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THE DUALITY OF 'YOUTH': SOME LITERARY CONTEXTS¹

Hugh Epstein

London

Conrad described his 'species of short story' to Edward Sanderson as 'a sort of sea narrative without head or tail' (*CL* 2, 71). A little while later he dismissed it as 'a bit of life — nothing more —' in a letter to Sanderson's wife, Helen (*CL*2, 90). However, Quiller-Couch in his review in 'Speaker' of 17 September 1898 (quoted *CL*2, 417) was acute in his desire to distinguish 'Youth' from other adventure yarns by pointing out that 'the story contains an idea'. In this essay I wish to examine the artistically informing 'idea' which lies 'above' the generality of nostalgic or wish-fulfilling adventure tales, and, in so doing, to suggest some contexts for Conrad's art and for his ideas in this story. This examination will reveal the way in which the recounting of a sailor's yarn conducts a debate between the value accorded to the endeavours of striving will-power and that of a different conception of what constitutes human fulfilment, which is brought to a close in a scene of beguiling ambiguity. Conrad's creation of Marlow as the fictional means of representing his own ambivalence is integral to the achievement of this final episode in 'Youth', and in this essay I will read Marlow in the light cast upon him by the final scene.

You fight, work, sweat, nearly kill yourself, sometimes do kill yourself, trying to accomplish something — and you can't. Not from any fault of yours. You simply can do nothing, neither great nor little — not a thing in the world. (94)

In the first half of 'Youth' the will-to-live is portrayed floundering amidst the indifferent will-of-the-world, but, in endeavouring to assert

¹This essay is an amended version of a paper given to the 16th International Conference on Conrad held at Canterbury in July 1990. I would like to thank Owen Knowles, in particular, for his help in making something more readable of the original text. All page references to 'Youth' are to the World's Classics edition, ed. Cedric Watts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

itself against cosmic unconcern, human willpower wrings out at least an illusion of meaning from life. Conrad repeatedly returns to this configuration. Indeed, it is in a letter about *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* that we can find the most apt expression of the ragged personal experience that is tidied into illustration and symbol in 'Youth':

As to lack of incident well — it's life. The incomplete joy, the incomplete sorrow, the incomplete rascality or heroism — the incomplete suffering. Events crowd and push and nothing happens. You know what I mean. The opportunities do not last long enough.

Unless in a boy's book of adventures. Mine were never finished, They fizzled out before I had a chance to do more than another man would. (CLI, 321)

A romantic approach to 'Youth' would have us read the story simply as fictionalised autobiography or as the literary completion of Conrad the sailor's truncated opportunities, readings perhaps encouraged by Conrad's own disclaimers to the Sandersons. However, one of the distinctions of 'Youth' is surely the comic manner in which the tale resists the jauntily egotistical voice of one of its own tellers, that of young Marlow. He functions as a narrator who would fulfil his creator's frustrated ambitions if he could, who projects the immediacies of individual struggle upon a timeless and ideal backdrop of sea and sky. He thus constructs one amongst several intimations in the story of the eternal and the test it places upon man: so the sailors who perform a harbour furl in the face of death are seen as expressing something 'inborn and subtle and *everlasting*' (118, my emphasis). In practice, the telling of the tale promotes a tension between a vision of the eternal sea and sky that diminishes man and a sense of the grandeur accruing to the individual privileged to have this vision:

It blew day after day: it blew with spite, without interval, without mercy, without rest. The world was nothing but an immensity of great foaming waves rushing at us, under a sky low enough to touch with the hand and dirty like a smoked ceiling. (100)

By reminding us of the 'smoked ceiling' — and earlier that the Judea 'wallowed on the Atlantic like an old candle box' (100) — the strain of exaltation is reduced and revealed as the product of a human consciousness formed in a world of artifacts shared with the reader. But Marlow's consciousness has found an enlargement that it takes to be ideal in this voyage in which 'there was no rest for her and no rest for us' (100); he has been granted the scope to experience 'the full privilege of desired unrest' (NN 90). 'The world was nothing' but his experience is taken to be everything. Young Marlow's restless spirit colours and agitates the prose of the older man's account; item, sensation, comment chase each other in short sentences that demand to be read quickly. The forward momentum is so strong, in fact, that the punctuating 'Pass the bottle' and the reflections on vanished youth read like awkward insertions that the reader stumbles upon. Vital to the conception though these interjections are, they mark only diagrammatically the distance that the older Marlow is to be seen to have travelled from his young self.

The older man is infected with youth's excitement as he recalls the experiences of a former life — 'but the door is shut'. Conrad wrote to W.E. Henley on 18 October 1898: 'And what you say of "Youth" is part, another line, of my "Finest Story in the World". Yes — but the door is shut.' (CL2, 109).² Kipling's 'The Finest Story in the World', published in 1893, is a story about reincarnation, written in the mode of Wellsian scientific romance, evoking 'half a dozen several and separate existences spent on the blue water in the morning of the world'. However, 'the door is shut' upon these experiences (a phrase used six times in the story): the burden of Kipling's tale is that the finest story of our dawn vision of ourselves can never be written and 'only briefly imaginatively re-visited. A distinctly misogynistic story, it celebrates a boyishly heroic masculinity and mourns the impossibility of dwelling in

²'The Finest Story in the World', *A Choice of Kipling's Prose*, ed. Craig Raine (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), 165 & 176. Another story that explores the status of experience the other side of the shut door is Wells's 'The Door in the Wall'. Although this was not published until 1906, several of his stories involving the dislocation of normal perception appeared in magazines in the mid-nineties, notably 'The Time Machine' (1894), 'The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes' (1895), 'The Plattner Story' (1896) and 'In the Abyss' (1896).

this vision of oneself in adult life because of women: 'Now I understand why the Lords of Life and Death shut the doors so carefully behind us. It is that we may not remember our first and most beautiful wooings'. In other words, in order to people the world, men must succumb to the later and lesser wooing of women. In 'Youth' the door is not so decisively shut, a feeling achieved in part by having the same person as central participant and narrator. Charlie Marlow is both Kipling's Charlie Mears and his unnamed narrator, who is trying to compose Charlie Mears's recollections into an artistically and commercially successful narrative.³ Both stories are as much about art as about the romantic spirit of adventure, of which young Marlow, too, is an incarnation. But, much more than in Kipling, the quality of remembrance is Conrad's subject in 'Youth'. This leads, in the conclusion to Conrad's tale, to a characteristic ambivalence about the atemporal and ideal world of art, which is a second sense of the eternal suggested by the story.

2

But what of the idea which organises Conrad's own art in his short stories? When Conrad delivered the first 14,000 words of 'The End of the Tether' to George Blackwood in May 1902, Blackwood queried Conrad's achievement by telling his brother that a reader would have 'hardly got into the story' as yet. After the subsequent meeting with William Blackwood, Conrad subdued his feelings of 'worthlessness' by writing the letter that has become almost as famous an expression of his artistic credo as the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. Claiming 'I know exactly what I am doing', Conrad asserts *a propos* 'The End of the Tether' that:

in the light of the final incident, the whole story in all its descriptive detail shall fall into place — acquire its value and its significance. This is my method based on deliberate conviction. I've never departed from it. (CL2, 417)

³ Conrad's later tale 'The Partner' clearly reworks some of the same ground.

Conrad here instances 'Karain', *Lord Jim* and *Heart of Darkness*, and then, with the emphasis that belongs to a new sentence, continues: 'And "Youth" itself (which I delight to know you like so well) exists only in virtue of my fidelity to the idea and the method'. Later in the same year he wrote to David Meldrum: 'I depend upon my reader looking back upon my story as a whole' (CL2, 441). The instruction to the reader is as consistent as 'the idea and the method' are consistently employed in the tales. Looked at in this light, 'Youth' comes to seem more and more a dramatisation of how Marlow constructs a new occupation when the door is shut, when the transition has been made from one life to another.

The story's 'final incident' is marked by a descriptive composure quite at variance with the heated excitement of the preceding narrative. In fact, Marlow's landfall consists of two episodes: a false arrival as it were, still involved with striving and arranging, in which 'the East spoke to me, but it was in a Western voice' (129); and a true arrival, in which 'The East looked at them without a sound' (131). By degrees the narrative voice has resolved itself more fully into that of the older man: 'And this is how I see the East ... And I see a bay, a wide bay, smooth as glass and polished like ice, shimmering in the dark' (127). The tone is elegiac of a moment long gone, yet calmly assured of the extension of that moment in the mind's eye, forever; and the reflection, both of the scene and of the voice reporting it, intensifies to a point of stillness:

Nothing moved. The fronds of palms stood still against the sky. Not a branch stirred along the shore, and the brown roofs of the hidden houses peeped through the green foliage, through the big leaves that hung shining and still like leaves forged of heavy metal. This was the East of the ancient navigators, so old, so mysterious, resplendent and sombre, living and unchanged, full of danger and promise. And these were the men. (131)

The silent gaze of changelessness seems almost to reprove the talkative energy that fought through to such a vision. If we have been prompted to see the voyage as a test, this final experience is also one of being

examined by life.⁴ It is here that the whole story is given to us in a single sentence: 'I came upon it from a tussle with the sea — and I was young — and I saw it looking at me' (132).

The dependable reader, looking back upon the story, recalls young Marlow's sustaining thought, that 'there was all the East before me, and all life' (108). But when Marlow arrives what he immediately faces is an 'enigma': 'The mysterious East faced me, perfumed like a flower, silent like death, dark like a grave' (128). The last two phrases are much more interesting than the standard Orientalism implied by the first half of the sentence (though this note admittedly persists, as in the evocation of the East as 'so old, so mysterious ... full of danger and promise'). Yet Marlow conspicuously foregoes a reading of the gaze that is turned upon him and offers his listeners a reflection that is simply a farewell:

And this is all that is left of it ! Only a moment; a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour — of youth ! . . . A flick of sunshine upon a strange shore, the time for a sigh, and — goodbye — Night — Goodbye . . . ! (132)

So how is the reader to interpret this face and its meaning for Marlow? There are, I think, three possibilities. The first would be that the enchantment of this beautiful final tableau is the gift reserved for the audacious; 'exulting like a conqueror', young Marlow achieves in this waking vision a sense of peace that is the triumph of his egoism, an enlarged perception that succeeds in investing him, too, with some of its steady grandeur. This highly romantic reading would be unwilling to acknowledge the force of the story's final words, that this has been a 'romance of illusions'. Conversely, a second reading would see the stilled enlargement of the tableau as belittling the small triumph of young Marlow's egoism, diminishing it to merely 'a tussle with the sea'. 'Silent like death, dark like a grave', what faces Marlow is, for all its perfumed enchantment, his own Nemesis, the grave of his youthful hopes. Its stare will defeat him, will outlast his youth and his

⁴I take the phrase from Fielding's assessment of Adela in Chapter 26 of *A Passage to India*: 'she was no longer examining life, but being examined by it; she had become a real person' (London: Dent, 1942), 212.

compelling will. The result can be seen in his tale, which would embrace lost youth if it could but instead has recourse to the bottle.

A third reading, the one I propose, is generated by recognising how extraordinarily closely the whole episode, concluding with precise verbal echoes, corresponds to the ideas of the final paragraph of the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (written six months previously). In this famous description of what the artist seeks to achieve we also find an exact description of the effect of the East on young Marlow:

To arrest, for the space of a breath, the hands busy about the work of the earth, and compel men entranced by the sight of distant goals to glance for a moment at the surrounding vision of form and colour, of sunshine and shadows; to make them pause for a look, for a sigh, for a smile ... a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile — and the return to an eternal rest. (NN xlv)

If it is granted that the story's final episode, in its extraordinarily static and pictorial quality, is composed in the same terms that Conrad uses to describe the aim and effect of art, what is the meaning of this correspondence? I have implicitly suggested that Schopenhauer's notion of 'egoism, which is the form of the will-to-live' is the philosophical perspective that informs Conrad's portrayal of young Marlow, and I will now show explicitly how 'Youth's' 'final incident' is given a particular meaning when we recall the aspects of Schopenhauer that helped to shape Conrad's Preface. These are to be found in Book Three of *The World as Will and Representation* and in the Supplement 'On the Inner Nature of Art'.⁵ The gloomier aspects of Schopenhauer's vision of the will-to-live, such as his picture of the benighted mole, belong to the world of *The Secret Agent* and perhaps flavour its peculiar humour: 'for what purpose does the species itself exist? That is a question to which nature makes no reply, when she is considered merely objectively ... no one has the remotest idea why the whole tragi-comedy exists' (WWR 2:351, 357). There is, however, a respite in that 'merely',

⁵*The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969). Hereafter as WWR. Paul Kirschner outlines the correspondences in his *Conrad: The Psychologist as Artist* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968).

one which Conrad amplifies in his Preface when he speaks of the artist finding 'within *himself* ... the terms of his appeal' (my emphasis). The exaltation of the artist as he holds up 'the rescued fragment ... and through its movement, its form, and its colour reveal(s) the substance of its truth' is prefigured in the power Schopenhauer attributes to the operation of art itself:

For it plucks the object of its contemplation from the stream of the world's course, and holds it isolated before it ... it therefore pauses at this particular thing; it stops the wheel of time; for it the relations vanish; its object is only the essential, the idea. (*WWR* 1: 185)

Schopenhauer frequently returns to the notion that art suspends the onrush of time. He praises 'those admirable Dutchmen who ... set up a lasting monument of their objectivity and spiritual peace in paintings of still life' (*WWR* 1: 197), and he idealises painting which 'appears to bring time itself to a standstill' (*WWR* 1: 231). Writing again of painting, Schopenhauer incidentally describes the moral effect achieved by the final section of 'Youth' when he claims "'What is life?'" Every genuine and successful work of art answers this question in its own way and quite calmly and serenely' (*WWR* 2: 406). Marlow arrives, as if before a picture, to gaze upon the East and finds it gazing upon him: 'And I sat weary beyond expression, exulting like a conqueror, sleepless and entranced, as if before a profound, a fateful enigma' (128). What Schopenhauer says about art is immediately applicable to his situation: 'Everyone has to stand before a picture as before a prince, waiting to see whether it will speak and what it will say to him; and, as with the prince, so he himself must not address it, for then he would hear only himself' (*WWR* 2: 407). At first, indeed, when the East speaks Marlow hears 'a western voice'; but when he wakes the following morning he is silenced into the contemplation Schopenhauer describes. Of course, the words, the narration, go on — but the talkative voice, so taken up with its own energy, is quieted. The East maintains its enigma, the prince does not pronounce Marlow's fate, for 'the East looked at them without a sound' (131). But the effect is clear. The triumphs and the self-delight of the restless striving will are suspended and superseded by the higher activity of aesthetic contemplation, the

contemplation of the impenetrable self-sufficiency of a composed picture.

Writing of the eyes of painted madonnas and saints, Schopenhauer says that 'the knowledge in them reacting on the will, does not, like other knowledge, furnish motives for the will, but on the contrary has become a quieter of all willing'. And he goes on to make the claim: 'And now art ends by presenting the free self-abolition of the will through the one great quieter that dawns on it from the most perfect knowledge of its own nature' (*WWR* 1: 233). Marlow has not, of course, seen the face of God, but his dawn vision is significantly and beautifully introduced by 'I was lying in a flood of light, and the sky had never looked so far, so high, before. I opened my eyes and lay without moving' (130). This passivity brings, if not self-scrutiny, the scrutiny of an irreducible Other: 'And then I saw the men of the East — they were looking at me' (130). The apparently unimpressed eyes of the 'living and unchanged' East look upon 'the tired men from the West' to produce the reflection in the reader's mind that the brash success of young Marlow, the anxious watchfulness of Mahon, the heroic single-mindedness of Captain Beard (both of whom are imaged as if dead), are fleeting and self-consuming. Western energy seems a small and fretful agitation beside the solidity of Eastern repose; and perhaps this is Marlow's thought too, leading to his Buddha pose in *Heart of Darkness*.⁶ But, just as man is both diminished and dignified in his fight with the sea, so for Marlow to receive that Eastern gaze is also an experience of grandeur. It is a picture of timelessness, but necessarily seen under the conditions of time. Unlike young Marlow's other experiences, it suffers no ironic change as it is remembered through the passage of twenty-two years. Old and young Marlow merge at this stage of the telling; 'I can see it now' suffers no rueful puncturing of its simplicity. What, finally, in its still and unchanging quality the picture reflects for Marlow is his own mortality in a bearable form. Furnished

⁶A negotiation of what East and West can offer each other is depicted in *A Passage to India* in which Aziz 'wanted Fielding to "give in to the East" as he called it' (226). On this aspect of Conrad see Chapter 1 of William Bonney, *Thorns and Arabesques: Contexts for Conrad's Fiction*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), especially pp. 24-26 on 'Youth'.

with the echoes from Schopenhauer that this final section of the story awakens, the reader can also sense that at an unconscious level Conrad depicts himself as standing before the achievements of art, to be judged by the continuities of a different temporal order.

This 'aesthetic' reading can claim the merit of retaining the second reading's harsher ironies without totally sacrificing the romance of the first. For 'Youth', surely, is written in the spirit of 'the romantic feeling of reality', as Conrad expressed it in his Author's Note to *Within the Tides*.⁷ It is a spirit that, in *Heart of Darkness*, finds itself looking upon that which demands its extinction, and its elegy is written with savage irony in 'The End of the Tether'. In 'Youth' the final episode does not reveal the ideal conception of the self to be simply untenable, as is the case in the other two stories in the volume; but, if we are to take Conrad's letter to Blackwood seriously, its alteration of perspective is what brings this 'narrative' (as 'Youth' is subtitled) into existence ('... exists only in virtue of my fidelity to the idea and the method'). It makes the story worth telling, one might say, to an adult audience.⁸

3

A reading that emphasises the deliberation with which the tale comes to rest in a stillness of contemplation, transcending the achievements of willpower, also makes the reader look back with renewed interest at an earlier contribution to the debate about egoism. Whilst the Judea is docked on the Tyne, Marlow tells us, 'I read for the first time *Sartor*

⁷This essay could usefully be read in conjunction with Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan's Essay, "'A Smile of Fortune" and the Romantic Paradox', *The Conradian*, 15.1 (June 1990), 1-12.

⁸We might recall how unambiguously Conrad declares himself to Cunninghame Graham in a letter written some eight months after the composition of 'Youth': 'C'est l'egoisme qui sauve tout — absolument tout — tout ce que nous abhorrons tout ce que nous aimons' (*CL2*, 159). I would propose to read this famous letter as an assertion by Conrad of the egoism required of the writer in his lonely vocation. 'Youth' itself is more ambivalent; but if young Marlow's egoism is the object of its gentle satire, the narrative reveals that doubts about the egoism that produces stories is more centrally the subject of the whole tale.

Resartus and Burnaby's *Ride to Khiva*. I didn't understand much of the first then; but I remember I preferred the soldier to the philosopher at the time; a preference which life has only confirmed' (97). Colonel Fred Burnaby's extraordinarily popular book (which had gone through eleven editions by the year after its publication in 1877, and at least another three by 1895) is, like 'Youth', the story of a journey to the East.⁹ Burnaby was an intrepid individualist of renowned strength, whose optimistic yet knowing outlook represents the 'Do or Die' attitude tempered with a large measure of common sense and worldliness. The appeal of his adventure, undertaken in the bitter Russian winter of 1875, is in part to the cast of mind which admires feats of endurance and responds to evocations such as 'The wind howled and whistled, billowing before it broad waves of snow. Our eyes began to run, and the eyeballs to ache; the constant glare and cutting breeze half blinded us as we rode' (RK 200). This is travel writing, not deeply reflective but observant and informative; the style is direct and fast moving, but with a capacity for both humour and deadpan irony. For Burnaby, as for Marlow, life is fraught with obstructions to be overcome; this too is a story of not being able to get started, to the point where 'I began to think there was some influence behind the scenes, purposely doing its best to retard me on my journey' (RK 123). Perhaps the greatest obstruction, and the most consistent object of irony in the account, is the Russian Empire itself, which Burnaby single-handedly disarms by what comes across as a very adaptable form of English good-breeding in order to get his glimpse of the Khan's kingdom to the east. At some level, I feel, echoes of this book remained with Conrad right up to the writing of *Under Western Eyes*, in which, perhaps, a version of the name of General Milutin, Russian Minister for War, resurfaces, as does the 'Where to?' of the St. Petersburg sleigh-drivers (RK 21).

The attraction of Burnaby's book for young Marlow is an obvious one, and his preference for 'the soldier to the philosopher' suggests he read it in a self-confirmatory manner. Yet Burnaby's informed and comparatively ironic persona can be read back as an oblique commentary upon the naive enthusiasms of young Marlow; and the

⁹Frederick Burnaby, *A Ride to Khiva* (London: Cassell, Petter and Gilpin, 1877) Republished London: Century Publishing Co., 1983. Hereafter as RK.

philosophy of action, so straightforwardly endorsed at this early point in 'Youth' by Conrad's narrator, is surely questioned by the final picture of the East in all its enticement being a grave for those 'of the conquering race, who are proud of their wisdom, of their knowledge, of their strength' (132). In the matter of books, as in much else, the older Marlow remains loyal to his younger self; but he intimates that he has read *Sartor Resartus* more than once; and Conrad depicts Carlyle as a troubling presence, despite Marlow's dismissal.

In 'Youth', Conrad can be seen as the inheritor of a dual vision of man as belittled and as exalted, not only from Schopenhauer but also from Carlyle.¹⁰ Teufelsdröck's difficulties in 'getting under way' (as one chapter of *Sartor Resartus* is entitled) lead him to feel that work is what saves 'purblind youth' from merely shifting into 'exasperated striplings of three score and ten'. Yet work is a leading string that can become a throttling halter:

Here, circling like a gin-horse, for whom partial or total blindness is no evil, the Bread-artist can travel contentedly round and round, still fancying that it is forward and forward; and realise much: for himself virtual; for the world an additional horse's power in the grand corn-mill or hemp-mill of Economic Society.¹¹

If young Marlow's conception of his work is too exalted to allow him to think of himself as a 'Bread-artist', the older Marlow is too conscious to 'travel contentedly round and round'. The mock comfort offered in the second half of Carlyle's sentence is of a sort particularly galling to one of Marlow's temperament. Though the tale's final episode evokes a sense of timelessness, the teller is left to carry on after the telling is over, as the final paragraph of 'Youth' inescapably reminds us. What has become profoundly problematic for the older man is exactly exposed in Teufelsdröck's contention: 'Our whole terrestrial being is based on Time, and built of Time; it is wholly a movement, a Time-impulse; Time is the author of it, the material of it. Hence also our whole Duty, which is to move, to work — in the right direction' (SR 98). Carlyle's

¹⁰See Alan Heywood Kenny, 'Conrad and Carlyle', *Journal of the Joseph Conrad Society (U.K.)*, 5.2 (March 1980), 7, 19, 20.

¹¹*Sartor Resartus* (London: Everyman's Library, Dent, 1908), 92. Hereafter as SR.

formulations, especially in the great chapter 'The Everlasting No', must have been deeply influential upon Conrad as he explored Marlow's possibilities further. His role in *Heart of Darkness* dramatises an unsettling enquiry into Teufelsdröck's assertion: 'Hence, too, the folly of that impossible precept, know thyself; till it be translated into this partially possible one, "Know what thou canst work-at"' (SR 124).

As far as 'Youth' is concerned, we might expect Marlow to have approved of the two precepts advanced in 'The Everlasting Yea': 'Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action' and 'Do the Duty which lies nearest thee' (SR 147). But the tale shows us a man whose experience and whose account explicitly deny the resurgence of strength and faith that is the prerequisite for this Yea: 'one day he will hurl the burden far from him and bound forth free and with a second youth' (SR 138). What 'Youth' actually shows us is a brashly optimistic outlook becoming that of a prematurely ageing raconteur (only forty-two, after all), sardonic and maudlin by turns. The sailor has become the storyteller, aware of the closure of the past and uncertain of the value of his present activity that feeds upon it. Writing of Schopenhauer, Terry Eagleton has recently made the point with typical economy: 'The world can be released from desire only by being aestheticised'.¹² This aestheticisation in fact emerges as the fundamental subject of Conrad's 'Youth'. If the episode recounted in the tale taught Marlow the distinction that the frame narrator makes at the outset between 'the amusement of life' and 'life itself', we might fairly imagine that Marlow now feels himself in danger of being left with the amusement — which, for Conrad, means the very unamusing 'life itself' of a writer. 'A good book is a good action', claimed Conrad in a moment of confidence: it is a certainty that the storyteller of 'Youth' would like to, but cannot, lay claim to.

I am aware that I have made 'Youth' sound something like Conrad's 'Sailing to Byzantium', which it is not, if only because the form is that of a yarn whose thread of story must be kept visible by a

¹²Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, (Oxford: Blackwell 1990), 163. Eagleton is, of course, highly critical of Schopenhauer's aesthetic 'solution' as it leads to political indifference.