Unit 6 "Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus"
+ "Aspects of the Novel" (16.03.2011)

Literary Impressionism
Sorted in several categories:
One of the categories is symbolism and it is applicable to modernist fiction. It originates from the art
movement and is greatly influenced by French symbolist Baudelaire, Mallarme.

Literary impressionism means when the writer focuses on the mental state of the characters,
impressions, feelings rather than on descriptions. Direct representation of the mental states of the
characters;
Impressionists: Conrad, Woolf, Joyce

Joseph Conrad: "Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus"

What is the task of the artist?
- It is a Preface to the novel "Nigger of the Narcissus" written in 1897-1898 published in the book
edition of the novel. The novel in which Conrad shows his craftsmanship. It talks about the art of
the artist. Artist means novelist in the preface.
The subtitle is the "TASK OF THE ARTIST". The importance is on the reality. Conrad in the
Henry James as all other theoreticians underline the meaning of the artist should reflect life;
the opposite of romantic fiction where heroic age is present, the reality and life is VIP.

Conrad underlines the importance of truth and of the definition of art
"And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render a just kind of justice to the
visible universe, by bringing into effect the manifold and opposite "living" elements of every aspect"

When he says art he means fiction. What does single-minded attempt means? An attempt of the
single writer to render justice to the visible universe. The definition of art is justice to the
visible universe, by rendering the manifold and opposite elements of every aspect.

He makes a comparison between a novelist and a scientist in order to underline the scope of the
novelist. He says that the novelist plunges into ideas whereas the scientist plunges into facts. The
ideas of the novelist are different and the novelist appeal is superior because the novelist looks from
within himself and what appeals to the part of the reader is the gift e.g. sense of mystery; The
appeal of the scientists is transitory because acts are substitute with new facts. Although the appeal
of the scientist may seem short it is long and enduring.

The motif justifies the matter; "Everything can be a subject matter of fiction", any obscure episode-
Woolf says the same.

In the manifesto of Conrad’s literary impressionism he explains how he appeals to the readers. The
appeal of the writer to the appeal of the reader; He appeals to the reader through impressions
which are conveyed through senses.

Another parallel is made between a writer and a painter (color), musician (sounds), sculptor (hand,
materials). The special vehicle for the writer is the word. The writer can be compared to all these
people because the writer also appeals through impressions. That’s why he is similar.

What is the task of the artist?
The task of the artist is by the power of the written word to make the readers hear, feel and SEE.
Conrad takes the position of impressionist, Senses are underlined. We receive what the writer has
done through our senses.

He emphasizes the importance of the moment. Objective time- moment- a transient but Conrad
wants to freeze it, capture the time and reveal the substance of truth.