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"SOME ASPECTS OF THE PHILOSOPHY
OF
JOSEPH CONRAD."

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE
THROUGH
PROFESSOR E. C. PERROW
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
"MASTER OF ARTS."

BY
MINNIE LEE DODD HILL

1917.

Term
"philosophy."

A man's philosophy is his view of life.
And every man who has lived his life - not merely spent it - has a philosophy. The convictions which go to make up this philosophy are rooted in the sub-soil of his experience. This sub-soil may contain ingredients carried up to him from the past of his race, of his nation, of his ancestors. His insight into his environment is not merely the view of a detached individual.

Conrad's
early ex-
periences.

The sad and gloomy experiences of Conrad's parents (banished to Vologda for taking part in Polish rebellion 1862) probably started in his child mind many of the doubts and resentments which he gives expression to in his pessimism.

Conrad, a
pessimist.

Conrad is incapable of a cheerful view of life. To him life is tragic and the world is evil. The record a man leaves is the story of his heroic struggle to conquer in his contention with Fate, which Conrad believes wills the tragedy of life. Man's struggle is complicated by

baffling failures and unaccountable injustices. But his will to grapple is strengthened by his antagonism.

Conrad does not derive this will in man nor does he project its usefulness beyond this life. Its function is to persist in vigor until man has satisfied his conscience, - until his ideal is justified in his conduct here.

Man wants to keep his place among his fellow-men.

To keep his place in our social existence man must discover the principles nature favors and conduct his life by them. The search usually consumes his life, - often to the point of sacrifice, - but the life which has gone on during this search has gathered, bit by bit, fragments which make up man's final vision of the banner of eternal truth which he has tried to serve.

Purpose in nature.

Such an analysis of purpose in nature is deep but surely only a partial and sinister view. Conrad's view is entitled to all the

respect which we bring to the reflections of any sincere thinker, but its very gloom disqualifies it for universal belief. That nature has planted man in such a glistening world of the senses, even if only to stage a merciless fight, which Fate puts up against him, seems in itself a fact which carries some compensation, and even glory.

There is no intimation of future punishment. Conrad seems to think that the great mass are condemned here on earth (don't have to wait for the hereafter). There is so little for the great mass of people. In "Chance" Conrad makes this pronouncement: "He was but a man, and the incapacity to achieve anything distinctly good or evil is inherent in our earthly condition. Mediocrity is our mark."

A few have exceptional talent or exceptional sensibilities. But it is not in these

(of Decoud in
"Nostromo.")

(said of Nos-
tromo in Nos-
tromo.)

gifts that satisfaction may be found: "disil-
lusioned weariness is the retribution meted out
to intellectual audacity" just as "disenchanted
vanity is the reward of audacious action." Grief
and imagination seem to be inseparable from the
gift of exceptional talent and these invent new
and greater sufferings for the gifted man. Of
Jim in "Lord Jim" Conrad points a case: "There
were his fine sensibilities, his fine feelings,
his fine longings - a sort of sublimated, ideal-
ized selfishness. He was very fine and very
unfortunate. A little coarser nature would
not have borne the strain; it would have had
to come to terms with itself - with a sigh,
with a grunt, or even with a guffaw; a little
coarser one would have remained ignorant and
completely uninteresting." This tone of pity
for awakened individuals takes us with him to
a place "where nothing but who knows nothing,
is once seen to smile." And here we wake up

Conrad sees
the hand of
Fate work-
ing in men's
lives.

to see the flaw in Conrad's philosophy. It is an incomplete view of life, - it allows no smile. He has cheated us of a part of their lives, - the lives of those fine, struggling and devotedly loyal people of his imagination. The wisdom of our own experience is part smile - was not their's, too? We can't expect a Pole to be cheerful but the doom which shadows Conrad's characters from the moment they appear until they have overtaken it is, nevertheless, a heavy burden for the reader to bear. Surely even Conrad's characters did some things just for fun! Why didn't he mention them? Surely some joy could have crept into even the small spaces left unguarded by the tormenting Fate which so nearly envelops the lives of mankind. This world filled only with soul-tortured or soul-sleeping people is not even cheered by the appearance of a child. The children, too, are denied the privilege of

laughter. They must reflect nature's wrath aimed at their parents over some transgression of her plans. Nina Almayer, Lord Jim's wife, and the Fyne children (in "Chance") are pathetic examples of childhood cheated of its claim.

Background:
Tropical
forests
and sea.

The intense color of Conrad's background (the Tropics and the Sea) accounts partly for the minor chord of his imagination. In the forests and the tropics, with their riot of plant life, Conrad turns his imagination loose and of course what he sees is the hopeless struggle with the destructive agencies of nature: "The big trees of the forest, lashed together with manifold bands by a mass of tangled creepers, looked down at the growing young life at their feet with the sombre resignation of giants that had lost faith in their strength. And in the midst of them the merciless creepers clung to the big trunks in cable-like coils, leaped from

tree to tree, hung in thorny festoons from the lower boughs, and, sending slender tendrils on high to seek out the smallest branches, carried death to their victims in an exulting riot of silent destruction" - - - "As he skirted in his weary march the edge of the forest he glanced now and then into its dark shade, so enticing in its deceptive appearance of coolness, so repellent with its unrelieved gloom, where lay, entombed and rotting, countless generations of trees, and where their successors stood as if mourning, in dark green foliage, immense and helpless, awaiting their turn. Only the parasites seemed to live in a sinuous rush upwards into the air and sunshine, feeding on the dead and the living alike, and crowning their victims with pink and blue flowers that gleamed amongst the boughs, incongruous and cruel, like a strident and mocking note in the solemn harmony of the doomed trees."

Conrad is cynical; but insists on courage. He thinks cowardice a great evil.

from
"Lord Jim."

Conrad's stern view of life sobers but does not dishearten him. He assumes that the world is evil and that all men are born cowards; that we are all here on sufferance; that each man is on trial for the parentage of his kind, - his own conscience the judge, his own actions the pleader for the verdict "courage". "A few simple notions you must cling to if you want to live decently and would like to die easy" - - "Existence is based on honest faith and upon the instinct of courage". He defines the word "courage": "I don't mean military courage, or civil courage, or any special kind of courage. I mean just that inborn ability to look temptation straight in the face, - a readiness unintellectual enough, goodness knows, but without a pose, a power of resistance, don't you see, ungracious if you like, but priceless - an unthinking, and blessed stiffness before the outward and inward terrors, before the might of nature

and the seductive corruption of men - backed by a faith invulnerable to the strength of facts, to the contagion of example, to the solicitation of ideas. Hang ideas! They are tramps, vagabonds knocking at the back door of your mind, each taking a little of your substance, each carrying away some crumb of that belief you must cling to."

Conrad thinks ideas weaken the will.

Toil and Fidelity; the bonded indebtedness of mankind.

To Conrad, mankind is a body of men held together by a "community of inglorious toil and by fidelity to a certain standard of conduct." Any doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct is the thing that "breeds yelling panics and good little quiet villanies; it is the shadow of calamity." The difficulty in the way of these simple notions of conduct (honest faith and the instinct of courage) is that not one of us is safe from our unknown weaknesses. "He looked as genuine as a new sovereign but

there was some infernal alloy in his metal."

Such weakness is a thing of mystery and terror -

"like a hint of a destructive fate ready for us all whose youth - in its day - had resembled his youth." Conrad has that to say of Lord Jim, his best loved character, whom he gives the most complete psychological study. The external facts of Jim's experience are handled with Conrad's best speculative skill. I say the "external facts" because Jim passes before us rather as a shadowed spirit of all mankind than as an individual whose flesh and blood we can claim to recognize. We recognize his family; we share his fear and his illusions; his dealings with himself are but our own, but his face we cannot see. This seaman in exile from the sea comes to Conrad's pages from the peaceful air of an English village. Jim's father "possessed such certain knowledge of the unknowable as made for the righteousness

(A companion picture to this is Flora in Chance: "You little ghost of all the sorrow in the world.")

of people in cottages without disturbing the ease of mind of those whom an unerring Providence enables to live in mansions." "The little church on the hill had the mossy grey-ness of a rock seen through a ragged screen of leaves."

Conrad is an admirer of the English temperament but his aim is not a portrayal of life under sunny arrangements, - he takes his Englishmen to the sea. The exactions of life at sea reveal man's pretences. "Three hundred miles beyond telegraph and mail-boat lines, the haggard utilitarian lies of our civilization wither and die to be replaced by pure exercises of imagination, that have the futility, often the charm, and sometimes the deep hidden truthfulness, of works of art."

Life at sea to Conrad means life in sailing ships at sea. A steamship does not offer the same opportunity to become acquainted with

From "Over-
due and Miss-
ing" in Mir-
ror of the
Sea.

the power of the sea nor with the value of discipline. "The life of a steamship is not so much a contest as a disdainful ignoring of the sea." "The sailing ship, with her unthrobbing body, seemed to lead mysteriously a sort of unearthly existence, bordering upon the magic of the invisible forces, sustained by the inspiration of life-giving and death-dealing winds." "Does the passenger ever feel the life of the ship in which he is being carried like a sort of honored bale of highly sensitive goods?" In contrasting the taking of old and modern ships about the world, Conrad says: A sailing ship offers "a single-handed struggle with something much greater than yourself; laborious absorbing practice of an art whose ultimate result remains on the knees of the gods." Service on a steamship is not an individual temperamental achievement but simply the skilled use of a captured force, merely

another step forward upon the way of universal conquest."

Conrad regrets the hurry of the times which stands nowadays between the modern seaman and the thorough knowledge of his craft. He looks upon sailing, - and by sailing he doesn't mean modern yachting (for pleasure), - as a fine art "made up of accumulated tradition kept alive by individual pride, rendered exact by professional opinion - - - ; spurred on, and sustained by discriminating praise." "Efficiency of a practically flawless kind may be reached naturally in the struggle for bread. But there is something beyond mere skill; almost an inspiration which gives to all work that finish which is almost art - which is art" - - - - . The bondage of the sailor-seaman's art is very exacting but his service is not given on the grounds of utility. Conrad thinks man is born to serve his time

on this earth and there is something fine in the service being given on other grounds than those of utility. He says "it is not important whether an industry or a game perish unless it perish of an insidious and inward decay. I rather think he believes that the old seaman type "bred in the hazards of life" has been supplanted by another which is determined "to lounge safely through existence" and there, of course, is a spot of decay in the change.

Conrad knows
sea life
better than
life ashore.

For twenty years, Conrad had his life on the sea. He saw the world from its ports - not beyond them. He was an inhabitant of ships and what he says of seas, of ships, and ships' men leaves nothing to be desired. But I wish he had known more people of the land. If he had known more he would have been less intolerant. After all it is not in isolation nor in innocence that the only meaning to life is to be found. It is surely a greater spiritual

feat to wring the meaning from a complex civilization than from one phase of life. The "immortal sea" was Conrad's selection; he condemned the land because he saw only its "dissolving contact": "Ports are no good-ships rot, men go to the devil." Sailors do not see the world that exists within "the frontier of infamy and filth, within that border of dirt and hunger, of misery and dissipation, that comes down on all sides to the water's edge of the incorruptible ocean, and is the only thing they know of life, the only thing they see of surrounding land, - - - those life-long prisoners of the sea." An almost paternal tenderness lies in a line like the following: "And they who could hear one another in the howl of gales seemed deafened and distracted by the dull roar of the busy earth."

A high spiritual note is struck in many of Conrad's tributes to his "Children of the Sea"; one of which I shall quote: They were

Nigger of
the Nar-
cissus.

"men hard to manage, but easy to inspire;
voiceless men - but men enough to scorn in
their hearts the sentimental voices that be-
wailed the hardness of their fate. It was
a fate unique and their own; the capacity to
bear it appeared to them the privilege of the
chosen! - - - "Their successors are the grown-
up children of a discontented earth. They are
less naughty but less innocent; less profane,
but perhaps also less believing; and if they
have learned how to speak, they have also learned
how to whine."

Man trying
to make things
easy for him-
self - Con-
rad thinks
this a mis-
take.

With life growing steadily easier for us
Conrad sees the possibility of a future race
which will know no sympathy and have no vigor.
He does not look upon modern achievements as
progress: we are less the sport of circum-
stance but we are dodging our own development.
The sea is the mirror of life to Conrad; he
takes his images from the sea to embody his

reflections upon this question: "The modern ship is not the sport of the waves - - - -

Each of her voyages is a triumphant progress and yet it is a question whether it is not a more subtle triumph to be the sport of the waves - yet survive, achieving your end.

Will the seaman of three hundred years hence have the faculty of sympathy? An incorrigible mankind hardens its heart in the progress of its own perfectability. How will they feel in seeing the illustrations to the sea novels of our day, or of our yesterday. They will probably be neither touched nor moved to derision, affection, or admiration - their eye will be cold, inquisitive and indifferent. Our ships of yesterday will not be lineal ancestors but mere predecessors whose course will have been run and the race extinct. The seaman of the future shall be not our descendant but only our successor."

Trade.

From the same point of view, Conrad sees in trade materials for a heroic tale of adventure and conquest. But it is not because of external successes that he uplifts it. As he sees it, the adventure is for the adventurer and the conquest is self-conquest, not conquest of weaker people. It is in order that physical bravery may not perish from the earth, that man has found it necessary to push his trade unto obscure and unfamiliar places. In the story of the Dutch and English adventurers (about the time of James the First) who went out for pepper, Conrad sees more than mere greed. Such persistence in endeavor and sacrifice could not have been kept alive on greed. They risked all they had but their reward was not pepper but wealth and comforts for those they had left at home, - "after their bones lay bleaching on distant shores." "To us, their less tried successors,

Said of
the 17th
Century
traders -
"Lord
Jim."

they appear magnified, not as agents of trade, but as instruments of a recorded destiny, pushing out into the unknown in obedience to an inward voice, to an impulse beating in the blood, to a dream of the future. They were wonderful; and it must be owned they were ready for the wonderful. They recorded it complacently in their sufferings, in the aspect of the seas, in the customs of strange nations, in the glory of splendid rulers." Trade has made the nations of the earth acquainted with each other. Conrad even further grants it to be one of the big factors in civilization. A fabric satisfying all international needs has been made by the machinery of trade. Imagination, energy, pluck, and almost a religious passion have gone into developing commerce. For such development, system has been perfected to such a point that it now menaces the life of the thing it developed. Machinery has too far taken the place of in-

dividuals in trade. There is no longer the bond of partnership in service.

With immense wealth and the power which comes from such wealth it is very easy for trade to turn into mere conquest, - and this is what much of the colonizing of the world is degraded into: trading companies are all too alert at seeing the "accident" of weakness in natives and in building upon such weakness, a far-sighted scheme propelled by self interest. In "Heart of Darkness" trade motives in Congo are held up to scorn - Conrad seems to consider the whole trade invasion of the tropics fantastic; thinks it will be short lived. "The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse. By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside, the silent wilderness surrounding this

cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion." - - - "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea - something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to - - - ."

Conquest.

Conrad: interpreter for primitive people of jungle.

Civilization and savagery. ("Heart of Darkness.")

To read a story such as "Heart of Darkness" is like going back to the early beginnings of the world. It contains Conrad's belief that civilization has merely plastered over the mind of man a few new prints but the original block is easily recognized. It is necessary to give a rather long quotation to illustrate this

statement: "We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there - you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were - no, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it - this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity - like yours - the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise; a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you - you so remote from the night of first ages - could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything - because everything is in it, all

the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valor, rage - who can tell? - but truth - truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder - the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff - with his own inborn strength. Principles? Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags - rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief." As Conrad sees it, civilization

Civiliza-
tion defined.

is merely a man-made means to an end - a round-about way of getting conditions of security; of increasing usefulness by means of instruction; but it does not change the nature of man. Self-preservation is the idea back of the service of all people. We may use the labor of the savage whom we have instructed but he, mean-

time, is interpreting his activity in terms of his own self preservation - "A thrall to strange witchcraft, full of inspiring knowledge", he may be willing to try to mend a leaky boiler for you, but while he works, apparently under control of your will, he may be weaving his own superstition around his deeds; he may be palliating the angry spirit he imagines to be in the boiler and very thirsty; he may be afraid of the vengeance of this thirsty spirit of the leaky boiler! Conrad thinks civilized man's power over less civilized man has come from his ability to create a feeling of uneasiness in his less instructed brother. Perhaps this uneasiness represents some faint memory of the anguish and excessive toil which men of the first ages paid for the right to survive, - a bit of inherited experience. The act of conquering a wilder-

Struggle
with nature.

Invention.

ness to live in left its mark in this uneasiness. The whistle of a steamboat terrifies the savage because it represents a new and strange force. It is probable that civilized man would inspire no more intense feeling than curiosity if it were not for the machinery which he takes with him when he goes on his expeditions. The savage does not know the intention of the strange new-comers with their boats and guns, consequently they are terrified, - somewhat charmed, too, perhaps. Equipment and instruction turn the victory to civilized man; but Conrad thinks it an execrable thing. He seems to think savagery has a right to exist, - "in the sunshine."

Savagery has a right to exist.

The law.

The savages, who rebel and resist the coming of civilized control, pass quickly from the status of enemies to the degrading position of criminals. "The outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble

mystery from over the sea." A chain gang of conquered savages at work on a railway offers material for Conrad's resentment. In this "raw material of the reclaimed, the product of the new forces at work," Conrad comprehends the "complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages." Of course the exercise of brute force is unlovely, but I can't help feeling that the boasted efficiency and the devotion to efficiency, which Conrad sees in English colonizing efforts, have been accompanied by administration which would not bear strong light.

Government.

I think the germ of Conrad's idea on government is that each country must evolve its own system, without any injection of foreign ideas. In "Under Western Eyes", we have Conrad's political confession of faith stated very briefly:

"History, not theory.

Patriotism not Internationalism.

Evolution, not Revolution.

Unity, not Disruption."

Conrad sees in political history, a record of conflicting intentions. He thinks the laws of a country should express the intentions of the people of that country. By patriotism Conrad means resignation to those intentions. He thinks the Russian is endowed with fine spirit of patriotism. In the very cynicism of the Russian, Conrad reads a prophecy of better times. "When the day of you thinkers comes don't you forget what's divine in the Russian soul - and that's resignation. Respect that in your intellectual restlessness, and don't let your arrogant wisdom spoil its message to the world."

Autocracy.

Conrad accounts for the Russians' acceptance of autocracy: "In Russia, the land

of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations, many brave minds have turned away at last from the vain and endless conflict to the one great historical fact of the land. They turned to autocracy for the peace of their patriotic conscience as a weary unbeliever, touched by grace, turns to the faith of his fathers, for the blessing of spiritual rest." By the fact of the land, I take it, Conrad means that when Russia, as a land, is ready to throw off autocracy it will do so without revolution. In the meantime, for the sake of peace, he would hold on to what unity is offered by an established government, even if that government be autocracy of a despotic kind. He says "I take it that what all men are really after is some form, or perhaps only some formula of peace." "Obscurantism is better than the light of incendiary torches."

Unity not
disruption.

War.

I think, however, that Conrad would not

be a peace-at-any-price man because he says several times that the power to make peace often comes through war. "It is in this sense alone that might so often is right."

Evolution
not
revolution.

Conrad looks upon the unmarked snows of Russia as an emblem of sacred inertia. He believes a maturing destiny is working under the snows. "The seed germinates in the night. Out of the dark soil comes the perfect plant. But a volcanic eruption is sterile, the ruin of the fertile land."

(isn't this the "super-man" idea which Shaw has, - as opposed to our belief that there will come a gradual lifting of the whole people?)

Conrad believes in the man who will come at the appointed time. History bears him out in this, - when ages have called, heroes have come (these heroes are the gifts of fate).

The "inertia" Conrad speaks of, serves as a guarantee of duration and safety while destiny goes on with its work, - "a work not of revolutions with their passionate levity

of actions and their shifting impulses,-
but peace." The enthusiasts only bring
about futile disruption: "And what can you
people do by scattering a few drops of blood
on the snow? On this immensity?" - - -

Visionar-
ies.

"Visionaries work everlasting evil on earth.
Their utopias inspire in the mass of mediocre
minds a disgust of reality and a contempt for
the secular logic of human development." Of
course Conrad sees that the world is incon-
ceivable "to the strict logic of ideas" but
he believes there is "a necessity superior
to our conceptions."

Conrad does not think any group of men
can, by their own deliberate efforts, bring
about a triumph of political liberty; - this
gift rests finally in the hands of Fate.
In the case of Russia, a slow and arduous
national growth is little by little adding
to her savings account which is to be turned

(perhaps this
is now paid!)

over at last to pay to Fate the price of political freedom. "The terms men and nations obtain from fate are hallowed by the price." In this way only can Conrad account for a nation's tolerance of such an absolutist government as Russia has had. There has never been anything to hinder such a great number of people from overturning the autocracy except unreadiness of the nation for self-government. When the time of readiness is reached: "The absolutist lies must be uprooted and swept out. There is nothing to reform. There is no legality; there are no institutions. There are only arbitrary decrees. There is only a handful of cruel, perhaps blind, officials, against a nation."

Description
of political
Russia.

National
growth.

Conrad defines national growth, giving application to Russia: "Everything in

a people that is not genuine, not its own
by origin or development, is - well - dirt!
Intelligence in the wrong place is that.
Foreign-bred doctrines are that. Dirt.
Dregs!" - - - "There (in Russia) yawns a
chasm between the past and the future. It
can never be bridged by foreign liberalism.
All attempts at it are either folly or cheat-
ing. Bridged it can never be! It has to
be filled up." Is it to be bridged by the
sacrifice of many lives?

The revolutionist may not represent the
people; he may not be true to the settled
type; revolt may be only the expression of
strong individualism, - all as Conrad has
said, - but is not life itself a continual
protest? Can growth come through sub-
mission to injustice? Does Conrad recog-
nize a different Fate to be presiding over
individuals and over nations?

Religious
views.

Conrad's ideas on religion are entirely consistent with his political views. He thinks the religion of a people should be its own expression and it is all that it should be if it gives peace to the restless soul. He seems to say 'let all religions exist, even with their prejudices and misunderstandings'. Religions are here because there is a need for them - they express the culmination of man's ideal of loyalty to a cause greater than himself, - served though unseen; believed in because it gives purpose to his life and makes his destiny seem ethical to him. I should say that Conrad has a religious spirit, a fine tolerance and reverence for all religions; but I cannot think he has found any one religion which expresses his faith better than another.

Reincarna-
tion.

Conrad expresses ideas of reincarnation with so much sympathy that I think he holds

these ideas himself. He says: "No man's soul is ever lost. It works for itself - or else where would be the sense of self-sacrifice, of martyrdom, of conviction, of faith - the labors of the soul?" Again he says: "They can kill my body but they cannot exile my soul from this world. I believe in this world so much that I cannot conceive of eternity otherwise than as a very long life." It is for its usefulness to this life that Conrad would value a religion and he thinks we find, in us and all around us, the materials for faith: "in our own hearts we trust for our salvation, in the men that surround us, in the sights that fill our eyes, in the sounds that fill our ears, and in the air that fills our lungs." It is not for an eternity beyond the sky that Conrad would justify this life.

But such a conviction is merely personal, and he recognizes that a different aim may con-

secrete another life; that we must not limit the expression of religious fervor to any one pattern. There are many references to the wealth of devotion which exists under the pattern of Catholicism. We must not hinder individuals in their pursuit of spiritual peace. "Nostromo" refused to bring a priest to a dying woman because he did not believe in them.

Later the thing stuck in his throat because she died thinking he deprived her of paradise. The form of religion does not matter. It is the spiritual value which each one discovers in his own form of worship which is important.

The form is only an art form which is the suggestion of the spirit. This idea is finely illustrated by Conrad's description of the Mohammedan pilgrims on the Patna ("Lord Jim") in a pilgrimage which might symbolize the search for the infinite by any people: "Eight hundred men and women with faith and hopes, with affections and memories, they had collected there,

Mohammed-
anism.

coming from north and south and from the outskirts of the East, after treading the jungle paths, descending the rivers, coasting in praus along the shallows, crossing in small canoes from island to island, passing through suffering, meeting strange sights, beset by strange fears, upheld by one desire. They came from solitary huts in the wilderness, from populous campongs, from villages by the sea. At the call of an idea they had left their forests, their clearings, the protection of their rulers, their prosperity, their poverty, the surroundings of their youth and the graves of their fathers. They came covered with dust, with sweat, with grime, with rags - the strong men at the head of family parties, the lean old men pressing forward without hope of return; young boys with fearless eyes glancing curiously, shy little girls with tumbled long hair; the timid women muffled up and clapping to

their breasts, wrapped in loose ends of soiled head-cloths, their sleeping babies, the unconscious pilgrims of an exacting belief." - -

"The Arab, standing up aft, recited aloud the prayer of travelers by sea. He invoked the favour of the Most High upon that journey, implored His blessing on men's toil and on the secret purposes of their hearts; the steamer pounded in the dusk the calm water of the strait; and far astern of the pilgrimage a screw-pile lighthouse, planted by unbelievers on a treacherous shoal, seemed to wink at her its eye of flame, as if in derision of her errand of faith." If these quotations prove anything, it is that Conrad believes all people are upheld by the same religious fervor; that they deride each other's faith because the form is unfamiliar, - how virulent such derision could be was shown by the religious crusades of the Middle Ages.

Origin of
Intolerance.

(Conrad deplores lack of spirituality today.)

Conrad resents the encroachment of modern commercialism into church life. He cites a man who was "shocked and disgusted at the tawdriness of the dressed-up saints in the cathedral - the worship, he called it, of wood and tinsel." Then Conrad says: "it seemed to me that he looked upon his own God as a sort of influential partner, who gets his share of profits in the endowment of churches. That's a sort of idolatry." "A poor Chulo who offers a little silver arm or leg to thank his God for a cure is as rational and more touching." (Nostromo.)

Conrad defines link between economic and social interests.

Conrad says law, order and security have sprung from material interests. "Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is

justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope." In the story of Nostromo Conrad traces the development of a South American republic from the community interest in developing and preserving the San Tome silver mine. The silver of this mine is the "emblem of their common cause, the symbol of the supreme importance of material interests." The common danger to workers and owners cemented their efforts in behalf of the mine. But Conrad thinks the success has been attained at the sacrifice of individuality: "The material apparatus of perfected civilization obliterates the individuality of old towns under the stereotyped conveniences of modern life." - - - "The San Tome mine had already thrown its subtle influence. It had

altered, too, the outward character of the crowds on feast days."

Conrad's attitude toward progress.

Conrad offers a very ironic smile to modern ideas of progress. He can't see that the amount of happiness or misery in the world has been changed. Political doctrines come and go but the amount of political rectitude is all that matters and he thinks that has not changed since primitive times. He looks upon "the virtues" as immortal, - each generation merely re-defines them. To primitive man success was the only standard of morality.

Morality.

He thinks that modern treachery is not far removed from utter savagery, - just veneered over with intelligence and Conrad offers no respect to this veneer! The sources of this conclusion are many but I shall quote from only one of his recitals on the subject:

"The popular lore of all nations testifies that duplicity and cunning, together with

bodily strength, were looked upon, even more than courage, as heroic virtues by primitive mankind. To overcome your adversary was the great affair of life. Courage was taken for granted. But the use of intelligence awakened wonder and respect. Stratagems, providing they did not fail, were honorable; the easy massacre of an unsuspecting enemy evoked no feelings but those of gladness, pride, and admiration. Not, perhaps, that primitive men were more faithless than their descendants of today, but that they went straighter to their aim and were more artless in their recognition of success as the only standard of morality."

Conrad not
an agitator.

This spirit of Conrad, so grudging to optimism, at least keeps him from being an agitating individual and makes him a rather interesting satirist of some modern phenomena.

The femin-
ist movement.

He is not perturbed over the feminist movement. After a short tirade against the

feminists, in which he dissects women's ideas of honor, decency, cautiousness and prudence, - asserting that "they want power"; that sensation at any cost is their secret device, -

("Chance.") Conrad analyzes what he considers the causes of this sex revolt: "And I thought with some sadness that all these revolts and indignations, all these protests, revulsions of feeling, pangs of suffering and of rage, expressed but the uneasiness of sensual beings trying for their share in the joys of form, color, sensations, the only riches of our world of senses." He consoles himself with his faith in the power of innate femininity: "What prevents them from 'coming on deck and playing hell with the ship' generally, is that something in them precise and mysterious, acting both as restraint and as inspiration; - their femininity in short which they think they can get rid of by trying hard, but can't and never

will. Therefore we may conclude that, for all their enterprises, the world is and remains safe enough."

("Chance.")

Conrad playfully projects the sort of irrelevant world women would have - a thing of "fine tissue" which men would put their elbows through. Women would then be the first to become disgusted with it - "for nothing looks more irretrievably deplorable than fine tissue which has been damaged."

Of the feminists themselves Conrad says: "I seem to see her (Mrs. Fyne's) very delightful disciples singeing themselves with the torches, and cutting their fingers with the swords of her furnishing."

Marriage.

It is rather as a force of nature, - and therefore, in Conrad's view, immutable, - that he discusses marriage. I shall quote again from "Chance": "I use the word not so much in reference to the ceremony itself or in

view of the social institution in general, as to which I have no opinion, but in regard to the human relation. The ceremony is adequate; the institution I dare say is useful or it would not have endured. But the human relation thus recognized is a mysterious thing in its origin, character and consequences." - - - - "Pairing off is the fate of mankind and if two beings thrown together, mutually attracted, resist the necessity, fail in understanding and voluntarily stop short of the - the embrace, in the noblest meaning of the word, then they are committing a sin against life, the call of which is simple. Perhaps sacred. And the punishment of it is an invasion of complexity, a tormenting, forcibly tortuous involution of feelings, the deepest form of suffering - - -".

Love and marriage.

The story of "Falk" contains Conrad's

frankest expression on the s u b j e c t of love and marriage. Need, which is the foundation of all emotions, is manifest in the procreative instinct, but is made beautiful by the flavour of discrimination. Falk wanted to marry Hermann's niece and "the utmost that can be said for him was that he wanted that particular girl alone." I think I saw then the obscure beginning, the seed germinating in the soil of an unconscious need, the first shoot of that tree bearing now for a mature mankind the flower and the fruit, the infinite gradation in shades and in flavor of our discriminating love."

Fashionable society.

(The type of woman Conrad resents.)

Conrad looks upon modern fashionable society as a sin against life. The story of "The Planter of Malata" contains his testimonials of this belief. Miss Moorsom, loved by The Planter of Malata, is so wedded to the vanities and conventions of society

that she doesn't yield to love when it comes; her egotism keeps her from accepting passion because it comes in an unfamiliar guise. Conrad calls fashionable society the "mere smother and froth of life - the brilliant froth. Their thoughts, sentiments, opinions, feelings, actions too, are nothing but agitation in empty space to amuse life - a sort of superior debauchery, exciting and fatiguing, meaning nothing, leading nowhere - - ". Conrad thinks women are doing very dangerous trifling in such a world, where "everything is possible except sincerity, such as only stark, struggling humanity can know."

Both the characterization and fate of this type of woman are handled very well: "She was so used to the forms of repression enveloping, softening the crude impulses of old humanity that she no longer believed in their existence, as if it were an exploded

Nature only
cares to
keep the
normal
woman.

legend." The Planter says "I had nothing to offer to her vanity"; - but she is still physically attractive to him. To her he says "it isn't your body, it is your soul that is made of foam." Here Conrad voices his belief that nature will take care to avenge such misdirected aspirations: "You are merely of the topmost layer, disdainful and superior, the mere pure froth and bubble on the inscrutable depths which some day will toss you out of existence."

Inter-
marriage.

Conrad does not believe the intermarriage of different races is often successful - thinks that differences in temperament are part of nature's plan; that temperament cannot be changed, - it is a specific characteristic meant as natural boundary to types. Differences in temperament breed race antipathies which react very painfully upon people having same social relations. The story of "Almayer's Folly" is Conrad's most elaborate

statement of his belief that such race antipathies do exist. He thinks the same social training and traditions are necessary if marriage is to be ideal. And it is always as an ideal that Conrad regards marriage. A pitiful instance of the failure of two people to attain happiness, even though they loved each other, is based on this fact of misunderstood racial impulses. The story I refer to is "Amy Foster", - one of the few stories Conrad has written in which he concerned himself about the love affairs of the poor and humble.

Race
superiority.

That Conrad does not grade one race superior to another is everywhere manifest. He believes that ideas of racial superiority have their foundation laid no deeper than the capricious outward signs of culture, as seen in different environments. The accident of power or weakness may make races re-

gard each other as superior or inferior; strangeness, the parent of antipathies, may also beget such childish ideas. It is not color of skin which marks a race high or low in civilization, but rather its ability to cope with new customs, - taking the best from the new and leaving the mark of its own best upon the new it has come in contact with. Conrad shows that what is fine in the Chinese would be fine in any other people. The Chinese know their officials better than we do, Conrad says. ("Typhoon") The capacity for fidelity to a given task is another characteristic often exalted by him. The little Serang who was eyes for Capt. Whalley in "The End of the Tether" is a sympathetic portrayal of the defects and virtues of the Chinaman's specific character: "His knowledge was absolute and precise; nevertheless, had he been asked his opinion, and especially if questioned in the downright, alarming manner

of white men, he would have displayed the hesitation of ignorance. He was certain of his facts - but such a certitude counted for little against the doubt what answer would be pleasing" - - - - "He was not troubled by an intellectual mistrust of his senses." Conrad places a high valuation upon this ability the Chinese have to execute orders unflinchingly. Examples of this are the helmsmen on the Patna in "Lord Jim"; and on the Nan-Shan in "The Typhoon" ("The body of the helmsman had moved slightly, but his head didn't budge on his neck, - like a stone head fixed to look one way from a column").

Conrad does not think that the Caucasians have any monopoly of higher civilization. Nor would he like to see any race have a monopoly of higher wisdom or power of any kind. He thinks race mixture is a bad

thing and says that the best way to insure against such an evil is to cultivate racial self-respect. In "Almayer's Folly", Nina Almayer's mother accomplishes this for her daughter. The consummation of her task is the marriage of Nina Almayer to a Malay prince.

Types of
Men Conrad
admires.

The seaman is undoubtedly a man after Conrad's own ideal: "his native rectitude, sea-salted, hardened in the winds of wide horizons, open as the day."

The soldier is to be preferred to the philosopher: "One was a man, and the other was either more - or less."

Youth
and
age.

To Conrad, youth is not a period of preparation for life, it is life; it is all there is to life. He has nothing more than a melancholy glance to give to old age "nursing the last flicker of life." I know

of no more vivid interpretation of youth than what Conrad has given. The expectancy of youth; the magnificent courage of youth; the romantic illusions of youth are handled superbly well by Conrad. This understanding of youth - I mean the ability to recreate the actual emotions of youth - was what made it possible for Conrad to write such a novel as "Lord Jim", and such a short story as "Youth". This short story is one of the two best he has written (the other being "Typhoon", - a story clear-cut and sustained throughout, embodying, too, some very fine human touches. The character of Capt. MacWhirr is unforgettable; he came out of life). I can do no better than to quote from the story "Youth": "I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any more - the feeling that I could last forever, outlast the sea, the earth, and all men; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to

Youth's
fine il-
lusions.

joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort - to death: the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small and expires - and expires, too soon - before life itself." This quotation suggests a parallel passage in "Lord Jim": "Our lives are too short for that full utterance which through all our stammerings is of course our only and abiding intention."

Conrad analyzes the charm and fascination of the East in the story "Youth", and shows that, in spite of his later understanding, he retains his first impression of the East: "I have known its fascinations since: I have seen the mysterious shores, the still water, the lands of brown nations, where a stealthy Nemesis lies in wait, pursues, overtakes so many of the conquering race, who are proud of their wisdom, of their knowledge, of their strength. But

(reference
to "Judea"
burned at
sea.)

for me all the East is contained in that
vision of my youth. It is all in that
moment when I opened my young eyes on it.

I came upon it from a tussle with the sea -
and I was young - and I saw it looking at
me. 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."

Expectancy
of youth.

"But you here - you all had something
out of life: money, love - whatever one gets
on shore - and, tell me, wasn't that the best
time, that time when we were young at sea;
young and had nothing, on the sea that gives
nothing, except hard knocks - and sometimes
a chance to feel your strength - that only -
what you all regret?" - - "And we all nodded
at him: the man of finance, the man of ac-
counts, the man of law, we all nodded at
him over the polished table that like a

still sheet of brown water reflected our
faces, lined, wrinkled; our faces marked
by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love;
our weary eyes looking still, looking always,
looking anxiously for something out of life,
that while it is expected is already gone -
has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash -
together with the youth, with the strength,
with the romance of illusions."

The converse of this philosophy is to
be found in Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra", one
stanza of which I shall quote:

"Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold:
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame:
Young, all lay in dispute; I shall
known, being old."

To Conrad youth bears the light and all is darkness when youth is gone; to Brown-
ing youth is only half of life and the light for the whole comes from a friendly God.
To Conrad youth walks beside his opportunity but that opportunity is veiled until he has come to terms with an unfriendly Fate. Youth steels itself to meet its opportunity unveiled - but the price is great and the meeting brief. However, Conrad sees the justification for such an ordeal in the final self conquest. Anyway it is our destiny and not to be avoided.

Conrad's
characters
aristocratic.

It is the highly developed individual who carries in his brain the epic of his race. Sometimes I think Conrad has chosen situations for his heroes which lie beyond the experiences of most men and, therefore, not typical. Perhaps he does this to show that with the light of youth any meridian may be crossed. Be that as it may, Conrad's

communication with his reader is in the quick, and many of his pages are steeped in enchantment.