Chapter Five

FORD WADOK FORD

Ford's critical writings deserve special attention in this study because he was not only a follower of the tradition of James and a conferee of Conrad but also a bold experimenter in the art of fiction and an ardent exponent of the Impressionist theory of the novel. Although his creative talent was strengthened by the First World War and found expression in the continued productivity of his later years, the best of his literary criticism was already available before 1914. He serves as a convenient connecting-link between the pre-war critics of fiction like Hardy, James and Conrad and the post-War aestheticians like Lawrence, Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Though a prolific writer whose literary output ranges from poetry to history, biography, essays, reminiscences, criticism, novels and sociology, his critical theories deserves closer study for the reevaluation of the late Victorian and early twentieth century schools of fiction in England.

By his historical placement Ford enjoyed literary associations which are rare in the history of letters. Almost from the beginning of the century when he was busy collaborating with Joseph Conrad, his public career can be described in terms of poets, painters and novelists whom he met, encouraged and published. His response to the demands and aims of several
artistic and literary groups, made him a significant transitional figure between the Pre-Raphaelites and the experimental British, French and the American writers of the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties. Among his immediate predecessors and well-known contemporaries, he knew Henry James, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Stephen Crane, Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and Galsworthy. During his editorship of *The English Review* (December 1908 to February 1910) and the years he spent with Violet Hunt (1906 to 1915), he was the first publisher of D.H. Lawrence, a staunch supporter of Pound, an ally of the Imagists, and something of an elderly mentor to Wyndham Lewis and other young American writers. This is, perhaps, why he has been called a writer’s writer. Ford had a deep insight into the techniques and theories of the art of fiction and his views influenced men so widely separated by time and nature as Joseph Conrad and Ezra Pound, and, at the other end of his life Earnest Hemingway, Allen Tate, Cecil Hailtland and Robie Macaulay.

Despite the wide range of Ford’s critical works and his persistent preoccupation with new techniques in the English

1. In *Return to Yesterday* Ford recalled the authors he published: We published contributions of one sort or another by Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, D.G. Rossetti — posthumously, Swinburne, Anatole France, G. Hauptmann, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, W.H. Hudson, W.B. Yeats and even President Taft. Of the then youngish — speaking in terms of career — we published Mr. Wells’s *Tono Bungay* serially in four numbers and short serial of Mr. Arnold Bennett in two, as well as Essers, Galsworthy, Bellov, Chesterton and other of then similar standing. (*Return to Yesterday* (New York, 1932), p. 372)
novel, he has not been given any detailed study as a critic of fiction. As a matter of fact Ford has not been considered worthy of any serious study by the English critics. Ignored and slighted in later years, he received in England on his death, the grudging sarcasm of the obituarists of what in his day he had stubbornly resisted, "The Establishment". Even those who have generously conferred upon Ford the belated laurel, have usually wondered whether the reasons for his neglect are embodied in the works themselves or whether extra-literary circumstances influenced critical judgment and popular reception. The "Conspiracy theory" advanced by Edgar Japson and by Douglas Goldring does seem to have some grains of truth in as much as literary and personal politics played some part in shaping Ford's reputation for better or for worse. But a more impressive explanation for his neglect, particularly in his native country, may be found in the bewildering variety of his literary productions.

Recent critical interest in Ford's writings, however, has been focused largely on the techniques of his major novels. Among his note worthy critics Mark Shorer, Robie Macaulay,


3. See David P. Harvey's article "Pro Patria Mori: The Neglect of Ford's Novels in England" in Modern Fiction Studies IX, (Spring 1963), pp. 3-13
William Carlos William, R.F. Blackmur and Graham Greene, all with certain reservations, present Ford as a craftsman and able technician. They casually refer to Ford's theories of the novel in discussing his major works. There are at least two reasons why Ford's theories of fiction have not been extensively studied by critics. His death in 1939 has allowed little time for scholars to examine all of his work and bring out the aesthetic principles he advocated. Secondly, the study of theory itself is a recent phenomenon in the criticism of fiction. Even writers of such stature as Henry James, Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf have only recently begun to have their due. It is not until 1962 that illuminating studies of Ford's work by such critics as Paul M. Wiley, J.A. Reixner and Richard Cassells have given comprehensive critique of the novelist's theory and practice. A study of Ford's published criticism, memoirs, reminiscences and novels in the light of his literary heritage, his associations with the Pre-Raphaelites and his collaboration with Joseph Conrad amply shows his enthusiasm for the theory of Impressionism and the cult of the New Novel.

Formative Influences:

Though Ford is never tired of claiming that he was
forced upon a literary career by his grand-father, Ford Madox Brown, who wanted him to become an artist of any sort, he showed keen literary sense from the very beginning of his early adulthood. From his literary associations and his own studies he was aware of the distinction between "commercial literature" and "imaginative literature". Son of Huxfer, the distinguished music critic of The Times and grandson of Ford Madox Brown, the famous Victorian painter, he had in his veins something of their blood. On his father's early death, Ford's home became No. 37 Fitzroy Square, London, where his grand-father painted and entertained all the "big bow-wows" of late Victorian artistic society. Thus he spent his youth in the company of a large group of writers, musicians, and painters including G.G. Rossetti, William Morris, Ruskin, Swinburne, Holman Hunt, Edward Burne-Jones, Joseph Joachim and, perhaps, Liszt.

Ford's formal education was more broad-based and discursive. Though somewhat aimless in his ambitions, he read widely. In The English Novel, he gives an account of his early reading in fiction. Other than the 'penny-dreadfuls' which he preferred to "the three volume novels of William Black, Besant and Rice and other purveyors of the novel", he read under his mother's direction such novels as Silas Marner, The
Wuthering Heights, Lady of the Pavement, Far From the Madding Crowd and the two famous novels of Wilkie Collins. When he was about seventeen, his grandfather introduced him to French fiction, recommending Madame Bovary and Daudet's Tartin de Tarascon and Tartin sur les Alpes. Ford also mentions reading at this time Smollett, The Castle of Otranto, Caleb Williams, and among American writers Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Sam Slick and Will Carlton.

He remarks that his reading in poetry was that of the usual school boy and young man interested in letters. Though recalled after forty years or so, this account of Ford's early reading is significant from our point of view. The study of Bronte and George Eliot on the one hand and of Flaubert and Daudet on the other, suggest his later preference for self-conscious writers to those writing with mere 'inspiration' and at their best producing not artistic masterpieces but commercial best-sellers.

Ford's recall of the literary forces in England of his adulthood is also revealing. In one of his earlier reminiscences, he throws light on the influence wielded by the Henley group and the Yellow Book School. The former "admired

physical force, lawlessness, piracy, the speed of motor-cars, the deafness of lino-type machines, and they studied words from the Authorized Version and Sir Thomas Brown. Stevenson, R.A.M. Stevenson, Merriett Watson and George Warrington Stevens represented that school. The yellow Book School "concerned itself with 'form', with the expression of fine shades, with Continental models and exact language". Adorned by Miss Hayne, directed by Henry Harland, they dominated the early nineties in England.

Ford supplements his account of the influence of the "literary Popes of London" in Return to Yesterday:

The other literary Popes of London were in the realms of what was then called "true literature". Mr. Norman Maccoll of the Athenaeum. In "mixed literature", it was Mr. W.L. Courtney ... who edited the Fortnightly Review and was the Literary editor of the Daily Telegraph. The Imaginative-literary Pope was my guardian, Mr. Theodore Watts-Burton who was the literary editor of the Athenaeum.

All these people for me were sixtyish, bad-tempered, formidable, and all, with the exception of Dr. Garnett, of the sort I did not like. They were united by contempt for novel writing which was perhaps why I insensibly disliked then. And the curious symptom of the time was that nearly all of them with the exception of Maccoll wrote novels before they died.

In his reminiscences Ford suggests that amongst such people the

6. Return to Yesterday (New York, 1932), p. 175
conception of the novel as a form was unthinkable. Fortunately for him the French novelists had already opened new vistas in the writing of fiction and that influence was gradually pervading English fiction through the works of George Moore, Arnold Bennett and most of all through Henry James. Ford knew the English novelists very well and had his own preference — Jane Austen, Emily Bronte, George Eliot, and Henry James but he was also influenced by the French writers, notably Flaubert and Haupassant. Ford owes a good deal of his conception of the novel to these two schools — English and French — which were converging in the critical writings of Henry James.

One of Ford's earliest critics Milton Bronner in his contribution to the American Bookman, referred to another strain which had a decisive impact on Ford's critical theory and also on his poetry and fiction. He notes that inspite of Ford's war-inspired vituperation of Prussianism, "his German blood and his German reading have had a large part in forming his poetic art". He further remarks: "The cause of his admiration of German verse is that the writers are enabled to use the ordinary language of their own circle and their own time. These poets impart to their poetry some of the virtues of prose — direct march of phrasing, avoidance of inversions and of
tortured constructions, scorned for the hackneyed literary coins that have been bestowed by predecessors. The German poet as Hueffer sees them express life in the ordinary language, employed by living men.7 Ford's ridicule of his contemporaries who learnt language from the Authorised version and Sir Thomas Brown and his later concern with the *not jusæ, justify Milton Bronner's view. The search for the "right word" which forms the central core of Ford's aesthetics, made him doubly conscious of his role as a critic of the novel.

**Functions of Art in the Republic**

Almost from the very beginning of his literary career, Ford was conscious of the civilizing value of art in society. He later asserted that for him the world divided itself into those who were artists and those who were merely the stuff to fill graveyards.8 In his essay "On the Functions of the Art in the Republic", he maintained that the chief value of the arts to the state is that they are concerned with truth:

> The artist today is the only man who is concerned with the values of life; he is the only man who, in a world grown very complicated through the limitless freedom of expression for all creeds and

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   Milton Bronner: "Ford Madox Hueffer: Impressionist", pp. 170-71

8. *It was the Nightingale* (London, 1934), p. 59
all moralities, can place before us how these moralities work out when applied to human contacts, and to what goal of human happiness those moralities will lead us ...

Again:

The province of art ... is the bringing of humanity into contact, person with person. The artist is, as it were, the eternal mental prostitute who stands in the market place crying: "Come into contact with my thought, with my visions, with the sweet sounds that I cause to arise — with my personality". He deals, that is to say, not in facts and his value is in his temperament. The assembler of facts needs not temperament at all but industry. He does not suggest, he states, and save in the mind of a professed thinker, he arouses no thought at all. But the business of the artist is to awaken thought in the unthinking.

To this wideness of appeal, to this largeness of sympathy, the specialist can never hope to attain. He addresses himself to the instructed. The province of art is to appeal, to solace, the humble ...

Ford considered art (and also literature) to be one of the best media for establishing contact between man and man. He is, however, perceptive enough to distinguish between good art and bad art and also between good literature and mere market-stuff.

10. Ibid., pp. 64-65
In a very illuminating passage in *The Critical Attitude*, he remarks:

Speaking broadly, literature at the present day divides itself into two sharply defined classes — the "imaginative" and the "factual" — and there is a third type, the merely "inventive", which, if it be not in any way to be condemned, has functions in the republic nearly negligible. The functions of inventive literature are to divert, to delight, to tickle, to promote appetites; of imaginative literature, to record life in terms of the author — to stimulate thought. 11

Elucidating this point elsewhere, he asserts that the only human activity that has always been of extreme importance to the world is imaginative literature. It is of supreme importance because "it is the only means by which humanity can express at once emotions and ideas". Thus comparing Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* with Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, Ford holds the belief that the latter cannot be superseded because it is a "record of humanity". "Science changes its aspect as every new investigator gains sufficient publicity to discredit his predecessors. The stuff of humanity is unchangeable". 12

11. *The Critical Attitude*, pp. 31-32
12. *Return to Yesterday*, p. 178
Of all literary forms, Ford's preference was for the novel. His interest in poetry, despite his Pre-Raphaelite associations, was nominal and his adventures in the realm of drama were equally negligible. But he found fiction capable of conveying "the subtiest speculations of metaphysical or the most doctrinaire of social philosophies". Being the most flexible of all the literary forms, it had the potential of saving the Republic from the onslaught of philistinism. It was Ford's belief that in the present century the novel, if it were to hold the public status must not only seek new aesthetic dimensions but also constantly affirm and demonstrate its indispensability to a culture that he regarded as radically altered from the past in both its habits and tastes. On this account he deserves particular recognition not so much as a major theorist in the art of fiction, like James, nor even as the technician that he has so often been called, but as a main advocate of the novel as a cultural force, in which role he may well stand alone among English writers of his time.

With his individual aesthetics and his messianic vision of the role of literature in general and fiction in particular, when Ford surveyed contemporary English novels he

13. The Critical Attitude, p. 34
found himself mortally disappointed. His views about "the temperamentally British novel, the loose, amorphous, genial and easy-going thing", 14 are well known. What is less known is his sincerity in trying to bring the English novel at par with the French novel. In denying any "form" to the English novel he was, perhaps, exaggerating the facts but the core of his arguments is as valid as any other from the pen of great contemporary critics of fiction:

... there is no technical history of the English novel. There is, of course, a history. You could write about the lives of Defoe and Fielding and Sarah Fielding and Richardson and Scott and Dickens and Thackeray and Meredith and all the rest of them. But you can't find much more than three sentences to say of the methods of any one of them. They may have had great natures or they may have been buoyant story-tellers, but of art they hadn't a pennyworth between them, and they did not care even that amount for analysis of human nature. I don't mean to say that weren't amusing or entertaining, or some of them romantic and others of them calculated to take you out of yourself; but, regarded as conscious literature their works are just splendidly null. 15

All these opinions were recorded in Ford Madox Ford's later reminiscences but there is no denying the fact that he held such views even before he met Conrad.

14. The Critical Attitude, p. 107

In Thus to Revisit (1921) he further asserted:
But our creative literature, as distinct from that of all the rest of the world, is usually the work of happy-go-lucky and doctrinairely obstinate Amateurs all whose practice is the rendering of their own moods of exaltation rather than the rendering of exact observation of life or even of manners, p.8
By 1898 Ford had already developed his personal aesthetics in the light of post-Flaubertian novel. His views about the position of the novel in the 'nineties in England were not wholly untrue:

At the date of which I am writing ... the Novel was still the newest, as it remains the Cinderella of Art-Forms. The practice of novel-writing had existed for a bare two-hundred and fifty years; the novelist was still regarded as a rogue and vagabond, and the Novel was a "waste of time" or worse. And the idea of the Novel as a work of art, capable of possessing a Form, even as Sonnets or Sonatas possess Forms — that idea had only existed since 1850, and in France of Flaubert alone, at that. Writers had certainly aimed at progression d'effet, in short efforts since the days of Margaret of Navarre; and obviously what the typical English Novelist had always aimed at — if he had aimed at any Form at all — and the typical English critic looked for — if even he condescended to look at a Novel — was a series of short stories with linked characters and possibly a culmination. Indeed, the conception of the Novel has been forced upon the English Novelist by the commercial exigencies of hundreds of years .... The novels of Fielding, of Dickens, and of Thackeray were written for publication in parts; at the end of every part must come the strong situation, to keep the plot in the reader's head until the First of Next Month. So with the eminent contemporaries of ours in the 'nineties of last century ... 16

The novel as "the Cinderella of Art-Forms" was in need of firmer public status and fresh direction. To accomplish

16. Thus to Revisit, pp. 42-43
this, Ford wanted it to be released from the suspicion of triviality sometimes accorded to it by English readers in the past and regulated by standards serious enough to meet the requirements of intelligence, a desirable schooling being that of the French disciplined sophistication earlier submitted to by George Moore. Affirming that the novel stood ready to become "... the only vehicle for the thought of our day", he sought to guarantee its recognition in the world of affairs, perhaps even its thoughtful acceptance by statesmen, by enjoining the novelist to win respect by craftsmanship rather than by hit-or-miss routine of the inspired amateur.

Ford's concern with technique had, in addition to its formal end, the utilitarian but defensible one of capturing the minds of reader not only impatient with older methods of narration but also exposed to the irritant of modern distraction. The enlarged opportunities of the novelist required increased technical proficiency to enable him to enforce his indispensable role in contemporary life.

Early Critical Writings:

As already suggested, Ford had been developing a kind of personal aesthetics (which he later called Impressionism) even before he met Conrad or knew Henry James
His immediate masters were the Pre-Raphaelite artists and poets and the French novelists. What he wanted from the British artist was a critical attitude, a sense of craftsmanship and consciousness of his vocation in the rendering of life. He acknowledged that there was no dearth of literary ability in English writers but they lacked in the literary sense:

*Literary Ability, in fact, is not the same thing as the literary sense; since the literary sense implies the power of self-criticism as well as the power to learn from others. The one has always existed; the other is a comparatively new-born thing, arising from a new and growing necessity...*

Post-Flaubertian technique amounts to no more than a determination on the part of the artist not to nod as some Academicist has told us, Homer sometimes did. *The writer of today must be self-critical or he will not be read even though he possesses a most beautiful talent.*

As collaborator of Conrad and as editor of *The English Review*, he tried to inculcate the idea of conscious craftsmanship in the minds of English novelists. His own contribution to the theory of the novel is also an attempt to bring English fiction at par with French.

*Thug to Revisit*, pp. 14-15
Ford's early critical awareness is fully evident from his book *Ford Madox Brown* (1896). From Ford Madox Brown and from his many years of close association with the Pre-Raphaelite group, he acquired an ardent devotion to the life of art. Though he did not care for some of his fellow artists individually he subscribed substantially to their view of representing life as seen through the temperament of the artist. Ford also gained from his literary sensibility and his intensely personal evaluations of art and life. His book on Ford Madox Brown, though more of an appreciation than criticism, does illustrate that early in his career, Ford had tentatively established a critical viewpoint. His summary of Brown's artistic development in the last chapter of the book is particularly revealing for tracing Ford's own critical acumen.

Ford sees Brown's work as reflecting his naive, imaginative, sympathetic, humorous personality, not only in the subjects he chose but also in his techniques and use of materials. 16 He was more original than most of the Pre-Raphaelites, who, Ford charges were apt to be imitative, to suppress individuality. Significantly, Ford admires Brown's

realistic work, inspired by Holbien rather than by the Italian primitives, and thinks much less of his "aesthetic period" when he paid more attention to the "sensuous side of his art", to decoration for its own sake, to "balanced reason as opposed to pictures of combined details". Already to be noted is Ford's concern with technique and with the shaping influence of temperament upon the artist's work. He is aware of the danger in an over-elaborate manner inappropriate to content, or in a technique which fails to focus or arrange the composition clearly for the viewer. Here is established his preoccupation with the "harmoniousness of combined details" and with the dramatic quality of a work of art, by which he apparently means not merely the telling or suggesting of a story or action. As the remark on Destiny implies, the total impression of a given work moves the spectator into a particular mood of self-forgetfulness and into a special train of thought. These views, so typically Pre-Raphaelite, prepare for the impressionistic theory and practice Ford later developed in collaboration with Conrad.

We have no record of Ford's earlier thinking on the art of the novel as inspired by the French masters but his work on Ford Madox Brown suffices to disprove the thesis that
he built his theory by imitating James and Conrad. In his study of Ford Madox Ford, Dr. Richard Cassell notes:

James' "The Art of Fiction" and Conrad's preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* might not unreasonably be taken as the immediate texts from which Ford shared the outlines of his fictional theory. 19

It is true that Ford's collaboration with Conrad and his closer association with James helped him develop his theory of fiction on sounder basis, but the charge of imitation is tantamount to denying Ford an individuality. The fact is that James, Conrad and Ford, all went to the same sources, particularly French, for inspiration and derived their own conclusions after reading the masters. James was more interested in "the dramatization of situations" and rendering of life through "central intelligence"; Conrad found his *forte* in the creation of the complex methods (particularly the 'Broken-sequence') and inner struggle of the protagonists in a drama. But Ford's chief motive was the search for the *juste* and the plea for *progression d'effet*. As a matter of fact, they were all sharing common principles of aesthetics.

They differed only in attitudes and emphases.

Ford's theory of fiction can be better understood in the light of his association with the Pre-Raphaelite School. In view of his theory of impressionism and of the techniques he was to develop in his novels, it is pertinent to review briefly certain aesthetic assumptions held in common by both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists.

As against the "inspiration" theory of the typical English artists (Ford mentions Thackeray and other commercial novelists), the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionists upheld the theory of conscious art. They had a distrust of inspiration without the guidance of skill in art. Rossetti speaks of the agonies of writing, of the "fundamental brain-work" that must go with the "music" to make up a poem. Flaubert struggled endlessly to achieve le mot juste, Conrad wrecked his nerves and "wrestled with the Lord" over every book and James calculated long and carefully to achieve his intended effects. For all of them art was a way of life and the life of art offered a legitimate and noble contribution to humanity. They were not men whose central passion was to make a living.

20. W. M. Rossetti, ed. Family Letter with a Memoir (Boston, 1895), 1, pp. 416-17
or to preach, or to reform. The Pre-Raphaelites, to be sure, sought ennobling subjects more consciously than, say, Oscar Wilde or Mary de Gourmont, but then they all felt, although in varying degrees of intensity, that a faithful rendering of reality, by presenting a picture of things as they are, gave to their art a moral atmosphere or sense from which the reader could infer as much in the nature of a sermon as he would.

After necessary qualifications, certain other similarities might fairly be noted among these serious and self-conscious writers in England and France from 1850 to 1900, for, despite their differences, the principles these writers held in common take us to the very heart of their aesthetic concerns. First, there is the view of the relationship of art to nature, which is easy to oversimplify. Basically it is expressed by Flaubert when he says "Art is not Nature". For the Pre-Raphaelite, the Aesthetics, the Impressionists, reality is as we perceive it to be, not as the "masters" (who imitated Nature) or the public or anyone else thinks it is.

This idea is reflected in Pater's concern with the "object as it really is". And for Pater, "the just stem

22. Letters, p. 226
towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly". Henry James in 1888 expressed his adaptation of this assumption in his famous statement that "a novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or lesser according to the intensity of the impression", and his corollary of this that "the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer". For Ford, strongly influenced by both the Pro-Raphaelites and Henry James, the artist is "a sensitised instrument, recording to the measure of the light vouchsafed him what is — what may be — the Truth".

Whatever the author's vision of reality, the later English writers James, Conrad and Ford sought to adhere exactly to this principle which allowed no compromise with any desire the author might have to preach or reform. A work of art was for them undeniably an expression of temperament — "the enlarged reflection" of the artist's personality — but

25. Thus to Revisit, p. 49
it must always be a detached one. Flaubert, perhaps, felt this most strongly of them all. "The artist must stand to his work as God to his creation, invisible and all powerful: he must be everywhere felt but nowhere seen." In theory, he was searching for a "pitiless method (with) the precision of the physical sciences", an idea which Zola later expanded into a theory of art based on the laboratory method. Few writers would go so far as Zola did in reducing art into science. But from Rossetti with his belief in the value of "fundamental brainwork" to the novelists who paid such close attention to manner we see writers who sought an objective, intellectual control over undisciplined inspiration.

One characteristic control, they discovered, was made possible through a new concept of perceived experience. It was to affect their methods of representing reality and, in particular, to create a profound interest in the technique of the writer's point of view. If reality is as we perceive it to be, then in representing reality the artist should present the action or emotion precisely as it strikes the consciousness, and not literally or completely, but rather through selection to reproduce the pattern of stimuli as they reached the

26. Letters, p. 98
conscious mind.

The consequences of this attitude towards representing reality, strengthened in time by the studies of psychologists were significant for artists in expanding their subject-matter and in suggesting new and effective methods. These new concepts made them aware of the fragmentary nature of conscious experience and of the fact that the mind orders events according to its own laws. Writers, especially poets, became interested in trying to capture and immobilize these fragments. In English poetry the evidence was first seen clearly in Rossetti's attempts to sustain the "spiritual ecstasy" of fleeting moments.²⁷ So far him a "sonnet is a moment's monument" and "some basis of special momentary emotion" was one of the stimuli he needed for poetic creation.²⁸ Pre-Raphaelite paintings and poems characteristically captured dramatic moments. Christina Rossetti, Ford realized, avoided abstractions and generalized statements in her verse and brought to her poetry intimacy and precision, and in many of her poems illustrated a single emotion, an instance of heightened feelings.²⁹ In the novel a more remote but similar

²⁸. D.G. Rossetti, Family Letters and a Memoir 1, p. 413
²⁹. The Critical Attitude, p. 179
shift is observable. Flaubert's elaboration of particular scenes (a succession of moments) were attempts to portray every separate perception of himself or his characters relevant to the effect to be created. The implication for the novel of the search to explore significant moments and "rescued fragments" were manifold. Most important of all was the effect this search had on the novelist's handling of point of view. Flaubert used Madame Bovary's limited consciousness for his novel but Henry James developed his elaborate theory of the role of "reflectors" in the novel.

The New Form:

Ford's critical theories follow quite naturally from the assumption that the artist must present the world as he sees it and not as authority or convention dictates. Post-Flaubertian fiction in France and the aesthetic principles of the Pre-Raphaelite group fully lived up to these ideals. Particularly for the Impressionists the functions of the artist and critic merged, as is witnessed by Oscar Wilde who thought "criticism of the highest kind" was that which "treats the work of art simply as the starting-point for a new creation". Ford appears to have thought that bringing

fictional techniques to his criticism would appeal to a larger audience than mere academic criticism and literary history would, and that a fictional method might be especially useful in educating the English speaking world to the salvation of human letters. But his assumption that the artist's primary devotion must be to technique imposes limitations upon his critical evaluations. He relegated to the second rate not only the novels of commerce and escape (the "nuvvie" as he called them) but also several major novels which fail in whole or in part to follow the principles laid down by Flaubert, Maupassant or James. He could always admit the historical importance of novels he did not like and could admire passages in them, but also chastised their authors for excesses, intrusions, digressions and moral omissions.

It was in the "New Form" of the novel as Ford visualized that the real redemption of what he took as "the English novel", lay. Though French in origin, the discovery was shared by James and possibly by Moore and Bennett. Like James and Conrad, Ford also stressed the point that the novelist must pay profound attention to matters of technique and structure before the "effect of life" is achieved. He
took care to note, however, that the end in view was not a "machine form" but "the sheer attempt to reproduce in words life as it presents itself to the intelligent observer", whose life has a pattern, not one of birth, apogee, and death, but a woven symbolism of its own.\textsuperscript{31} James had metaphorically described it as the "figure in the carpet".

Ford is more explicit about 'form' when he deals specifically with the novels of Henry James, Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy. In his book \textit{Henry James} (1913) and also in his essay on the master in \textit{Lightier than the Sword} (1920), he considers James to be the "greatest living writer and in consequence, for me, the greatest of living men". He acknowledges that like Shakespeare and Turgenev, James has "plenty" of personality and cannot be fully revealed by the critics but at the same time he maintains that through "his craftsmanship, his conscious literary modifications, his changes of word for word, the naturing of his muse" he has betrayed his art to us. Although Ford opines that Henry James's greatness lies in his being "the historian of one, of two, and possibly of three more civilizations",\textsuperscript{32} he bases

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Thus to Revisit}, p. 46
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Henry James}, pp. 9-22
his judgments mostly on the craftsmanship of the novelist. He admires James's ability to take the most hint from life, his "germ" to make it more complex and symmetrical, and to work out his stories so that every word, every action, every "apparent digression" works towards the inevitable end. James maintains a sense of life by "making the digressions appear like real negligences, as they appear in the life we lead". Since James exhausts all the aspects of his "affairs" and moves his stories towards a single culmination, he attains the effect of inevitability. That is valuable because it gives to his work "a feeling of destiny, a given semblance of an implacable outside Providence".33

Ford looked to both Henry James and Conrad as masters of "form" in modern English novel. His praise for Conrad's Elizabethan personality and for his French genius in art is eclipsed by his lavish acclamation of Conrad's craftsmanship and sense of form in the treatment of his subjetmatter. He finds Conrad's earlier work when the author was not under much pressure from literary agents, technically perfect. Thus "Youth", "Heart of Darkness" and such other nouvelles appear to him as perfect specimens of finished art. But he has his

33. Henry James, pp. 159-61
reservations about Conrad's later works. Novels like *Nostrono*, *Chance*, *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent* are "finished off with the quick, deft touches of a de Maupassant curte and the rapid invention of any efficient writer of short stories." Ford thinks that since the leisurely mood of the earlier period was gone, Conrad worked continuously under a "cloud of panic" so that the conclusion of each of the later novels is less protracted and impressive than was warranted by the carefully "building up of such an immense fabric".  

Ford's views about Conrad's "political romances" have been recently echoed in the critical appraisal of such critics as Thomas Hosier who believe that Conrad's art lacked its earlier glow after *Nostrono*. But the point to be emphasized is that the later novels of Conrad though written under distraction are quite a different kind of literary product. Though one could condemn the complex design and the baffling structure of *Chance* and *Rescue*, it is difficult to deny a "form" to *Nostrono*, *Under Western Eyes*, *The Secret Agent* and *Victory* whose literary excellence has been acknowledged by such distinguished critics as N.C. Bradbook,

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34. *Lighter than the Swords*, p. 67
The critique of Hardy's novels in *Lightier than the Sword* equally reflects a prejudiced vision. Ford's thesis that Hardy "was not a novelist, never wanted to be a novelist" is based on the flimsy grounds of his earlier apprenticeship as a poet and his so-called carelessness about his novels. Of all the novels of Hardy, Ford considers only *Jude the Obscure* to be a fine specimen of form because "in its working out he did employ some sort of conscious artistic knowledge." Few critics consider *Jude* to be a technical success. It is regarded as a kind of philosophical chronicle and has most of the defects of structure in its length and digressions. Ford's rejection of such masterpieces as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* as not at all representation of good craftsmanship appears to be quite biased in view of the wide admiration of those novels by men of literary sensibility.

The defects of Ford's literary theory and his critical errors, particularly in the assessment of the works of the realistic novelists like Arnold Bennett, H.G. Wells and John Galsworthy, emanate from his pre-conceived notions of the
impressionistic art. It is true that Ford as a votary of technique dogmatically upholds certain theories but he is not unconscious of the variety of human talent. In his book on Joseph Conrad he wrote:

But these two writers were not unaware that there are other methods; they were not rigid in their own methods; they were sensible to the fact that compromise is at all time necessary in the execution of every work of art. 37

Thus he acknowledged the freedom of the artist to develop his own method and also allowed him the freedom of temperament to treat his subject-matter as he thought best. Dealing with the works of Shakespeare and Turgenev he had realised "that the greatest works deviate occasionally from the strict sequence of cause and effect." 38 Finally he maintained that each writer must discover his own rules; the only limitation is the interest of the reader; the principal criterion for a technical rule is the degree of its success in conveying a sense of life.

Theory of Impressionism:

Ford's slogan of "the impression over the statistics" made a case for the vital function of the novelist who alone, through his gift of direct and imaginative

37. Joseph Conrad, p. 193 (Italics Ford's)
38. The Critical Attitude, p. 59
apprehension, could present a unified vision of the world at large and as writer of fiction close the breach between the divided areas of factual information. Because statistics bring no insight into the nature of private life and its passions, the novelist alone can record such experience of other men as the increasingly isolated reader lacks, the writer not moralizing but simply "rendering".

Ford held, then, that the novelist must be above all an impressionist, a register of his time, or indeed of earlier centuries, not by the laboratory methods of the specialist but by using his temperament and personal insight as measures of experience. Obviously, he wanted the term 'Impressionist' to denote higher powers of comprehension and creativity. While still cherishing a belief in the supremacy of the artist, Ford directs his arguments not to affirming detachment of the artist from the vulgar but to the far more cogent point of the artist's value to society and, finally, to the positive function of the arts as a whole to the maintenance of civilization.

The central problem of the impressionist novelist as Ford conceived it lies in the "form" of his novels which must give the effect of the formlessness and fragmentary nature of
life as it meets the individual consciousness, while at the same time everything must move in direct, carefully calculated line to the inevitable conclusion. Art has eternally sought to achieve order out of the disunity and confusion of life, but it was the impressionists, primarily, who sought to keep the feeling of that very disunity and confusion in the forefront of their work. The reader is deceived into believing that he is experiencing life as it is, while the novelist is actually arranging and managing his tale so as to leave the reader with a view of life clearer, more organic, and more meaningful than life itself could probably ever give. The secret lies in concealing the art. Ford is right in defining Impressionism as a technique which reinforced the realistic frame of mind:

"Thus the real trait d' union between all these authors (The modern realists from (Flaubert) and modernity in general" was not their temperaments, which were all different but "the technical one which this writer prefers to call Impressionism."D

The impressionist group of novelists with their background of French realists and English pro-Raphaelites adhered to the central principle of impressionist-realist technique: the rendering rather than the relating of events in

order to achieve an illusion of reality. Rendering is the
dramatic presentation of a scene to give an impression of
immediacy. Ford defined it as the "reproduction of one art or
another of the impressions made upon one by one's observation." As at a play, the reader is to be carried away so that he
thinks himself at the scene being depicted. Bunyan, for
example, succeeds in involving the reader because he tells his
story in simple language, "using such homely images that the
reader, astonished and charmed to find the circumstances of
his own life typified in words and glorified by point, is
seized by the homely narrative and carried clean out of himself
into the world of that singular and glorious thinker." 41

Ford is so much fascinated by the impressionistic
technique that he writes most of his memoirs and criticism in
the same manner. The efficacy of the method is perhaps the
most vital force in Ford's aesthetics. For him the stuff of a
'memoir' and a 'novel' is the same: the aim being a "picture of
one's time" and the technique being the "rendering", not
"recording" of life. 42 Though he seems to give impression of

40. Great Trade Route (New York, 1937), p. 32
41. The English Novel, p. 86
42. In his Dedication to Mr. Michael, Ford wrote: "You will say that volumes of memoirs have no forms and that
this collection of them is only a rag-bag. It isn't really.
The true artfulness of art is to appear as if in a disordered
habiliments. Life meanders, jumps back and forwards, draws
netted patterns like those on the monk-melon. It seems the
most formless of things... But if one is to set down one's
life... one should so present the pattern of it that,
sensibly, it in turn, presents itself to your awareness".
(Return to Yesterday, pp. V-VI)
adherence to his own notions of accuracies, "accuracies of my impressions" rather than to "factual accuracies", he shows sincerity in the pursuit of "truth":

I say — and quite frequently do — plan out every scene, sometimes even every conversation, in a novel before I sit down to write it. But unless I know the history back to the remotest times of any place of which I am going to write, I cannot begin to work. And I must know — from personal observation, not reading — the shapes of windows, the nature of door-knobs, the aspects of kitchens, the material of which dresses are made, the leather used in shoes, the method used in manuring fields, the nature of bus-tickets. 43

This passage clearly indicates Ford's passion for meticulous details. But what distinguishes him from Sole and other naturalists is his method — impression and not photography.

Ford's "Impressionism" has not only annoyed his critics but has also led some of them to doubt what he says.

An anonymous critic of Ford writing in The Times Literary Supplement, under the caption "The conscious Artist", wrote:

To explain fully Ford's alienation from the English establishment one must add ... other "ungentlemanly factors"... One was Ford's habitual romancing inaccuracy, which he elevated to the level of an aesthetic principle, and

43. It was the Nightingale, p. 204
called Impressionism. Impressionism, for Ford meant a subjective version of experience for which there could, or at least should, be no appeal to facts. 44

The statement does not seem to do full justice to Ford. As already suggested, Ford was as much concerned with facts of life as any other imaginative artist but like other literary masters — Turgenev, Flaubert and James — he thought that the writer should be free to mould his material as suits his design. Ultimately it comes to the problem of technique which is the crux of Ford's theory of fiction.

The numerous concerns of Flaubert and his followers for technique were of enormous value to James, Conrad and Ford. Ford has abundantly made clear the significance of Flaubert's literary set and their preoccupation with the manner of their art. Flaubert, the Goncourt, Turgenev, Gautier, Daupré, Tolstoy, James, he writes, all discussed the minutiae of words and their economical employment; the charpente, the architecture of the novel; the handling of dialogue; the rendering of impressions; the impersonality of the author. They discussed these things with the passion of politicians inciting to rebellion. And in these conaculacae the modern novel — the immensely powerful engine of our civilization — was born. 45

44. The Times Literary Supplement (June 15, 1962), p. 437
These basic technical issues were also the special concern of Conrad and Ford. During their collaboration the two writers talked endlessly about the numerous practical problems of their craft. The principles which they had argued and then partially tested in their collaborative novels Ford accepted as the criteria for his theory of fiction. He formulated a method compatible with the high aesthetic ideals and artistic dedication of his Pre-Raphaelite inheritance.

Writing about "The Battle of the Poets" in *Thus to Revisit*, Ford gives an interesting account of the Impressionists and the *Les jeunes* — Ezra Pound, D.H. Lawrence, Pound, "M.D.", Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot. The Impressionists in the plastic or written arts had been the leaders of the movement that came immediately before these young writers. And the main canon of the doctrine of impressionism had been this: "The artist must aim at the absolute suppression of himself in his rendering of his subject". The Cubists, Vorticists and Imagists charged that the Impressionists were only trying "to hypnotise the public". This was exactly what the Impressionists had tried to do:

46. *Thus to Revisit*, p. 139
We wanted the reader to forget the writer —
to forget that he was reading. We wished him to
be hypnotised into thinking that he was living
what he read — or, at least, into a conviction
that he was listening to a simple and in no way
brilliant narrator who was telling — not
writing — a true story. 47

Ford is suggesting that the novelist should not only conceal
himself behind the personages of the human drama he is
depicting but he should also so fascinate the reader that there
is a "willing suspension of belief" in his response to the work
of art. All this is part of the skill that the creative artist
should acquire in order to appeal to his readers.

To impressionistic writing Ford ascribed a special
intention which removed the implication of subjective lyricism
and exacted from the writer a disciplined choice and shaping
of his materials. Whether embodied in a single passage or a
complete book, an impression was, for one thing, a compressing
and shortening of a much broader field of possible data.
In the novel it represents the difference between Tolstoy’s
expansive and panoramic treatment of war and Crane’s concentrated
and suggestive handling of the same topic in The Red Badge.

Properly determined and implemented the impression could be
heightened, from a base in action, so as to become symbolic and

47. Thus to Revisit, p. 53; See also Joseph Conrad, p. 154
thus bring home to the reader the central, enduring truth of an aspect of human life. Herein lay the strength of Conrad in his stories such as "Youth" or The Nigger of the Narcissus and in his middle novels, particularly The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes, as virtually "condensed histories" recorded through selected instances of human psychology and passion. In stressing this combination of selection of incident with universality, Ford clearly distinguished the aims of impressionism in his group of English novelists from those of naturalistic realism and the provinciality of its outlook.

One of Ford's notable critics, Hugh Kenner, acknowledging his contribution to the technique of modern English novel claims that it is Ford, and Ford almost alone, who in the first decade of this century "absorbed and transmitted the discoveries of Stendhal and Flaubert on an English wavelength". Paying glorious tributes to his "self-effacing virtuosity" the critic compares Ford's "impersonality" with T.S. Eliot's. He considers Eliot's impersonality — "an author suppression compatible with great local intensity" — but for Ford "it was not a matter of intensity but of mass : progression d' effet". 48 It was bound to be for the simple

reason that a poet has to work on a comparatively smaller scale whereas the novelist's field is much vaster. Unless he takes recourse to other methods he cannot suppress his personality as effectively in a novel as is possible for a poet.

Ford's critique of fiction brings to the fore the problem of point of view and its effect on the form of the novel. If the author is to be invisible, some means have to be found to tell the story, to give it, as Henry James says, focus. When James objected to Conrad's use of Marlow's consciousness as a narrative focus, Ford maintained the "it is in that way that life really presents itself to us". The "form" is achieved less by the demands of the "affair" a novel recounts than by the mode of the consciousness viewing it. The air is psychological verisimilitude, that rightness with which events are represented according to the workings of the narrative intelligence. The method applies not only to a first person narration but also to action viewed from the consciousness of one or several characters in a third person account, or to action viewed from the consciousness of the unseen author telling the story as it comes to his mind.

49. Thus to Revisit, p. 55
The narrative point of view with all its variations gave rise to the complicated time-schemes of many impressionistic novels. The time-shift was the strongest instrument these writers had found to break away from the form and structure of the traditional novel. Plotting according to the impression of the seen or unseen narrator gives greater freedom than a method committed to the more or less chronological unfolding of action, for then the author can inflate or deflate the significance of thoughts, feelings, events, and arrange and juxtapose them for the creation of specific effects. Ford holds that the "supreme function" of impressionism is to select out of the myriad fragments of experience what is necessary to tell a story successfully and then to arrange these fragments for the best effects. James is the master of this art because "he can create an impression with nothing at all." It was this aspect of the time-shift technique of the Impressionists that the later school in fiction — the stream of consciousness school — exploited. In replying to a remark by the New York Times, Ford maintained that the time-shift technique is indispensable to the detective writer and "delights everyone" and "that technique is identical with that of all modern novelists, or of myself ... or Proust."

50. Henry James, pp. 152-55
51. It was the Nightingale, pp. 193-94
Closely allied to Ford's objective method and the
time-shift technique is the technique of "juxtaposed situation". In practice it amounts to a scene being rendered on a series of levels, both stated and implied. As practised by Stendhal and Jane Austen, it is the device by which "the juxtaposition of the composed renderings of two or more unexaggerated actions or situations may be used to establish, like the juxtaposition of vital word to vital word, a sort of frictional current of electric life that will extraordinarily galvanize the work of art". For Ford, the advantage of this method is that it surprises the reader with one of the little surprises that give a novel the quality of life. Though certainly not a new technique of story-telling, the device of juxtaposing situations was extended by writers like James, Conrad and Ford, who carried it to new extremes and intensities by the juxtaposition of impressions, objects, images and metaphors.

The synthesizing device for giving a novel the vibration of life and at the same time shaping the work into an organic form was that of progression d'effet. the gradual revelation of character, of the conflict to be

52. The March of Literature, p. 804
53. In his book Joseph Conrad, Ford defined progression d' effect as follows:
"... every word set on paper ... must carry the story forward and, that as the story progressed, the story must be carried forward faster and faster and with more and (Continued ...
narrated, of the meaning and significance to be perceived by
the reader. It offers an economical mode of rendering action
and contributes to the accumulation of effect on every level of
the story — the "conflicting irresolutions ending in a
determination". The shifts in time, the juxtaposed situations
and impressions, the succession of words and images, are so to
speak, subservient to the progression d'effet, because by the
selection and arrangement and by the choice of language the
story progresses inevitably to its final effect.

The examples Ford uses to explain progression d'effet
are all taken from long short stories or nouvelles (like
James's The Turn of the Screw and Conrad's "Youth" and
"Heart of Darkness"). Ford seldom wrote short stories, but,
like James and Conrad, he was trying to achieve in his full-
length fiction the consciousness and precision of the conte
more intensity" (p. 210)

Robert F. Haugh in his Joseph Conrad: Discovery in Design
as follows: "The term employed by Conrad and Hesse in
their conversations on the art of fiction, embraces growth,
movement, heightening of all elements of the story: Conflict
and stress if it is a dramatic story; intensity and magnitude
of image if it is a poetic story; complexity of patterns;
balance and symmetry; evocation in style used for mood and
functional atmosphere".

54. Henry James, p. 168
or the *nouvelle*. Despite the leisurely manner in which these writers tend to begin their novels, they carefully construct the *progression d'effet* which itself shapes the structure of their stories. The novelist, if he wishes to achieve an impression of inevitability, must apply the principle of "justification." This meant that every element in a novel must justify its presence and so win the reader's rational conviction. On this reasoning a character, for instance, cannot be launched convincingly until nearly everything in his background has been established — in particular the facts of his birth and family history. The novelist must at every turn decide what he wants to tell or withhold about his characters or the action and exactly how he wants to do it. Ideally, every such decision is consistent with the novel's design.

To Ford and Conrad, the problem of language was partly one of discovering means to eliminate language, to reduce the number of words on the page, not only because long handling has tended to rob words of their edge but also because a loosening of the fabric of statement opens the way

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55. *Joseph Conrad*, p. 204
to a closer perception of reality. By this route, the impressionists arrived at one of their most characteristic and subtle techniques, that of the omission of entire scenes, even such apparently crucial ones as would be developed at length by other novelists. Verification of Ford's point comes from The Secret Agent when Conrad omits a direct account of the central bomb incident yet so sharply visualizes contributing details. James employed the same device in The Ambassadors and The Wings of the Dove.

Like other impressionistic techniques advocated by Ford, the art of omission helped serve the end of inducing the reader to participate imaginatively in the action of the "affair" and thus intensify his sense of vicarious experience in happenings significant for contemporary history. But Ford seldom denies the entertainment aspect of his art:

The first thing that you have to consider when writing a novel is your story, and then your story — and then your story! If you wish to feel more dignified you may call it your "subject". Once started it must go on and on to its appointed end. Any digression will make a longer, a patch over which the mind will progress heavily. You may have the most wonderful scene from real life that you might introduce into your book. But if it does not make your subject progress, it will
divert the attention of the reader. A good novel needs all the attention the reader can give it. And then some more. 57

In order to make the story more interesting, Ford and Conrad made several experiments. One such experiment was that a story must open with "a breathless sentence". At any rate the opening paragraph of a book should be of the tempo of the novel performance. He observed that "our ideal novel must begin either with dramatic scene or with a note that should suggest the whole book." 58

Before everything else, Ford and Conrad had maintained that a story must convey a "sense of inevitability". In Ford fatality is of human or historical making and proceeds inevitably from causes, however remote. Thus fate enters into the atmosphere of his novels but not as an agent from outside the scene. Human error, consequently, cannot be eliminated, though its effects may be traced without lapse from dignity into the vice of pity. The right tone in a serious novel should be of austerity, so that glimpse of horror may occur but the ending itself remain unharrowing. In order to achieve a sense of inevitability the author must make the character's action the

57. *It was the Nightingale*, p. 192
58. *Joseph Conrad*, pp. 171-73
only action that character could have taken: "It must be inevitable because of his character, because of his ancestry, because of illness or on account of the gradual coming together of the thousand small circumstances by which Destiny, who is inscrutable and august, will push us into one certain predicament". 59

Ford, emulating Flaubert and Henry James, disliked "propaganda" novels. He agreed with Conrad that "the novel is absolutely the only vehicle for the thought of our day" and that with the novel one could "enquire into every department of life" and explore "every department of the world of thought". But the one thing that you cannot do is to propagandise as author for any cause: "You must not, as author, utter any views: above all you must not take any events ...." Ford, however, does not rule out the possibility of the novelist's "mouthpiece". Granting that the artist's "business with the world is rendering, not alteration", he feels that if the urge "to assent the human race is so great that you cannot possibly keep your fingers out of the watchsprings", there is a device that you can adopt: "you must ... invent, justify, and set going in your novel a character who can convincingly express

59. Joseph Conrad, pp. 204-5
your views". Hence the need for a Dowell, a Tietjens in Ford, Marlow and other "reflectors" in Conrad and a host of "central intelligences" in Henry James.

The difference between the traditional and the Impressionist novelists was not that the latter did not "moralise" but that they veiled their identity and let the work of art speak for itself. In one of his later critiques, Ford suggested this point in a beautiful image:

But if you imagine the High Alps to be the intolerable Victorian moralists with, in their crannies, the forgotten, humble novelists of their day, you will have part of a useful pattern. Then consider the foothills below them to be Conrad-James-Crane-Hudson group .... And below the foothills runs a rolling plateau of champagne country that may stand for Lawrence and contemporaries ....

The Middle Victorians professed themselves inspired by that (Moral purpose) as by a divine afflatus and the whole world believed them. The next generation of writers sensed the danger .... So neither Conrad nor James, neither Crane nor Hudson were in any sense major moralists. Those then were the Impressionists, with, of course, behind them the great shades of Flaubert and Turgenev. The one passion that united then all — as perhaps it unites all great and serious writers — was that to leave behind them a creative record of their time. They said: 'Once we have rendered our day, with a due vision for the inner truths of it — then the world can draw its own morals ....'

60. Joseph Conrad, p. 209
61. Mightier than the Sword, pp. 266-68
Ford's objection to the art of H.G. Wells and even Galsworthy was not so much for their "realism" as for their deliberate attempt to ameliorate the world. Ford, nourished in the school of imaginative writers, thought that they had not the time and patience to "live" their experience and distil from them the quintessence of art:

The journalists go to things to look at them and use their genius in reportage. The great imaginative writer lives ... and then renders his impressions of what life has done to him. He lives, that is to say, in, if possible, a fine unconsciousness .... He must, in order to get perspective, retire in both space and time for the model upon which he is at work... still more, he must retire in passion... in order to gain equilibrium. 62

Turgenev's greatness lies precisely in the fact that he carried the rendering of the human soul one stage further than any writer who preceded or followed him. He had supremely the gift of identifying himself with the passions of the characters with whom he found himself. And then he had the gift of retiring and looking at his passion with calmed eyes.

**Style and Language**:

Ford as a champion of the Impressionist movement in England, views it in the European background. The Flaubert-

62. Eightier than the Swords, pp. 207
Turgenev-Conrad-James wave of Impressionism lasted prominently in Anglo-Saxondom for nearly thirty years — say from 1893 to 1923. Its world course was longer, lasting, as Ford claims, half a century, from 1870 to 1920. The world adopted the Impressionists, Ford reminds us, because "it was weary to death of the large-scale Moral-Purposist's — Polinicim. It wanted some Hamlet: " But it was weary not merely of "the Eunuch-Widow point of view"; it was weary of it and their "language." According to Ford "the unease" took visible shapes in various parts of the world: "The French got busy about not justes; they could no longer stand the hackney-salmon styles of Balsacs and Dumas. The Slavophils of Russia expelled Greek-and-German derived words from their manifestoes; the English Pro-Raphaelites, led by William Morris, determined to use none but Anglo-Saxon expressions."

In novel — and in the impressionistic novel in particular — a large part of the struggle to achieve a sense of the real, a vibration of life, was the quest for a language, a style, a cadence, a word that could pass the test of "justification". Since Ford was recommended to Conrad as a stylist, we would expect, as he tells us, that his main pre-

63. Mightier than the Swords, pp. 270-71
occupation during the collaboration was with style and language. Ford had condemned his contemporaries for the use of the words borrowed from the Authorized version and Sir Thomas Browne. His plea was always that the writer should use the language of his own day, not the fine and literary language but the vernacular. He finds models of excellent vernacular prose in the English and American newspaper of the eighteen-twenties, in Clarendon and Cobbett, and in his contemporary, J.H. Hudson. He had turned to these and other writers of non-fictional English prose after he had modified his admiration for the more intricate and conscious styles of Flaubert, James and Conrad. He never, however, modified his faith in the methods by which Flaubert and Conrad sought to discover exact words and to achieve a non-literary, non-poetic vocabulary.

The vernacular Ford sought meant that the writer had to avoid words which stuck out of sentences by being so unusual or so brilliantly apt that the reader pauses to admire them. "A style" as Ford puts it, "interests when it carries the reader along". A style ceases to interest when by reason of disjointed sentences, over-used words, monotonous or jog-trot cadences, it fatigues the reader's mind. "Simplicity"

64. Joseph Conrad, p. 193
is the formula for sustaining the interest of the reader.

"We wanted to write", Ford says, "as the grass grows". In their attempt to achieve a "habit of style" Ford and Conrad reached the same conclusions which Coleridge and Wordsworth had revealed in their discussions on the "poetic diction".

For Wordsworth "there is no essential difference between the language of prose and that of metrical composition". For Coleridge, "the opposite of prose is not poetry but verse; the opposite of poetry is not prose but science". Ford's view of the matter was not very different from his predecessors of the Romantic period. "We agreed that a poem was not that which was written in verse but that, either prose or verse, that had constructive beauty". Hence the resolution during the collaboration: "each of us desired one day to write Absolute Prose".

The search for la not juste, the proper cadence, a new form, which consumed the attentions of Conrad and Ford, resulted during their collaboration in a political allegory (The Inheritors), a historical romance (Romance) and an ironic tale of comic deception (The Nature of a Crime). Perhaps, Ford more than Conrad took the opportunity to experiment with

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65. *Thus to Revise*, p. 52
66. *Joseph Conrad*, pp. 35-36
ways to catch fleeting impressions. Conrad had great difficulty with the English language because many words have different shades of meaning and the exact image was difficult to render in English as it was easier in French. However, both the artists starting from this point moved in different directions. Conrad found a language that was less exacting but more rewarding, less purple but more evocative and suggestive than the language of the early phase of his writing. Ford working on his own in various romantic genres, in contemporary comedies of manner, and in novels analysing politics and society, developed a variety of techniques to render his "vision" of the world.

Ford's tireless insistence on adequation of language to the thing perceived or the sensation undergone and his meticulous concern for impressionistic writing, page by page, phrase by phrase, mass by mass, has not invited brickbats from critics as has James's elaborate style. But there have been critics who deplore his endless labours to acquire a style. However, Ford was always working on the assumption that communication between man and man is only possible by a close and serious study of language, and its proper use in a work of art. Hence his jibes against the Victorian masters
who received their inspiration from heaven and wrote in the full fury of passionate outburst. The typical English attitude, Ford points out, was responsible for lack of a critical attitude in the writer who was always prone to over-write and succumb to slipshod habit of expression. From his own experience Ford knew that it was a difficult job dealing with 'word':

> It is not more easy for us to put words together; it is more difficult because we have more sense of words. And we who go at it with persistence, underpairing, in the face of inevitable failure ... are the gallant spirits. 67

There is some reason to believe that Ford went at this task with more "furious earnestness" than Conrad always thought wise. Nevertheless, Ford kept at his work, developing a theory of style from the English habit of avoiding direct speech. He implies that he borrowed the idea from James, in whom, he says, was united the European international culture, with its interest in the technique of form, and the Anglo-Saxon imagination, with its habit of shrinking from direct statement and its consequent tendency to allegorize. 68 Ford sought a more literal translation of literate colloquial speech than James did and carried the technique much further.

than James and in another direction.

Again, the task is to convey a sense of discontinuity of life while creating the ordered world which art communicates. The task is genuinely a poetic one, for such a close attention to the careful juxtaposition of objects, of the images and impressions they convey, and of associations they bring to the minds of both the character portrayed and the reader, and such a concentration on the creation of rhythmic effects are traditionally more matters of concern for the poet than for the novelist. The adoption of such concerns by the novelist, echoing as they do Flaubert and preparing the way for Joyce and Virginia Woolf, demonstrate as well as anything else the shift in emphasis in the modern novel away from plotted action ordered by the sequence of chronological time to the plotted imitations of human consciousness, and from largely narrative concerns to almost completely poetic ones.

**Ford's Critical Method and Impressionism:**

In one of his suggestive critical passages N.D. Zabel has summed up his views of Ford’s theory and principles thus:
The fact is that Ford's aesthetic origins and associations served him both well and badly. They made it impossible for him to live any other life than that of literature, and to live it whole-souledly and passionately .... They kept him through five decades a lover of good writing, original talent, authentic invention. But his dedication to form, style and the not juste, coupled with his habit of pontificating, desire to faire ample at all costs, and compulsive addiction to paper, likewise kept him writing, prosing, repeating himself, when there was, very often, little actual substance to work on. Style, technique, manner, and method were kept grinding away, half the time saying little and producing what can be, for long and desperate stretches, a garrulously tiresome parody of his intentions. 69

This seems to be quite a fair assessment of Ford's critical writings. As a theorist Ford does suffer from some of the defects of the Impressionist school and also from his own limited vision. His high ideas of fiction and his literal adherence to the technical theories expounded by Flaubert and James led him to reject the English tradition without due examination of the merits of the authors concerned. True, the new achievement in style and technique opened new vistas in the realm of fiction but despite the best intentions of the impressionists their circle of readers was far smaller than that of Dickens and Thackeray. So the theory in a way contradicts itself in as much as the pretext of talking to a majority of the public proved a mere stunt.

The second major defect of Ford's theory is his unscrupulous attitude towards "facts" in his critical pronouncements. Among his immediate predecessors both Flaubert and James held fast to the ideal of truth, verisimilitude, the "solidity of specification". But Ford did not feel himself bound to such restrictions. He wanted free play with his material and adopted the novelist's technique for criticism. The result was what were "impressions of truth" for the author, were, very often, congenital lying for his enemies and embarrassments for friends. Though his anecdotal tone makes his criticism interesting and readable, it mars his writings of precision, compactness and the detachment of real criticism, as Matthew Arnold might call it. Not only that he is very often garrulous and baggy, he intersperses his remarks with innuendoes on his role as a mentor and a sort of literary godfather to his younger contemporaries and immediate successors. As a matter of fact, Ford was more of a cultivated journalist than a critic. Though he rendered excellent service to the English letters as editor of The English Review and later of The Trans-Atlantic Review, his professionalism did leave some of its marks on his criticism. Sifting good, bad and indifferent material, he could not help himself being muddled, rambling
and discursive in his literary judgements. One has to wade through a pile of husks and chaff to reach a few grains of truth from his memoirs and several other critical writings.

But when all is said about the limitations of Ford's criticism and his shortcomings as a critic, there remain a good many things to be said in his favour. His position among critics of the modern English novel and especially among the Impressionists remains distinct. True, Henry James had paved the way in English fiction criticism but it was left to Conrad and Ford, indoctrinated as they were with high ideals of life and art, to break new grounds by evolving and formulating its aesthetics. Ford's theory of fiction, drawn from Flaubert, Turgenev, Maupassant, the Pre-Raphaelites and the critical writings of James, committed him to plead for the dispassionate rendering of life, to giving the effects of the forlorn and fragmentary nature of life as it meets the individual consciousness. His concern with techniques designed to achieve these aims — the point of view, the time-shift, the progression d'effet, the selection and juxtaposition of events and impressions, and an objective, non-literary language — are more than an extension of the theories of James and Conrad. They definitely point to the future of the technical
achievements in the English novel —— the stream of consciousness technique. Perhaps it may not be an exaggeration to say that Ford did for fiction criticism what Pater and Rossetti did for poetry and painting.

Ford has, perhaps, the clearest 'historical sense' among most of the fiction critics of his age. He knew the Henley group and the yellow Book school thoroughly well. As editor and sometimes as literary columnist and reviewer, he had to study the growth of schools and traditions, the sources of literary movements, their achievements and decline. All this discipline is reflected in Ford's criticism of the novel. In this particular branch of knowledge even Henry James may not succeed in beating him. One has only to learn from his remarks in *Higher than the Sword*, *The English Novel* and *The March of Literature* for the proof of his sound knowledge of artistic movements and a sense of literary perspective. He remains to date one of the best literary chroniclers of the period between the last decade of Queen Victoria's reign and the outbreak of World War II.

Another great characteristic of Ford's criticism seems to be his prophetic note in his critical pronouncements. Complaining of the declining influence of James-Conrad-Hudson-
Crane school of Impressionists, he remarked in 1938:

What brings back a forgotten artist is what I call an essential honesty — of writing, of purpose, of selection, of presentation. The poor dear Impressionists are, it would appear, today going through a period of eclipse .... But I think that those men will surely return — because they had, each, minds fixed only in their work and the methods of their work. So they achieved that certain honesty of purpose that unites all writers who have returned. 70

It took them not even a decade to return. The post-War revival of these authors has won for them glories and laurels not only from both sides of the Atlantic but also from countries as far-flung as India and Japan.

Ford's criticism of certain novelists, particularly Henry James, Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy are regarded even today as the earliest specimens of fiction criticism. It was Ford who likened Conrad to an Elizabethan and claimed Hardy to be "a poet and not a novelist". These ideas are echoed in Dr. F.R. Leavis's writings on fiction. Again, Quentin Anderson's famous thesis of a metaphysical unity in James's later works, emanates from Ford's remark that James was a modern Dante. One can find many more illustrations in the

70. Mightier than the Sword, pp. 288-89
critical theories of Ford which directly or indirectly influenced many successive writers in England and U.S.A. Ezra Pound always recognized Ford's part in revolutionising English letters: "The revolution of the world", he has written, "began, so far as it affected the men who were of my age in London in 1908, with the lone whisper of Ford .... " More recently he said: "I don't know whether justice has yet been done to Ford. I went to England in 1908 to "learn" from Yeats — and stayed to learn from Yeats and Ford". This is a poet's remark. For a better assessment of his historical position we have only to study deeply his impact on Conrad, Hemingway, Edith Wharton and a host of American writers whom he inspired through his works and personal encouragement. One would have been wrong about the details, but not about the facts that, in the age of Kipling, Haggard and Wells, an age of increasing carelessness among good writers, he was a conscious artist. His theory of the novel and his own practice as a novelist brought such insight and vision that both for their art and their 'truth' we cannot ignore or by-pass.

71. Quoted by Kenneth Young in Ford Madox Ford (Longmans, 1956), p. 16
CONCLUSION

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(F.M. Ford : Mightier than the Swords, 1938)