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In Search of Individual Freedom: Ford Madox Ford, Phenomenology & Reader-Response Criticism

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1984

IN SEARCH OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM:
FORD MADDOX FORD, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Edgar Thomson Shields, Jr.

June 1984

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IN SEARCH OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM:
FORD MADDOX FORD, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

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IN SEARCH OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM:
FORD MADOX FORD, PHENOMENOLOGY, AND READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

Edgar Thomson Shields, Jr.

June 1984

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Directed by: Dorothy McMahon, Nancy Davis, and James Heldman

Department of English

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Ford Madox Ford has often been seen by critics as an author of pure style, writing without philosophic underpinnings for his impressionistic techniques. However, philosophy plays a large role in Ford's work--as a foundation for both his themes and literary theory. This philosophy, phenomenology--the metaphysics of individual experience as opposed to universal determinism--came into existence during Ford's lifetime. Though Ford may never have read in phenomenology, his works reflect the movement both in what he writes, by emphasizing the individual over the communal experience, and how he writes, using the idea of the neutral author to present objective narration.

The first three chapters explore three of Ford's works--the fairy tale The Queen Who Flew (1894), the novel The Good Soldier (1915), and the tetralogy Parade's End (1924-1928)--and show a growth of phenomenological thought within each. Starting with The Queen Who Flew, Ford portrays the first principle of phenomenology, the importance of individual perspective, a principle found in the early phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. In The Good Soldier, a second stage of phenomenology, Martin Heidegger's discovery of the underlying void and apparent meaninglessness of life, can be seen. Third, Jean-Paul Sartre's ideas of nihilation, freedom, and the self-created being are reflected in Parade's End.

The final chapter applies phenomenology to Ford's literary theory, an early version of reader-response criticism, a literary school of thought which comes from phenomenological philosophy. Three central relationships appear in Ford's critical writings: the relationship between the writer and the word, epitomized by the removal of authorial presence; the relationship between the reader and the writer, marked by humbleness on the part of the writer; and the relationship between the reader and the word, a relationship based on surprise. Each of these relate back to Ford's major intent, to become the neutral author. Ford's criticism shows him consciously applying the basic ideas of phenomenology to his own writing, allowing readers to arrive at their own subjective interpretations of life as presented in the novel.

To Dr. Dorothy McMahon, my thesis director, for arguing with me, prodding me, disagreeing with me, and believing in me--and Ford Madox Ford (as much as she could). I have written this essay, but Dr. Dorothy and I have created it.

It is true there are no villains in the world; you have the sense to see that I, who am an Anarchist, a destroyer, am not, when the shouting is over, ethically a bit worse than Mr. Cecil Rhodes who is an Empire Builder.

Ford Madox Ford, in an undated
letter to John Galsworthy

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Preface

If anything at all, the central theme to this essay is that Ford Madox Ford is not a Smurf. In a recent issue of Channels, a journal on electronic communications, Walter Karp writes about the new cartoon heroes--written as plural because the individual hero no longer exists in children's television. Instead, there are the Smurfs. Smurfs, according to Karp, exist as purely social creatures, only able to survive as members of a community. If a Smurf strikes out on his own (there turns out to be only one female Smurf, Smurfette, so that the masculine pronoun becomes appropriate), it is only to learn that he can not live without the gifts others give to him ("Where the Do-Gooders Went Wrong," Channels, 4, No. 1 [1984], 41-47). As I watched a few minutes of the Smurfs myself on television the other morning, I was struck by the fact that the heroic deed of the day was performed by Lazy Smurf, whose snoring saves a group of these blue-faced creatures who are trapped underground. The lesson to be learned, as told by Papa Smurf, is that now we can see how everybody has a natural talent which has been given by nature to help the community in some way.

But what do Smurfs have to do with Ford Madox Ford? The one theme that runs throughout Ford's works is the importance of the individual over communal concerns. Without the individual, the community becomes Oceania of 1984--a well oiled machine nobody can appreciate, since a perfected community requires that no one think,

that no one subscribe to individual ideas, because individual ideas might run against those adopted by the community as a whole. Ford's vision, however, works because thinking individuals separate themselves from the community in order to have personal existence, to have individual meanings for their lives.

A possible reason for Ford's lack of acceptance in modern criticism may be that his emphasis on individuality carries over into his aesthetic. The idea of a universal truth expressed through art can not exist for Ford if all people are to define themselves as individual beings rather than as social creatures. Therefore, Ford's aesthetic must be one of presenting the most objective picture possible, leaving interpretations of truths to the reader. This lack of an argument for a universal philosophy leaves literary critics puzzled. "If a writer removes the philosophic argument, what is there to critique?" they ask.

Ford is not a literary photographer, however. There is a philosophic argument in his work. On two different levels Ford presents a world of ideas--ideas to be discussed, argued, accepted, rejected, transformed, and used. The first level is in the minds of his characters. In the epigram to this essay, Ford writes in a letter to John Galsworthy that "there are no villains in the world," leaving all people, as individuals, to be heroes. Each character in Ford's works represents a world view, and each of these can be seen as a certain perception of truth. Through this form of pluralism, philosophy is presented. In the essay that follows, I have attempted to decipher which of the characters Ford uses to present his own

world view. However, even though one character may act as spokesperson for Ford himself, this does not mean that Ford believes all people live by the truths this character expresses. Instead, it is only one world view among many--no more right or wrong than the others.

The second location for Ford's world view is in the method and techniques Ford applies in writing his works. The objectivism and pluralism in Ford's novels hold certain implications about the nature of the universe. Objectivity implies, again, pluralism, individuality, through the absence of judgement. Though a bit more obscure, these implied ideas are as important for arriving at a world view for Ford as are the actual words of his texts. The clichéd way of expressing this goes, "Ford's medium is his message."

One final location of ideas for Ford's world picture should not be overlooked--his own critical writings. Rich and varied, within them can be found explanations for all the ideas presented in the rest of Ford's writings.

The actual method used to explore Ford's philosophical program in this essay is quite simple. First, three works from three different periods in Ford's life are examined--The Queen Who Flew (1894), The Good Soldier (1915), and Parade's End (1924-1928)--showing how each portrays a different version of phenomenology, the philosophical school of thought coming into being during Ford's lifetime. The final chapter discusses Ford's critical writings in light of reader-response criticism, the school of literary criticism which comes from phenomenology. In various places throughout the text, general overviews of phenomenology are given in order to acquaint the reader with the metaphysical issues being raised.

One final note needs to be made. As I did my research, I felt perhaps the days of treating Ford criticism as an act of apologetics--trying to apologize for Ford's impressionistic techniques, exaggerated imagination, seemingly simplistic style, etc.--were over. However, the most recent study of Ford's works, Ann Barr Snitow's Ford Madox Ford and the Voice of Uncertainty (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), once again looks at Ford as a man who didn't quite understand all he was doing. (A typical comment reads, Ford "is at his best only when irony undercuts and complicates his tragicomic dream of feudal society" [p. 7].) Once again, Ford's objective presentation and pluralism are misconstrued for a lack of a workable vision. This essay attempts a beginning at correcting that view of Ford.

With all this said, I would like to begin this inquiry into the philosophy behind the writings of Ford Madox Ford with his own words, written in that same letter to Galsworthy mentioned earlier:

When one reads a book one is always wondering more or less what kind of man the writer is--as writer be it said. In this case the writer is all right; speaks with a right sort of voice; has things to say worth listening to; has a philosophy and finds expression for it.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who should be acknowledged and thanked--my fellow graduate assistants, Western Kentucky University's English Department, my parents and family--but two acknowledgements need specific mention.

First, I would like to thank my committee as a whole, Dr. Dorothy McMahon, Dr. Nancy Davis, and Dr. James Heldman, all of whom have been helpful and patient as I completed my thesis.

Second, I would like to acknowledge Professor Dennis Baumwoll of Bucknell University who, as my undergraduate professor of Twentieth Century Novel, introduced me to Ford Madox Ford. His presence in this essay can be found throughout, but most particularly in chapter two, "The Good Soldier: A Picture Without a Meaning." Professor Baumwoll lectured for almost three weeks in the fall of 1981 on The Good Soldier, and what I received from these lectures has become, in many ways, indistinguishable from my own insights.

The Victorian Utopia:

The Queen Who Flew and News From Nowhere

The late eighteen hundreds was a time rich in Utopian visions of the world. Among these was William Morris's News From Nowhere (1891), a picture of England in the undated future, turned into a pastoral cornucopia of good will, free love, and social equality of all people--men and women, rich and poor. This pastoral vision is similar to that of many people in Morris's circle, in particular one young writer named Ford Madox Hueffer. Hueffer, or as he later became known, Ford Madox Ford, was the grandson of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Ford Madox Brown; therefore, he was surrounded by many of the great artists of the period--D. G. Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and, of course, William Morris. Beyond being the people who physically surrounded Ford in his youth, they were also a major intellectual influence on the budding writer. Still, Ford did not accept all of the Pre-Raphaelite teachings as gospel truth. A close examination of Ford's earliest works, his fairy tales, and in particular The Queen Who Flew (1894), will reveal not only the pastoral vision of Utopia the young Ford shared with Morris, but also the metaphysical difference with which Ford approaches his vision.

The Queen Who Flew¹ tells the story of a young Queen who has lived her whole life alone inside her castle walls, never meeting

anyone except servants and continually changing Regents, who gain power only through constant overthrows of one another, and who are continually coming to the Queen with papers for her to sign (despite the fact that she does not know what they are for). One night, as the Queen finds herself sitting in the garden alone during another military overthrow, she strikes up a conversation with a bat, through which the Queen learns the secret of flying and, with her new found powers, takes off over the castle wall, having a variety of adventures-- with her subjects in the town; with the king of the neighboring country; with a witch, Satan, and some enchanted geese; and ultimately with a blind young man and his mother in a land across the sea.

The most important of the adventures in The Queen Who Flew is this final one, the Queen's encounter with the blind young man and his mother. The Queen lands, after an Icarian attempt to fly to the sun, finding herself on a hill above a young farmer tilling his fields alone. The Queen helps the young farmer plow his last furrow for the day, and he invites her to eat supper at his cottage. On the way, the Queen discovers that this agile young man is blind. After meeting his mother, the Queen becomes like a member of the family and stays with them for over a year. At the end of that time, the Queen decides to journey back to her kingdom, remembering that the bat who taught her how to fly had also mentioned a cure for blindness. The Queen arrives in her kingdom only to discover that the Regent has announced he will be marrying the Queen in a private ceremony. The Queen appears to her subjects, tells them what a

fraud the Regent is, gets the blindness cure from the bat, and sets the bat up as ruler of the kingdom. Returning to the young farmer and his mother, the Queen brews the wind-flower crown she wears to make her fly (the cure for blindness being wind-flower tea), heals the young man's eyes, marries him, and lives happily ever after.

Ford's Utopian world in this last section of The Queen Who Flew compares directly in many ways to Morris's vision in News From Nowhere.² Most obviously, of course, both Utopias are pastoral visions. In News From Nowhere, the great cities have been razed and restructured as villages and towns. They are still the largest population centers, but the population in each has been greatly reduced. The pastoral vision of The Queen Who Flew shows in that the only Utopia described exists as the blind man's farm. The only urban scenes occur in the city surrounding the Queen's castle, scenes of corruption and revolution.

Another similarity between The Queen Who Flew and News From Nowhere is the treatment of capitalism and commerce in both works. Upon his arrival in the future, Morris's Guest takes a boat out on the Thames to go swimming. Returning to shore, the Guest attempts to pay the oars-man for his services. The oars-man refuses, puzzled at first, but soon recognizing the Guest as a stranger, unaware of the pure communism that has been adopted by England (pp. 6-10). A parallel scene occurs in The Queen Who Flew when the Queen first meets the blind young farmer and he offers her supper. She replies that she can not pay him. "Now I see you are a stranger,"

the farmer answers (p. 55). Again, when the Queen first meets the farmer's mother, she indirectly thanks the woman for taking her in without payment:

The Queen said, "Yes, I am a little tired; and it is very kind of you to let me stop."
The little old woman looked at her with an odd, amused look in her gentle eyes.
"Now I see you are a stranger," she said. (p. 58)

There is good reason for the Queen's naivete about money and hospitality in this new land. Since leaving the castle garden, the Queen has met several people asking to be paid, in some form or another, for services they provide.

In the first of these encounters, the Queen enters a honey-cake maker's shop, asks for, and receives, several cakes, all of which she immediately eats. The Queen, however, is not ready for what comes next--the honey-cake maker asks for payment. Since the Queen has never been outside the castle walls and has never had any money of her own, she is confused and doesn't know what to do. Only when the honey-cake maker realizes that, with the Queen's permission, he can advertise as "'JAMES GRUBB, / Honey-cake Maker,' / 'to her Majesty the Queen and the R-----'" is the Queen's debt to the tradesman considered paid (pp. 17-20). The Queen has lost her innocence about commerce and begun her capitalistic education.

The second part of the Queen's economic education also has overtones of commerce and capitalistic ways--her encounter with the witch, the enchanted geese, and Satan. In this section of The Queen

Who Flew, the Queen lands by a cottage where an old woman lives. The Queen asks the woman for something to eat, to which the old woman replies, "And what will you pay me?" (p. 32). The Queen, having no money, agrees to do a day's work herding the woman's geese in return for food. As it turns out, the geese are enchanted and unherdable, at which point the old woman reveals herself as a witch, one who wants to eat the Queen for supper. The Queen escapes the old woman (another story in itself) and returns to the cottage to live.

The Queen encounters commerce once more when she has her run-in with the devil, who, in a Faustian scene, appears at the cottage and makes a fool of himself, mistaking the Queen for the old woman, believing that the elixer of love and youth he had left the witch worked miracles. Realizing his mistake, the devil makes a fool of himself again by falling in love with the Queen, who has been drinking this elixer of love without knowing it. Finally, this foolish devil decides to make the Queen a commercial proposal. "But if you won't marry me, madam, perhaps we can do a little business in my line. I pride myself that my system is the very best--the seven years' purchase system, you know. . . . Come, let me fill you up a form" (p. 47).

Commerce and the capitalism that accompanies it act not just as a central focus, but also as a good joke in both The Queen Who Flew and News From Nowhere. The outdated ideas of money and trade are laughable in both Morris's and Ford's Utopian visions. After the

Guest offers the oarsman money, and after the oarsman realizes what has happened, the Guest receives a joyful explanation from the man that "if one person gave me something, then another might, and another, and so on; and I hope you won't think me rude if I say that I shouldn't know where to stow away so many mementos of friendship" (p. 10). Ford, in his own way, makes light of the system of capitalism, associating it with the totally corrupt society that the Queen leaves in her homeland, with the old witch and her enchanted geese, and ultimately with a very silly Faustian devil. Ford might as well have been talking about money as love (a comparison that Morris makes that will be discussed below) when, in a terrible pun, Ford has the Queen ask the witch's birds, newly disenchanting and turned back into the men they were who had come for the elixer, "Dear me! . . . Does love make such geese of people?" (p. 50).

Not only as pastoral and communistic visions, however, do Ford's and Morris's Utopias parallel one another. The governing method of the ideal world is similar in both as well--anarchy. In News From Nowhere, Morris envisions the abolishment of all types of political boundaries, the largest being international boundaries between nations. With this abolition, a national governing body is no longer needed. The disdain Morris feels for even an elected national ruling body such as Parliament shows when his future Utopia turns the House of Lords and the House of Commons into a municipal storehouse for manure. There are still differences of opinion that need settling in Morris's Utopia (such as when to cut the hay, etc.), but these decisions are made only within the group to whom they matter and are decided by a

majority rule system (pp. 85-90). Morris's Utopia sees large governing bodies as artificial, and the politics they argue as equally artificial.

The Queen Who Flew has a similar idea of how a government should work. First, Ford makes fun of the constant revolutions in the Queen's homeland, highlighted by the fact that the best ruler turns out to be the bat the Queen puts in power, a symbol of both nature and blindness—two important traits for any ruler, if there is to be a ruler at all. Second, there is Ford's Utopia, the country where the blind farmer lives. (Again, note the idea of blindness.) After the Queen eats dinner the first night with the young man and his mother, she has the following conversation with them:

"But what is the land called, and who rules it?" the Queen said.

The ploughman laughed. "Why, it is called the land of the Happy Folk; and as for who rules it, it gets along very well as it is." (p. 59)

In Ford's Utopian vision, anarchy is the only possible form of government that can work. Any other form is artificial, for as the farmer says, "it gets along very well as it is" without help from rulers of any sort.

This is the Victorian Ford, the child growing up in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, sharing with the artists of his grandfather's circle a pastoral vision of beauty, one that can best be found through socialism and anarchy. Though this is a shared vision with Morris, it does not give the complete picture of what the young Ford is

thinking. Only by exploring the metaphysical underpinnings driving each writer's vision can their differences be found. And they are vast differences--the differences between a modern and a Victorian mind.

It is appropriate at this point to include a short introduction to phenomenology, the philosophic school of thought that will be attached to the works of Ford Madox Ford. Quite possibly, Ford never read the phenomenological philosophers. Even though Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, is a contemporary of Ford's (Husserl: 1859-1938; Ford: 1873-1939), Husserl's major works were not translated into English until Ford was well into a phenomenological pattern of thought. The assertion made by attaching the ideas of phenomenology to the writings of Ford Madox Ford is for phenomenology as a worldwide modern idea, whether as an organized worldwide movement or not.³

Phenomenology, as a philosophy, has three root sources: the Aristotelian method of discovery, the Cartesian man, and Kant's Copernican revolution. The first root, Aristotle's method of discovery, is the simplest idea to explain.

There are two possible methods for discovery. One is to make a claim, then to find all experiences that fit within the realm of that claim. For example, the claim may be made that sneakers are canvas shoes with rubber soles worn while engaged in a sporting event. With a specific definition in mind, observers can attach the title

sneaker to any object that fits the definition. First the concept is arrived at, then real world objects are classified according to that concept.

The second possible method of discovery, the inverse of the first, is the Aristotelian method, which, instead of taking a concept and fitting experience to it, experiences the world and then forms concepts out of what is observed. "The natural path of investigation starts from what is more readily knowable and more evident to us although intrinsically more obscure, and proceeds toward what is more self-evident and intrinsically more intelligible," writes Aristotle.⁴ Aristotle believes that the proper method of discovery is to form understandable abstractions about life from the actual experiences of life itself. An observer would view all types of shoes, their construction and use, then arrive at a definition of sneaker from observations rather than from pure abstract thought. It is this observation then abstraction method of discovery that the phenomenologist will adopt.

The second root concept of phenomenology, the concept of Cartesian man, states that a person knows one thing, that he or she exists--"I think, therefore I am." Unlike Descartes, the phenomenologist will not use this proposition to attempt a proof of existence beyond the individual mind. Phenomenology accepts man as a creature who has a certain existence, what Descartes calls thinking, but beyond that there is nothing sure in the world, there is nothing provable. Even if a sneaker has a certain existence, that existence holds no

importance in the phenomenological method. The only important fact is that the mind perceives the sneaker.⁵ It believes that it has encountered the sneaker.⁶

The third root concept of phenomenology is closely allied to the Cartesian man--Kant's Copernican revolution. As Copernicus solved the problem of planetary motion by changing his perspective from geo-centricity to helio-centricity, Kant changed the perspective of metaphysics from an object-centered view to a mind-centered view. Before Kant, metaphysics concentrated on the nature of the objects being observed--a good metaphysician would be attempting a definition of "sneakerness," trying to discover what in a sneaker's physical construct makes it a sneaker. Kant says that it is not the sneaker a metaphysician need worry about, but instead how that sneaker is perceived. Kant writes:

Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them a priori, by means of concepts, have, on this assumption, ended in failure. We must therefore make trial whether we may not have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge.⁷

Kant does not say that the physical objects of the world actually mutate and change according to what occurs in the human mind, but that people only know perceptions of objects, and these perceptions must conform to the knowledge people already possess. When Cartesian man perceives the sneaker, he fits that perception into the structural limitations already found in the mind. Phenomenologists will accept Kant's Copernican revolution as the basis for metaphysics, but again,

as with Descartes, they will not use this information for further proofs of deeper knowledge. Kant uses the revolution to show the existence of certain a priori knowledge in the human mind. The phenomenologist rejects this proof, claiming that there is no a priori knowledge, only a posteriori or empirical knowledge. The sneaker has no existence to the human mind until it is experienced, until it is perceived.

What is phenomenology, then? From Aristotle, phenomenologists have taken an empirical method of observation; from Descartes, the idea of self; from Kant, the idea that the proper study of philosophy is the way people perceive the world, not the actual world itself. It is an empirical philosophy, but unlike earlier empiricists, phenomenologists observe perceptions instead of objects, saying that all people know are their perceptions--and perceptions can only be known once they are perceived. A sneaker has no knowable existence until I perceive it.⁸ I do not know if the sneaker existed before; I can not be sure that it exists now. Whether it truly exists, i.e. exists in a physical form, is not important. What is important is that I perceive a sneaker. That perception is what I am able to base my knowledge on.

A major split between early phenomenology and existentialism arises at this point. Husserl will claim that through perception the phenomenological method uncovers universals--the existence of "essence" or the ideal structure. Looking at the sneaker, an observer comes to some meaning of what a sneaker is, Husserl's

essence of the sneaker. (For Husserl, the essence of man is perception.) The existentialist does not believe in this found meaning but instead believes the observer creates meanings. People make, rather than discover, the definition of sneaker. Husserlian phenomenology sees man as a creature who questions and discovers; existential phenomenology sees man as a creative being. One other form of phenomenology exists between these two, that of Heidegger, which states that people neither discover nor create but only interact with the phenomena that surround them. At this point none of these propositions will either be accepted or rejected. Only the act of perception itself will be explored.⁹

One other aspect of phenomenology needs mentioning, the idea of time and mutability. To this point, phenomenology has been discussed only in relationship to space, a static definition of people and their existence. However, people live not only in space, but also in time; time allows for a dynamic process, allows for change. A perception exists only for one moment, but experience is more than momentary perception. There also exists the memory of perception--reflection. Because people not only perceive the world but also reflect on those perceptions, the structure the mind uses to understand the world must change in accordance with these internal changes. I may view a sneaker through my static definition, arrived at earlier through experience, of canvas shoes with rubber soles worn while engaged in a sporting event. This definition works until I encounter a leather or nylon sneaker. At this point I restructure my thinking to include nylon running shoes in my definition. My

thoughts are not static. As I reflect on my old observations about sneakers and add my new perception, the structure of my thinking changes.

Phenomenology works as a dynamic process of perception and reflection. The importance of this idea to art will be detailed in the final chapter on reader-response criticism, but it should be noted here that the application of this process is not limited merely to sneakers. It implies that a work of art, if seen as the perception of an object rather than the object itself, is not static but dynamic. A work of art is continually perceived then reflected on, and through this process, the thought structures of observers continually change. Readers bring life to books. By actively reflecting on the words they read, people give meaning to a work. It is this active involvement of the reader in the process of art that phenomenology highlights for the literary critic.

Ford Madox Ford's father, scholar and music critic Francis Hueffer, came to England from Germany in 1868 with letters of introduction from the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Among these was one addressed to Thomas Carlyle, the British philosopher who became Francis Hueffer's entree to Pre-Raphaelite society.¹⁰ In many ways, Schopenhauer and Carlyle represent the epitome of nineteenth-century philosophy. Schopenhauer, in particular, represents the nineteenth-century idea of fate as the driving force behind people and the Universe.

Through his writing, Schopenhauer moved philosophy into the

realm of pessimistic fatalism. As Frederick Copleston interprets Schopenhauer in A History of Philosophy: "Knowledge is the servant of the will. Or, to omit metaphysics for the present, knowledge is in the first instance the instrument of satisfying physical needs, the servant of the body."¹¹ It is will that controls people. Knowledge, the intellect, can help interpret the actions of the will and give advice (but not orders) on what a person should do in life, but intellect does not control a person. Will does.

The nature of will in Schopenhauer is important as well. Individuals, according to Schopenhauer, do not have their own special wills, only Will. Individuality is only the physical manifestation of the one universal Will. As Johannes Hirschberger explains Schopenhauer in The History of Philosophy:

If the will must reveal itself, it can do so only by making itself an individual, by "individuation." The principle of this individuation is space and time. The result is that all things in time and space are thrown into turmoil, are eternally unsated, and are eternally unhappy, because each one of them seeks to be the cosmic will.¹²

Schopenhauer has taken life's meaning and purpose out of the individual's hands and put it into a communal spirit that creates individuals only as physical manifestations of itself. Schopenhauer has limited, if not destroyed, the act of individual free will. People act only under the received motivations of a universal driving mechanism.

Carlyle, too, writes about a transcendental driving mechanism that all people bow to, which goes by the name of Force:

This Universe, ah me--what could the wild man know of it; what can we yet know? That it is a Force, and a thousandfold Complexity of Forces; a Force which is not we. That is all; it is not we, it is altogether different from us.¹³

Carlyle, like Schopenhauer, regards people not only as small cogs in a universal machine, but as cogs that have no say in what function they will perform. This idea of fatalism, of the inevitable outcome in history, occurs not just in these two philosophers, but enters into the works of many other thinkers.

Most significant among nineteenth-century proponents of the universal driving mechanism were the socialists, including Karl Marx, but other forms of socialism rose alongside Marxism. Not all thinkers agreed with the economic emphasis that Marx placed on his philosophy. Among these dissenters was William Morris, who had formed his own socialist ideals before reading Marx. Morris does not base his Utopian vision on economic equality (though he does not exclude it either), but instead on an aesthetic principle closely allied to that of Ruskin.¹⁴ Morris writes of people whose only desires are for the most beautiful objects. News From Nowhere describes the quest for a universal idea of beauty. Still, universal beauty works no less as a driving mechanism than does universal economics. They are simply different interpretations of the same universal will.

The consequences of Morris's philosophy of universals are a united purpose for all people and, at the same time, the destruction of the solitary person. The first of these consequences, a united

philosophy of life, shows in the criminal system Morris creates for his Utopia. Crimes, for Morris, are the outward symptoms of disease, not conscious acts of violence:

"And lesser outbreaks of violence," said I, "how do you deal with them? . . ."

Said Hammond: "If the ill-doer is not sick or mad (in which case he must be restrained till his sickness or madness is cured) it is clear that grief and humiliation must follow the ill deed; and society in general will make that pretty clear to the ill-doer if he should chance to be dull to it. . . ."

"So," said I, "you consider crime a mere spasmodic disease, which requires no body of criminal law to deal with it?"

"Pretty much so," said he; "and since, as I have told you, we are a healthy people generally, so we are not likely to be troubled with this disease." (p. 83)

Crime, according to Morris, lives far removed from the normal human mind. Even if crime does occur in people who are not sick, it occurs when they become "momentarily overcome by wrath or folly" (p. 83), and people will quite naturally feel remorse over their actions.

Passions, "wrath or folly," as the greatest threat to the goodness of society lead into the second consequence of Morris's universal will, the denial of the solitary person. A specific example rather than an abstract statement works to illustrate Morris's idea. In the passion aroused by romantic love, Morris sees the ego in its worst state. After the Guest comments to his guide about the beautiful woman whom they have just left their horse with, the guide comments on the romantic situation of News From Nowhere:

"Well, so she is [beautiful]," said he. "Tis a good job there are so many of them that every Jack may have his

Jill; else I fear that we should get fighting for them. Indeed," said he, becoming very grave, "I don't say that it does not happen even now, sometimes. For you know love is not a very reasonable thing, and self-will is commoner than some of our moralists think." (p. 35)

In romantic love, Morris finds the greatest evil, the greatest threat to his Utopian vision. Love threatens because its actions are ego-centric; they are assertions of self-will. Self-will, individualism, can not be allowed if a truly universal philosophy is to exist.

Morris takes self-will beyond the realm of romantic love and goes on to show self-will as the root evil for all major problems. As the Guest continues in his learning adventures, he meets with his guide's uncle, old Hammond. Hammond and the Guest have a lengthy discussion, including a history lesson on how the revolution which set up Morris's Utopia came about:

Looking back now, we can see that the great motive-power of the change was a longing for freedom and equality, akin if you please to the unreasonable passion of the lover; a sickness of the heart that rejected with loathing the aimless solitary life of the well-to-do educated man of that time. . . . Well these men [the early socialists], though conscious of this feeling, had no faith in it, as a means of bringing about the change. Nor was that wonderful: for looking around them they saw the huge mass of the oppressed classes too much burdened with the misery of their lives, and too much overwhelmed by the selfishness of misery. . . . (pp. 104-105)

In Morris's view, selfishness is the world's greatest evil; it points toward ego-centricity and ego-centricity means that a universal ideal can not be at work. Without the universal ideal, the universal driving mechanism, News From Nowhere and the Utopian vision it presents would be no more than Morris's dream--nice but impossible. Therefore,

Morris has no choice but to rid his Utopia of its worst enemy, the solitary man, the individual with an individual will. Only the nineteenth-century ideal of the universal will can bring about Morris's Utopia.

Even though Ford's Utopia in The Queen Who Flew appears physically similar to that of Morris in News From Nowhere, Ford takes a different spiritual approach to the problems of perfecting the world. In answering the basic metaphysical question of where meaning for the universe comes from, Ford diverges from both his father's influence--through Schopenhauer and Carlyle--and his grandfather's--through Morris. Ford does not portray a world run by a universal driving mechanism but instead puts the individual above the ordinary workings of the world, allowing, even forcing, people to find meaning for their own lives within themselves rather than in some outside force.

In The Queen Who Flew, when the bat reveals the secret of flight to the Queen, he also presents the idea that people are what they make of themselves by repeating to the Queen that she won't be able to fly if she keeps supposing that she can't. "Half the evils in the world come from people supposing," the bat says (p. 4). The Queen still does not understand the bat's message, so she asks him again if she, too, could learn to fly:

"Well, it certainly won't be if you suppose you can't," the bat said. "Now, when I was a mouse, I used to suppose I couldn't fly, and so, of course, I couldn't. But, one day, I saved the life of a cockchafer that had got into a beetle-trap, and he told me how it was to be managed."

(p. 4)

The bat tells the Queen she has control over her own life, over what she will be and over what she will make of the world. Just as the bat learned to fly once he stopped supposing it impossible, so too can the Queen stop supposing it impossible for her to learn how to fly. The self-imposed strictures of thinking must be removed to open up the infinite possibilities available to the individual.

The bat repeats this lesson again when he tells the Queen that the secret to flight is found in a flower:

"Yes; but I shall have to travel over so many mountains and rivers and things before I can find it," the Queen said dismally.

"How do you know that?" the bat asked sharply.

"I don't know it, I only suppose it; at least I've read it in books."

"Well, of course, if you go supposing things and reading them in books, I can't do anything for you," the bat said.
(p. 6)

According to the bat, the Queen's chance to make something of her life, whether through flying or something else, will come only when she stops supposing things to be true and restructures her thinking to be open to new possibilities. The Queen's hope lies first in accepting an Aristotelian method of discovery, to observe life before forming ideas about it. Second, hope rests in the Queen's acceptance of control over her own life. To this point, the Queen has allowed outside forces to control her life--from Regents to books. The Queen must form her own ideas about the meaning of life, no longer accepting the universal truths given to her, the supposings of others, and finding her own meanings, her own universal truths to live by. The bat tells the Queen she must become a phenomenological individual.

The rest of The Queen Who Flew consists of the Queen's experiences once she learns to fly, ending with her marriage to the farmer. Here, again, Ford splits with Morris on metaphysical grounds. For Morris, the greatest threat to Utopian existence is an emphasis on romantic love and the necessary ego-centricity of such a passion. The Queen Who Flew, however, concludes with the traditional fairy tale "they lived happily ever after": "But next day, Eldrida and her love were married, and, from that time forth, they worked together, and went hand in hand up the tranquil valley or in among the storms on the hill crests, and so lived happily ever after" (p. 82). In the marriage of the Queen (who in the Utopian atmosphere of the farm has decided to go by her given name, Eldrida, rather than by her title) and the young farmer, Ford highlights the goodness of love. Love takes the Queen back to her homeland in search of the cure for blindness. Love allows her to give up the throne in order to stay with the farmer and his mother. This does not say that Ford has forgotten the silliness of the men turned into enchanted geese, all of whom were in search of love. With Ford's emphasis on individuals' taking life into their own hands and giving it meaning for themselves, love, even romantic love, can have two different meanings for two different individuals. Love takes on different meanings as different people perceive it through their own experiences and thought patterns.

There remains one last important detail to be discussed in light of the difference between Morris's and Ford's metaphysical approaches to Utopia--anarchy. For Morris, anarchy works because the world has

its own universal driving mechanism, an aesthetic principle which resides within all people. Anarchy is necessary in order to allow that aesthetic to work without the artificial restraints of politics and government. But if, as Ford claims, meaning comes from inside individuals, not from external forces, there can be no underlying mechanism that will replace politics in an anarchist's world. Why rid Utopia of government, then? Only conjecture is possible; however, if Ford believes that meaning comes from within individuals, then the abolishment of government only reinforces the idea of individual freedom. To restrain people under some limited political system is to limit the infinite possibilities open to them. Anarchy, from a phenomenological view, affirms the importance of the individual will instead of accepting a universal driving mechanism.

The Queen Who Flew owes much to Ford's Victorian Pre-Raphaelite upbringing. Like many of those who surrounded him, the young Ford takes on a pastoral vision of Utopia. And, like the newly founded socialist parties and organizations of the late eighteen hundreds, Ford uses communism and anarchy as the basis for his own Utopian vision. But Ford makes one major break with his Victorian past, a break that brings him closer to the moderns of the early twentieth century. The Queen Who Flew is an affirmation of the individual over the universe, not the universe over the individual.

Notes

¹ The Queen Who Flew: A Fairy Tale (New York: Braziller, 1965). All further references to this work appear in the text.

² News From Nowhere, in vol. 16 of The Collected Works of William Morris (New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), pp. 1-211. All further references to the work appear in the text.

³ Given here is a very simple overview of phenomenology, including phenomenological existentialism. For more indepth introductions to this philosophy, see Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, vols. 7 and 9 (New York: Newman Press, 1975) for phenomenology and existentialism respectively; A. Robert Caponigri, Philosophy from the Age of Positivism to the Age of Analysis, vol. 5 of A History of Western Philosophy (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971); but particularly Pierre Thevenaz, "What Is Phenomenology?" in his What Is Phenomenology? and Other Essays, James M. Edie, ed. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962), pp. 37-92.

⁴ Natural Science, in Aristotle, Philip Wheelwright, trans. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1935), p. 3.

⁵ Two important terms from Husserl's phenomenology need to be noted here. First, bracketing, which is the action of removing all unknowable ideas from the sneaker, leaving only the perceived sneaker. Bracketing, though, does not deny existence for the physical sneaker, but instead abstains from passing judgement on such an object. The second term, the intended object, is how people are able to perceive the sneaker. The intended sneaker works by man placing his intentions upon it, thinking such things as "this would make a good running shoe" or "Joey had better pick that up before I trip over it." For Husserl, people perceive objects through their possible use, their intent, rather than as pure phenomena (textured bottom, twelve inches long, white rubber edging, etc.). Intentionality, for Husserl, is the human essence and can not be removed from the formula.

⁶ This statement appears highly skeptical and is if left at this point. Phenomenologists such as Heidegger will do just this. However, there are other phenomenologists, such as Husserl, who believe that though the sneaker itself can not be known, its essence, or basic defining structure, does have a knowable structure, knowable through the phenomenological method.

⁷ Critique of Pure Reason, Norman Kempf Smith, trans. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 22.

⁸ Note that for a pure phenomenology, first person must be used. Any observations made come through my mind--are colored by my thought patterns. Therefore, I can make no generalizations about anyone else. I only know what I myself perceive.

⁹ For more on the split between the different types of phenomenology, see Copleston, vol. 7, pp. 432-441.

¹⁰ Douglas Goldring, The Last Pre-Raphaelite: A Record of the Life and Writings of Ford Madox Ford (London: MacDonald, 1948), p. 26.

¹¹ Copleston, vol. 7, p. 269.

¹² The History of Philosophy, vol. 2, Anthony N. Fuerst, trans. (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1959), p. 450.

¹³ On Heros, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History, in English Prose of the Victorian Era, Charles Frederick Harrold and William D. Templeman, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 173.

¹⁴ Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, The Fabians (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), p. 77.

The Good Soldier: A Picture Without a Meaning

Ford Madox Ford's self-proclaimed tours de force, The Good Soldier,¹ is also his bleakest novel. The story of a man learning to deal with the memories of the people among whom he has lived for the past twelve years, The Good Soldier works as an epistemological study on how the human mind can come to accept the inadequacies of human understanding. Even though epistemology works as an entree to Ford's novel, beneath this act of comprehension lies a deeper structure--a metaphysical picture of the world as a whole. Ford's world view in The Good Soldier can be seen as a bleak picture which takes Husserl's phenomenology of essences a step further down to Heidegger's pure phenomenology, a world without meaning--either discovered or created--a world of pure phenomenological interaction.

The two seminal studies of epistemology in The Good Soldier, Samuel Hynes's "The Epistemology of The Good Soldier"² and Paul B. Armstrong's "The Epistemology of The Good Soldier: A Phenomenological Reconsideration,"³ both argue for a shift in interpreting Ford's novel. Most earlier critics raise moral and/or philosophic questions about the characters The Good Soldier's first-person narrator, Dowell, describes, or they deal with the reliability of Dowell as a narrator for the events of the story (what of his tale can be believed?). But with the appearance of epistemological criticism on The Good Soldier, something similar to Kant's Copernican revolution occurs. Instead

of concentrating on the objects Dowell talks about in his narrative, the critic must now concentrate on how Dowell sees and understands these objects. Unlike the first-person narrator in Charles Dickens's David Copperfield who steps back in order to relate objectively the facts of his tale, Dowell continually reminds the reader of his presence. Dowell says to the reader at the story's start: "It is not unusual in human beings who have witnessed the sack of a city or the falling to pieces of a people to desire to set down what they have witnessed . . . just to get the sight out of their heads" (p. 5). Even at the book's end, Dowell's act of narration continues to be a part of his story: "I am writing this, now, I should say, a full eighteen months after the words that end my last chapter" (p. 233). One way to describe the difference between the two works, then, might be to call David Copperfield object-centered and The Good Soldier subject or mind-centered.

The method Ford uses to mind-center The Good Soldier becomes indicative of the novel's epistemology--two key phrases give a general picture of what occurs in Dowell's mind. The first phrase, a question raised by Dowell, serves as an introduction to the entire novel. "If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core," asks Dowell, "and discover its rottenness only in nine years and six months less four days, isn't it true to say that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple?" (p. 7). Is it true? Answering this question becomes The Good Soldier's first problem. Dowell must decide if he can gain some idea of what truth is. By asking the question of the apple and its core, Dowell has already

come to realize that truth is not found in the physical objects people perceive. Dowell lived believing that his relationship with his wife, Florence, and the Ashburnhams was of the finest kind:

Permanance? Stability? I can't believe that it's gone. I can't believe that that long, tranquil life, which was just stepping the minuet, vanished in four crashing days at the end of nine years and six weeks. Upon my word, yes, our intimacy was like a minuet, simply because on every possible occasion and in every possible circumstance we knew where to go, where to sit, which table we unanimously should choose. . . . (p. 6)

As long as Dowell saw his world as a minuet, it was a minuet.

Permanance and stability did exist and are lost only after reflection, after time plays its tricks.

Shortly after calling his relationship a minuet, Dowell claims that it wasn't a minuet but a prison, but then he comes to this conclusion:

And yet I swear by the sacred name of my creator that it was true. It was true sunshine; the true music; the true plash of the fountains from the mouth of stone dolphins. For, if for me we were four people with the same tastes, with the same desires, acting--or, no, not acting--sitting here and there unanimously, isn't that the truth? (p. 7)

Armstrong calls this process of discovery, filled with revelations of past errors in judgement, "disillusioning surprise."⁴ Armstrong goes on to say, "Dowell reexamines his erroneous conjectures not to abandon hypothetical thinking but to project new beliefs. If his earlier conjectures misled him, he can still only discover truth through hypothesis. . . ."⁵ Armstrong's claim is that Dowell, through continual rethinking, reflecting on the earlier perceptions

he has had, comes closer and closer to a real sense of truth, closer to the Husserlian essence of the situation. But does Dowell ever come to some truth about the apple and its core? Does Ford allow for some static truth that Dowell could arrive at?

Before answering this question, another discussion of phenomenology becomes necessary. Earlier a general introduction to phenomenology was given; now two of the major phenomenological philosophies must be explained.

Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger were professor and student in the early part of this century, about the time of the First World War; however, as time went on, a split became evident between the two thinkers. Heidegger accepts and appreciates the work of his teacher, particularly the idea that philosophy needs a new basis from which to work, but Husserl's basis for the new philosophy is not radical enough for Heidegger. Husserl creates the phenomenological method, basing all knowledge on the interaction people have between themselves and that which surrounds them. For Husserl, the answer comes to essences. Inside each person, says Husserl, is a certain essence that describes him or her as a human being, a transcendental quality of thinking, questioning, and probing that all people are involved in. After viewing the human creature, Husserl takes Descartes's famous line and turns it on itself--I am, therefore I think.

Heidegger, though, believes that this transcendental is not the true basis for understanding the idea of being. As Pierre

Thevenaz writes in "What Is Phenomenology?":

In Husserl the . . . foundation was expressed in terms of consciousness. In Heidegger interrogation pushes still deeper, even below transcendental consciousness, down to the "foundation of the foundation." And it is already evident that this "iteration," this redoubling of radicalism can lead us only to a sort of "void without ground" . . . toward a nothingness, a nothingness more radical than any being or than any foundation that is. . . . Fundamental ontology leads into an ontology of non-being, into a neontology.⁶

The question Heidegger raises is similar to that of the scientist who asks, "But before creation, before the Big Bang, what was there?" Heidegger says that Husserl's consciousness is only another of the phenomena that is interacted with, not the basis of being, not where creation came out of. For Heidegger, the true bottom level of existence is nothingness. There is no transcendental in Heideggerian phenomenology, only pure interaction of phenomena with nothingness.

Two different epistemological theories arise from each of these two different phenomenologies. First, through Husserlian interaction of phenomena and the probing mind, people can discover truths, essences. But in a Heideggerian world, truth is impossible. There can only be the void at the foundation of learning, interaction between the world and nothingness. And it is this Heideggerian sense of the world that gives The Good Soldier its bleak nature.

As mentioned above, Armstrong believes that Dowell approaches some sense of truth through the reflections on the nine years he has spent with the Ashburnhams. The book, in fact, is a series of

Armstrong's "disillusioning surprises." But what is Dowell's final conclusion about these revelations? Samuel Hynes says that Dowell comes to accept a plurality of truths,⁷ and Armstrong takes these pluralities and fits them into an Husseralian construct, concluding that through his discovery of pluralism, Dowell discovers the essence of man. But all this disregards the second major epistemological phrase that runs throughout The Good Soldier. Whenever Dowell raises any sort of question, he inevitably answers himself by saying, "I don't know."

The question then becomes what does Dowell's continual asking without coming to any concrete answer show? To understand Dowell's musings, his words must be taken at their simplest level. To say "I don't know," and to continually repeat this phrase, can only show there is no answer for Dowell to find. The final metaphor Dowell uses in telling his story, a metaphor describing the young girl Nancy who has gone insane, but a metaphor which can be applied to the story as a whole, shows the true state of affairs in The Good Soldier: "It is very extraordinary to see the perfect flush of health on her cheeks, to see the lustre of her coiled black hair, the poise of the head upon the neck, the grace of the white hands--and to think that it all means nothing--that it is a picture without a meaning" (p. 254). No real essence has been discovered. Only a Heideggarian void rests at the bottom of Ford's bleak story.

One final problem of The Good Soldier needs to be dealt with. If the novel works as an epistemological study, yet nothing can be learned, how can Dowell come to any conclusions at all, true or

false? In part, the answer lies in the work's complete title, The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion. Passion runs throughout the novel, seemingly a driving force impelling most every action the characters take. But passion, like Dowell's conclusions, implies a universal truth, an Husseralian essence. How can passion's presence be explained in a Heideggarian void? A careful examination of The Good Soldier's epilogue provides an answer.

Right after using the metaphor of a picture without a meaning, Dowell concludes his story with a two page explanation of how Teddy Ashburnham commits suicide. In this epilogue, Dowell reminds the reader of Teddy's one particular character trait--his sentimentalism: "Well, Edward was the English gentleman; but he was also, to the last, a sentimentalist, whose mind was compounded of indifferent poems and novels" (pp. 256-257). Universal truths do not make up Teddy's thought structure, but, instead, his mind has become filled with words from sentimental novels. In effect, Teddy's mind becomes no more than the words he reads. Not only in the epilogue does Dowell tell the reader that Ashburnham's life is made of nothing more than words. In an earlier description of Teddy, Dowell says: "For all good soldiers are sentimentalists--all good soldiers are of that type. Their profession, for one thing, is full of the big words--'courage,' 'loyalty,' 'constancy'" (pp. 26-27). Passion works as another of these "big words" by which people live their lives. It becomes a word game people play. But in a Heideggarian void, it becomes a game without meaning, an act without purpose, and in effect

Teddy Ashburnham plays the game of passion throughout the book without its ever coming to any purposeful end.

The end does arrive, however, with Teddy's suicide, for as Dowell relates the story, Ashburnham kills himself once he realizes that all his passions have come to nothing. Every woman he has ever loved has either died or stopped loving him--La Dolciquita never loved him; Maisie Maiden has been crushed under the weight of her own luggage; Florence has committed suicide, not as much because Teddy has fallen in love with another woman, but because Dowell may have discovered her infidelity; and the final blow, Nancy sends a telegram that she is having "a rattling good time" (p. 255) now that she has left the Ashburnhams. The greatest possible hope for Edward Ashburnham, passion, proves itself to be the greatest possible fiction. All that Teddy has left is the Heideggerian void, something he no longer wishes to face.

Even in Teddy's suicide, Dowell realizes this lack of meaning. No passion exists in this final act, only the end of life: "So long, old man," says Ashburnham to Dowell, "I must have a bit of a rest, you know" (p. 256). Dowell himself finds no meaning to place on the act:

I didn't know what to say. I wanted to say: "God bless you," for I am also a sentimentalist. But I thought that perhaps would not be quite English good form, so I trotted off with the telegram to Leonora. She was quite pleased with it. (p. 256)

Dowell, by admitting his own sentimentalism, ties himself to Teddy and all the big words that have made Teddy's life. There is nothing

to create meaning for any of the characters except the fiction of words.

And what is the end result of this ill-placed faith in a fictional passion?

Well, it is over. Not one of us has got what he really wanted. Leonora wanted Edward, and she has got Rodney Bayham, a pleasant enough sort of sheep. Florence wanted Branshaw, and it is I who have bought it from Leonora. I didn't really want it; what I wanted mostly was to cease being a nurse-attendant. Well, I am a nurse-attendant. Edward wanted Nancy Rufford and I have got her. Only she is mad. It is a queer fantastic world. Why can't people have what they want? The things were all there to content everybody; yet everybody has the wrong thing. Perhaps you can make head or tail of it; it is beyond me. (p. 237)

The only end of all Dowell's reflections, of all the fictions lived by each of the characters, is nothing.

All of this leaves The Good Soldier to be a very bleak novel. The final conclusion becomes no conclusion, only a Heideggerian void. If we were to ask if there can be an answer to the question of meaning in Ford's tours de force, the answer would not even be a resounding, "No." Instead, using what is found in The Good Soldier, all a person can say is, "I don't know."

Notes

¹ The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion (New York: Vintage, 1951). All further references to this work appear in the text.

² "The Epistemology of The Good Soldier," Sewanee Review, 69 (1961), 225-235.

³ "The Epistemology of The Good Soldier: A Phenomenological Reconsideration," Criticism, 22 (1980), 230-251.

⁴ Armstrong, 238.

⁵ Armstrong, 239.

⁶ Thevenaz, pp. 56-57.

⁷ Hynes, 231.

Parade's End and the Creation of Man

To this point, Ford Madox Ford has been shown writing fairy tales affirming the individual over universal driving mechanisms and novels portraying the bleak void that underlies creation, but is there a way to reconcile the two? Can Ford accept the importance of individuals without leaving them in chaotic nothingness? Most critics see Parade's End, Ford's tetralogy about World War I,¹ as a record of the decline and fall of Victorian and Edwardian England during and after the war. However, Parade's End does not just record destruction, but also the rebuilding of a new society, one not based on a naturalistic class system but rather on values seen earlier in The Queen Who Flew--the importance of individual needs above and beyond those of society. Unlike The Queen Who Flew, though, Parade's End recognizes and uses the void of nothingness as the foundation for creating individual meaning.²

One of the best explorations of Parade's End, James Heldman's "The Last Victorian Novel," discusses Ford's use of literary technique to parallel Victorian society's downfall and the rise of modern man. Heldman writes:

Perhaps the most Victorian feature of Parade's End is the emphasis Ford places on the extent to which individual identity is or can be defined in relation to a community. . . . More significantly, however, in Parade's End Christopher Tietjens moves from a vestigial sense of community to isolation. The process and the result make it an epitome of the experience of modern man and an archetypal modern novel.³

As Heldman points out, Parade's End shows the movement from a Victorian ideal of community to a modern ideal of individual man and parallels this thematic movement through shifting literary techniques, starting with the omniscient narrator of Victorian novels, ending with the interior narrative--what might be called stream-of-consciousness--of modern works. Beyond the shift in both literary and thematic emphasis, however, lies a metaphysical change, the decline of eighteenth century mechanism and simultaneous rise of phenomenological individualism. Before exploring this change, one more dip into phenomenological philosophy becomes necessary.

So far, the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger have been explored, but now a third step becomes necessary to understand the full range of possibilities within a phenomenological view, the step Jean-Paul Sartre takes in his work Being and Nothingness.⁴ Sartre begins where Heidegger leaves off, with an underlying void, nothingness. However, Sartre changes the idea of void as pure interplay between mind and phenomena to a void even more radical. In Heidegger, existence means an empty slate for experience to mark, but only marks without meaning. In Sartre, though, even the slate is denied, allowing existence to be built out of nothing.

The method Sartre uses to show this, the most radical of phenomenological reductions, is nihilation--the process of isolating each object out from its environment, thereby showing the object as non-essential, non-foundational. Nihilation begins with the simplest objects, isolating out the material things of the world.

As I write, I begin to isolate one particular object out from the rest--my mug of tea becomes a distinguishable presence on my desk top. By distinguishing the mug from the clutter, I have isolated the mug through nihilation--by destroying its particular importance to being an integral part of the desk top's cluttered existence. By nihilation, I can remove any object from being essential to existence. I can isolate my desk from my living room, my living room from my apartment, my apartment from the duplex, etc., until I have finally nihilated all objects from the essence of existence, leaving a base of nothingness.

Nihilation affects not only physical objects; mental processes can be separated out as well. Even the act of intending an object, the idea central to Husserl's discovery of essential being, can be isolated through nihilation, removing all essences as foundations upon which existence can be built. This is the real idea behind Sartre's radical twist of thought, to show that being precedes essence, that there is nothing a priori to existence. Existence becomes nothingness. Beyond nothingness, all else is added. The implication Sartre gives to his radical nothingness works differently from that of Heidegger's blank slate. Nothingness now implies that if there is to be any conscious existence at all (and all people end up participating in some form of conscious existence), then this existence is neither found essence as in Husserl, or meaningless interplay between man and the cosmos as in Heidegger, but instead, conscious existence becomes a creative act--people creating their own meanings out of nothingness.

With people as creative beings, they become free--free from mechanistic preconceptions and free to create meaning for life, essence, as they see fit. Freedom lifts the control over life the individual mind once held, since the ego has been removed as a foundational base for existence. "The freedom which reveals itself to us in anguish," writes Sartre in Being and Nothingness, "can be characterized by the existence of that nothing which insinuates itself between motives and act. It is not because I am free that my act is not subject to the determination of motives; on the contrary, the structure of my motives as ineffective is the condition of my freedom" (p. 34). Two final directions must be explored in light of Sartre's words--the importance of act over motive or thought, and anguish, or the pessimistic nature of Sartrian freedom.

First, freedom from all external and internal restraints leaves one feature to create meaning with--the act. According to Sartre, action defines people. What people do, what they project from nothingness, becomes the foundation for meaning; all else is fiction. Because only physical manifestations of thought--actions--are important in the creation of meaning, Sartrian philosophy will say that Jesus's idea that thinking about adultery is as sinful as the physical act of adultery no longer stands. Only the action matters.

Second, for Sartre, freedom does not carry the joyful connotation people traditionally associate with the word, but instead freedom acts as a prison in which humankind is caught. Freedom comes only when people have nihilated all preconceived essences, foundations to their existence, and allows them to create new essences for their lives.

But new essences are still essences, and people, by creating new essences, become trapped again by preconceived notions--they create fictions about the future before living in it. In other words, Sartre's freedom acts as a prison, a Catch-22, an inescapable endless loop of creation, nihilation, creation, nihilation.⁵ The endless loop, because it shows the futility of finding a true meaning for life, creates anguish--the freedom of life becomes a prison from which there is no escape. Through freedom, hope for true meaning is lost.

What does Sartre's phenomenological existentialism do, then, to the sneaker? First, through isolating nihilation it destroys any foundational meaning the shoe might have had. From there, the truly free individual, one who has gone through personal nihilation and individual redefinition, takes the sneaker and acts on it--not to give the sneaker any real meaning, but rather to give the individual meaning. Even if this individual creates meaning for the sneaker, inherent in that meaning comes anguish and pain, because meaning can only be fiction; it can not last. Meaning for the sneaker must change because of freedom, and therein lies the endless loop--meaning is found, nihilated, found, nihilated, found, nihilated. . . . And from the endless loop, the individual who acts on the sneaker takes on the anguish and absurdity the endless loop holds.

Before going further, it needs to be pointed out that Ford's program in Parade's End is not a perfect parallel of Sartre's phenomenological existentialism. Though similar, the two programs

divide at crucial points, in particular with the physical nature of the act and with the anguish Sartre's version of freedom creates. For Ford, the act must be defined in a larger sense than in Sartre and include the mental act; and freedom for Ford does not mean heated anguish, but instead holds no specific emotional ties over people. Freedom is cold, unworried passion.

Ford does parallel Sartre in one major point, though--nihilism. Parade's End portrays not so much Edwardian society's downfall, but the rise of modern individualism by following Christopher Tietjens, the modern individual who isolates himself from society in order to define his own being. Tietjens moves from the community experience of working in England's pre-war bureaucracy to the pastoral solitude of country living, and, through the war, Tietjens discovers the true depth of nothingness shown by nihilism. Nihilism plays a particularly important role in Parade's End's second novel, No More Parades, where Tietjens, working as a supply officer during the war, receives word that his wife, Sylvia, has come to France in order to settle affairs with Christopher. Learning that Sylvia has put up at a nearby hotel and waits to see him, Tietjens sits on his bunk and tries to decipher his wife's present actions and their meaning, coming to this final conclusion:

What in the world was he doing? Now? With all this introspection? . . . Hang it all, he was not justifying himself. . . . He had acted perfectly correctly as far as Sylvia was concerned. Not perhaps to Miss Wannop. . . . Why, if he, Christopher Tietjens of Groby, had the need to justify himself, what did it stand for to be Christopher Tietjens of Groby? That was the unthinkable thought. (p. 350)⁶

Christopher comes to the realization that he is nothing more than a created being, created by the conventions of society. To justify existing as Christopher Tietjens of Groby becomes an impossible task. Christopher in his role of landed gentry has been isolated, nihilated, leaving simply Christopher Tietjens.

As the war continues around him, Christopher goes further and further inside himself, in a sense making his own trip into hell, finding that the only important meaning in life is what people make of themselves, the self-made character. After the creative act, all else ends as meaningless word play:

Levin exclaimed:

"Just heavens! What a pessimist you are!"

Tietjens said: "Can't you see that that is optimism?"

"But," Levin said, "we're being beaten out of the field. . . . You don't know how desperate things are."

Tietjens said:

"Oh, I know pretty well. As soon as this weather breaks we're probably done."

"We can't," Levin said, "possibly hold them. Not possibly."

"But success or failure," Tietjens said, "have nothing to do with the credit of a story. And consideration of the virtues of humanity does not omit the other side. If we lose, they win. If success is necessary to your idea of virtue--virtus--they then provide the success instead of ourselves. But the thing is to be able to stick to the integrity of your character, whatever earthquake sets the house tumbling over your head. . . . That, thank God, we're doing. . . ."

(p. 454)

Like Sartre, Christopher, and Ford through Christopher, sees that success and failure are static goals, impossible and therefore unimportant. Instead, action becomes important, the creation and definition of self, simply because action is not static but necessarily temporal. Christopher has gone through self-nihilation and risen as

an individual whose life takes on meaning only through his individual actions.

An interesting contrast to Tietjens is Sylvia, who has the same opportunity to become an individual, but instead falls deeper into the trap of being defined by society. On the evening Sylvia and Christopher meet at the hotel near Christopher's post in France, something happens to her. At the hotel, though surrounded by people and noise, Christopher appears quiet, withdrawn. Sylvia, though, seems acutely aware of all that surrounds her--the newly promoted ex-Sergeant-Major Cowley, the sleeping General Campion, the dancing in the next room, and above all, the overly loud gramophone:

She screamed blasphemies that she was hardly aware of knowing. She had to scream against the noise; she was no more responsible for the blasphemy than if she had lost her identity under an anaesthetic. She had lost her identity. . . . She was one of this crowd! (p. 440)

Sylvia, unlike Tietjens, defines herself less and less as an individual and more and more as part of society. Instead of isolating herself from other people, instead of self-nihilation, Sylvia requires other people to give her life meaning.

Reflecting on the works discussed earlier, The Queen Who Flew and The Good Soldier, a pattern begins to emerge. Like the Queen before meeting the bat, Sylvia defines herself through outside forces and therefore works as a purely social creature. Just as the Queen continually accepts the "supposings" of others, Sylvia defines herself through others' words, the strongest of these being those of Father Consett, the priest who told Sylvia that the one thing she

would not be able to handle would be Christopher's falling in love with another woman. "She tried to rouse herself," Ford writes, "and said: He knew me. . . . Damn it, he knew me! . . . What's vulgarity to me, Sylvia Tietjens born Satterthwaite? I do what I want and that's good enough for anyone. Except a priest" (p. 415). Sylvia allows herself to be controlled by an outside force, the memory of Father Consett. Christopher, meanwhile, by allowing himself to think the unthinkable, that being Christopher Tietjens of Groby means nothing, has actually freed himself, has moved beyond supposings.

However, even if Christopher has moved into the world of self-definition, a significant difference exists between it and the Queen's world--the necessity of nihilation to gain freedom. The Queen achieves the goal of individualism without destruction, Christopher only through nihilation, by passing through the deep, meaningless nothing that Dowell has discovered at the end of The Good Soldier. Unlike Dowell, however, Christopher lifts himself up to rebuild a new world through nihilation. Christopher defines himself. Dowell becomes unable to reach meaning without social relationships. The themes of the earlier works are fully developed, but now come to light in the presence of a Sartrean created being.

As mentioned above, Ford does not follow the complete Sartrean program. For Sartre, the act has purely physical connotations, but Ford will accept a wider definition for action, closer to that of Henry James in "The Art of Fiction," where James says that what occurs in the mind, the act of consciousness, is as interesting and important a subject for a story as any physical action that can be

portrayed.⁷ Parade's End concludes with psychological drama, The Last Post, where, instead of Christopher or Sylvia, the reader watches the mind of Mark Tietjens, Christopher's older brother, as Mark lives through the last afternoon of his self-imposed paralysis and muteness. Inside Mark's mind, the action of redefining an individual's life occurs. What Mark sees, thinks, feels in the few hours of an afternoon shows the redefining of self not through brute force and bold movement, but through subtle mental maneuvering of his isolated, nihilated self.

The other difference between Ford and Sartre, the emotional nature of a truly free person, shows Mark's self-created being and the difference between heated anguish and cool, unworried passion. Anguish plays an important role in Sartre's pessimism, anguish over the fact that since people are free they can never attain a true, static resting place, a final truth that will work for all time. But, as seen by Ford, the modern being seeks constant movement, desires it. Mark Tietjens silences himself in The Last Post not because the world is changing around him, but because the world refuses to change, refuses to move. As Ford writes:

Well, that was not his, Mark Tietjens' fault. He had given the nation the Transport it needed; the nation should have found the food. They had not, so the children had long thin legs and wristbones that protruded on pipe-stems. All that generation! . . . No fault of his! He had managed the Transport as it should be managed. His department had. His own department, built up by himself from junior temporary clerk to senior permanent official; he had built it up, from the day of his entrance thirty years ago, to the day of his resolution never more to speak a word. (p. 679)

Mark was a man of action, and through self-imposed paralysis, though in an ironic way, still acts. But Mark's actions come not from Sartre's anguish, but from cold passion. Ford continues writing about Mark:

Not yet stir a finger! He had to be in this world, in this nation. Let them care for him, for he was done with them. . . . He knew the sire and dam of every horse from Eclipse to Perlmutter. That was enough for him. He had interests enough! (pp. 679-680)

Mark's retaliation is not angry or frustrated but cool, like his paralysis. The idea of a coldly passionate man is not exclusively Ford's but can be found in Yeats's "The Fisherman" and Wallace Stevens's concept of the glass man.⁸ However, in Parade's End, cold passion has actual manifestation--the nihilated and recreated Mark and Christopher Tietjenses.

So where has Ford wound up? He began, in The Queen Who Flew, by affirming the importance of the individual, continued by discovering the Heideggarian void in The Good Soldier, and ends by forcing people to redefine themselves from the void in Parade's End. It is not unimportant that Ford winds up where he began, in a pastoral and anarchic society with people free to define themselves in whatever way they wish.⁹ Parade's End, however, provides a fuller sense of freedom than the fairy tale through the tetralogy's use of nihilation and nothingness, opening the world to the wide range of infinite possibilities. The existential stoicism, though it appears bleak, can be equally as well slanted to the direction of a rich and full individual life. Ford, in his pluralistic world view, leaves the

final creation of meaning, optimistic, pessimistic, or neutral, to the reader.¹⁰

Notes

¹ Consisting of the novels Some Do Not. . . . (1924), No More Parades (1925), A Man Could Stand Up (1926), and The Last Post (1928).

² Parade's End will be treated as a tetralogy despite disagreement over the inclusion of the final book, The Last Post, as an integral part of the work. Since The Last Post deals with characters and situations developed in the first three books, and is the last heard of the Tietjens family, it seems fair to discuss it in light of its predecessors. All four works are printed in one volume: Parade's End (New York: Vintage, 1979). All further references to this work appear in the text.

³ "The Last Victorian Novel: Technique and Theme in Parade's End," Twentieth Century Literature, 18 (1972), 272-273.

⁴ Being and Nothingness: An Ontological Essay, Hazel E. Barnes, trans. (New York: Philosophical Library, n.d.).

⁵ Sartre's endless loop becomes possible through the nature of time and mutability. Sartre will say that the loop works because freedom is the freedom to transform, and the only transformation people are capable of is the creation of meanings--fictional meanings.

⁶ All ellipses in this and following passages from Parade's End and other works by Ford, unless otherwise noted, are Ford's own.

⁷ "The Art of Fiction," in The Theory of Fiction: Henry James, James E. Miller, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), pp. 40-42.

⁸ "The Fisherman": "A man who does not exist, / A man who is but a dream; / And cried, 'Before I am old / I shall have written him one / Poem maybe as cold / And as passionate as the dawn.'" (ll. 35-40); and "Asides on the Oboe": "The glass man, cold and numbered, dewily cries, / 'Thou art not August unless I make thee so'" (ll. 21-22).

⁹ In neither work does pastoral mean life without trouble. The Queen Who Flew concludes with the Queen and the young farmer walking "hand in hand up the tranquil valley or in among the storms on the hill crests. . ." (my ellipses). And the last seen of Christopher Tietjens, he is being scolded by Valentine for having forgotten some important prints inside a jar at the dealer's.

¹⁰ A similar pastoral retreat can be found in Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, published in 1929. The most interesting aspects of this parallel are, first thematically, that both are results of nihilistic experiences during World War I, and, biographically, during the 1920's, Hemingway worked for Ford as a reader in Paris for the transatlantic review.

The Neutral Author:

Ford Madox Ford as Literary Critic

In 1936, a few years before his death, Ford Madox Ford wrote Portraits From Life, memories and criticism about literary figures Ford had known. Within this work, Ford's long-standing disagreement with H. G. Wells about the artist's role in society can be found:

What we contended was that the world could be saved only by the Arts; Mr. Wells and his followers proclaimed that the trick could only be done by Science. What, secondly, we contended was that if you intended to practice the Arts you had better know something of the mental processes of how works of art are produced; the enemy forces proclaimed, with drums a-beat and banners waving, that to be an artist of any sort you had only to put some vine leaves in your hair, take pen or brush and paper or canvas and dip pen or brush in inkstand or paint pot, and Art would flow from your fingertips. The opposing doctrines were, in short, those of Inspiration and of Conscious Art.¹

One theme that has run throughout Ford's work has been the absence of determinism, allowing, even forcing, people to find their own meanings for themselves and life. Ford and Wells argue the place, in both theme and creation of art, for determinism--Science or Inspiration--and the conscious act--Conscious Art.² But what does Conscious Art mean to Ford? How does a writer work without the safety net of heaven (or hell) sent Inspiration?

One place to look for this answer would be in the ideas of reader-response criticism, a critical theory arising out of the phenomenology that has been attached to Ford thus far. One of the

first bases of reader-response criticism is behaviorism, the psychology of learned response. Through behaviorism, deterministic archetypal psychologies such as those of Freud and Jung can be discarded. In his 1923 essay Women and Men, Ford lays out some basics for behaviorism by rejecting universals as non-existent abstractions having no true universal value. "The view that the English woman has of 'a Man,'" writes Ford, "may differ from those of the French, the Germans or the Russians, but it is nevertheless largely a view of an object that never existed--a view of an abstraction."³ For Ford, the abstract archetype of Man (and he says the same for archetypal Woman) works as fiction, created by people for their own purposes.

But where does the idea of abstract Man come from in the first place? Ford lays blame on, or gives credit to, the word. In writing on the original source for the English ideal of Woman, Ford says:

The Englishman's mind is of course made up entirely of quotations. A person entirely without intellect himself, he is the man of all the world who best knows his poets. And the poets best known to him are of course Shakespeare and the English translators of the Bible. When his quotations do not come from either Shakespeare or the Bible he thinks they do, so that it comes to the same thing. (p. 27)

Just as Ford describes Teddy Ashburnham as "full of the big words-- 'courage,' 'loyalty,' 'constancy,'" or else describes the Queen as made of other people's "supposings," all people are created beings, made up of the words they experience in life.⁴ In The Good Soldier,

all the reader knows of Dowell are his words; the reader is never presented with an objective description of this highly subjective first-person narrator. In The Good Soldier, the reader must accept the "supposings" of another person to form a picture of reality. In Parade's End, words play a similar role only with a different effect. Mark Tietjens protests the stupidity of Britain's inaction not only by imposing paralysis on himself, but also muteness. Mark protests by refusing to use the tool by which people define themselves--words.

If Ford places words in an exalted position, what becomes the artist's role in the system? Ford answers in his introduction to Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell To Arms, from which I quote a rather lengthy passage:

The aim--the achievement--of the great prose writer is to use words so that they shall seem new and alive because of their juxtaposition with other words. This gift Hemingway has supremely. Any sentence of his taken at random will hold your attention. And irresistibly. It does not matter where you take it.

I was under the canvas with guns. They smelled cleanly of oil and grease. I lay and listened to the rain on the canvas and the clicking of the car over the rails. There was a little light came through and I lay and I looked at the guns.

You could not begin that first sentence and not finish the passage.

That is the great part of this author's gift. Yet it is not only "gift." You cannot throw yourself into a frame of mind and just write to get that effect. Your mind has to choose each word and your ear has to test it until by long disciplining of mind and ear you can no longer go wrong.

That disciplining through which you must put yourself is all the more difficult in that it must be gone through in solitude. You cannot watch the man next to you in the ranks smartly manipulating his side-arms nor do you hear any word of command by which to time yourself.

On the other hand a writer holds a reader by his temperament. That is his true "gift"—what he receives from whoever sends him into the world. It arises from how you look at things. If you look at and render things so that they appear new to the reader you will hold his attention. If what you give him appears familiar or half familiar his attention will wander. Hemingway's use of the word "cleanly" is an instance of what I have been saying. The guns smelled cleanly of oil and grease. Oil and grease are not usually associated in the mind with clean smell. Yet at the minutest reflection you realise that the oil and grease on the clean metal of the big guns are not dirt. So the adverb is just. You have had a moment of surprise and then your knowledge is added to. The word "author" means "someone who adds to your consciousness."⁵

This one passage contains the three main concerns to Ford's conception of art: the relationship of the author to the word, the relationship of the reader to the word, and the relationship of the author to the reader.

The first relationship to be developed, that between writers and their words, Ford establishes on a theory prevalent among novelists of the early twentieth century, the removal of authorial presence from a work. The most famous of these theorists, James Joyce through the character Stephen Dedalus in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, explains the role of the artist to be "like the God of creation," remaining "within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."⁶ For Joyce, the author stands back in order to allow the audience opportunity to revel in the work's truth—objective reality without interference from an artist's subjective viewpoint. Ford will agree with Joyce to a large extent. The

removal of the author, according to Ford, allows the objective presentation of the world. "The one thing that you can not do," writes Ford in Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, "is to propagandize, as author, for any cause. You must not, as author, utter any views: above all you must not fake any events. You must not, however humanitarian you may be, over elaborate the fear felt by a coursed rabbit. . . . Your business with the world is rendering, not alteration."⁷ This movement from telling to showing, alteration to rendering, can be seen in the movement Ford makes from omniscient narrator to stream-of-consciousness in Parade's End, a movement characterized by a changing concentration from the author's view to the character's. The removal of authorial presence can be seen even more in The Good Soldier where Dowell says all and Ford never speaks to the reader directly. Ford plays the role of detached author in the same way the phenomenological philosopher plays the role of detached observer, to experience life in its rawest state before giving it meaning. Through this basic philosophic difference between Joyce and Ford--Joyce believes in presented universal truths, Ford in created ones--the ultimate reason the detached relationship between author and work takes on a different significance for each writer.

For Joyce, objectivity in rendering allows the reader to view and experience truth. For Ford, the reader creates a new truth. First, as Ford writes, "the general effect of a novel must be the general effect that life makes on mankind." If this is the case, then the novel must render life as it appears to the mind. "We saw

that life did not narrate," continues Ford about himself and Conrad, "but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate but render . . . impressions" (pp. 72-73). But what end results come from renderings? If Ford, as does Sartre, believes in the creation of meaning, then the result must be to stimulate speculations within the mind of the reader rather than to show existing truths; for existence must precede essence. Being comes before meaning.⁸ The role of the writer becomes, then, not one so much as creator, for that duty will be left for the reader, but instead the writer becomes a renderer, painting pictures which help readers create new realities within their minds.

The second relationship to be explored grows directly out of the first, that between the reader and the word. Ford defines this relationship with one word--surprise. "We agreed," says Ford, still talking about his literary partnership with Conrad, "that the one quality that gave interest to Art was the quality of surprise" (p. 78). Surprise actively includes the reader in the process of art, as implied by Ford's discussion of the clean smell of oil and grease on the guns. However, before discussing Ford's idea of surprise and the reader, what surprise is not needs to be explored.

Surprise does not shock readers, like sneaking up on a friend and screaming "Boo!" Instead of disturbing the reader through vulgarity or other foul insinuations, what generally gets termed shock value, Ford includes a wider range of methods under shock. As

Ford explains in a 1903 letter to H. G. Wells:

By the bye; I lament to see you fall into the error of upholding "Elizabethanism." That sort of thing is the curse of modern English. What we want is to use our vernacular so skilfully that words, precious or obsolete, will not stick out or impede a reader. . . . No, sir; their vocabulary seems better than ours because we are creatures of association--precisely because we consider a ploughed field "Nature!" We have been taught to consider Elizabethan words as "poetical"--and so we do. And we all of us have in us a little touch of the pedant; we like to twist things round to show off. But really it's much better to write "not pertinent" and to keep "impertinent" for its present use. . . . Consider, oh my friend, these points--for, very firstly, you make the sense of language so important a part of your scheme. What we want is to cultivate that "sense" than to increase our vocabularies with obsolete words that are attractive mainly because they are allusive.⁹

Shock value comes from overly pedantic as well as vulgar forms. In either case, shock value draws attention to the author and has little or nothing to do with surprise in the reader.

If surprise is not shock, then what is it? The ability to inform, says Ford. James L. Kinneavy, in his A Theory of Discourse, speaks about the need for unpredictability in words if they are to inform, for already known or easily predictable statements "come as no surprise," provide no learning value.¹⁰ The words presented in a text, according to Ford, must inform readers by surprising them with ideas and thoughts never encountered before. Ford outlines the method of surprise in a 1914 essay, "On Impressionism," where, speaking of the reader, Ford says:

You will seek to capture his interest; you will seek to hold his interest. You will do this by methods of surprise,

of fatigue, by passages of sweetness in your language, by passages suggesting the sudden and brutal shock of suicide. You will give him passages of dulness, so that your bright effects may seem more bright; you will alternate, you will dwell for a long time upon an intimate point; you will seek to exasperate so that you may better enchant. You will, in short, employ all the devices of the prostitute.¹¹

Ford's methods are developed in order to drive the reader forward through a process of continual change and redefinition.

Wolfgang Iser, in his seminal work on reader-response criticism, The Implied Reader, reiterates the idea of surprise, though in a more academic tone than Ford:

The individual sentences not only work together to shade in what is to come; they also form an expectation in this regard. Husserl calls this expectation "pre-intentions." As this structure is characteristic of all sentence correlatives, the interaction of these correlatives will not be a fulfillment of the expectation so much as a continual modification of it.¹²

As a text moves forward, it continually forces readers to take new information into their thought structures, causing a necessary change to accommodate the new information. The relationship between the reader and the word becomes interactive, a joining together to find meaning, continually changing meaning.

Through this interactive relationship, art returns to the concept mentioned in the first chapter--art needs an audience in order to be art. Continuing in The Implied Reader, Iser writes, "The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination

of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination" (p. 279). Art works as the coming together of reader and text, the two acting as one in a process of creating a new reality. Ford's way of describing this relationship between reader and word becomes, "A picture should come out of its frame and seize the spectator."¹³ The active nature of the relationship between art work and audience epitomizes Ford's aesthetic as well as reader-response criticism and phenomenology. Work and audience come together to find a new reality, a new meaning.

The third and final relationship, then, is that between writers and readers, a relationship Ford has already described as that found between prostitutes and their johns. But what does this description really imply? The main implication is that writers, in the terms of modern management techniques, work as "facilitators." Instead of forcing knowledge down readers' throats, Ford believes that writers must present worlds where readers can discover meaning for themselves. To characterize Ford's idea of author and audience, one word stands above all--humbleness. Unlike Joyce, who removes himself from the text to stand above it, Ford removes himself in order to stand below the text. The text, for Ford, has become Iser's virtual text, the interaction between a reader and words; therefore, if the virtual text acts as the true presentation of art, the author has no right to stand above it, claiming to be indifferent to or better than the creation of meaning present in the process of art. In another lengthy but important passage from "On Impressionism," Ford writes:

But one point is very important. The artist can never write to satisfy himself--to get, as the saying is, something off the chest. He must not write propaganda which it is his desire to write; he must not write rolling periods, the production of which gives him a smooth feeling in his digestive organs or wherever it is. He must always write to satisfy that other fellow--that other fellow who has too clear an intelligence to let his attention be captured or his mind deceived by special pleadings in favor of any given dogma. You must not write so as to improve him, since he is a much better fellow than yourself, and you must not write so as to influence him, since he is a granite rock, a peasant intelligence, the gnarled bole of a sempiternal oak, against which you dash yourself in vain.
(p. 54)

The writer, according to Ford, works dilligently to present clear, believable pictures, as objectively as possible, for readers to interact with as they would the physical world, allowing them to experience and change. "The word 'author' means 'someone who adds to your consciousness.'"

Ford, then, is one of the first literary artists to consciously subdue his own personality and his subject to the importance of the reader. Behind this move in literary technique lies a firmly founded philosophical ideal--individual beings who create meanings for themselves. The author has no right to subdue those individuals to a set of preconceived ideas that are only created fictions. Writers, according to Ford, have no right to impose their own "supposings" on the minds of others, but instead must allow their audiences to create supposings of their own. In fact, Ford advocates pluralism, a world filled with infinite meanings, each created by a different individual. And pluralism does not work simply as a device used to draw readers into a work, but extends to all facets of art, including the creation of art works. In Joseph Conrad, Ford emphasizes the point of plurality

by italicizing an entire passage on the subject:

But these two writers were not unaware--were not unaware--that there are other methods of writing novels. They were not rigid even in their own methods. They were sensible to the fact that compromise is at all times necessary to execution of a work of art. (p. 87)

Ford admits that no one method, not even pluralism, fits all situations and works best at creating all works of art. In other words, by refusing to set any strict standards at all for art, Ford creates the ultimate plurality, one that accepts all theories, even non-pluralistic theories, of art and life.

What has Ford done, in the end, for art and for the novel in particular? First, he has moved the novel into the realm of phenomenology by removing the necessity of universal truths in either writing or interpreting a work. The author is neutralized, allowing the words an objective presentation. Secondly, by creating a tension of surprise between the reader and the word, Ford moves art from the didactic position of showing the reader truths to the new position of learning through an active process of creation. The reader's consciousness is added to by creating meanings out of surprising juxtapositions rather than through the reader's being told what truth is. Finally, by standing below the words he has written, Ford has put the emphasis in art on the act of appreciation, the interaction of the reader and the work, the virtual text, anticipating the concerns of reader-response criticism, the critical approach which will later arise out of the ideas of phenomenology. Ford, through his idea of the neutral author has given art to the audience. As he writes in "On Impressionism":

It is in short no pleasant kind of job to be a conscious artist. You won't have any vine-leaves in your poor old hair; you won't just dash your quill into an inexhaustable ink-well and pour out fine frenzies. No, you will be just the skilled workman doing his job with drill or chisel or mallet. And you will get precious little out of it. Only just at times, when you come again to look at some work of yours that you have quite forgotten, you will say, "Why, that is rather well done." That is all. (pp. 54-55)

Notes

- ¹ Portraits From Life (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), pp. 107-108.
- ² Ford uses the same imagery quite often for those of the "enemy camp"; in Portraits From Life, Ford also calls Theodore Drieser a man of Science and accuses him of the same faults as Wells:

I represent, as the reader will by this time no doubt have observed, the novelists who believe that there is a way of doing things as opposed to the novelists of genius. These last set vine-leaves in their hairs, grasp pens as large as weavers' beams, and with enormous strokes pen polyphonic rhapsodies, accusing us meanwhile of carving ingenious patterns with tooth picks on peachstones . . . or of being poets. . . . For when Mr. Drieser wishes finally to indicate that I am a sort of fusionless village imbecile he says:
"You're a poet. . . . That's what you are. A regular poet."
Naturally I retort:
"It's you who are the poet," and so get under way. (p. 165)
- ³ Women and Men (Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1923), p. 37.
- ⁴ Words, it will be noted, are more than simply letters strung together and printed on a page, but are also oral or else visual presentations of ideas in forms other than writing--similar to the idea of signifiers in modern critical theory.
- ⁵ Introd., A Farewell To Arms, by Ernest Hemingway, in Critical Writings of Ford Madox Ford, Frank MacShane, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), pp. 133-134.
- ⁶ A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: Viking, 1968), p. 215.
- ⁷ Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (London: Duckworth, 1924); rpt. in Critical Writings, pp. 86-87. Ellipses are my own, not Ford's.

⁸ French novelist/film maker Alain Robbe-Grillet explains this new stance for the novel in the essay "A Future for the Novel" (1956; rpt. in his For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction, Richard Hower, trans. [New York: Grove Press, 1965], p. 21):

In this future universe of the novel, gestures and objects will be there before being something; and they will still be there afterwards, hard, unalterable, eternally present, mocking their own "meaning," that meaning which vainly tries to reduce them to the role of precarious tools, of a temporary and shameful fabric woven exclusively--and deliberately--by the superior human truth expressed in it, only to cast out this awkward auxiliary into immediate oblivion and darkness.

⁹ Letter to H. G. Wells, 1903, in Critical Writings, pp. 94-95.

¹⁰ A Theory of Discourse (New York: Norton, 1981), p. 93.

¹¹ "On Impressionism," Poetry and Drama, 2 (1914), 161-175, 323-334; rpt. in Critical Writings, p. 54.

¹² The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 278.

¹³ "On Impressionism," p. 48.

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