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Connecting myth and history in Conrad's *Nostromo*

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Abstract

Conrad's *Nostromo* is a temporally and spatially extended novel, which brings together events from the lives of many characters. These events do not follow a chronological order, but are interwoven instead in time and place. Above any personal story is the history of a province, Sulaco, an isolated province inhabited by various communities, native and foreign, a history which goes back in time at the beginning of the novel and records the first signs of modernity by the end of it.

Given the contextual complexity of the novel, storytelling is never entrusted to a single narrator or to a single narrative form. The novel can be considered a polyphonic novel, in that it incorporates various narrative voices, linguistic communities, languages and narrative forms. All these narrative perspectives are wrapped up from the onset by the mythical viewpoint, which frames the story of Sulaco into the legend of the Azuera, thus representing in this way the voice of the people or the unofficial version of history.

The paper discusses Conrad's narrative attempt to combine history with anecdote/myth and to suggest that this attempt is not indicative of moving between one form and the other, but rather of establishing a dialogic link between the traditional wisdom of oral culture and the indeterminacy of modern writing.

Key words: *history, anecdote, myth, narrative voice, linguistic communities, oral culture*