



## **YOUTH**

based on the story by Joseph Conrad

A HomeschoolRadioShows Listening Guide

### **Summary**

This episode of the CBS Radio Adventure Theater, originally broadcast in 1977, dramatizes the story "Youth", by Joseph Conrad, an autobiographical tale of a young man's first voyage as second mate aboard a cargo vessel. Unfortunately, it is a doomed ship, plagued by one hardship after another, which affects the crew in many ways – and severely tests the young Marlow's idealism and romantic optimism of life. It is an exciting adventure story for all ages.

### **About the Story, "Youth"**

*(information taken from Wikipedia)*

**"Youth"** is an autobiographical short story by Joseph Conrad. It was written in 1898 and included as the first story in the 1902 volume **Youth, a Narrative, and Two Other Stories**. This volume also includes *Heart of Darkness* and *The End of the Tether*, which are concerned with maturity and old age, respectively. "Youth" is narrated by Charles Marlow who is also the narrator of *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Chance*. In youth, Marlow is depicted his first journey to the East as second mate on board the ill-fated cargo ship, *Judea*.

The ship's motto, "Do or Die," seems to foreshadow events to come in the future.

Because Marlow was only twenty and already a second mate, he was very excited about his first voyage to the East. But bad winds and weather make the first part of the voyage very difficult: it took the ship 16 weeks to get from London to the Tyne River. When they arrived at the docks they had lost their turn to load and remained there for a month.

Once the ship was loaded with its cargo of coal, a crew was assembled, and the voyage to Bangkok was begun. Soon after they shipped out, the Judea began to leak. In order to stay afloat, the crew took shifts trying to pump the water out: each watch would pump their entire four hour shift.

In spite of all of their efforts, the ship had to return to their port in Tyne. The shipwrights caulked the seams and repaired the other damage, the cargo of coal was reloaded, a new crew assembled, and the Judea left for Bangkok again.

This time the ship traveled only about 300 miles when a storm flooded the ship. Once again they had to return to Tyne where they were docked for six months. They were in port so long that the local people began to make fun of them.

Finally, the ship was re-caulked, and got a new copper-bottom; the cargo was reloaded. Oddly enough, now that the Judea was finally sound, all the rats were seen leaving the ship.

Far out at sea the crew noticed an odd smell but it was disregarded; however once the smoke was visible, it was obvious that the cargo was on fire. Because the coal had gotten wet, both from the leaks and from sitting out in the rain for several weeks, the cargo spontaneously combusted.

To quench the fire they tried starving it by sealing it up; they tried pumping water into the hold. Eventually the coal dust exploded and severely damaged the ship. The crew assessed the damage and noticed more smoke coming from what was left of the cargo.

They spotted a steamer that agreed to tow them to Anjer or Batavia, but the added speed of the towing fanned the smoldering cargo and it burst into flames again. The captain of the steamer offered to take them to Singapore, but Captain Beard declined so that his crew could salvage whatever they could from the doomed vessel.

As the ship was burning, the crew gathered as much of the ship's gear as they could to save for the investors. While Marlow worked on getting the escape boats ready, the rest of the crew was having a meal of bread, cheese, and stout and the captain took a nap.

After the crew was finally persuaded to leave the ship, the three boats drifted away from the Judea, but lingered long enough to see it burn and sink into the sea.

The Judea's three boats sailed north separately. Marlow's boat was without a sail, but he made one from a spare oar and part of an awning. His boat was overmasted, but Marlow was determined to beat the other boats to shore and safety, which he did.

Eventually they all met up at a port in Java and found a steam ship from Singapore, who gave them a lift back home.

This story is about the exuberance of youth and the romantic illusions that the young have about life. It is a "coming of age" story and the burning of the ship could represent the loss of Marlow's youth. Although he leaves his youthful illusions behind, at the end of the tale, Marlow clearly misses the optimism and romance of youth. The story ends with the phrase "the romance of illusions" which time and age have seemed to destroy.

## About the Author



**Joseph Conrad** (born Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski; 3 December 1857 – 3 August 1924) was a Polish novelist. Many critics regard him as one of the greatest novelists in the English language—a fact that is remarkable as he did not learn to speak English fluently until he was in his twenties (and always with a Polish accent).

Conrad is recognized as a master prose stylist. Some of his works have a strain of romanticism, but more importantly he is recognized as an important forerunner of modernist literature. His narrative style and anti-heroic characters have influenced many writers, including Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Graham Greene, William S. Burroughs, Joseph Heller, V.S. Naipaul and John Maxwell Coetzee.

Conrad's novels and stories have also inspired such films as *Sabotage* (1936, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, adapted from Conrad's *The Secret Agent*); *Apocalypse Now* (1979, adapted from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*); *The Duellists* (a 1977 Ridley Scott adaptation of Conrad's *The Duel*, from *A Set of Six*); and a

1996 film inspired by *The Secret Agent*, starring Bob Hoskins, Patricia Arquette and Gérard Depardieu.

Writing during the apex of the British Empire, Conrad drew upon his experiences serving in the French and later the British Merchant Navy to create novels and short stories that reflected aspects of a world-wide empire while also plumbing the depths of the human soul. Conrad became a naturalized British citizen in 1886.

## **Discussion Questions**

Is this story based on a real life incident? Whose life?

Why do you think Conrad title this story "Youth"?

What kind of perspective toward life does Marlow seem to have?

Why do you think Marlow had the kind of outlook on life he had?

How does it affect his responses to the events that occur through this story?

Does a person's perspective or attitude toward life change as we get older? Why or why not?

Have any of your attitudes and opinions changed as you have grown up? Do you think they will continue to change?

What part of this story was most memorable for you?

What did you learn from this story?

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