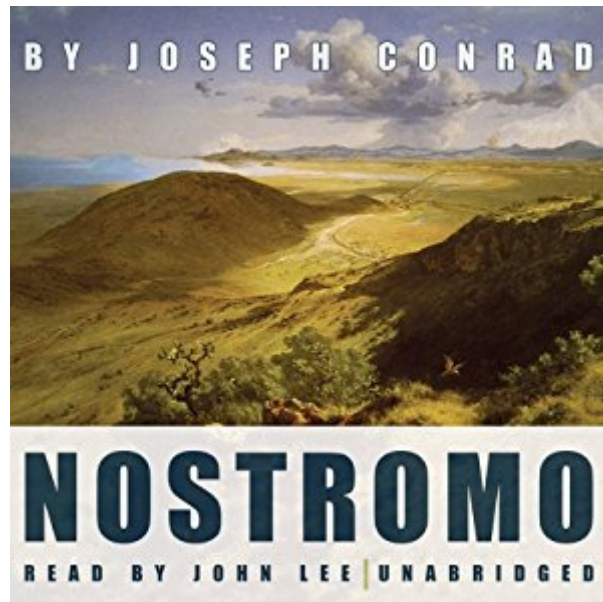


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Nostromo



Synopsis

Joseph Conrad's multilayered masterpiece tells of one nation's violent revolution and one hero's moral degeneration. Conrad convincingly invents an entire country, Costaguana, and sets it afire as warlords compete for power and a fortune in silver. *Señor* Gould, adamant that his silver should not become spoil for his enemies, entrusts it to his faithful longshoreman, Nostromo, a local hero of sorts whom *Señor* Gould believes to be incorruptible. Nostromo accepts the mission as an opportunity to increase his own fame. But when his exploit fails to win him the rewards he had hoped for, he is consumed by a corrupting resentment. Nostromo, relevant both as literature and as a brilliant social study, ambitiously brings to life Latin American history and the politics of an underdeveloped country.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Joseph Conrad's most famous work is of course "Heart of Darkness," but fans and scholars generally consider Nostromo his masterpiece. One can certainly make a great case for it, as it expands many of the better-known short works strengths to novelistic scale. Like them, it is on the most obvious level an epic adventure and can be enjoyed for this alone. However, again like them and far more importantly, it is deeply symbolic, and its grand display of Conrad's bleakly tragic vision has much to say about human nature, existence, and a range of other topics. That said, it would be selling Conrad's genius rather short to simply say the book adapts his short work to a larger scale. It in fact shows his remarkable diversity, largely forsaking the sea-centered stories that

dominated his early work for an intricately detailed and realistically presented fictional world. The novel also furthers Conrad's ongoing technical innovations, making it an important and influential example of very early Modernism. Finally, as always with Conrad, the prose is mesmerizing. This is quite simply Conrad's grandest and very possibly his greatest creation - one of the twentieth century's best novels and essential for anyone who likes his other work. The adventure aspect is certainly obvious, and greater length lets Conrad work in even more than usual. There is plenty to grab even casual readers' interest: revolutions with numerous battles, political crises, several love stories, family drama, business conflicts, suicide, intercontinental capitalistic and political scheming - even buried treasure. The complex, sweeping story has numerous exciting subplots that eventually come together in a stunning conclusion, making the book seem longer than it is in the best possible way.

Nostromo is one of Joseph Conrad's longer novels, and one in which he doesn't make use of his typical "undependable narrator." Instead, the tale is told by an omniscient narrator. That is, I think, a source of weakness. The narrator wants to tell too much, wants to analyze too much, describes too much. In other words, the book is too long and too diffuse. It has too many themes: notions of human behavior and motivation, insights into the nature of political brutality and corruption, counter-insights into the virtues of simple working people and their loyalties, a flaming love story, a burned-out love story, and a tale of the temptation and 'fall' of the everyman Nostromo. Conrad expounds the ideals of the "blancos" - the upper-class globalizing developers - who are the central characters of the novel with complete sympathy, and yet he also tosses in the rhetoric of the rebels, called 'liberals' although in normal economic terms the blancos are the liberals. The n-word is thrown at these peasants and poor folk rather freely, but underneath Conrad's commitment to the interests of his 'blanco' hero, one can detect a strong taint of revolutionary sympathy for the underdogs. I wish it were clear that Conrad was deliberately undercutting the 'victory' of the progressive classes by revealing the injustices and exploitations they commit to the working classes, but it's not so clear. One has to suspect Conrad of wanting to have it both ways, to "have his cake and eat it too." Nonetheless, I can't imagine NOT enjoying such a vivid, picturesque, risk-taking novel. It's full of lusty humor and sardonic wit. It has glorious descriptions of the tropical sights and sounds of the imaginary Latin American country where the story happens. It has a cast of powerful and believable characters.

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