Melville and Conrad's (Post)Colonial Sights of South America: "The Encantadas" and *Nostromo*[1]

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As it is generally acknowledged, a text is not totally autonomous, but a relational body. New times and new sights/sites promote new readings, and thus new meanings are established, developed, or hinted at. Yet, a literary work of any merit is always more than its context(s). Mine is a postcolonial reading[2] which aims to reveal and articulate some of the structures and legacies of colonialism and imperialism which Melville's "The Encantadas" (1854) and Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) encapsulated.[3] In fact, Melville and Conrad's texts assume new meanings at different times and places because of their problematical relationship with colonialism and imperialism, which they do not separate. Both "The Encantadas" and *Nostromo* are (post)colonial texts in the sense that they both portray the evil effects of the 'colonizing project' in both the colonizer and the colonized. Melville and Conrad's colonial and imperial enterprises, however, differ in several ways. Melville depicts settler colonies formed by immigrants; Conrad's Costaguana presents a different panorama: no foreign rulers are installed to govern the new nation of Sulaco; no land is seized for settling immigrants. This is the imperialism of free trade,[4] or 'business imperialism': control over loans and the monopolization of infrastructural development such as the railway and underscored by the role of the foreign mine engineers.

Fortunately, texts and readings travel, and travels, as Melville declared, might be highly profitable:

> in the first place, you get rid of a few prejudices. The native of Norway who goes to Naples finds the climate so delicious as almost to counterbalance the miseries of government. The Spanish *matador*,[5] who devoutly believes in the proverb, "Cruel as a Turk," goes to Turkey, sees that people are kind to all animals…and comes home to his bull-fights with a very different impression of his own humanity. The stock-broker goes to Thessalonica and finds infidels more honest than Christians; the teetotaller finds a

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> country in France where all drink and no one gets drunk; the prejudiced against color finds several hundred millions of people of all shades of color, and all degrees of intellect, rank, social worth, generals, judges, priests, and kings, and learns to give up his foolish prejudice. ("Traveling" 421-23)

It is my intention to invite the reader to an 'intellectual journey' to South America to discover whether Melville, but also Conrad's prejudices, were shattered or confirmed by their travels to those lands. In fact, the texts to be examined, Melville's "The Encantadas"[6] and Conrad's *Nostromo,* represent South America, apparently following the popular metaphors and iconography of their times, according to which South American matters could not be helped, for the revolutionary and utopian 'adventures' which had taken place there evince that the same foils are being repeated again and again, as if both writers had been afflicted, in Melville's words, with "the greatest curse of modern travel—scepticism" (*Journals* 96). However, it is their sometimes paradoxical, if not ambivalent or even contradictory, critical position (as outsiders) which has attracted my attention most. On the one hand, why should Melville, after having given terribly dismissive descriptions of Cholos in *Mardi*,[7] choose a Cholo in *Moby-Dick* to stand for the only character who is not afraid of the 'white whale',[8] or choose Hunilla, a Chola, a 'mestiza,' Catholic, as the main protagonist and heroine of one of the sketches of his collection "The Encantadas" (see Liquete, "When Silence Speaks"), at a time when being a half-blood placed people in the worst positions to be in? Certainly Melville's choice, apart from showing a great awareness of race issues, served him not only to 'save' but also 'worship' Hunilla.

Concerning Conrad, the question which arises is why he chose Spanish America to write a hard critique upon capitalist imperialism in which the 'whites' fight with other 'whites/Blancos', although, curiously enough, among the many Spanish words and expressions scattered throughout the narrative he never uses the term "criollo", but 'creole' instead, and not very often. Incidentally, *Nostromo* seems to show more interest upon class conflicts than in racial issues. In fact, the term 'Cholo' only appears once in Conrad's novel; Indians are largely represented by him as a 'silent and patient' group—which, interestingly enough, reminds the reader of Melville's Hunilla's portraiture—and 'negroes' are always connected with insults. However, this apparent disinterestedness upon racial or ethnic details makes the presence of 'Basques' at least surprising. They are mentioned three times in *Nostromo*, and they are always described in positive terms: faithful, patient and hard-working.

Should I stop here and locate myself as a critic, for readers/critics are limited by their 'prejudices' as well? Being by (de)formation accustomed to paying attention to silences and absences,[9] the presence of an unexpected detail is usually quite relevant for me. In this case, being a Basque myself, when reading *Nostromo* I could only think of Simón Bolívar, of Basque ancestry, as a possible cause for Conrad's mentioning them,[10] given that Basques not only have a fairer complexion than the rest of the Spaniards, and that all expeditions to the New World included Basques, well-known for being excellent sailors. Besides, the association of Basques and their English chiefs

recalls the economic support provided by the British to the South American wars of independence, and to Bolívar,[11] in particular.

Not only Melville (1841, 1843) and Conrad's (1878) trips to South America, but also their readings about those countries, have been well documented by their biographers. What has interested me, however, is the way they have re-created those experiences in their writings: what they have chosen to include, and what they have hidden or just dismissed.

In the case of Melville, it must be recalled that North American society witnessed some changes in perception concerning the figure of Christopher Columbus by the late eighteenth century when the third centenary of the discovery of America was being celebrated. Several North American writers contributed to this shift: Irving and Longfellow among others. The aim seemed to be to save and appropriate what Christopher Columbus represented—the colonization process and the spirit of the 'civilizing project'—while condemning the ways in which both actions had been carried away by the Spaniards, a critique upon Spanish American life, religion and politics to which both Melville and Conrad also subscribe.

According to all of them, the new South American Republics were plagued by social and economic paralysis and political chaos. Independence had not released the shackles of inherited backwardness. Traditional society had been deprived of its legal framework, but it had not been destroyed. The Spanish legacy of prejudices and customs remained, as did a colonial mentality and an intellectual dependence upon Europe. Latent social disorganization was everywhere in evidence. Different civilizations and stages of culture existed side by side. The working class, a melancholy sea of illiterates, had no sense of their stake in good government. The large Indian population, accustomed to servitude, desired to isolate themselves from Europeanized sectors. Mestizos and mulattoes, unruly and aggressive, were distrusted by the Creoles, and a weakened Roman Catholic Church which sought to regain its privileges, together with the failure of the privileged groups to couple liberty with law and impose order, made anarchy triumph.

There seems to be an agreement concerning the possible reasons for this failure. Prior to Melville or Conrad's explanations, Darwin and historian William Prescott —among others—hinted at them. Writing in 1835 Darwin claimed that "No state in S. America, since the declaration of the Independence, has suffered more from anarchy than Peru: at present there are four chiefs in arms for supreme government" (*Diary* 330). For Darwin, race, culture and religion provide excellent explanations for this being so. According to him, the South Americans [who] "present every imaginable shade of mixture between European, Negro & Indian blood", appear a depraved, drunken set, fond of gambling, much drinking, and extreme indolence. Not only are robberies a natural consequence, but nearly every public officer can be bribed. The president himself had obtained his present rank by being Governor & mutinying against the former president, Charles Darwin declares (*Diary* 331). He even accuses the governor and prime minister of being openly combined to plunder

the state (*Diary* 176), and concludes: "Spanish colonies do not, like our British ones, carry within themselves the elements of growth" (*Voyage* 81), later remarking that "tyranny seems as yet better adapted to these countries than republicanism" (*Diary* 147). If, as Darwin upholds, "a republic cannot succeed till it contains a certain body of men imbued with the principles of justice and honour" (*Diary* 159), it is obviously inferred that this cannot occur in South America, due to the manner in which these countries have been brought up by their "unnatural parent, Spain" (*Diary* 176). Likewise, Prescott stated:

> What a contrast did these children of Southern Europe present to the Anglo-Saxon races who scattered themselves along the northern division of the western hemisphere! For the principle of action with these latter was not avarice…but independence—religious and political…no golden visions threw a deceitful halo around their path.… watering the tree of liberty with their tears and with the sweat of their brow, till it took deep root in the land and sent up its branches high towards the heavens, while the communities of the neighbouring continent, shooting up into the sudden splendours of a tropical vegetation, exhibited, even in their prime, the sure symptoms of decay.
> It would seem to have been especially ordered by Providence that the discovery of the two great divisions of the American hemisphere should fall to the two races best fitted to conquer and colonize them. Thus the northern section was consigned to the Anglo-Saxon race, whose orderly, industrious habits found an ample field for development under its colder skies and on its more rugged soil; while the southern portion, with its tropical products and treasures of mineral wealth, held out the most attractive bait to invite the enterprise of the Spaniard. How different might have been the result, if the bark of Columbus had taken a more northerly direction, as he at one time meditated, and landed its band of adventurers on the shore of what is now Protestant America! (*History of the Conquest of Peru* 192, 193)

Some years later, in 1850, a North American newspaper article, entitled "The Spanish American Republics and the Causes of their Failure," claimed in a similar manner that:

> Our revolution was the consummation of centuries of well-directed, rational effort for freedom.
> In Spanish America, on the other hand, amidst the magnificence of the tropics, and the fragments of aboriginal greatness, were diffused a people, reflecting alike the splendours and the corruptions of a powerful court and of an arrogant aristocracy.
> Here, in short, were reproduced, in many of their most odious forms, the systems of monarchical Europe, followed by their entire train of corruptions in church and state. …ignorance and superstition…A degenerate aristocracy filled the place of the conquistadors, and added the vices of effeminacy and indolence to the crimes of cruelty and oppression.
> Truly Republican Institutions are developments of human wisdom…and their permanence depends upon the general intelligence and morality. In the Spanish American colonies, it is obvious, such an advance was impossible. (23-24)

The inherited Spanish character was then found guilty of the tyranny and anarchy reigning in South America. Moreover, assuming that, as Melville asserted, "Tyrants seldom can prove blessings" (*Mardi* 447), the difficulties of establishing Paradises in

the now independent Spanish American countries are, in part, explained. Actually, in this collection of sketches Melville evokes the ominous fate which seems to fall upon the Encantadas, a 'special curse' that to them 'change never comes, neither a change of seasons nor of sorrows,' as revealed in "Sketch First," impression that is confirmed through the tales that follow, where Paradise is presented as a human enchantment, bewitchment rather, an optical delusion at best. But as the two sides of the tortoises, the main inhabitants of the isles, both South America and the Galapagos's reality is far more complex than it may seem at first sight.

In fact, reading this collection of tales, the Hispanic reader misses the name given to this group by the newly independent government of Ecuador, to which this cluster belongs: Archipiélago de Colón in 1832. This silencing, however, compromises the 'real' concern that interests here, in this narrative: colonialism. Blending an English (The) and a Spanish word (Encantadas), "The Encantadas" as a choice substitute, not only suggests the haunting effects of this dreaming atmosphere, but also provides the most suitable location to contest Spanish, British and American imperial desires. In fact, the effacement of the Spanish names of the islands in the chartered maps of the British buccaneers, somehow underwrites the narrative by their absence. Given that naming can be considered an instrument of power, name substitution does mark change in power relations. Indeed, this absence rehearses the long period in which the Spanish empire neglected large tracts of 'colonised' territories. This negligence encouraged their being occupied and appropriated by foreign powers. In fact, the Galapagos were long disputed by the British buccaneers and the United States whalers, as narrated in "Sketch Sixth." A new change will be brought by the declaration of independence of South America, a moment in which South Americans themselves will endeavour in neocolonial enterprises. Interestingly enough, failure will prevail in these attempts, as illustrated in "Sketch Seventh, Charles Isle and the Dog-King," the one that specifically describes the failed attempt to found a new colony by a Creole.[12] The demise is caused by the governor's acting as a monarch, unable to rule upon the pilgrims he had called forth to join him in this adventure; finally, the rebellious character of these, his subjects, triggers a revolution. His dog-soldiers cannot avoid his being expelled from the island. The newly proclaimed Republic soon turns into a Riotocracy, which somehow foretells the future of the newly independent South American Republics. It seems as if this story described how the ideals of the French Revolution were later destroyed by the evils of Despotism and the Napoleonic empire.

Surprisingly, in the next Sketch, "Norfolk Isle and the Chola Widow," a Chola, half-Spanish, half-Indian, a 'mestiza', the only female heroic protagonist in Melville's work, occupies a central position. Abandoned by a French whaler, she is rescued by an American whale ship. Should we think that Hunilla might stand for South America herself? Being abandoned by the lure of the French Revolution, North American revolutionary ideals 'save' her.[13] Left on an island often chartered in maps as the 'Indefatigable,' Hunilla, tortoise-like, survives her ordeal for more than three

years. However, when back to her place, riding a humble ass, fixing her eyes at its shouldered cross somehow evokes the trials to come.

When dealing with Hunilla, critics continue neglecting the presence of Catholic issues, such as miracles, superstition, irrationality, which Melville subverts by presenting them as positive, hopeful and useful, so much so that they help Hunilla cross the island and be finally rescued. Through the mestiza Hunilla, Melville clearly defends, worships and admires the indefatigable ability common people, victims, have to survive their ordeals.[14]

The following tale, "Sketch Ninth: Hood's Isle and the Hermit Oberlus," is surveyed by a dark atmosphere, as the presence of a negro sailor attests. Located at an isle whose Spanish name, Española, evokes Haiti,[15] thus providing another critique of colonialism, this time serving Melville to introduce surreptitiously the issue of slavery. Hood's Isle,[16] also named McCane's Island, is a fit name to suggest the need of the agency of black slaves to produce white sugar (cane). In it, a black lava beach serves as the fittest scenario for the degradation of a white European who tries to colonize the island by enslaving men.[17] Fortunately, the attempts of this tyrant, czar of the island, end in failure as well. Curiously enough, he is associated with Caliban, probably hinting at the perverse effects of enslavement, or the colonizer colonized by his own dark and evil desires. Ironically, in this sketch, the 'cannibalistic' project of the 'civilizing mission' ends up by cannibalizing those who practice it.

In spite of the fact that the last sketch, entitled 'Runaways, Castaways, Solitaries, Grave-Stones, Etc.' reiterates the critique against the "dastardly, retrograde Spaniards," it finishes by claiming that "flight from tyranny does not of itself insure a safe asylum, far less a happy home" (198).

Incidentally, freedom and enslavement seem to walk hand in hand in New World enterprises both North and South. Political liberation movements, although liberating, brought forth new ties. Seeking and reaching freedom, however, used to be based on and also caused the enslavement of others. Actually, economic freedom sometimes meant enslavement to money and riches.[18]

As I have mentioned earlier, the failure of the South American Republics to avoid successive revolutions is also attributed to Popish Catholicism, which would account for their superstitions and irrationality. As a matter of fact, the teleology of Protestant history linked the global march of civilization to progressive religious development, reaching its apogee in the Protestant nationalism of Britain and America, which meant that Catholicism was anachronistic (Griffin 4); "a religion of bondage and feudal subjugation," in Eric Sundquist's words (Sundquist 46). When compared to Melville's,[19] Conrad's anti-Catholic critique in *Nostromo* shows a deeper knowledge, that which can only be acquired from within. Catholic-born Conrad knows how to attack the evils and weaknesses of the Catholic Church. Thus, Father Corbelán is described not only as a missionary to the wild Indians, but also as a conspirator, friend and patron of Hernandez the robber, who became the first Cardinal Archbishop of Sulaco, and the explanation given, that "It was believed that his unexpected elevation

to the purple was a counter-move to the Protestant invasion of Sulaco organized by the Holroyd Missionary Fund" (417), leaves no doubt in evincing the hard fight held between Protestants and Catholics to conquer South America.

Reading *Nostromo* one hears the echoes of previous mid-nineteenth century assumptions about Spanish America:

> The Spanish American Republics, since their independence, have exhibited a spectacle full of sorrow to the friends of free institutions throughout the world. Their general history has been one of anarchy and blood, with scarcely a page from which we do not turn in horror and disgust. The partisan struggles which in our own country come and go like summer storms….Have been marked in these Republics by a spirit of fierce intolerance.
>
> The first effort of a triumphant party is not only to crush but exterminate its opponent; and it hesitates not in adopting the extreme measures of confiscation, exile and death, in the attainment of its objects.
>
> So long as it wields the power, it is absolute, tyrannical, despotic. He who entertains principles and opinions counter to the dominant faction, must guard his words and actions, under peril to property and life.
>
> The consequences are plain and inevitable: hate, distrust, intrigue, revolution. This intolerance precludes the existence of parties as we know them.
>
> ("The Spanish American Republics" 22)

Echoes of Darwin and Prescott are readily detected in these lines. New insights, however, are added in *Nostromo*. To this political portraiture, Conrad adds economic and social aspects missing in the previous analysis. Conrad, does, in fact, successfully depict the material and cultural inequalities of the North/South divide, of Catholic versus Protestant ways of life. Besides, he shows the social consequences of imperialism, independently of its origin, be it Spanish, European or North American. The novel narrates the creation of a new Republic, Sulaco by name, now independent from the ex-colonial mother nation, Costaguana. This is just one in a long line of revolutions and counterrevolutions. But political independence cannot be achieved without economic independence, and money—symbolized by the San Tomé Silver mine—is the property of an Englishman, Charles-Carlos Gould and his supporter, the American investor, Mr. Holroyd. Nostromo cannot but condemn the San Tomé Silver mine corporation, that "Imperium in Imperio" as the narrator keeps reminding the reader throughout the narrative. Not by chance, Part One, subtitled "The Silver of the Mine," remarks the ways in which economic (in)dependence limits human, national and international action. By linking material development with new technologies—which most newly independent countries have to import—a new dependence is promoted. Thus, the first commercial revolution was brought by the substitution of sail ships by steamships, for the calm winds made extremely difficult for ships to reach Sulaco by sea. This process is clearly contrasted with the impossibility of getting rid of the past, for the old building of the Holy Office has now become the site of the Aristocratic Club of Sulaco. However, the San Tomé mine and the railway have brought many foreigners to the Republic of Costaguana and to the

city of Sulaco.

Interestingly enough, immigrants might not only profit from the New World, but also be highly profitable in exchange. Both North and South America witnessed diverse waves of European immigrants as the nineteenth century evolved. Actually, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento,[20] in his *Civilización y Barbarie* (1845), promoted European immigrancy, especially British, to counter the Spanish political, economic and cultural heritage which prevented South American development. Many agreed with Darwin's exclamation: "How different would have been the aspect of this river if English colonists had by good fortune first sailed up the Plata!" (*Diary* 158). Interestingly enough, both Simón Bolívar and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento also vindicated the need to imitate foreign political models: either the British, as the former subscribed, or the North American template, as the latter defended.

The history of the San Tomé mine elucidates the economic demise of these countries so rich in raw materials. Although their wealthy mines had been exploited since antiquity in which whole tribes of Indians had perished, when rediscovered after the War of Independence, an English company had obtained the right to utilize it. The mine had been nationalized, abandoned and later forced upon Gould's father by the fourth Government in six years. Charles Gould, its owner at present, feels part of those around him who are being robbed by the grotesque and murderous bands that played their games of governments and revolutions after the death of Guzman Bento, the last president. American investor, Holroyd, having the temperament of a Puritan and an insatiable imagination of conquest, dares go a step further defending the North American imperial capitalism, declaring that:

> We in this country know just about enough to keep indoors when it rains. We can sit and watch. Of course, some day we shall step in. We are bound to. But there's no hurry. Time itself has got to wait on the greatest country in the whole of God's Universe. We shall be giving the word for eveything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith's sound, and beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands and continents of the earth. We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it—and neither can we, I guess. (*Nostromo* 75)

Furthermore, he adds, "On the other hand, Europe must be kept out of this continent, and for proper interference on our part the time is not yet ripe, I dare say" (*Nostromo* 76). Charles Gould complies to this theory of the "the appalling darkness of intrigue, bloodshed, and crime that hung over the Queen of Continents" (*Nostromo* 81) situation that asked to be modified. To this end, new agents are needed. Inhabited by peoples of all colours: redddish-brown, blackish-brown, coppery-brown, judged to be backward, slow-moving, and indolent by Darwin and Sarmiento, Conrad's narrative changes this negative vision by emphasizing their victimization, either by the Spaniards or by the new economic masters, not only by depicting the "burdened Indians" (*Nostromo* 81), a people, suffering and mute, waiting for the future in a

pathetic immobility of patience, but also by drawing our attention towards the great number of unknown heroes used and abused in all revolutions, colonial as well as imperial, as the very name of the main protagonist, Nostromo (nostro homo, our man), implies.

It might not be by chance that Part Two of *Nostromo*, entitled "The Three Isabels", recalls the names of three great queens: Isabel I, the Catholic, under whose auspices America was discovered; Elizabeth I, who strived for sea power, opening up the way to buccaneers like Drake and the British colonization of North America; and Isabel II, who reigned in Spain from 1843 to 1868 when she was dethroned. It was during her reign that the Spanish feudal economic system gave way to capitalism. Isabel I the Catholic, who revolted at the idea of consigning the Indians to the horrors of slavery, encouraged missionaries to learn the native languages for the conversion of the natives (Prescott, *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella* II. 470), and urged royal letters and ordinances to show gentleness and humanity in all dealings with the Indians, was the one who, as Prescott alleges, introduced slavery in the New World:

> It was with the design of ameliorating the condition of the natives that she sanctioned the introduction into the colonies of negro slaves born in Spain. This she did on the representation, that the physical constitution of the African was much better fitted than that of the Indian, to endure severe toil under a tropical climate. To this false principle of economizing human suffering, we are indebted for that foul stain on the New World, which has grown deeper with the lapse of years.
>
> (*History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella* III. 496)

Catholic or Protestant, the three Isabels' mandates shifted their countries' as well as the American continent's future forever. In fact, Part II of *Nostromo* depicts the different ways in which those in power, largely whites, strive to impose their will. As Prescott also recognised, "Every step of the white man's progress in the New World, may be said to have been on the corpse of a native" (*History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella* III. 474).

Assuming that South Americans were not prepared for autonomous control, the fact is that foreign intervention, be it British or North American, or provided by Italy or Poland, countries which had direct maritime routes with South America,[21] did not improve matters. In fact, South America was the territory upon which foreign nations fought their economic interests. Great Britain[22] not only helped the South American liberators—Bolívar, Francisco de Miranda or General José de San Martín—but tried to conquer 'El Rio de la Plata'—Argentina and present Uruguay. In fact, Conrad's *Nostromo* does illustrate the British 'reconquest' of South America's lucrative mineral resources from centuries of Spanish colonial misrule.[23]

Europe and North America knew of the wealth of the mines of the Spanish empire thanks to Humboldt. He had access to important archives during his visit to South America. And we know that he gave his knowledge to the US government by his correspondence with Jefferson. Thus he paved the way for the North American expansion into the South and for the economic conquest of the Southern parts of

America. Considered unfit to rule themselves by the British and North Americans, who regarded them as having a weak compliance with the demands of the European powers, secret promises of support had been given to the inhabitants of Sulaco by 'their great sister Republic of the North' against the sinister land-grabbing designs of European powers (*Nostromo* 129).

Actually, in a letter to Alexander Humboldt in 1813, Thomas Jefferson declared

> it most fortunate that your travels in those countries were so timed as to make them known to the world in the moment they were about to become actors on its stage. That they will throw off their European dependence I have no doubt; but in what kind of government their revolution will end I am not so certain. History, I believe, furnishes no example of a priest-ridden people maintaining a free civil government.…The different casts of their inhabitants, their mutual hatreds and jealousies, their profound ignorance and bigotry, will be played off by cunning leaders, and each be made the instrument of enslaving others.…America has a hemisphere to itself. It must have its separate system of interests, which must not be subordinated to those of Europe.

Likewise, Sarmiento, following Ulloa's reports to Ferdinand VII, would also contribute to this extremely dismissive portrait of the South American character, characterized by its corruption, ignorance and avarice, thus coinciding with British and North American critiques of the South American Spanish racial and cultural heritage, rendered as indomitable and incapable of carrying out any profitable enterprise (*Civilización y Barbarie* 325).

Certainly, anarchy seemed to be the rule of the day, as in Melville's "The Encantadas", the difference laying in who tells. In *Nostromo*, South American citizens themselves are critical of their situation.[24] They realize that, after the independence of South America, "Now [that] the whole land is like a treasure-house,… all these people are breaking into it, whilst we are cutting each other's throats" (*Nostromo* 151). In spite of this recognition, most of them keep blaming others instead of accepting their responsibility in the affair. They continue blaming their fate: "We are a wonderful people, but it has always been our fate to be robbed and exploited," said Martin Decoud (*Nostromo* 152), attributing this failure to "the lawlessness of a populace of all colours and races, barbarism, and irremediable tyranny. As the great Liberator Bolívar had said in the bitterness of his spirit, 'America is ungovernable. Those who worked for her independence have ploughed the sea'" (*Nostromo* 159). It might seem ironic that great South American liberators such as Bolívar and Sarmiento would agree with Darwin (British) and Prescott's (North American) prejudiced views.

Part Three, entitled "To the Lighthouse," changes focus. In it, class issues gain centrality. The great gulf between North and South America is enlarged and the population of the latter is infantilized,[25] failure is seen rooted in the political immaturity of the people, in the indolence of upper classes, and the mental darkness of the lower classes. Actually, the South American Blancos formed in Paris will prove to be of no help, as Martin Decoud's suicide evinces. Once revolutionary republicanism has done its work, 'Imperial democracy' becomes the power of the future. Jefferson's

'Empire for Liberty' is criticized by Conrad in *Nostromo* by showing how 'material interests' affect individuals.

Part III in *Nostromo* gives voice to the working class' critical view of capitalism. Thus Nostromo—a man of the people—realizes that not only Kings, ministers, aristocrats, but the rich in general, kept the people in poverty and subjection: they kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service, as soldier dogs,[26] those used by the tyrant Creole to maintain his power in Melville's "Sketch Seventh." Nostromo feels his fidelity has been taken advantage of—when he persuaded the body of *cargadores* to side with the Blancos against the rest of the people—and finally betrayed: "You fine people are all alike. All dangerous. All betrayers of the poor who are your dogs.…you do not care for those that serve you" (*Nostromo* 374). The problem is that, once he stops being the rich's best dog, he becomes enslaved to the silver he was hiding and 'saving' for them.

However, the focalising consciousness in the novel[27] is Giorgio Viola. This choice is explained by Joseph Conrad in his Introduction to *Nostromo*, where he declares, "I did not hesitate to make that central figure an Italian,…Giorgio Viola, the Garibaldino, the Idealist of the old, humanitarian revolutions. I needed a man of the People as free as possible from his class-conventions and all settled modes of thinking.…Not an Anglo-Saxon" (12).[28] In spite of liberty and Garibaldi[29] being his divinities, in his spare time Giorgio studied the volume of a (Protestant) Bible in Italian published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Actually, he had a great consideration for the English, for several of them had poured their blood for the cause of freedom in America. In fact, as he proclaims, one Samuel had commanded a Negro company under Garibaldi during the famous siege of Montevideo (38). Even Charles Gould's grandfather had fought in the cause of independence under Bolívar, in that famous English legion which on the battlefield of Carabobo had been saluted by the great Liberator as Saviours of his country (51). Besides, Giorgio respected their nation because they loved Garibaldi, "who showed his great pity for all that was poor, suffering, and oppressed in this world" (39) However, not even Garibaldi's intervention would be able to save South Americans. Racial mixture, Catholicism, as well as the backward and 'orientalised'—when not 'Africanised'[30]—Spanish heritage would be imputed to be the causes that hindered Spanish and Hispanic American progress.

It should come as no surprise to find orientalist perceptions of Spain and South America both in Melville's "The Encantadas" and Conrad's *Nostromo*. In spite of their 'whiteness', there seems to be a difference in degree that makes Spaniards have more 'tanning' than that which should be recommendable. Too much exposure to racial mixture can only be destructive. In the case of Conrad, all 'whites' are equalled, be they European, North or South American. Furthermore, he shows that colour is not the main requisite for bringing destruction, but money. If this is so, when 'Other', non-white races are presented, racism and xenophobia only increase in degree.

It might be agreed that both Melville and Conrad's sympathies for colonial subjects came out of their own experience as subjects to British or Russian colonial

imperial prejudices. Namely, their own background was not unlike that of the colonized peoples they encountered. In fact, Melville's first novels were published in England by John Murray under the headings of "Colonial Literature." Conrad was a Russian subject and grew up in an occupied country, which allowed him to see colonialism through the eyes of both the colonizers and the colonized (Peters 26). Although both writers focus on the individual, this is always placed in the midst of political, historical, and cultural forces. Both engaged in rendering the role of technology, mechanization, alienation, and dehumanization and the way this (de)marks the distinction between progress and primitivism—developed and underdeveloped countries—and serves to measure morality.

Melville's perception of the role of the Cholos prior to "The Encantadas" changes from a totally negative vision in the past to a more hopeful one in the future as that represented by Hunilla, whereas Conrad's views place individuals as subjected to their racial prejudices, as when we read about Mrs. Gould's racial conventions or Martin Decoud's preconceived views of his European civilization, illustrated by his exclamation: "We Occidentals!" (*Nostromo* 159). Both writers meditated upon their encounters with the Other outside and inside, providing a powerful exploration of their fears and desires—theirs and their contemporary readers/audience—linking thus public and private spheres. Conrad, however, describes new forms of imperialism created by multinational capitalism (Collits 147).

Conclusion

Melville and Conrad both follow the tradition of the Spanish Black Legend, with its obligatory mention of the Spanish Inquisition and Inquisitorial behaviour, thus connecting imperial with religious matters, and material and cultural inequalities, exemplified by the contrast between a backward feudal economic system versus the progressive capitalism. Besides, emphasis on Catholic ignorance—which made Catholics be easily convinced and ruled—opposed to Protestant literacy—based on free choice—obliterates the fact that both cultures forced their subjects either to suppress or be suppressed, thus helping them develop other more 'secretive forms.'

Although critical of Catholic institutions, as detected in Melville's use of the term 'Romish', for instance, and Conrad's negative depiction of the interference of the Catholic Church in political issues, Catholic individuals are shown to possess the same virtues and vices as any other. In addition, Catholicism serves them well to dive deep into the mysteries of the human as well as into those psychological processes that cannot be easily 'rationalized.' Although political, material and cultural differences are connected with religious matters, they are also united by an imperial desire. Against those who claimed that Protestant imperialism/colonialism is different from Catholic imperialism, Melville and Conrad showed that, in spite of the different means used, both caused the same evil consequences on those who did not comply

or were considered obstacles to their progress. Although race, class and gender issues would all be intertwined to justify (post)colonial ends, economic means is what in the beginning separates them most, only to unite them in the end, in their intent to further develop a capitalist system.

My argument is concerned to examine, to what an extent we, contemporary readers, continue to hold the same prejudices displayed by Melville and Conrad's narrators and characters; to what extent the Black Legend, which has been reproduced from *Robinson Crusoe* onwards and imitated by the Anglo-Americans is still held and reproduced nowadays. American 'cultural colonization' has been colonized by European anxiety. Are Anglo-Americans 'enchanted' or rather, 'bewitched' by Spanish matters? Readers haunted by South American silver mines and by Hunilla; Hunilla being "saved" by North American money; and silver presented as an incorruptible metal that tempts and corrupts Nostromo.

What surprised me most while reading Melville's "The Encantadas" and Conrad's *Nostromo* is the thrilling and frightening experience that, rather than depicting South America of old, these texts seem to be musing contemporary views. I am reminded of the ways in which it still continues to be (re)presented at present, as if time had not elapsed. Melville's "The Encantadas" and Conrad's *Nostromo* both provide the same 'orientalist' gaze; racist tones are detected in the description of Spanish and Spanish/Latin-American characters. At other times, instead of South America, Africa[31] comes to my mind, and easily substitutes it. Some prejudices are countered, others are left, if only by default, in place. Both writers chip away colonial class system and imperial complacencies, exploring the violence that kept such systems going (slavery and racism). Both coincide in presenting a pessimistic vision of revolutionary and utopian 'adventures' when the same foils are being repeated again and maintained.

Melville and Conrad's texts show a great ability not only to juxtapose past and present, but also different 'races' (shall I say 'ethnicities?'), diverse social classes as well as genders, in a single compelling vision. Contrary to Conrad, Melville was not anxious about racial contamination nor worried about the taboo of interracial marriages, as his choice of a Chola, Hunilla, proves. Besides, Melville did not feminize or erotize the conquered.

Both Melville and Conrad's sympathies for colonial subjects come out of their own experience as subjects to British colonial or Russian imperial prejudices. Their 'outsidedness' and de-familiarization of the countries they were born in and those they visited, may be attested to their being both sailors, foreigners to distant lands somehow, having exiled themselves from their own land, at least temporarily, and thus readier to examine Imperialism at Home.

Notes

1. This article is part of a work in progress I am preparing on Spa(i)n(ish) Matters in Melville's Work.

2. The brackets in my title try to avoid the misleading implication that colonialism is now a matter of the past, as well as that of reducing literary texts to an alter-effect of or response to it. Besides, what makes postcolonial critique distinctive from anti-colonialism is its research into the continuing cultural and political ramifications of colonialism in both colonizing and colonized societies. It involves a political analysis of the cultural history of colonialism, making connections between the past and the present (Young 6).

3. Interestingly enough, Edward Said's analysis of *Nostromo* excluded any discussion of the Spanish empire.

4. The Jeffersonian "Empire for Liberty" understood as 'liberty of free trade.'

5. My own italics, to show Melville's use and, consequently, familiarity with Spanish, and therefore he knew the significant difference between 'torero' —bullfighter—and 'matador'—bull-killer.

6. Melville's choice of this title is quite revealing, for it mixes English (The) and Spanish (Encantadas) terms, which underscores a gendered vision that might have passed unnoticed otherwise, provided by the Spanish feminine ending '–as.' Furthermore, this linguistic mixture foretells some of the controversial concerns present in this collection of tales. That the choice was done in purpose is revealed by the fluctuating uses of both 'The Encantadas' and 'The Enchanted Isles.'

7. "in a cluster of islands—besides the natives they encountered a couple of Cholos, of half-breed Spaniards, from the Main; one half-Spanish, the other half quartered between the wild Indian and the devil; a race, that from Baldivia to Panama are notorious for their unscrupulous villainy.
Now, the half-breeds having long since deserted a ship at these islands, had risen to high authority among the natives.…their treacherous race…the Cholos…the half-breeds…the Cholos…treachery of the half-breeds who intended to capture the brigantine.
The Cholos; the headmost Cholo('s long hair); stricken Cholo; the surviving Cholo; Cholo and savage" (*Mardi* Chapter 22).

8. A Cholo, Cabaco by name, appears in chapter 43, "Hark," (196), and in chapter 48, "The First Lowering" (218). His protagonism is scarce but significant. These chapters are connected with the hunt of Moby Dick. Its whiteness, frightening to some, leaves Cabaco unmoved. In fact, he does not seem to perceive the whale approaching (297, 319). He is not interested in the hunt.

9. I readily detected the absence of Basque whaling in *Moby-Dick*, especially because the book is trying to present a sort of 'historical' record of whaling in the world, and taking into account that Melville was familiar with the books published by William Scoresby in which Basque whaling is mentioned. Besides, an article published in January 1834 by the *North American Review* on "The Whale Fishery" claimed that "The Biscayans appear to have been the first Europeans, who systematically and extensively pursued the whale fishery.…The same descriptions of whale gear and instruments are now used, that were employed by the Biscayans in the fifteenth century" (85). It was later added that the first English whaling expedition about 1610 included 24 Basks (Basques, Biscayans), "who were experienced in that faculty of whale striking" (86).

10. John Fisher examines the importance of Basque mine engineers in "El Real Seminario de Bergara y las tentativas de modernizar la tecnología minera en el Perú (1788-1810)". He also advocates the important Basque contribution to the development of the American mining industry during the colonial period, due to the number of Basque immigrants working in the imperial mines, as well as the mine scientific education taught in the Basque Country (365).

11. "Basque workmen who rallied faithfully round their English chiefs" (*Nostromo* 25). According to scholars, the Basques were the main immigrant group to South America during the nineteenth century. See Marcelino Iriani Zalacain.

12. Melville based this story on the real shortcoming of a new colony established in Floreana—formerly James Island—in the Gallipagos in 1832, described by Captain Robert Fitzroy in his *Narrative of the Surveying Voyages of the HMS Adventure* and also by John Coulter's *Adventures in the Pacific*.

13. As if the United States political template were substituting the French revolutionary model.

14. It might be helpful to remember the 'naturalistic' or 'scientific' origin of the term 'hybrid' as it was used by Darwin. In fact, when describing the mule—an animal extremely useful in South America—he describes it as "a most surprising animal. That a hybrid should possess more reason, memory, obstinacy, social affection, powers of muscular endurance, and length of life than either of its parents seems to indicate that *art has here outdone nature*" (*Voyage* 343, italics mine).

15. Haiti is located on the first island discovered by Columbus, first named La Española and later Santo Domingo, before the French occupied the territory which would become Haiti.

16. Haiti was the place where black slaves made their revolution and the first island to have a 'black' government. It was declared independent in 1804.

17. Interaction and inevitable interconnectedness between master and slave: enslaving enslaves. It points out the perverse effects of enslavement upon the so-called 'masters'.

18. "the Dons (Spaniards): have ransacked the theology of the religion of peace for fine names for their fighting ships; stopping not at designating one of their three-deckers, The Most Holy Trinity. But though, at Trafalgar, the Santissima Trinidada thundered like Sinai, her thunders were silenced by the victorius cannonade of the Victory" (*Mardi* 751).

19. It should be noted that Melville's attitude towards religion could be considered as 'anti-clerical', for he also criticized the use of religion, by Protestant groups in *Typee* and *Omoo*, among others.

20. Who would become President of Argentina (1868-1874).

21. Fernando Devoto mentions the "regular sea traffic from Naples to Río de la Plata" in his *Historia de la Inmigración en la Argentina* (88).

22. Miranda's friendship with James Mill and Jeremy Bentham resulted in the article 'Emancipation of Spanish America,' published in the *Edinburgh Review* (1809).

23. See Almeida 151. Great Britain was also afraid of Napoleon's taking over Spain's maritime possessions after he invaded the Spanish peninsula. Having defeated the French and the Spanish at Trafalgar in 1805, the British started colonising South America. Furthermore, she also claims that "The Americas opened for England a new space to represent itself as a liberal empire, one that would abolish the evil of slavery, both in political and in personal terms" (Almeida 164).

24. "We convulsed a continent for our independence only to become the passive prey of a democratic parody, the helpless victims of scoundrels and cut-throats, our institutions a mockery, our laws a farce. …and an ignorant, boastful *indio*…our defender" (*Nostromo* 149).

25. "the childish rapacity of the passionate, clear-minded, Southern races, is seen wanting in the misty idealism of the Northeners, who, "at the smallest encouragement dream of nothing less than the conquest of the earth" (*Nostromo* 264).

26. "They keep us and encourage us as if we were dogs born to fight and hunt for them" (*Nostromo* 345).

27. This might explain Nostromo's death, for he has finally betrayed his 'heroism' by having changed master: the silver, by becoming a thief, a pirate, a buccaneer.

28. Interestingly enough, Italians and Basques formed the largest groups of immigrants to Rio de la Plata by the 1850s. See Devoto and Morner.

29. By the time Melville was visiting Peru, Garibaldi was living and fighting in Argentina, across the Andes.

30. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento used to compare Spain to Africa in his *Civilización y Barbarie* (*Civilization and Barbarism*) published in 1845, while Isabel II was reigning in Spain, a monarchy he was very much critical of.

31. Spain and Africa united by Sarmiento.

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