My Personal Review:
This is, as another reviewer put it, a different Conrad at work. Contrasted to the detached narration of the classic Nostromo or even Marlowes insightful presence in Lord Jim, Heart of Darkness, and Chance, Conrad delves much deeper into the story here with a protagonist first person narration. And, this tale of first love seems deeply personal. If you ever thought that there is more to love than three simple words, then read this book. Nowhere else, to my knowledge, has Conrad shared so much of his own views on the mystery and power of love. And, he does so with so many beautiful passages. Or, as Henry James described, so many meandering discourses that surround a thought or idea from all angles, but ultimately fails to fully identify it.
Whereas in the Rescue Conrad paired a love story with high adventure, the love story here is the main event. Although the protagonist is running guns, such is only recounted in passing. Consequently, the reader is left with a bare view of the romance (at least from the mans perspective), and I think Conrads ideas on love come across better than in the Rescue. As with that novel and to a lesser extent Conrads stories A Smile of Fortune and the Planter of Malata, the reader is left wondering why some things cannot seem to be resolved in Conrads world between two lovers. In Chance, love conquered the circumstances and personalities, so we know Conrad thought it possible, but the Arrow of Gold suggests his opinion that
this is the exception and not the rule. And, maybe that is for the best sometimes.
Characteristically, the novel is a slow starter, but once you make it through the first hundred pages or so, you'll be drawn into the psychological, romantic adventure. The dialogue is quite dramatic by today's standards, but it never bothered me. Rather, I was struck by the thoughtfully deliberate speech of the characters. The art of conversation, I suspect, is lost on modern generations, with so much entertainment around us all of the time.
The themes and message in The Arrow of Gold rank with Conrads best efforts, though the dramatic presentation is not as sophisticated or groundbreaking as in Nostromo or Lord Jim. So, while it is not Conrads masterpiece in terms of the novel itself, I found it to be very powerful narrative worthy of more attention than it has received, which hopefully will change now that the Arrow of Gold is back in print.

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