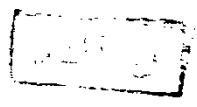


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FORD MADDOX FORD AS A MODERN NOVELIST
(1873-1939)

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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P R E F A C E

Ford Madox Hueffer changed his surname to Ford after World War I for obvious reasons. He was the son of Francis Hueffer, the German music critic of the Times, and of Catherine, daughter of the pre-Raphaelite English painter Ford Madox Brown. He therefore belonged to three literary generations.

Ford was a social critic, a psychological novelist and a moral novelist. He was an English rebel whose early gods were men like Turgenev and Tolstoy. He developed his own standards basing them on precepts learned from his father and his grandfather. This thesis focuses attention on his background and his critical views of writing novels.

In the Introduction to my thesis, I have first pointed out the influence on Ford's work of the literary movements of his day. Ford was usually called "the last of the pre-Raphaelites", due to the influence of the pre-Raphaelites on him. He gained from them his emotionalism and his intensely personal evaluations of art and life. His social idealism, his antagonism to modern industrialized society, and his interest in medievalism are reflected in the subject matter and themes of many

books which number seventy works of fiction, poetry, propaganda, criticism, biography and historical fiction.

To Ford, the novel was a mirror of society and the novelist's function was to draw an unbiased picture of the world we live in. As Ford once put it, "the novelist should be an exact scientist, never appearing, never buttonholing the reader, never moralizing."

Ford strongly opposed the great Victorian moralists of the nineteenth century, who depended on elaborate diction and their idealism. They also neglected precision of language. According to Ford, the function of art was to render life as it is, to educate but not to teach a direct moral lesson.

Ford's method of narrative technique is his belief that the novel, as a work of art, was a distinct genre to be explored and developed in terms of form, not of social ideas or of mere subject matter. Ford said: "it is only the finding of a New Form that is a worthy occupation". The writer should be a conscious craftsman who renders events in order to achieve an illusion of reality.

Ford explains what the characters do by analyzing

why they do it. He depended on cause and effect and not on chance.

Ford always began his novels with human situations, subject matter was relatively unimportant for the how is more significant than the what, to produce beauty in art. That was a shift in emphasis in the modern novel.

As to the Fordian hero, Ford used the double perspective in technique. The public hero was to be both admired and condemned. Ford condemned the existing public hero of the Great Victorians.

Ford's collaboration with Conrad was based on the fact that both admired Flaubert. Both talked about novel writing, about construction, style, le mot juste. Out of the talk grew a theory of 'the impressionist novel'. Life does not narrate, they argued, it makes impressions on our brains. Events were arranged in a psychological, not a chronological order. They therefore relied heavily on juxtaposition, time-shift and progression d'effet.

Chapter I deals with some of Ford's early novels and reveals Ford's development as a novelist. Ford's early novels of contemporary life recall a civilization that has vanished. They were experimentations in tech-

nique and show Ford's development from apprentice to craftsman. They are his pre-war novels which he subtitled romances: romances of contemporary life and historical romances. He dealt with "unromantic realities" as basic themes. Ford wrote about the need for love and for money and also to behave well under pressure. The novels that have been dealt with are fairy tales, for example The Brown Owl, The Feather and The Queen Who Flew, historical novels like The Fifth Queen, The Half Moon and Ladies Whose Bright Eyes.

Chapter II deals with The Good Soldier, one of Ford's masterpieces and his best book technically. It is a Pre-War novel, but written in 1915, and has for major theme: appearances have their reality. It is "a tale of passion" and of suffering. The Pre-War years seemed to make this novel relevant to a western world undergoing moral and psychological turmoil and collapse.

The Good Soldier was written in one of the gloomiest periods Ford knew: the beginning of war and the end of his marriage. Besides, there was the scandal over his relationship with Violet Hunt. His financial problems were great at that time, in addition to his loss of certain close friends.

Finally, Chapter III deals with Ford's other masterpiece: Parade's End. Beginning with the period just before the war, and ending shortly after, this tetralogy treats war as a kind of catastrophe, repugnant to thought, unrelated to any coherent or tolerable conception of life. Ford pictures a civilization in which the last vestiges of feudalism and hereditary aristocracy have been shattered and modernism is triumphant. He does not tell, he shows and seeing is believing. Ford has employed very brilliantly the modern structure of the novel in which the events are linked together partly chronologically, and partly by their realization or recurrence in the consciousness and memory of the various principal persons involved.

This thesis is also an attempt to show Ford's contribution to the modern novel. His very choice of themes as pastoralism, and escapism to the countryside, from a socially decaying world, is significant. Again, his theme of the protagonist who is out of tune with modern times and his double perspective of the hero, who is both admired and condemned, is revealed. Also, his contribution to his technique and his use of time-shift,

the juxtaposing of events and the progression d'effet, all lead to the Impressionist theory of the novel.

Ford's writing career did not end with Parade's End. A decade filled with novels and volumes of reminiscences remained to him. But Parade's End, however, seems the proper book on which to close a study of Ford. For, like Henry James, Ford spent the last years defining and refining his "sense of the past."

FORD MADOX FORD AS A MODERN NOVELIST (1873-1939)

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Background and some of his views on novel writing:

Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939) was born Ford Hermann Hueffer. Disliking his German surname, he changed it during World War I. His father, Dr Francis Hueffer, was the German-born music critic of the London Times, a champion of Wagner, and ex-pupil of Schopenhauer, and a close friend of Williams Morris. His mother was the daughter of Ford Madox Brown, the Pre-Raphaelite painter. By marriage, the Rossettis - Dante Gabriel, William Michael and Christina - were part of the family circle. This was the brilliant literary and artistic world in which Ford was reared. But his world was also one of foreigners, of people outside the mainstream of English culture.

He married Elsie Martindale, the seventeen year old daughter of a famous manufacturing chemist and whose mother had been matron of a Dublin hospital. After Ford's and Elsie's elopement and marriage, they settled in a country cottage where Ford wrote poetry, inherited 3,000 pounds, and took up golf. They had two daughters.

Unfortunately, the marriage failed, and since Ford could not obtain a divorce to remarry, he lived an unconventional life with Violet Hunt, an English bluestocking, eleven years older than himself.

* * *

Of all the major influences on Ford, that of his grandfather, Ford Madox Brown, was perhaps the strongest. He influenced and encouraged Ford towards art. He also gave Ford a rule of behaviour in life which Ford himself always tried to follow. The young Ford quotes him as saying:

Fordie, never refuse a lame dog over a stile. Never lend money: always give it. When you give money to a man that is down, tell him that it is to help him to get up; ... Beggar yourself rather than refuse assistance to anyone whose genius you think shows promise of being greater than your own.-

Moreover, Ford's grandfather was entirely devoted to his work of art, and never changed anything artistic for the sake of flattering a prospective buyer.

As to Ford's father, he taught Ford the need of internationalism in art. Dr. Hueffer introduced Ford to European culture, especially French literature and Ger-

¹Ford Madox Hueffer, Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1910), pp. 197-8

that time. Like his father, Ford became an enthusiastic publisher of prose in his later years, and during the period of his collaboration with Joseph Conrad, Ford joined a group of men who took a continental attitude towards writing.

Another formative influence on Ford was that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood he admired. The Pre-Raphaelites advocated the right of the artist to represent life as he saw it. Ford gained from them his emotionalism and his deep personal evaluations of art and life.

His social idealism, his attraction to modern individualism and to the interest in humanitarianism, all trace back to the artistic father and to some of his novels, clearly seen from the childhood through the Pre-Raphaelites. From them he acquired the lifelong interest in human suffering. His love of conversation and sympathy with the direction of political opinion.

At the same time Ford admired the originality of Madox Brown's work as being different from that of the other Pre-Raphaelites. The Pre-Raphaelites were somewhat imitative and suppressed individuality. They admired Italian painters of the 15th century and aimed at

¹ Richard A. Cassell, Ford Madox Ford: A Study of His Novels. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1929, Chap. II, p. 11.