

INTRODUCTION

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‘No artist can paint what he sees’, E. H. Gombrich declared. ‘What he (she) can do, and does’, Clifford Geertz commented, ‘is exploit the means available in this place, or that time, for image-making, the production of sensory illusion’. Or, as Gombrich pointedly put it, ‘The world can never quite look like a picture, but a picture can look like the world’. Just how much a variety of word-pictures look like the world marks the study of history and representation in Ford Madox Ford’s writings in this volume.

The essays in it bring new perspectives to Ford’s fiction, poetry, and criticism of art, literature, and society. They agree that for Ford there was no such thing as an objective historical account of an event, no less of a series of events like those that make up an election or a war, for instance. History, not unlike fiction, is what the writer makes of the facts, not the facts themselves. For Ford, who said so time and again, the value of any work of art lies in the personality of the author. Consequently, it is impossible to eliminate personality from the art of writing history – no less the art of writing poetry, fiction, and criticism. All who write with the facts before them render their own impressions of those facts. That is what Ford did in his novels, poems, critical writings, propaganda, and histories – histories like those of the Cinque Ports, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, or, more pertinently, the history of his own times. The focus of this collection of essays, then, is Ford’s rendering of a variety of pictures of the world in his writings.

Patrick Parrinder begins by suggesting that even in works like *The Spirit of the People* there is a notable absence of ‘English character’ in Ford’s writing because he despised imperialism which, in his view, formed the English character. Alternately, he shows in *Parade’s End* how nepotism and a family curse doomed the Edwardian ideal of character. Peter Christensen presents a less historically engaged Ford by comparing him with Boris Pasternak. He

argues that Ford did not address the major issues of contemporary social history in *Parade's End* nearly as thoroughly as Pasternak did in *Doctor Zhivago*. Anne Marie Flanagan, in an analysis of *The Fifth Queen* trilogy, proposes a similar lack of engagement on Ford's part; there a woman's private education is not meant to give her a public voice, but only to make her a suitable companion to a public man. Could it be that the Ford who borrowed the title of *This Monstrous Regiment of Women* from John Knox shared the reformer's antipathy toward the rule of a woman?

Anthony P. Monta finds a different Ford altogether. His Ford fully engages social history and women's suffrage by his attention to the mechanization of the British administrative system in times of both peace and war. Vita Fortunati likewise emphasizes Ford's historical sensitivity to the reckless stupidity of a war run by politicians and generals far from the battlefields that claim the lives of soldiers and civilians. Similarly, Paul Skinner proposes that we recognize an engaged Ford in *No Enemy* and *Last Post* where he dramatizes the process of personal and social reconstruction after the Great War. Jonathan Boulter takes us a step further into Ford's awareness by demonstrating in *No Enemy* the personal psychological dynamics of such reconstruction. Dominique Lemarchal, Elena Lamberti, Jason Harding, and Sara Haslam analyze a variety of Ford's work to suggest the penetration of the personal in the historical, showing how his impressionist technique draws on historical events for signification rather than validation, thus nudging him and his readers toward a post-modernist approach to reality. In the process we learn a good deal about *The Cinque Ports* from Lemarchal, *A History of Our Own Times* from Lamberti, *The Fifth Queen* from Harding, and *The Rash Act* and *Henry for Hugh* from Haslam. Alan Judd then offers an example of the signification of *The Good Soldier* for a contemporary novelist.

James Scannell, writing about *Mr Fleight*, Robert McDonough about *Mister Bosphorous and the Muses*, Angus Wrenn about *Holbein*, and Max Saunders about Ford's critical writings emphasize the importance of his neglected works to modernist poetry, contemporary politics, art criticism, and literary theory. Harriet Cooper and Andrzej Gasiorek look carefully at Ford's propaganda as well as at

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works like *The English Novel* and *Provence* to reprise the working of his impressionist technique and elucidate its importance in his non-fictional works. Finally, in Ford's *The March of Literature* Nicholas Delbanco locates and recreates an old man mad about writing who – immersed in literature from Confucius' day to his own – shows us how much the best that has been written matters for all who would write well.