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Ford, Modernism and Postmodernism

Isabelle Brasme

Whilst devoting a chapter to modernism will undoubtedly seem a prerequisite in a Research Companion on Ford Madox Ford, extending the topic to postmodernism may appear perplexing when dealing with an author who was born in 1873 and died in 1939. Due to the time frame of his writing, his collaborations with Conrad and his allegiance to authors such as James or Flaubert, Ford has mostly been identified as a transitional figure straddling *fin-de-siècle*, Edwardian literature and modernism. His links with various modernist movements and authors are well known. Nevertheless, as this chapter will show, fitting Ford's literary technique within a distinct literary period, even one as heterogeneous as modernism, can prove a challenging, if not impossible task, and one that has been much addressed by scholarship over the past few decades. This chapter will examine the existing criticism on the oft-debated question of Ford's relationship to avant-garde and modernist movements, and as a result of its survey will propose an alternative view of the difficulty in situating Ford in a stable position within the aesthetics of his time. Ford's writing may be considered as questioning the long-established categories of 'realism', 'modernism' and 'postmodernism'. The divide between these categories has lately been reconsidered by critics; examining the lack of fixity of Ford's position therefore contributes actively to the current debate on literary periodisation.

I will start by examining the more widespread position that establishes Ford as a central figure within modernism, not least due to his role as editor of modernist journals. In the second part, criticism that has tended to relegate Ford to the margins of modernism, or to regard his literary work as pre-modernist, will be contrasted with more recent research that has re-evaluated these points. Lastly, this chapter will examine criticism that posits Ford's work as going beyond the divide between modernist and postmodern categories.

A Well-Established Role within modernism

Despite a tendency to overlook Ford in early accounts of modernism, that he was a major contributor to English modernism has long been established, both during his literary career and in current criticism. Ford now figures prominently in studies on modernism. Michael Levenson devotes much space to Ford in his *Genealogy of Modernism* (1984)—in the preface where his name comes third amongst a list of the main figures who contributed to the emergence of modernism, in the fourth chapter which is entirely dedicated to him, as well as throughout the study. Ford, he claims, is ‘indispensable’, and due to his activity as literary journalist and editor, and as ‘the acknowledged representative of Impressionism’, Levenson proposes to ‘set him with Hulme as an exemplar of the early development of modernism’ (Levenson 1984a: 48). Ford is extensively mentioned in the volume of the *Oxford English Literary History* series devoted to the modern movement: Ford’s use of ellipses to render his characters’ uncertainty and fluid thought processes is associated with the practices of Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair, Osbert Sitwell, Rosamond Lehmann and Virginia Woolf (Baldick 2004: 66-7). The abrupt time shifts and non-linearity in his narratives, as well as the emphasis on memory, are also related to the novelistic technique of canonical modernist authors such as Joyce and Woolf (Baldick 2004: 202). Likewise, Roger Poole declared in 2003 that ‘[t]he great modernist novelists are James Joyce, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf and Ford Madox Ford’ (Poole 2003: 117).

One of the oft-mentioned tokens of Ford’s centrality to modernism is the publication of the beginning of *The Good Soldier* (then entitled ‘The Saddest Story’) in the first issue of *Blast*, edited by Wyndham Lewis and self-proclaimed as an epitome of the modern movement in England. Another indication of Ford’s currently well-established status as a major figure of English modernism is the number of currently available canonical editions of *The Good Soldier*: the Norton Critical Edition by Martin Stannard (1995; 2012) was followed with releases of the novel Penguin Classics in 2007, with an introduction by David Bradshaw, Wordsworth Classics in 2010 with introduction and notes by Sara Haslam, and Oxford World’s Classics in 2012, with an introduction by

Max Saunders. The presence of this novel in the ‘Classics’ collections of these major publishing houses bespeaks Ford’s recognition as a major author within early twentieth-century literature.¹ *Parade’s End* was likewise considered by Malcolm Bradbury as ‘a central modernist novel of the 1920s, in which it is exemplary’ (Bradbury 1992: xii).

The archetypal quality of Ford’s attitude to and within modernism is indeed particularly well described by Bradbury, the co-editor of a long-standing authoritative history of modernism (Bradbury and MacFarlane 1991); in another magisterial study published in *Edwardian and Georgian Fiction* (2005), Bradbury starts out by talking at length about Ford:

There is no doubt that one of the strangest, and most representative [figures], was the one then labelled ‘Hueffer’, though later known as ‘Ford.’ [...] He collaborated with Conrad, wrote well on James, and had literary friendships [...] with most of the major figures of the era—Conrad, James, Hardy, Stein, Jean Rhys and Robert Lowell, helping many of them to publication. He was close to every major movement, from Pre-Raphaelitism to Dada, over the fifty years of his writing life. He wrote [...] from the early 1890s to 1939, the year of his death; thus his writing life more or less matched the main span of modernism. He both enacted modernism’s story, and told it—not always accurately, but he was an ‘Impressionist’—in many books of criticism and reminiscence (Bradbury 2005: 283-4).

This account is an apt rendering of Ford’s significant place within modernism, not only as a modernist author and a scholar of modernism, but also as a representative figure in himself, through his relationships with many actors of modernism, and what could be termed his own *avant-garde* way of life: changing names; oscillating from one movement to the other; hosting well-attended literary parties; and editing modernist magazines.

¹ For a detailed survey of criticism on *The Good Soldier*, see John Attridge’s chapter.

Ford's role within modernism is indeed not only that of an author, but of a major force fostering the development of other modernist writers, especially through his activity as editor. This is the subject of Matt Huculak's chapter, so the point here is to delineate the crucial function of the *English Review* and of the *transatlantic review* within the landscape of modernism. Saunders considers that '[t]hese journals alone would have earned him a place in literary history, even had he not also been a prolific novelist, critic and poet. [...] [T]he groups of writers he gathered around his reviews helped to define modernism in its pre-war and post-war guises' (Saunders 2010: 10). In his chapter devoted to the *English Review* in *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, Saunders writes extensively on the role of the *English Review* within modernist movements, asserting that 'The *Review* signalled the presence of English modernism' (Saunders 1996a: 248). From the outset of his monograph, Saunders also defends the view that 'the period of literary modernism is "the Ford era" as much as it is Pound's, or T. S. Eliot's, or Joyce's' (Saunders 1996a: vii). Ezra Pound has always made his indebtedness to Ford clear, and has noted the specific role of Ford among '*les jeunes*': 'The revolution of the word began so far as it affected the men who were of my age in London in 1908, with the LONE whimper of Ford Madox Hueffer' (Lindberg-Seyersted 1982: 142).

Sara Haslam's monograph *Fragmenting Modernism: Ford Madox Ford, the Novel and the Great War* (2002) establishes the way in which Ford's writing fully partakes of the cultural, political and psychological context of modernism; it analyses the modernist quality of Ford's technique through the perspective of fragmentation, a key modernist feature, and develops specifically the image of the kaleidoscope. The second part of the monograph, however, focuses on the peculiarity of Ford's stance within modernism, asserting that Ford's work disputes the 'almost ubiquitous, catastrophic, slant to the [modernist] pattern' (Haslam 2002: 8), and offers in its stead a joyful celebration of the multiplicity of images and potentialities emerging from an aesthetics of fragmentation.

Likewise, in the collaborative volume *Ford Madox Ford: an Introduction* (2015), Seamus O'Malley exposes the various techniques regarded as characteristic of

modernism that are relevant to Ford's writing: non-linearity, fragmentation, the narrator's subjectivity and unreliability, and textual self-awareness. However, O'Malley concludes by underlining the other modernist practices that Ford did *not* partake in, especially the recourse to the mythical. He argues that Ford's rejection of obscure literary references allows a less esoteric reading of his work as compared to writers such as Eliot, Joyce or Pound. Likewise, Paul Skinner has recently defended the view that the esoteric mode of writing typical of 'High Modernism' 'was incompatible with his own post-war vision of the world and the novel's place in it, a vision that never excluded or undervalued some interaction with his readers' (Skinner 2014: 134). While Ford's writing thus undeniably partakes of modernist practices, his position within the modern movement remains imbued with an enduring singularity.

A Disputed Stance within Modernism

Ford's status as a modernist writer, indeed, has not always been assured. He features in authoritative studies of modernism with remarkably varying prominence; also interesting is the way in which his assimilation with one or the other sub-movements of modernism can differ from one study to the next. In an overview of modernist movements that still remains a reference guide today, Peter Nicholls includes Ford amongst the 'Men of 1914', i.e. Pound, Lewis, Eliot, and Joyce, insofar as he shares with them a central concern with time and with reconnecting modernity with the past (Nicholls 1995: 166-7); yet Ford is not mentioned in the initial list of writers that Nicholls includes under this label, and Nicholls considers that the inclusion of *The Good Soldier* within *Blast* stands at odds with the general spirit of the journal, since the "sentimental" elision of life and art' it displays 'would become the constant butt of Lewis's satire' (Nicholls 1995: 186). Taking a closer look at Ford's and Lewis's relationship, however, has allowed O'Malley to produce a more nuanced picture of the interaction between the two writers—an interaction that was more symmetrical than unbalanced. In 'The Ferociously Odd, Mutually Beneficial Editorial Relationship of Ford and Wyndham Lewis' (2010),

O'Malley argues that Ford and Lewis 'use each other as generational foils, Ford using Lewis to represent *les jeunes*—the younger avant-garde—and Lewis casting Ford as the professional man of letters whose time had passed' (O'Malley 2010: 89). Looking back to 1914 in the 'Coda' of *Return to Yesterday*, Ford considered that '[T]he *English Review* seemed then profoundly to have done its work. Ezra and his gang of young lions raged through London. They were producing an organ of their own. It was to be called—prophetically—*Blast*' (Ford 1931: 399). O'Malley emphasises the way in which Ford's *English Review* paved the way for more experimentation on the London literary scene. He also quotes Saunders's remark that Ford is

seeing Lewis as a kind of double of his artistic self, someone who is continuing his lifelong campaigns for new forms, only by other, more belligerent, means; and, most importantly, recognizing that the kind of art Lewis is advocating should not be seen as in uncompromising opposition to his own work, since he has been practicing something like it all along, perhaps without realizing it (Saunders 1996b: 190).

Along the same lines, Andrzej Gasiorek, who is editor of the *Journal of Wyndham Lewis Studies* and has written extensively on both Ford and Lewis, has argued that Ford was not supplanted by Vorticism, but was fully part of it. Gasiorek reminds us that despite the attempts by modernist movements at presenting themselves in opposition to one another, they 'were engaged in ramified negotiations with various other movements' (Gasiorek 2008: 85). He argues that besides the personal relationship connecting Ford, Lewis and Pound, the three authors were engaged in a dialogue about their respective views on what avant-garde literature should be. Although their views did not coincide, they intersected at many points. Gasiorek also disputes Nicholls' judgement of the opening section of *The Good Soldier* as being out of place in the first issue of *Blast*:

[W]as ['The Saddest Story'] really so valedictory? Was it not, rather, a *critique* of the sentimental nostalgia expressed by Dowell, which mercilessly exposed how his sexual panic (manifested as hysteria) is displaced onto a fantasised social order rooted in the perceived safety of the past? Should it not be seen as a text in which the social and cultural stasis blitzed by *Blast* is taken apart in a more forensic fashion? (Gasiorek 2008: 95)

In allowing the first section of 'The Saddest Story' to be published in *Blast*, Ford, Gasiorek argues, proposes an alternative modernism to that of Vorticism. Insofar as *Blast* was vastly eclectic in the styles it included, *The Good Soldier* was 'an integral part of this polyglot and heterogeneous mix' (Gasiorek 2008: 99). Gasiorek's essay disputes the way in which Ford and Lewis presented themselves as respectively of the past and of the future, and suggests an alternative view in which the styles upheld by either writer were engaged in a constant crisscrossing of influences.

Gasiorek also discusses the complex issue of Ford's relationship with avant-garde and tradition in his article entitled 'Ford Madox Ford's modernism and the Question of Tradition' (2001). This article is of particular importance not only insofar as it invites us to consider anew Ford's stance within modernism, and offers a much-needed re-evaluation of Ford's relationship both with tradition and avant-garde; but also because this analysis contributes an alternative perspective on the definition of modernism. Gasiorek refutes the established idea that 'modernism' should be defined first and foremost in oppositional terms with 'tradition':

The view that modernism is anti-traditional is theoretically flawed, since it relies on a monolithic conception of tradition, and empirically false, since it ignores the continuities between tradition and innovation fostered by many writers. Ford does identify a socio-cultural break with the past and he does believe that a new kind of writing is required if literature is to do justice to a transformed world, but he doesn't try to step outside traditions altogether; he traces the lineaments of a symptomatically modern tradition within which he situates his own work (Gasiorek 2001: 4).

Gasiorek carefully maps out Ford's relationship to tradition and to an aesthetic mode that is steeped in modernity. Ford's 'search for a sustaining tradition', Gasiorek asserts, 'is not just a formalist exercise but a historicising attempt to discover an aesthetic appropriate to the modern age' (Gasiorek 2001: 6). Ford's particular take on the question of art's autonomy in the modern world perhaps crystallises his ambivalence amongst his fellow Modernists. To Ford, although it should not be primarily concerned with morality, art does carry a moral impact.

Ford's Impressionism: a Modernism?

Gasiorek's re-evaluation of Ford's stance in relation to tradition and modernism is especially relevant when it comes to gauging the place Ford's literary Impressionism occupied amongst the various modernist movements. Our focus here will not be on the movement itself, as it is addressed by Rob Hawkes in 'Style, Technique, Theory', but on the way scholars have interpreted this movement as taking place either within or without modernism. Gasiorek moves on from a broad consideration of the way in which Ford's writing partakes of modernist practices, to a more specific analysis of what makes Ford's Impressionism a form of modernism:

Impressionism acknowledges the opacity and unknowability of other people; the subjective and often unreliable nature of our cognitions; and the difficulty of making sense of reality. [I]f life has become so difficult that it is 'almost impossible to see any pattern in the carpet,' then impressionism is the art par excellence which does justice to our perplexities and scepticisms; it states, Ford avers, 'the definite facts of a story, leaving to the reader the task of adopting what moral attitude he will towards a given set of circumstances. This is the modern canon' (Gasiorek 2001: 13-14).

However, where most avant-garde movements of the early twentieth-century posit themselves in stark contrast with one another and with 'tradition', Ford ceaselessly acknowledged both his indebtedness to traditional forms and to other modernist movements, especially when it came to his definition of Impressionism. This syncretism is what made literary Impressionism as theorised and practised by Ford difficult to apprehend, and what hindered for a long time its inscription within the modernist canon. Nicholls thus argues that Pound's aim in devising Imagism was to move away from Conrad and Ford's Impressionism, insofar as Conrad and Ford are focused on rendering one single moment, whilst Pound strives to create a simultaneity of sensation, a 'collision of time-schemes'. Nicholls goes so far as to posit that 'much of the subsequent history of modernism is foreshadowed in this at first sight rather trivial distinction between 'image' and 'impression' (Nicholls 1995: 171).

In his essays ‘Modernism, Impressionism, and Ford Madox Ford’s *The Good Soldier*’ (2004) and ‘Ford and Impressionism’ (2008), Saunders has addressed the reasons for the unwillingness to classify Ford’s Impressionism as a modernism. Quoting the notorious passage from ‘On Impressionism’ where Ford defines Impressionism as akin to Futurism whilst relating its practices to those of Flaubert, Saunders highlights the difficulties inherent in the description, and asks: ‘when does literary Impressionism, as Ford describes it, begin and end chronologically? The appeal to the real seems to situate Impressionism as pointing back towards Realism. [...] But then, on the other hand, Ford is saying that what he calls Impressionism is the same as Futurism: in other words, that it points forwards, towards modernism’ (Saunders 2008: 154). Saunders mentions Poole’s assessment of Ford as one of the great modernist novelists (as quoted earlier in the present chapter); but he also recalls Poole’s increasing frustration with what he considered to be a perplexing gap in Ford’s criticism, particularly in *The March of Literature*: ‘Why does Ford, who has hobnobbed with the most eminent Modernists of his day, helped many of them into print indeed, supported and cheered on unpopular figures like Joyce and Pound, not present himself as being part of that illustrious group? [...] Why is the category of modernism never discussed, never even mentioned?’ (Poole 2002: 192). Saunders’s two abovementioned essays address this conundrum. One first crucial answer has to do with the history of the term ‘modernism’:

When Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane wrote the introduction to their influential collection of essays, *modernism*, that was to define the field for a generation, they seemed untroubled by the fact that none of their many witnesses cited discussing the ‘Modern’ or the ‘New’ actually use the word ‘modernism’. [...] It is not until the 1930s that both terms begin to take on the meanings they have now, labelling a broad conscious movement, analogous to Impressionism or Symbolism or Expressionism. [...] In general, Modernists didn’t discuss ‘modernism’; it was left to their successors to establish the discourse that drew together the different schools and movements that the Modernists did discuss: fauvism, post-Impressionism, cubism, futurism, imagism, Vorticism (Saunders 2004: 426).

This argument is of critical importance when it comes to positioning Ford within modernism. It reminds us that we need to use caution when using the term ‘modernist’, a label mostly created in hindsight, which was for a long time narrowed down to representatives of ‘High Modernism’, and left out major figures, such as Ford himself.

The second answer provided in Saunders’s essays is more significant still, as it questions our usual categorisation of the literary eras in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: ‘Ford doesn’t see the decisive break as between Victorian and modernist. [...] Rather, as is implied by the structure of *The March of Literature*, the decisive break comes earlier; with the advent of Impressionism’. Ford, Saunders demonstrates, ‘disturbs our notion of literary periodization’ (Saunders 2008: 157). Rather than focusing on differences between the various literary schools, Ford was interested in pointing out ‘the continuities between Realism, Impressionism, Aestheticism, and the twentieth-century movements such as Imagism, Futurism and Vorticism [...] a change in writing coming in after the realism of Balzac or Dickens, and running through from writers like James and Stephen Crane, to those we call Modernists, but who often called themselves, or were called, Impressionist, or who wrote about the importance of the impression’ (Saunders 2008: 158). From this perspective, Impressionism as theorised and practised by Ford partakes both of realism and modernism, working as a bridge between the two, but also between the various strands of the modern movement:

Rather than being a case of critical myopia, Ford's version of literary history shows extraordinary perspicacity. The work of Flaubert, James, Conrad, Proust, Joyce and Hemingway is so varied that in terms of its subject matter or techniques it seems counter-intuitive to categorise it together. Yet once it has been demonstrated, the concern with the nature of the impression is visible as the connecting thread (Saunders 2008: 158).

In the same IFMFS volume, I write in a similar vein about the way in which Ford’s Impressionist technique can be considered as the very mode through which he negotiates a transition between tradition and modernity, whilst refusing to fixate his work as exclusively partaking of one or the other. One argument is that Ford’s literary work goes further than his own aesthetic theory. Using Todd Bender’s study on Literary

Impressionism (1997), I highlight the fact that Ford's aesthetic is rooted in the late-nineteenth-century literature and in French pictorial Impressionism, which was enacting a 'shift from a direct, "realist" representation of the world to the representation of the impression left by the world on a consciousness' (Brasme 2008: 190). However, Ford's actual practice of Impressionism in *Parade's End* appears to go beyond the definition that Ford gives of the movement in his various critical writings:

Instead of a traditionally realist narration where representation is stable, here the meeting point between the various perspectives remains vacant, since they do not converge, and thus leave the source of the impressions continually elusive. Such aesthetics breaks away from realism in that the centre of representation—in this case, the focal point where the various perspectives should concur—appears void (Brasme 2008: 192).²

However, the centre of representation, whilst elusive, remains as a potentiality: 'The text keeps pointing towards a spectral meaning which is never fully revealed, yet underlies the various perspectives. There is an initial event that triggered all the characters' impressions; but since it is never directly narrated, and since the character's points of view on that event differ, it can never be fully unearthed and reconstituted' (Brasme 2008: 193). The aesthetic at work in *Parade's End* is thus 'characterised by in-betweenness: not in the sense of uncontrolled vagueness, but of a deliberate refusal to oppose tradition and modernity in an antagonistic relationship' (Brasme 2008: 195). The variety of Ford's influences in *Parade's End* grants some dynamism to the work, as the synthesis can only occur in the reader's mind and the various elements need to be constantly reshuffled and considered anew.

This leads us to the relationship between Impressionism and realism. The main debate amongst scholars is whether Impressionism ought to be regarded as an updated

² A definition of the metaphysics of presence can be found in Derrida, Jacques (1978), *Writing and Difference*, London: Routledge 353.

form of realism, or whether it is opposed to realist principles. In *The English Novel*, Ford clearly posits himself in the wake of Flaubert, Maupassant, Turgenev, James and Conrad. The chapter devoted to Ford in Levenson's *Genealogy of modernism* starts with the 'difficulties in approaching Ford' (Levenson 1984a: 48), once again linked with Ford's ambivalent or at least singular handling of tradition in a modernist context: Ford 'transformed the tradition as he extended it. [...] It was Ford who carried its standard into the pre-war critical arena', and who was, 'in Pound's phrase, "the shepherd of English Impressionist writers"' (Pound 1913: 251, quoted in Levenson 1984a: 49). The contradiction inherent in this description, making Ford both a torchbearer for late nineteenth-century prose and a modernist writer in his own right, is also prevalent in Ford's definition of Impressionism, which, as Levenson reminds us, was developed 'slowly and with hesitation'. Levenson proposes to make Ford 'an exemplar of the early development of modernism' (Levenson 1984a: 49); here and in his article on 'Character in *The Good Soldier*' (1984), Levenson analyses the process of 'justification' which is described by Ford as fundamental in Impressionist writing. Levenson considers that Ford's justification is a case of hyper-realism:

Ford upheld the extreme realist proposition that the success of prose fiction depends on its power to create 'an illusion of reality,' and in explaining how that illusion might be achieved, he placed special emphasis on what he called 'justification,' by which he meant the task of granting motives and grounds to behavior that might otherwise appear obscure. [...] In his insistence upon justification, Ford locates himself in continuity with those Victorian realists whom he so often attacked (Levenson 1984b: 373).

This interpretation of Ford's Impressionism as hyper-realism has been challenged by Rob Hawkes in various essays (2008, 2015) and in his monograph on Ford (2012). The aim of Hawkes' monograph is to demonstrate that Ford's 'in-betweenness' undermines the categories of early-twentieth-century literature. Hawkes' demonstration rests on a detailed narratological analysis of Ford's major novels. In the first chapter, drawing from *A Call* and *The Good Soldier*, he argues that Ford's method of 'justification' is 'anti-realist', and that it foregrounds the characters' construction as 'beings of paper':

[T]he reliance on ‘justification’—which Michael Levenson describes as an ‘extreme realist’ approach to characterisation—is, in fact, an anti-realist gesture. That is, if the realist novel depends on the flat character as much as on the round, then a wholesale commitment to justification works against this tradition. Justification is precisely a technique for ‘rounding’ characters [...]. In attempting to justify ‘too much’ or ‘too many’ of his characters—or, rather, in *overjustifying*—Ford rejects the realist character-system, which, I am urging, is one of the more confusing and disorientating aspects of his approach to character (Hawkes 2012: 43).

Through over-justification, Ford ultimately disrupts the mechanisms of realism, and frustrates the reader’s expectations. This process of characterisation, according to Hawkes, ‘should be considered as a ‘response to the complex, dynamic, and contradictory conditions of modernity’ (Hawkes 2012: 50). The same goes of the way in which Ford’s narratives subvert plotting. Hawkes emphasises the fact that plots are indispensable in Ford’s narratives, and as such, seem to link him to more traditional narrative modes. However, in undermining the boundary between the Genettian concepts of *histoire* and *récit* and in drawing attention to the plot’s deceptive quality, Ford’s narratives are above all metafictional: Ford’s novels are ‘allegories of *plotting*, of the desire and need for narrative shape and stability that plots fulfil, and of the distortions they can effect as a result’ (Hawkes 2012: 91). This tension, of course, is inseparable from the modern condition: ‘the desire for and the suspicion of plots [...] are responses to the same set of circumstances: those following in the wake of the transformation of time and space and the institutionalisation of doubt that define modernity’ (Hawkes 2012: 70).

In his monograph analysing the relationship between historical narrative and modernism in Conrad’s, Ford’s and West’s historical novels (2015), O’Malley also scrutinises the way in which *The Good Soldier*, *No Enemy* and *Parade’s End* renew the genre of historical narrative and in so doing, enact a transition from Realist to modernist fiction writing. To take one example, O’Malley analyses the way in which Ford in *Some Do Not . . .* rewrites the traditional historical novel by replacing a direct depiction of the facts with a remembrance of the events: ‘the very narration itself strives to replicate the process of historical reconstruction, to ingest the historiographical process into its very

form'. The eclecticism of Ford's narrative practices in *Parade's End* furthermore implies that Ford is enacting within the text itself 'a slow transmutation of the narrative style itself, a gradual shift from panoramic, omniscient realism to fragmented and elliptical impressionism' (O'Malley 2015: 133). *Parade's End*, O'Malley notes, starts in a realistic mode, with a linear narrative; but the blanks, ellipses and time shifts multiply as the narration unfolds:

Parade's End actually interrogates history most radically as it gets away from the realist mode in which the novel (ironically) began, becoming increasingly rememorated instead of narrated from an omniscient viewpoint. Each passing scene strikes us as less and less akin to historical narratives, but this illusion of distance from history should make us re-evaluate how we conceive of historical narration in the first place, and why we assume that 'historical realism' is some sort of default mode for historiography (O'Malley 2015: 133).

O'Malley uses Ricœur to analyse historical writing in Ford, a reference which, as shall be examined in the last part of this chapter, allows his writing to be associated with a perspective that was delineated after the modernist era.

Intermodernism

The singularity of Ford's position in the modern movement leads us to examine the inclusion of Ford within the category of 'Intermodernism'. Nick Hubble in particular has championed this view. The concept of Intermodernism has stemmed from a frustration on the part of some scholars with the stark division between 'High Modernism' and presumably more low-brow forms of early twentieth-century writing, in the wake of Virginia Woolf's division between 'materialist' and 'spiritual' writers (Woolf 1966: 319-37). Hubble associates Ford's Intermodernism with what Slavoj Žižek has described as 'the parallax view' (Žižek 2006). According to Žižek, it is in the gap—'the difference seen in the object as a result of the shift of perspective'(Hubble 2008: 169)—that the parallax Real can be found. If we are to apply this relationship to modernism and Social Realism, Hubble argues that modernism is not one of the two perspectives, but 'the shift

itself' (Hubble 2008: 170) between perspectives, and as such, subsumes Social Realism. Hubble's contention is that the origins of Intermodernism can be found in Ford's writing; in an earlier essay, Hubble already argued that, against the grain of Woolf's rejection of social mimesis, 'Ford seems always to have been aware that a modernist identity could not be constructed in opposition to modern mass society, but only in conjunction with it' (Hubble 2006: 154). Hubble uses *The Good Soldier*, *A Call*, *The New Humpty-Dumpty* and *Parade's End* to demonstrate the increasing force with which Ford's novels delineate the parallax shift from the passive social mimesis characteristic of Social Realism, to the active subjectivity that is fundamental in modernist fiction.

The notion of Intermodernism is also relevant to Ford's role as literary editor. Hubble has thus remarked that the authors contributing to the *English Review* fall on both sides of the Woolfian divide, and that 'thinking of the *English Review* as modernist—as the first moment of English modernism—actually requires a leap beyond our usual intellectual habits' (Hubble 2010: 67). Examining the relationship between Ford and Wells in the *English Review*, Hubble invites us to go beyond the generally accepted distinction between Ford as modernist and Wells as champion of social-realist mimetic fiction. The serialisation of *Tono-Bungay* in the *English Review*, he argues, was 'absolutely fitting and integral to that journal's modernist project', 'because it is simply the best fictional account—probably the best sociological account as well—of what happened to England in the closing decades of the nineteenth century' (Hubble 2010: 68). To Hubble, 'socialist-realist mimetic fiction' and 'modernist' writing intersect and mingle in the *Review*, as they did in the landscape of English literature in the first decades of the twentieth century. Likewise, the *transatlantic review* has appeared as non-conventionally and non-exclusively modernist. Stephen Rogers has underlined the ambivalence of Ford's editorial goals and his wish to overlook the tradition/avant-garde divide:

For Ford the magazine was to provide support for the emergent wave of writers then congregating in Paris, which he referred to as: 'the modern more-or-less-Movement for which we more or less stand' (*TRev* I [Apr. 1924] 209). [...] Ford's notion of editor was, as it had been with the *English Review*, based on getting into

print that which he regarded as the best of its time whether or not that work was experimental (Rogers 2010: 190).

Ford chose Paris as the review's headquarters for the very inclusiveness made possible in the French capital: 'The Conductors and Proprietors of the *Review* have selected Paris as its home because there is no other home possible for a periodical which desires to spread comprehension between the three nations' (Ford 1923, quoted in Poli 1967: 39). This inclusiveness was, however, the cause for the review's lack of clarity in its editorial aims, and may account for the perplexity of his contemporaries and of later readers in how to classify both Ford's reviews and his own work. Bernard J. Poli has highlighted this difficulty, and underlined the brutal shifts in time experienced by the reader discovering the first issue of the *transatlantic review*:

To the average reader who bought the new review by accident, the uncapitalized title in conjunction with rather esoteric poems by Cummings and Pound denoted a bizarre avant garde publication, but to young Americans on the left bank or in Greenwich Village, Pound was a veteran, and Cummings was hardly a discovery since his poems appeared in practically every little magazine (Poli 1967: 48-51).

Ford's inclusiveness in his relationships with fellow writers reflects his own eclecticism in writing. What was sometimes perceived as a lack of consistency in his editorial choices may also explain why his position within modernism was only consolidated over time.

Beyond Modernism

Moving away from the debate as to Ford's inclusion within realism and modernism, and looking at the other chronological end of modernism, several scholars have indeed argued that Ford's work urges us to question the received divide between 'modernism' and 'postmodernism'. Such a notion was first contended by Cornelia Cook as early as 1984. In 'Going beyond modernism', Cook analyses the way in which *The Rash Act* enacts a departure from modernism and from Ford's earlier association with Literary Impressionism. According to her, *The Rash Act* is itself a self-parodying comment on modernism, and can be construed as 'a pastiche modernist novel' (Cook 1984: 163). The way in which the narrative underscores its own fictionality and artifices,

and in effect defeats the epiphany of form inherent in High Modernism, seems indeed to tentatively gesture towards postmodernism. Cook concludes thus:

The Rash Act suggests that Ford, as sensitive to the time as ever, has himself gone beyond modernism, to register his distaste for and despair of the modern moment in a literature of futility and self-absorption. [...] In such a subtle questioning of the fictional enterprise, in so thoroughly obstructing the ostensible realism of his text and its subjective centre, the novel which Ford called so ‘correct in handling’ of its modernist form suggests an uneasy groping in the direction of postmodernist awarenesses (Cook 1984: 166-7).

I have argued in favour of a similar interpretation of *Last Post* (2010), and highlighted the way in which *Last Post* can be construed as a gesture of self-parodying rewriting of the whole *Parade’s End* tetralogy. In my monograph on *Parade’s End* (2016), I have also analysed the novel’s self-deriding reflexivity as gesturing beyond modernism. Whereas crisis in High modernist literature is resolved through an epiphany of form, in *Last Post* any attempt at order through form is defeated by self-derision:

Any possibility of a modernist aesthetic culmination is undermined by excess and irony. On closing *Parade’s End*, we are left with a sense of loss, with the feeling that the aesthetic questions opened out by the text are never resolved in a stable or satisfactory manner. The redemption through form that we can find in other modernists is here denied us. It seems we are reaching beyond, or at the very least besides, canonical modernism (Brasme 2016: 203, my translation).

I then develop the idea that Ford’s aesthetics in *Parade’s End* can be analysed as ‘interstitial’—as being suspended between a use of modernist codes and a metatextual irony that corresponds to Waugh’s definition of postmodern writing.

In her monograph *Ford Madox Ford: Vision, Visuality and Writing* (2008), Laura Colombino also underscores the way in which Ford’s text is both modernist on the one hand, and simultaneously pre- *and* postmodern on the other hand: it

still experiences late Victorian and Edwardian nostalgia for a world whose meaning has been shattered (in contrast with the joyful destructuring of Vorticism which, in the disintegration of reality, celebrates the triumph of vitality) but chooses to inflect this void of referentiality in its newest and most powerful form:

serial production and the standardisation of objects and human beings (Colombino 2008: 94).

Colombino focuses on Ford's concern about the mass reproduction, commodification and circulation of art as heralding Benjamin's definition of a postmodern 'phantasmagoria of equality' (Colombino 2008: 98-9). She analyses in particular detail *The Good Soldier*, with its references to mechanical reproduction and its description of modern society as a simulacrum (Colombino 2008: 96-105), and *Parade's End*, where there are instances in which Ford's parody entails 'a postmodern linguistic construction of the self' (Colombino 2008: 132). Commenting on a scene of *Some Do Not...*, she suggests that Ford's representation of Tietjens's mind as 'made up entirely of quotations unquestionably prefigures a postmodern view: the inner void of the subject, its entirely verbal construction, "its minimal existence as a kind of *béance*"' (Colombino 2008: 132, quotation from Jameson 2000: 70).

Lastly, and most recently, two essays have examined afresh the 'postmodern' quality of *The Good Soldier*, despite its being usually considered as Ford's most unquestionably modernist novel, and its featuring consistently in curricula on modernism. In the centenary collection of essays on *The Good Soldier* (2015), I argue that Ford's dismissal of causality in history, associated with the way in which the narrative in *The Good Soldier* demonstrates the futility of delineating between fact and fiction, appear more in keeping with postmodern concerns (Hutcheon, Veyne) than modernist ones. The essay then moves on to reading *The Good Soldier* in the light of Ricœur's consideration of the telling of history, and concludes on the notion that Ford's goal is simply to point out the pitfalls inherent in any historical narrative:

Ford's works not only encompass modernist aesthetics, but also prefigure what later came to be considered as postmodernist views, especially in terms of deconstructionism. Instead of offering an alternative, satisfying artwork to the witnessed chaos of the world, as other modernists do, Ford leaves us with a mere adumbration and a variety of possible ways to redefine the world. His means of representation is ultimately a gesture forever suspended *towards* representation (Brasme 2015: 88).

Most directly addressing the question of *The Good Soldier*'s stance within modernist and postmodern categories, however, is Catherine Belsey's essay, which originated from a keynote address at the Centenary Conference on *The Good Soldier* in Swansea, and whose title asserts *The Good Soldier* as 'Ford's Postmodern Novel' (2015). Belsey examines Lyotard's distinction between modernism and

the postmodern *in modernism*, which consists in their opposite response to 'the withdrawal of the real': 'in the first case, the work, nostalgic for the missing certainties, preserves the pleasures offered by good form; the second [...] refuses that solace and seeks out new modes of presentation, proceeds without regulations in order to uncover after the event the rules of 'what *will have been done*' (Belsey 2015: 33; with quotations from Lyotard [1984]: 79, 81).

As Belsey's essay makes clear, *The Good Soldier* raises a plethora of questions—on the actual subject of the story, on representation, on a possible ethical reading, on irony, on a possible psychoanalytical interpretation—that are all left unresolved. 'Bleak in its account of human relations but jubilant in its power to exploit the possibilities of the signifier, the novel dramatizes what Lyotard would call the postmodern condition, in the grip of unconscious imperatives we cannot be sure we are aware of and held by equivocating signifying system we cannot rely on as a ground of certainty' (Belsey 2015: 42). The chronology, here, is of no import. What Belsey's reading of *The Good Soldier* teaches us is that the indeterminacy of Ford's writing invites us to consider anew the labels of realism, modernism and postmodernism, and to question the way in which they have been inextricably woven with the notion of periodisation.

Conclusion

Navigating the various positions Ford has been considered to hold in twentieth-century literature thus proves a complex, if not baffling process, and it remains clear that this debate is far from exhausted today. Ford has been largely seen as a transitional figure spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and partaking both of traditional and avant-garde aesthetics. With the current re-evaluation of the modernist canons and of the

divide between categories of 'modernism' and 'postmodernism', however, research on Ford now tends to push the boundaries even further and go to the other end of the modernist era in order to fully account for Ford's aesthetic choices. In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale suggests a redefinition of the divide between modernism and postmodernism along an opposition between an epistemological 'dominant' in the case of modernist fiction and an ontological 'dominant' in the case of postmodernist fiction (McHale 1987: 9,10). It may appear fruitful to examine the way in which Ford's novels fall on one or the other side of this divide, or indeed are engaged in a joint concern for modes of knowing and modes of being. More broadly speaking, the current debate on modernist versus postmodernist aesthetics should invite a wider re-evaluation of Ford's whole body of work, since the way in which Ford subverts established categories of tradition, avant-garde, and deconstructionism has hitherto been mostly analysed in his best-known novels. An assessment of the way in which Ford's novelistic work has evolved from his earlier to his later novels with regards to definitions of modernist and postmodernist fiction should likewise be a fertile approach. Another aspect of Ford's writing that should enrich this issue is his eclectic and atypical handling of genres—not only because Ford was just as prolific as a novelist, essay writer, and poet, but also because he kept pushing the established boundaries within each of these broad categories. Lastly, a closer reading of Ford's critical, editorial work and letters may help illuminate the seeming contradictions in the orientations taken by his writing, and on a larger scope, help sustain the current reassessment of the scholarly periodisation of twentieth-century literature.

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