole criterion to which both Sulaco and fiction itself do not testify is Foucault's insistence on the actuality, on the reality of heteropias: "des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui sont dessinés dans l'institution même de la société" (1580). For him, heterotopias, contrary to utopias, are located *somewhere*.

A twilight country

The "reality" of Sulaco as a fictional place is problematic. For Sulaco both is and is not in South America, it is both unreal and real: *Nostromo* is littered with historical references to colonisation and European wars, but at the same time heavily fictional in its depiction of a country which *could* exist but does not. Conrad called Sulaco a "twilight country" that is "imaginary but true" (*Nostromo* ix). And it is our contention that Conrad questions just that: through the use of an enclave he embeds the ontological dialogism of fiction according to which imagination feeds upon reality only to influence it back again. The link that exists between the enclave of Sulaco and the world is the same as the one that exists between the part and the whole in a synecdoche, and it is the same that exists between Conradian fiction and reality: they are mutually interdependent and rely on the linguistic concept of referentiality. Sulaco is real insofar as it constitutes a synthetic reference to something else which is necessarily outside of it. As such, the wish for independence of the enclave of Sulaco clearly echoes the idea that heterotopias are formed by drawing lines in the sand—"dessinés" Foucault says—to delineate a place which is as artificial as it is not-the-same, as fictional as it is "other". This does not go against Foucault's definition of heterotopia, on the contrary, since it propels fiction in the realm of the for ever "other".

As a dramatization of fiction within fiction, the *topos* of the enclave synthesizes the dual meaning of *topos*. It is both a place and a literary theme or formula in literature. If we are to parody, even contradict Alfred Korzybski as regards Conrad's fictional map of Sulaco, we could say that—in *Nostromo*—the map is the territory[9] (Korzybski 58). Sulaco, as a metafictional enclave, bears within itself its own means of representation and internalises the "other" by constantly reaching outside in its quest for identity. The constant interplay between inside and

[9] The original quotation is "A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness."

outside fails to stabilize Sulaco's identity. On the contrary, it makes it highly susceptible to invasions. Indeed, the relationship established is such that the enclave is constantly being invaded by the world outside while always retaining some of its autonomy. Hence the metaphor of one of the characters, Don Jose Avellanos (interestingly, the character who writes the history of Sulaco: a fictional book called *Fifty Years of Misrule*) who states that Sulaco is a "paradise of snakes" (*Nostromo* 193). Fiction cannot escape reality; it is corrupted by it. Fictional language escapes the one-to-one relationship to the world but cannot get rid of referentiality altogether. Now this posits that the world is ultimately unknowable and that language cannot account for its complexity. Father Romàn's solution to look to the heavens will not do anymore.

As such *Nostromo* is a product of its time, of its own modernity. For despite Sulaco's isolation and eventual independence from Costaguana, Sulaco is invaded by modernity and its most sly serpentine representatives: global capitalism and neo-colonialism of foreign investments. These phenomena, together with better means of communication, reduced the world to the size of a small pea. It is true that Victorians felt a strong sense of expansiveness because of England's imperial position in the world. But towards the end of the 19th century, because the world was being mapped by this global network of communication, this feeling shifted in favour of a sense of constriction, according to Janice Ho. She quotes H.G. Wells: "the world grows smaller and smaller, the telegraph and telephone go everywhere" (3). This is reminiscent of Marlow's disillusion when he realizes in *Heart of Darkness* that the blank spaces that maps usually promised are no longer blank (*Heart of Darkness* 7-8). The enclave of Sulaco remains a blank space on a South American map, and as such constitutes an act of resistance against globalisation and the constriction of the world it brings about. Choosing to set the story of *Nostromo* in an enclave that is not chartable is a political act that goes against new imperialism, as it sets the place as a place of resistance, as always "other", always heterogeneous.

Interestingly enough, modernisation somehow fictionalizes Sulaco. When an (English) engineer is asked to build a railway and a telegraph line to provide a better way in and out of the enclave of Sulaco he clearly reminds us of the limits of reality and ejaculates: "We can't move mountains!" (*Nostromo* 41). But the engineer finally manages to build the railway and the telegraph line, creating a link between Sulaco and the rest of the world, virtually moving mountains, finally achieving what was considered as some mere impossibility years before. He, in fact, bridges the gap between fiction and reality.

Thomas Pavel sees fictionality in similar geographical terms. He maintains that "the frontiers of fiction separate it on one side from myth, on another from actuality. To these borders we should add the line that isolates the represented space of fiction from the spectators or readers. Accordingly, fiction is surrounded by sacred borders, by actuality borders, and by representational borders" (81). Interestingly enough, Pavel maintains that historical fiction

functions like road empires (that is to say, empires that create enclaves by spreading across the world without securing the passage from the homeland to the colonies, like the British empire), and that it distorts truth in order to prove an ideological point. Historical fiction tries to legitimize this ideology, but the consequence of this is that "fictional extensions [...] then leave indeterminate the frontiers between what is actual and what is not" (82). Perhaps Conrad's playful attempt at dealing with this subtle tangle of fiction and reality lies in his acknowledgement that *Nostromo* was very much influenced by the fictional history book called *Fifty Years of Misrule*, which as we saw was written by Don Jose Avellanos, one of the characters of the novel.

The final sentence of *Nostromo* provides the reader with a final transformation, or rather a transmutation of fact into fiction. All along the novel, the silver mine has been referred to as the "the greatest fact in the whole of South America" (*Nostromo* 197). Yet, in the end, the silver has become ethereal and vaporous: "In that true cry of undying passion that seemed to ring aloud from Punta Mala to Azuera and away to the bright line of the horizon, overhung by a big white cloud shining like a mass of solid silver, the genius of [Nostromo] dominated the dark gulf containing his conquests of treasure and love" (*Nostromo* 512). The solid fact has become a cloud of silver, losing in substance, gaining in influence. If "every cloud has a silver lining", as the Miltonian expression has it, it does not necessarily mean that everything will be fine in the end. The pessimistic, or at least neutral, end of the novel cannot but prompt us to see the silver lining of this cloud as very ironic. The final mention of the cloud is in fact doubly ironic because it echoes "the mourning draperies of clouds" (7) on which the novel opens, contradicting the Shakespearean epigraph: "So foul a sky clears not without a storm". Confined within the limits of the enclave, the revolution in Sulaco feels like a storm in a teacup, absolutely incapable of clearing the sky. *Nostromo*'s end is very much like its beginning. As such, a revolution has taken place, but the silver cloud lingers on.

As a conclusion, we would like to qualify Conrad's attitude towards language. We have seen that Conrad's metafictional depiction of Sulaco allows him to develop a metafictional game of mirror. The link between the enclave and the world outside is shown to mirror that between fiction and reality. Such a self-conscious embedding of the ontological status of fiction within a work of fiction itself is symptomatic of early modernism and its strong focus on language as the main component and sometimes the very fabric of the world. Yet Conrad does not belong to those who felt that language—in the words of Michael Levenson—"rather than describing or reflecting the world, language was now seen to form it" (16). For even though Conrad grants language a high degree of self-consciousness, total independence from reality is not an option. The synecdochic relationship that the enclave of Sulaco entertains with the world outside emphasises the strong interdependence between both parties. Sulaco is not a simple

reproduction of the world outside. It is at the same time a production of this world and a synthetic representation of it. As such, even though the synecdochic relationship at work is not based on direct equivalence, a certain knowledge of the outside world is necessary to fully understand the nature of the enclave. The porous boundaries between one and the other ensure that the relationship is a game of references that goes both ways. The necessity of fiction as enclave expresses itself in its fundamentally heterotopic nature.

Yet, Conrad's embrace of the modernist embedding of the ontological link between fiction and reality in the *topos* of the enclave does not posit Conrad's outright commitment to *everything modern*. On the contrary, it is his rejection of contemporary politics which provides his literature with the most modernist aspects. In *Nostromo*, the modernisation of the world is mostly represented by the dawn of globalisation as it is embodied by the never-ending "pursuit of material interest". Paradoxically, the independence of Sulaco—supposedly an act of absolute isolation—aims at guaranteeing freedom of movement for men and their capital. The independence, the building of the railway, the establishing of trade routes to the United States of America all partake of a desperate attempt at drawing a modern map of Sulaco that will allow the integration of its territory into a globalising world. Therefore, *Nostromo* is a blatant demonstration that Conrad is "a modernist at war with modernity" (4) as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan would have it.

Now if we believe that enclaves may reflect the position of literature as regards the actual world, it may be interesting to study such a trope in premodern literature for instance. The study of enclaves in mystery plays during the pre-modern era would probably yield very different results from our study of enclaves in Conrad. Or are enclaves doomed to be constructions of the mind, in-between heterotopic worlds, as long as we remain in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in which every paradise is a paradise lost, every paradise is a paradise of snakes, and enclaves are but imaginary lines of twilight countries.

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