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## “THE POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD”: LITERARY IMPRESSIONISM IN CONRAD’S “YOUTH”<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Joseph Conrad’s famous statement in the “Preface” to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* – “my task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word... to make you see” – is often taken as a pithy expression of the goal of the impressionist movement in literature. It implies devising a method of writing which would enable the reader to visualize with special acuteness the scenes and events presented in a narrative. However, in his study, *What Was Literary Impressionism?* (2018), Fried proposes a new understanding of this literary movement which foregrounds the act of writing itself. Based on his analysis of the impressionists’ works, primarily those of Stephen Crane and Joseph Conrad, Fried argues that what these authors “make the reader see” is in fact the very scene of writing. As Fried maintains, the impressionists unwittingly and automatically metaphorize the action of inscription, the materiality and the production of writing, through motifs such as upturned faces, maps and charts, or the relation between visual and aural signifiers. The paper proposes to analyse Conrad’s well-known short story, “Youth”, by referring both to the traditional understanding of the power of words in impressionism, and to Fried’s poststructuralist one, by laying emphasis on the following aspects of the writing process: erasure and inscription.

**Key words:** Joseph Conrad, Michael Fried, literary impressionism, impressionist techniques, scene of writing

### 1. Impressionism: The Traditional Perspective

Impressionism as a literary movement originated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Literary works which emerged within this movement were focused on an individual’s personal impressions and experiences, aiming to depict characters, scenes and actions from a subjective point of view. The process of perception is given special prominence in these works. As van Gunsteren points out, in literary impressionism “writers had to interpret the world around them for themselves” and make sense of their own experience (1990: 19). According to John G. Peters, the author of an extensive study titled *Conrad and Impressionism* (2001), impressionists realized that “knowledge always comes through the medium

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of human subjectivity”, implying that objects do not possess universal features which are perceived equally by everyone, as the fiction of the realist movement previously seemed to imply (Peters 2001: 14). In impressionism, reality is viewed as a combination of sensations which are filtered through one’s consciousness and consequently transformed into impressions. The boundaries and distinctions between objects remain “fluid” due to the fact that an onlooker perceives an object “in the context of a seamless flow of experience” (ibid., 45). Furthermore, impressionists acknowledge the fact that a person’s experience is comprised of fragments, which they aim to depict in their works.

The characters’ ability to understand and make sense of their general surroundings represents one of the dominant themes of this movement. As Van Gunsteren points out, the verb “to see” is often used in impressionist fiction to imply comprehension because, for these authors, “a character’s ability to see is synonymous with his ability to interpret his own experience coherently” (Gunsteren, 1990: 19). On a similar note, Tod Bender explains that the authors of that time want to “render an affair” in their writings, instead of merely describe the details of an event (1997: 6). This means that they do not focus on the objective occurrences that comprise the plot; rather, they center their attention on the comprehension process of the character who is perceiving the said events. To achieve this goal, the impressionist authors apply the narrative techniques which, in the words of Peters (2001: 2) “represent the way human beings obtain knowledge”, while focusing on an individual perception of reality. Instead of presenting the world from the viewpoint of an omniscient observer, who would give the reader access to unlimited information that would have been inaccessible to a single observer, the impressionists present the individual point of view of a character. Among the various techniques that they employ are first-person or limited third person narration, the use of evocative language to convey sense impressions, achronological narration, and juxtaposition.

No definition of literary impressionism would be complete without taking into account Conrad’s famous “Preface” to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* (1897), which has often been regarded as a manifesto of literary impressionism (Saunders, 2005: 205). Conrad’s celebrated preface asserts that the main role of the writer is to use written words in order to encourage the reader to hear, feel, and, most importantly, see the scenes which are not literally there on the page in front of him, but which the letters, words and sentences seek to evoke: “my task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see!” (Conrad, 1914: 140). In his study *Conrad in the nineteenth century* (1979), Watt elaborates on the “Preface”, explaining that Conrad was convinced that everything in a work of art “began with the sense-impressions made by external reality on the individual consciousness” (1979: 79). However, Conrad did not merely wish to convey the writer’s sensory impressions to the reader and make him a passive recipient of the written work. Instead, as Watt explains, Conrad believed that what was needed was “some intermediate psychological center in which the individual can remember and compare all the impressions made by the external world” and discern their meaning (ibid.). The fact the artists are capable

of appealing to our senses also gives them the unique ability to address this inward faculty which Conrad considered universally human. It is for this reason that a writer needs to use evocative language in his prose and aid the reader in visualizing a scene. Furthermore, Watt explains that the word ‘make’ is closely related to the characteristics of Conrad’s fiction and its “steady narrative pressure” which prompts the reader to view the situation from a specific angle (ibid., 83). As for the verb ‘to see’, both Watt and Peters argue that Conrad uses it to denote more than just a person’s ability to perceive visual impressions. As Peters points out, the connotations of the word *see* in Conrad’s texts “obviously include the perception not only of visual impressions, but of ideas” (2001: 35).

In the later chapters of his study, Watt introduces the term *delayed decoding*, which is his name for one of Conrad’s most striking impressionist techniques; as Watt explains, it “functions as a verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter’s attempt to render visual sensations directly” (1979: 176). This technique, which frequently appears in Conrad’s fiction, allows the author to portray a character’s direct sensations, while also enabling the reader to become aware of the temporal gap between the immediate sensual impressions and their consequent rational comprehension. Since the reader is presented with “the chronological sequence of momentary sensations in the protagonist’s mind”, he is able to notice the temporal delay which occurs when the protagonist tries to make sense of these impressions (ibid.). In other words, delayed decoding enables the reader to experience each step in the comprehension process of the character who is actively trying to understand a scene or event. This narrative technique is based on the presupposition that the reader’s understanding of the story is limited to the consciousness of the fictional character. As Watt explains, Conrad’s use of delayed decoding is aimed at reflecting the difficulties in “translating perception into causal or conceptual terms” (ibid., 178). Delayed decoding will be further addressed when analyzing the short story “Youth” through the traditional impressionist framework.

## 2. Michael Fried’s Approach to Impressionism

In 2018, Fried published his thought-provoking study titled *What Was Literary Impressionism?*, proposing a radical change in the perception of impressionist texts. According to Jonah Siegel, Fried has managed to create “a network of heuristic structures that allows him to relish a vision of the struggle between the artist and the medium that is at once titanic and abject” (2019: 999). In his study, Fried postulates that, while the impressionists sought to compel readers to see what was described and narrated, they also inadvertently made visible the process of writing itself. Namely, he argues that impressionists made the reader see what was actually present in front of the author when he sat down to compose his work: “the written words themselves, the white, lined sheet of paper on which they were inscribed, the marks made by his pen on the surface of the sheet, even the movements of his hand wielding the pen in the act of inscription” (Fried, 2018: 13). Fried’s fascination with literary impressionism

began after viewing Thomas Eakins's painting *The Gross Clinic* (1875) at an art exhibition. Eakins's *The Gross Clinic* is an oil on canvas painting which depicts Dr. Samuel D. Gross in the process of lecturing a group of medical students in a surgical theatre. It occurred to Fried that the acclaimed surgeon, who was portrayed holding a blood-tipped scalpel, resembled the image of a painter standing before his canvas and holding a paintbrush. The idea that Eakins's painting contained a hidden representation of the painter in the act of creating his work prompted Fried to transfer this analogy to the field of writing. He then examined a number of texts from the end of the nineteenth century for what he believed they revealed about their authors' preoccupations at the moment when they were creating their work. While Fried refers to Conrad's famous claim regarding the "power of the written word", and its ability to "make us see", he is not interested in how a writer can compose his narrative so as to make the reader visualize a scene. Instead, his focus is on unveiling the reoccurring imagery that foregrounds the scene of writing.

Nevertheless, Fried realizes that when such motifs unconsciously appeared in the works of impressionists, they posited a threat to their project due to the fact that they "called into question the very basis of writing as communication" (ibid.). The impressionists' predominant focus on conjuring up scenes and images made them especially anxious to conceal the writing process and mask the existence of the written word. Otherwise, if the materiality of writing was foregrounded, "the narrative continuity would be threatened and the writing in question could turn into mere mark" (ibid., 15–16). This is why Fried claims that the materiality of writing is at the same time brought forth and subdued in the works of the impressionist authors. It is brought forth because, in most cases, the materiality "doesn't call attention to itself" when one proceeds to read a text, and subdued because, if it became visible, "the very possibility of narrative continuity would be lost" (ibid., 16). In Fried's opinion, the authors' eagerness to suppress the materiality of the writing process contributed to the poetic intensity of their works. He claims that the scenes which depict the images of dead or dying bodies, violent acts directed at a body, or memories of such acts, actually portray the writer's struggle to conceal the writing process. This is the reason why, as Fried argues, the impressionist project is "profoundly conflicted" and in a sense "tortured" (ibid., 15).

Fried begins his analysis by investigating Stephen's Crane short two-part narrative called "The Upturned Face" (1900). The story, which takes place during the time of the American Civil War, portrays the burial of a dead officer by two fellow soldiers under enemy fire. The central figure of the story is the image of the chalk-blue face of the dead man which is facing upwards. As Fried explains, the upturned face is "the principal object of the characters' attention" (2018: 9). The two soldiers, who are standing beside the corpse, experience repugnance at the prospect of having to cover the dead man's face with dirt, and hesitate to complete the burial. Fried's main argument is that "The Upturned Face" has a metapoetic dimension as it actually reveals the process of its own creation. In order to explain how he came to this conclusion, he puts forward his theory of the spaces of reality and the written text. He states that real life space and the space which is seen in fictional

representations are radically different, arguing that there is a contrast between “the allegedly upright or erect space of reality and the horizontal space of writing and drawing”, and that this contrast poses a problem when representing vertical objects on a horizontal plane (ibid., 11). It is for this reason that a human character who is normally standing upright and “so to speak forward-looking” needs to be made “horizontal and upward-facing, so as to match the horizontality and the upward-facingness of the blank page” on which the author writes (ibid.). After applying this argument to Crane’s short story, Fried comes to the conclusion that the upturned face in his narrative represents the sheet of white writing paper that the author had before himself at the moment of literary creation.

Fried also investigates Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895), which depicts the life of a ruined Dutch merchant on Borneo, married to a native Malayan woman. According to Fried, the novel thematizes the act of erasure, the process by which a writer erases the traces of his previous writing. In the novel, Almayer desperately wants his daughter Nina to be integrated into Western society and for that reason sends her to a European school in Singapore. Once Nina returns to Borneo, she falls in love with a Malayan, Dain Maroola. Fried comments on a scene in which Almayer swears that he will forget his daughter Nina after she has completely turned to her mother’s Malayan tradition and eloped with her Malay lover. He explains that Almayer’s blank and expressionless face represents a visible portrayal of erasure, due to the fact that “all passion, regret, grief, hope and anger” have been erased from it (Conrad, 1895: 190). Additionally, after his daughter leaves him, Almayer acts upon his vow and performs a symbolic act of erasure as he buries the traces of her feet in the sand, so that each footprint resembles a miniature tomb. Here, erasure is portrayed as “a visible marking over of preexisting writing” (Fried, 2018: 37). Symbolically, it represents the act of writing over a text, while at the plot level it suggests that the narrative of Almayer’s life has essentially changed.

Fried claims that Conrad also makes visible the scene of writing by suggesting an analogy between a white sheet of paper and an uncharted map. Namely, as he explains, whenever a map appears in an impressionist text, the white space on the map may be equated with the blank surface of a page because it represents an area of limitless opportunities for the author. In many of Conrad’s novels and stories, in particular, the blank surface of a page “which is described as a field of boundless possibility for the writer seated before it”, is juxtaposed to a blank map depicting the Third World countries in the imperialist era, “which functions as a comparable field of imaginative self-realization for the young male Europeans” (ibid., 53). Fried notices such imagery in Conrad’s short story “Youth”, adding that its youthful protagonist, Marlow, is implicitly compared to a blank page ready to be filled with inscription. In the following sections of this paper, the narrative of “Youth” will be examined, first by referring to the traditional understanding of its impressionist elements, and then by referring to Fried’s theories on the thematization of writing.

### 3. The Traditional Reading of Conrad's "Youth"

This section will offer a reading of Conrad's short story "Youth" based on the traditional understanding of literary impressionism, its aims and techniques. "Youth" is a short story which describes Marlow's first voyage to the Eastern waters on board the ship *Judea*. The frame narrative depicts a middle-aged Marlow conversing and drinking with four other men as he tells them the story pertaining to his youth. He explains to his companions that when he was a young man of twenty, he undertook his first sea voyage as a second mate on an old ship *Judea* bound for Bangkok. The voyage proved to be a very turbulent experience, with the ship facing numerous troubles. At first, the *Judea* was rammed by a steamship in Newcastle harbour, and then further damaged by gales in the English Channel. Afterwards, it underwent endless repairs at Falmouth, before finally setting out to Bangkok. However, just as the crew set sail after making some additional repairs to the ship's hull, its cargo of coal caught fire. After a long struggle to control the fire, an explosion off Sumatra forced the crew to abandon ship and seek refuge on the lifeboats.

It is important to note that through all of these misfortunes, it is the possibility of finally seeing the mythical East that keeps Marlow's hope alive. This subjective perspective of the optimistic, youthful Marlow offers an ironic counterpoint to the story's main events. Thus, for him, the *Judea* is not "an old rattle-trap" (as it is for the middle-aged, cynical Marlow who narrates it to his companions), but "the test, the trial of life" (Conrad, 1903:7). Marlow's youthful enthusiasm makes him too self-preoccupied to feel the tribulations of the ship. Instead, he sees everything as an adventure.

In order to enable the reader to be an immediate witness to a crucial event in the story, Conrad employs a narrative technique which Watt has labelled "delayed decoding". As explained above, delayed decoding "combines the forward temporal progression of the mind" during the moment that it receives signals from the exterior world "with the much slower reflexive process" that characterizes the way in which a human being usually makes out their meaning (Watt, 1979: 175). As Watt argues, by employing this narrative technique, Conrad enables the reader to come into intense sensory contact with the events. His use of delayed decoding reaches its climax in Marlow's description of the final explosion on the *Judea*:

The carpenter's bench stood abaft the mainmast: I leaned against it sucking at my pipe, and the carpenter, a young chap, came to talk to me. He remarked, 'I think we have done very well, haven't we?' and then I perceived with annoyance the fool was trying to tilt the bench. I said curtly, 'Don't, Chips,' and immediately became aware of a queer sensation, of an absurd delusion, —I seemed somehow to be in the air. I heard all round me like a pent-up breath released—as if a thousand giants simultaneously had said Phoo!—and felt a dull concussion which made my ribs ache suddenly. No doubt about it—I was in the air, and my body was describing a short parabola. But short as it was, I had the time to think several thoughts in, as far as I can remember, the following order: 'This can't be the carpenter—What is it?—Some

accident—Submarine volcano?—Coals, gas!—By Jove! we are being blown up—Everybody's dead—I am falling into the after-hatch—I see fire in it' (Conrad, 1903: 13).

Watt explains that “the very slowness of the decoding makes us smile at Marlow’s impercipience” (Watt, 1979: 178). At first, Marlow is standing abaft the mainmast and leaning against the carpenter’s bench when the carpenter comes up to talk to him. Marlow perceives the young man with annoyance, believing that he is trying to slant the bench, and tells him to stop. Seconds later, he notices something strange happening all around him. He comes to realize that his feet are no longer on the ground and that he is flying. Watt argues that Conrad succeeds in creating a strong effect of delayed decoding by contrasting Marlow’s initial sensations and their causes: “the odd contrast between the pedantic precision of ‘my body was describing a short parabola’ with the wild chaos of what is actually happening”, which adds a layer of irony to the story (ibid., 176). Furthermore, Watt explains that, in normal circumstances, there are various factors which influence human perception and affect our ability to perceive and recognize the most relevant and important matters related to an event. In literary impressionism, “the field of vision is not merely limited to the individual observer, but is also controlled by external and internal conditions that prevail at the moment of observation” (ibid., 178). Marlow’s untimely reaction to the explosion can be explained by taking into account the various internal and external factors that prevail at the moment when the accident occurs. Firstly, Marlow’s mind is preoccupied with other things. In the given scene, he is trying to relax for a few minutes and smoke his pipe in peace. Secondly, his habitual expectations alter his interpretation of impressions. Initially, he believes that the carpenter is the one trying to tilt the bench because he is standing near it. Thirdly, it must be noted that Marlow has many items in his range of vision when the explosion happens, and cannot focus on all of them simultaneously. It can be concluded that Conrad has successfully represented to the reader the difficulties that an individual encounters when translating sensual perceptions into concepts and comprehending their meaning – and in this way, as Watt maintains, established an impressionist technique equivalent to the ones used in visual arts (ibid., 176).

#### 4. Michael Fried’s Reading of “Youth”

Fried offers his own unique reading of the short story by foregrounding two of its aspects which, in his opinion, depict the creation of a written work: the process of word erasure and the blankness of the piece of paper in front of the author. Erasure, that is, the act of erasing a former literary representation, can be seen in the passage which describes the obliteration of the *Judea* as it sinks:

As we pulled across her stern, a slim dart of fire shot out viciously at us, and suddenly she went down, head first, in a great hiss of steam. The unconsumed stern was the last

to sink; but the paint had gone, had cracked, had peeled off, and there were no letters, there was no word, no stubborn device that was like her soul, to flash at the rising sun her creed and her name (Conrad, 1903: 21).

Even though *Judea* is destroyed, Marlow's enthusiasm is not dampened, and he is still eager to sail to Java. After a while, along with the other crew members, he manages to finally reach land. The thematic of erasure is further expressed in Marlow's two experiences of arrival – "the cursing voices and the silent gazes" (Fried, 2018: 56). At first, Marlow is dispatched to see whether the ship in the new harbour is English. The men he encounters "swore and cursed violently" at him, while their loud voices "riddled the solemn peace of the bay by a volley of abuse" (Conrad, 1903: 23). Moments later, after the men realize that Marlow is their compatriot, they take on a more pleasant tone and allow the crew of *the Judea* to seek refuge on their ship. Feeling exhausted after the whole turbulent experience, Marlow falls asleep and only awakes the next morning. When he opens his eyes, he sees the following scene:

And then I saw the men of the East—they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the color of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement (ibid., 24).

These two encounters, which occur within the span of just a few hours, cancel each other out. Namely, as Fried argues, the second experience effectively cancels, without exactly denying, the first. As Marlow wakes up after a night's sleep, he is greeted by numerous Asian faces looking at him and the jetty in silence. He then proceeds to explain that "this was the East of the ancient navigators, old, mysterious and somber" (ibid.). Therefore, this passage represents Marlow's stereotypical conception of the East as being a mysterious and uncharted region which is full of danger. However, it is important to note that Marlow's initial experience of the East was completely different. At first, he was greeted by a clamour of voices who had "riddled the solemn peace of the bay by a volley of abuse" and called him a "pig", followed by other "unmentionable adjectives" (ibid., 23). Thus, Fried explains that the second experience (the silent voices) "represents a mode of writing that renders irretrievable a prior writing (the cursing) but whose own legibility as erasure depends on a certain material survival of the original text" (Fried, 2018: 37). In other words, Marlow's initial experience of the East is not completely deleted, but concealed by a more favourable one, closer to the stereotype of the mystical Eastern realm which he has desired to experience.

Fried also argues that when writing his short story "Youth", Conrad managed "through the medium of erasure, simultaneously to bear witness to the success of the imperialistic strategy to mobilize young men", and to allow the reader to see how this strategy functions (2018: 56). He explains that, historically, the uncharted maps at the end of the nineteenth century served to help encourage the imperialistic project. When a young man sat down in front of a world map, the empty spaces on the map, the colour charts, and the exotic names of faraway places would tempt him

to join the colonial project in some capacity and explore foreign destinations. Fried adds that maps allowed imperialist tendencies to expand, “not only because they gave objective expressions to the struggle for geopolitical domination, but because they helped mobilize the youthful energies of an entire class of persons” (ibid., 53). On the surface, it appeared to the young men of that period that they were engaged in individualistic undertakings; however, in reality, they were lured to help further their country’s geopolitical rule over other nations. In other words, maps aided Britain in assembling a large mass of people into a “largely collective undertaking, whose economic and political consequences need not have been recognized as such” (ibid.).

In Fried’s interpretation, Conrad’s story “Youth” equates the uncharted space on a map (representing a blank surface on which the white man’s experience of the East, or Africa, or South America would be inscribed) with a blank piece of paper which is laid before the writer. This in turn implies that Marlow can be read as representing a blank page. This analogy is especially suggested by the scene on the jetty, when Marlow wakes up and observes the Eastern faces from his upturned, horizontal position. As Fried comments, it is “as if the scene by the jetty was visualized from the position not of the writer staring at the white paper but rather of the paper under his eyes” (Fried, 2018: 56). In this manner, as he explains, Conrad wanted to expose and depict a mobilizing tactic employed by the ruling Western classes, by which they managed to convince young men to set sail and explore unknown areas, under the assumption that they were embarking on a personal adventure:

And this suggests in turn that one of the fundamental mobilizing strategies of the “new imperialism” was to encourage its younger representatives to imagine, for all their prior formation in European society and the actual economic work they were carrying out, that they were engaged in a strictly personal enterprise of self-realization that cast them in the passive role of blank surfaces on which their experiences of the East, or Africa, or South America, would inscribe the first identity-defining marks (ibid.)

As Fried explains, young men were encouraged to imagine themselves as “blank pages” on which the experiences in the distant Third World regions would inscribe “identity-defining marks”; this in turn made them view their role in the imperialist enterprise in strictly personal terms, as a process of self-realization, while remaining oblivious to its political implications. It is for this reason that the older Marlow admits that when he was young, dreams of great and perilous adventures sustained him, and illusions allowed him to survive all the misfortunes he experienced on his journey to the fabled East. “For me,” as he sums up in the story, “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” (Conrad, 1903: 26).

## 5. Conclusion

Michael Fried’s approach to impressionism redefines the way one views the texts originating in this literary period. By turning the readers’ attention to the scene and the materiality of writing present in the works he examined, he created an entirely

new framework for the analysis of impressionist fiction. Fried is not interested in the impressionists' attempt to turn their prose into a medium for conveying sensual perceptions; instead, he focuses on uncovering the hidden imagery contained in their writings, which is associated with the very production of the literary work.

In this paper, both the traditional and the novel approach to understanding the impressionist project in literature have been applied to the analysis of Conrad's short story "Youth". When examined from a traditional critical framework, "Youth" is regarded as a work which has significantly contributed to the exploration of subjectivity and individual perception in the early twentieth century fiction (Krieger, 1959: 257). By using innovative impressionist techniques such as delayed decoding, Conrad enables the reader to directly perceive the events and conversations which are happening in the story without an intervening consciousness commenting on the scene. The reader sees the story through the protagonist's eyes and follows his thought process as he gradually uncovers the details of an event from his limited point of view.

Fried, on the other hand, offers a completely novel reading of Conrad's story. He argues that in "Youth" Conrad successfully dramatizes the effects of the dominant strategies to mobilize young men and encourage them to explore and conquer new uncharted lands. By drawing a parallel between a blank page laid before a writer, a "space of delightful mystery", and the white space on the map, Conrad demonstrates how these strategies managed to prompt white male Europeans in the late nineteenth century to participate in a nationalistic enterprise (Fried, 2018: 232). In this particular case, Fried uses his theories regarding the thematization of writing not only to show how Conrad's story reveals the materiality of the writing process, but also to suggest how it reveals the workings of the imperialist ideology.

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## MOĆ PISANE REČI: IMPRESIONIZAM U KONRADOVOJ PRIPOVECI „MLADOST“

Čuvena izjava Džozefa Konrada u „Predgovoru“ za roman *Crnac sa „Narcisa“* – „moj zadatak koji pokušavam da ostvarim je, snagom pisane reči... da vas navedem da vidite“ – često se navodi kao jezgroviti prikaz ciljeva impresionističkog pokreta u književnosti. Konradov iskaz odnosi se na pripovedne tehnike čiji je cilj pre svega da čitaocu dočaraju čulne utiske i omoguće mu da jasno vizualizuje scene i događaje prikazane u narativu. Međutim, u studiji *Šta je bio književni impresionizam?* (2018), Majkl Frid predlaže nov pristup ovom književnom pokretu, koji bi u prvi plan stavio sam čin pisanja. Analizirajući dela impresionista kao što su Stiven Krejn i Džozef Konrad, Frid dolazi do zaključka da je ono što ovi autori „navode čitaoca da vidi“ zapravo sama scena pisanja. Kako Frid tvrdi, impresionisti nesvesno i automatski u svojim delima dočaravaju čin pisanja, kao i materijalnost i proizvodnju pisma, kroz motive kao što su lica i tela u ležećem položaju, geografske mape, ili odnos između vizuelnih i zvučnih označitelja. U radu se analizira Konradova poznata pripovetka „Mladost“ sa osvrtom na tradicionalno shvatanje moći reči u impresionizmu, kao i na Fridovo, poststrukturalističko, pri čemu se naglasak stavlja na sledeće aspekte procesa pisanja: brisanje i upisivanje.

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