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**“To Inhabit in Tranquility”: Landscape, Vision and Empathy in Ford Madox Ford’s *No Enemy***

**Abstract I:** In *No Enemy* di Ford Madox Ford, la minaccia mortale rappresentata dalla guerra influisce sulle forme e sulla possibilità stessa di provare empatia. Dopo aver mostrato come Ford si inserisca nel dibattito coevo sulla *Einfühlung*, l’articolo approfondisce le riflessioni dell’autore sulle distorsioni subite dalla sua “immaginazione simpatetica” e sull’angoscia per i territori mutilati dalla guerra. L’intento è di mostrare come le rare visioni surreali di paesaggi inviolati concedano a Ford di riconnettersi con i pensieri, le paure e i desideri più profondi dei suoi simili. I recenti studi di psicologia sui diversi livelli di empatia e sulla sua compromissione in situazioni di stress forniscono il quadro concettuale dell’analisi.

**Abstract II:** In Ford Madox Ford’s *No Enemy*, the mortal threat posed by the war affects the forms and even the possibility of empathy. After showing how he participates in contemporary discourses on *Einfühlung*, I investigate his musings on the distortions of his sympathetic imagination and his grief for mutilated territories. The aim is to show how rare surreal visions of landscapes untouched by the war offer him the possibility of reconnecting himself with the deepest thoughts, fears and longings of his fellow beings. Recent psychological research on different levels of empathy and its impairment under stress provide the conceptual framework of my analysis.

**Impressionism and the Sympathetic Imagination**

In Joseph Conrad’s oft-quoted definition of literary Impressionism, writing “must make its appeal through the senses”: “My task which I am trying to achieve”, he claims in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), “is by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see” (Conrad 1979: 147). Such vicariousness, the ability to make the imagination of the reader respond to the world created by the author, was at the core of Impressionist writing, a style which gained momentum between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Beside Conrad, a considerable number of writers have been associated with, or discussed in terms of, literary Impressionism, among them Arthur Symons, Stephen Crane, Katherine Mansfield, D. H. Lawrence, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. Yet Ford Madox Ford was by far the most central figure of this movement: despite his manifold experimentations throughout his long and prolific career, he always styled himself as an Impressionist and more than any other con-

tributed to defining the theoretical underpinnings of this kind of writing. Ford believed that literature should render – and reproduce in the reader’s mind – impressions as they impinge on the author’s consciousness; for this process to be effective, the reader should be a “sympathetic soul” (Ford 1992: 17), whose mind’s eye is sufficiently untrammelled by conventions to be impressed by the writer’s vivid renditions of reality.

Unsurprisingly, the epistemological question has been the province par excellence of Fordian and, more generally, early twentieth-century studies: conditions of perception and the limits of knowledge are, after all, the fundamental issues of Impressionism. Yet it is a well-known fact that, from the turn of the new millennium, scholars have largely lost interest in the question of representation and visuality. Other fields and intellectual formations – from cognitivism to affect theory – have pointed to new concerns and suggested new methods through which literature might be fruitfully addressed in epistemological terms. Yet, one may object that vision is too central to Ford’s writing to be dismissed on the grounds of the new academic agenda. And it is precisely on the premise of this objection that my article attempts to start revitalising the analysis of vision in Ford, by arguing its inextricable connection with one of the main subjects debated across the humanities and health sciences today: empathy. As Meghan Hammond argues in her 2014 monograph *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, “[l]iterary impressionism is valuable largely in that it stimulates sympathetic imagination or empathic thinking” (2014: 120). In this context, so I argue here, vision should be centre stage, as it is undeniable that images – be they physical or mental – involve the viewer emotionally and that Ford was especially prone to being moved by their evocative power. As he suggested in a letter to Stella Bowen on 11 May 1923, “Holbein’s portrait of Xtina of Milan or the Karats really make you feel at least all – & a great deal more – of the emotions one ough[t] to feel on meeting X. of M” (Stang & Cochran 1994: 199).

In Ford’s pre-war writings of good soldiers and nostalgic gentlemen, emotions are usually repressed or manifested only in very small gestures and brief remarks; often, they are evoked indirectly through colours or other aspects of the visual field. But when confronted with, and overwhelmed by, the traumatic experience of the First World War – which emerged in his writings of the 1920s – Ford felt that his power to receive and convey sensory impressions had been severely compromised, as much as his ability to feel and make us feel. Consequently, the Great War – an unprecedented challenge to imagination and emotion – is the best field to test the complexities of Ford’s Impressionism under strain, its ability to represent the violence done both to individual perception and fellow feeling.

Over the last decades scholars have offered explanations of Ford’s psychology of war through psychoanalytic, biographical, aesthetic and epistemological approaches. In the recent collection *War and the Mind: Ford Madox Ford’s Parade’s End, Modernism and Psychology* (2015) edited by Ashley Chantler and Rob Hawkes, for example, contributors have engaged with shell-shock in Ford’s war writings from a variety of perspectives: from the relationship of trauma with sexuality to parallels between individual trauma and the dramatic historical transformations brought about by the war. In this collection, empathy features in Meghan Marie Hammond’s essay, which investigates fellow feeling in relation to the importance of the eighteenth century in *Last Post*, while Eve Sorum invokes Deleuze and Guattari’s rhi-

zomatic theories to “argue that the characters in *Parade’s End* through their own alienation from their experiences and sense of disorientation with the emotional and experiential terrain, actually invite the reader into a world that might otherwise be inaccessible” (2015: 53). Along the same lines, Hammond claims elsewhere that in Ford “empathy and abstraction, two aesthetic processes that Hulme, following the work of Wilhelm Worringer, wanted to separate, can actually function productively together” (2014: 29). On the whole, the theory of empathy is still too recent to have had a significant influence on Fordian studies and these few contributions on the topic tend to focus mainly on techniques of fragmentation and effects of bewilderment in order to claim that modernist abstraction and shifting points of view can be conducive to the reader’s empathic response to the text. Their concern with the reader’s emotional reception loosely follows a line of enquiry set out by Suzanne Keen’s seminal book *Empathy and the Novel* (2007).

This approach is alien to the aims of my article, which is not concerned with the experience of reading. Rather, its objective is to make sense of Ford’s consciousness at war, where the prolonged mortal threat affects the forms and at times even the very possibility of fellow feeling, but also to investigate his displacement of the empathy for human beings onto forms of anguish for the disfigured landscape. After showing how he participates in early twentieth-century discourses of emotional response, I will investigate his baffled musings on the distortions of his sympathetic imagination. In particular, my analysis will try to make sense of his grief for territories devastated by the war which, to his own dismay, he experiences as more unbearable and heart-breaking than the view of slaughtered soldiers; but I will also show how rare surreal visions of landscapes untouched by the war offer him the possibility of reconnecting himself with the deepest thoughts, excruciating fears and intense longings of his fellow beings. In *No Enemy. A Tale of Reconstruction* (1929) – Ford’s book under scrutiny in this article – the poet’s “mind, always aware of itself, comments on its own complexity” (Stang 1977: 50), probing into the depths of the psyche, where a diversity of responses to the war stratify: the threat of dissolution, the exhilaration produced by escaped danger, the emotional numbness caused by the exposure to a traumatic space of mud and death, and, finally, the desire for an inviolable place. As Sondra Stang suggests, *No Enemy* is a sustained effort to examine “the nature of the mind under stress – the particular way it perceives, what it selects and uses, how it survives: and in the Poet’s case how the mind strengthens itself so that it can again function in a creative way” (1977: 50).

*No Enemy* is composed of two sections. Part One (“Four Landscapes”) draws upon particular views which have left an indelible trace on the memory of the poet Gringoire, Ford’s protagonist and alter ego. As he explains, “before August, 1914, I lived more through my eyes than through any other sense, and in consequence certain corners of the earth had, singularly, the power to stir me” (Ford 1984: 21). But from the outbreak of hostilities, “aspects of the earth no longer existed for him” (21) with the exception of the view of four landscapes: these became, according to Sondra Stang, quasi-Wordsworthian “spots of time for the mind under stress to repair to, reverting to its most nourishing activity – storing itself with ‘observed aspects’” (1977: 50).

### Conceptual Frames

In the early twentieth century there was a flourishing of theories of empathy in England. The term first appeared in English as a translation of the German *Einfühlung* ('in-feeling') and its first recorded use, in 1904, is credited to amateur psychologist, novelist and travel writer Violet Page (alias 'Vernon Lee') (Cooke 2008: 155). A central concept in German aesthetics, *Einfühlung* captured the almost spiritual experience of the viewer who projects his or her feelings into natural forms, in a moment of deep consonance or sympathy between subject and object. Individuals, it was believed, attribute beauty to the forms in which they succeed in transferring their own vital sense; consequently, their aesthetic enjoyment amounts to an objectified enjoyment of themselves.

The idea of empathy became widespread above all following the appearance of the successful work of Wilhelm Worringer *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908). His study presented empathy as an aesthetic category suitable for understanding only classical and Renaissance art – which arise from a feeling of identification with organic forms – but inadequate to the appreciation of the art of primitive peoples as well as pre-classical and oriental civilizations, in which an anti-naturalistic feeling tends to prevail. Next to the need for empathy, claimed Worringer, the existence of an original impulse towards abstraction must be postulated, which tends to the inorganic, the regular and the geometric. Naturalistic art is that of civilizations who follow an immanent impulse, who feel at home in the world and confident about its knowability; to the contrary, the urge for abstraction comes to those who perceive the world as disquieting and unintelligible. Worringer described this anguish as a "dread of space", a "spiritual agorophobia in the face of the motley disorder and caprice of the phenomenal world" (Worringer 1997: 16, 129). In Susan Lanzoni's words, "[r]ather than leading one to extend oneself into forms in the world, the urge to abstraction produced a withdrawal from a chaotic and unsettling world. This chaos prompted the creation of repose and order in a new crystalline, geometric style, which was typical of the Byzantine mosaic or the Egyptian pyramid" (2018: 88). His idea of the relationship between archaic geometric form and agorophobia or space-shyness was reaffirmed for Anglo-American modernism by T. E. Hulme. Wyndham Lewis "would have found much to his liking in Hulme's interpretation of Worringer, which yoked the geometrical forms of machinery to those found in archaic art" (Hammond 2014: 125).

According to Kristy Martin, other writers, such as Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, were more appreciative of empathy, which they conceived as a "bodily and yet ecstatic form of feeling", "a type of sympathy that was both sensuous and epiphanic" (2013: 9-10). Above all, it was Vernon Lee who wrote extensively on the topic and is credited with its popularisation for English-speaking audiences. According to Hammond, in the pre-war years Ford was familiar with "contemporaneous discourse on aesthetic empathy, especially that of Vernon Lee", as "[s]he was one of several female authors whom he featured in the pages of the *English Review*" (Hammond 2014: 121). Admittedly, he never used the word 'empathy', preferring instead the more widespread and long-standing term 'sympathy'. Yet, if today the latter defines "a distanced feeling of pity for another, whereas empathy is a deeper-going ability to engage with a variety of feelings and to inhabit, sometimes even bodily, the



other's perspective" (Lanzoni 2018: 5-6), in the early decades of the twentieth century the two words were used interchangeably.

Yet, one should not presume that concerns behind Worringer's preference for abstraction were altogether alien to Ford's own. Worringer's dread of space – which is engendered by its indefiniteness, its being the realm of phenomena, transformation and decay – accorded with Ford's sense of the war landscape as a vast, baffling space of sheer matter and dissolution, a mixture of mud and corpses, which does not encourage the empathic extension of the self into space but rather a withdrawal from it. Worringer saw the "geometric-crystalline regularity" of modernist art as a way of impressing upon the image "the stamp of eternalisation and wrest it from temporality and arbitrariness" (1997: 42); as will become apparent in the following, Ford found the same urge satisfied by the image of a safe nook, protective and inviolable, which allowed him to inhabit space again but also to find a way of reconstructing his ability to visualise and empathise.

My investigation of the mind at war as it appears in *No Enemy* is partly modelled on the theories of recent psychological research. These reveal that automatic, instinctive forms of empathy (usually defined as 'emotional contagion') coexist with others which have an emotional and moral quality or even a cognitive nature. This complexity has generated various theoretical attempts to produce clear-cut definitions. Keen, for example, "distinguish[es] the spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling as empathy, and the more complex, differentiated feeling for another as sympathy (sometimes called empathic concern in psychological literature)" (2007: 4). For other theorists fellow feeling expresses itself at three levels. The most basic is "empathic resonance" (also known as "contagion"), which is an instinctive muscular response; often "[t]his so-called perception-action link is defined as an unconscious mimicry of the postures, facial expressions, and other behaviors" (Nietlisbach *et al.* 2010: 833). A higher level is "emotional empathy" which defines an individual's experience of another person's actual or inferred emotional state. Finally, the term "cognitive empathy" refers to the ability to understand and explain the mental states of others and is known as "Theory of Mind" (Nietlisbach *et al.* 2010: 832–833). These categories are recurrent in contemporary studies of the psychology of empathy but by no means stable, as different scholars tend to shift emphases and redefine boundaries. Moreover, as psychologist Eva Koopman has pointed out, although these theoretical distinctions may be useful, they are also difficult to make in practice and perhaps even arbitrary, because the various forms of empathy are likely to cooccur in real life (see Koopman 2015: 63).

### **Feeling for the Country, Feeling for Others**

Throughout his career, Ford was concerned with what since the eighteenth century had been known as 'sympathetic imagination', "the moral and aesthetic concept debated by the philosophers David Hume, Adam Smith, and Edmund Burke" (Lanzoni 2018: 5). According to Max Saunders, the cultivation of understanding between minds was "Ford's most important aesthetic doctrine": "all his criticism rests on a broad sense of how art effects a 'contact' between individuals; how 'feeling with' or 'feeling like' someone quite other militates against human isolation; how it enables knowledge, understanding, self-understanding" (1996: 400).

As a second lieutenant in the British Army, Ford was sent to France in 1915 where he saw first-hand the devastating violence of the Somme and the Ypres Salient. In *No Enemy*, the carnage of the modern warfare leaves the veteran Gringoire, Ford's *persona*, with a capacity for feeling which is severely impaired, to the extent that – somewhat worryingly and in an evident state of dissociation – the protagonist speculates: “Perhaps I am lacking in human sympathy or have no particular cause to love my fellow men” (Ford 1929: 28). War generates alienation: “the battle did not exist for the purpose of stirring your emotions. Neither does the night, nor yet do the corpses. They are all profoundly indifferent to your existence”, writes Ford in the essay “Pure Literature” (Ford 1999: 261). Researchers in cognitive psychology have shown that impaired empathic resonance in post-traumatic stress disorder – which Ford suffered from as a consequence of shell shock – is a protective move: “[s]uppression of contagion might be an unconscious coping strategy of the aroused system, preventing the individual from being overwhelmed by the stressful experiences of others” (Nietlisbach *et al.* 2010: 841). According to psychologist D. S. Weiss, this compassion fatigue can be regularly observed in people overexposed to suffering (2010: 771).

Gringoire's puzzlement at his emotional numbness emerges repeatedly in *No Enemy* and finds an echo also in Ford's war essay “Arms and the Mind”, written at the front in 1916:

In battle – and in the battle zone – the whole world, humanity included, seems to assume the aspect of matter dominated eventually by gravity. [...] It is all just matter – all humanity, just matter; one with the trees, the shells by the roadside, the limbered wagons, the howitzers and the few upstanding housewalls (Ford 1999: 39).

“On the face of it I am a man who has taken a keen interest in the aspects of humanity – in the turn of an eyelash, an expression of joy, a gesture of despair. In the old days [...] I felt certain emotions”, Ford writes in the same essay (1999: 39). In peacetime such details and nuances can be taken in and rendered by impressionist writing, but the immense cruelty and devastation of the first modern warfare strain the limits of human comprehension: “I dare say it was just want of imagination: one couldn't perhaps figure the feelings of ruined, fleeing and martyred populations”, claims Gringoire (Ford 1984: 26). The constant, stressful exposure to the abjection of the body – its subsumption into the mud as undifferentiated matter – impairs empathic resonance, just as the sheer scale of entire suffering populations cannot be conceived (or, in impressionist terms, mentally visualised) and consequently produces a crisis of emotional empathy.

In the midst of this debacle of the sympathising imagination, Ford recognises nonetheless the power of narration. The abjection of human beings whose corpses have become one with matter may have impaired empathic resonance but this is one which words are still able to rekindle:

one of the young fellows began to talk of an operation for appendicitis he had had to undergo. We had to stop him: the mere talking of cutting flesh with a knife made us feel sick. Yet the sight of a man literally smashed into the dust had produced no emotions in us.... I know of no more striking tribute to the power of the word” (Ford 1999: 260).

The effect of contagion described in this passage recalls Vernon Lee's similar assertion about the capacity of narration to produce an instinctive muscular reaction: "[w]hen one felt the body 'shrinking at the narrative of an operation', one might experience imitative movements, what Lee called a 'sympathetic realization'" (Lanzoni 2018: 27). Ford is persuaded that the fictional evocation of an object is more conducive to vivid mental imagery than the observation of the object in the real world: as a pre-war writer, he claims in "Arms and the Mind", "I could make you see [...] anything I had seen, and still better, anything I hadn't seen" (Ford 1999: 36-37). It follows that only the reconstruction of the power to visualise, that is, to wrest moments of vision from the unintelligible, agoraphobic space, will restore his empathic abilities.

The drab abstraction of the war landscape entails the impossibility of inhabiting it visually and physically. Space may be mapped cartographically and its details be memorised to facilitate the movements of troops, but they will present nothing meaningful to the soul of the poet who feels existentially stranded, without coordinates. Space is primarily a lived experience (Lefebvre 1991: 162) and the question of its embodiment is certainly crucial to Ford, especially in the midst of a space that threatens to engulf and assimilate his body, as he suggests in *It Was the Nightingale*:

*houses*. They had been used to seem cubic and solid permanences. But we had seen Ploegsteert where it had been revealed that men's dwellings were thin shells that could be crushed as walnuts are crushed. Man and even Beast... all things that lived and moved and had volition and life might at any moment be resolved into a scarlet viscosity seeping into the earth of torn fields [...] Nay, it had been revealed to you that beneath Ordered Life itself was stretched, the merest film with, beneath it, the abysses of Chaos (Ford 1934: 48-49).

If, in *No Enemy*, open places constantly produce states of dread and agoraphobia, the book is above all an attempt to retrieve the few quiet moments during the war when Gringoire's poetic imagination was reactivated. The significance of such spots of time becomes apparent to him only afterwards, in the long-desired quiet of the English cottage where he lives contentedly after the war, even if the damaged state of this haven clearly alludes to the incompleteness of his recovery. The cottage is "like a gingerbread house from a Grimm's fairy tale" but still in need of repair, "with a roof that leaks, walls that used to drip with damp" (Ford 1984: 22, 16). For Gringoire, the difficult process of psychological and artistic reconstruction is dependent on the possibility of dwelling in this safe corner of the earth, however precarious and ramshackle it may be. His desire to "inhabit in tranquility" (Ford 1984: 9) signals the quasi-Wordsworthian nature of Ford's enterprise: to recollect means to reconstruct, from a secure green nook of the earth and through the consonance with a natural landscape, the sense of a common human sensibility.

During the war, Gringoire fears that all the "nooks of the world were threatened by the tide of blue-grey mud" (Ford 1984: 63). If, as illustrated above, the suffering of entire populations is ungraspable for Gringoire's traumatised mind and causes a crisis of emotional empathy, such compassion is transferred from the civilians to the country itself: "what one

feared for was the land – not the people but the menaced earth [...] one couldn't perhaps figure the feelings of ruined, fleeing and martyred populations", he says (Ford 1984: 15). When he visits some gutted French villages, he is struck by "the feeling of abashment that seemed to attach to furniture and wall-paper exposed to the sky – not the sufferings of the civilian population" (27). The anticipation of the trauma that the war may inflict on the landscape always produces in him a sense of dread, just as the observation of wounded houses engenders melancholy thoughts:

what struck me as infinitely pathetic was lace curtains: for there were innumerable lace curtains, that had shaded vanished windows, fluttering from all the unroofed walls in the glassless window-frames. They seemed to me to be more forlornly ashamed than any human beings I have ever seen. Only brute beasts ever approach that (27).

As Susan Sontag contends in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, a village or "a cityscape is not made of flesh. Still, sheared-off buildings are almost as eloquent as bodies in the streets" (2003: 7). Gringoire's feeling for the landscape throughout the book is clearly a displacement of his sympathetic imagination, a compensation for his temporary inability to fully experience other people's actual or inferred emotional state. But it is also the sense that nature and civilization – as they are revealed in the countryside, dwellings and poetry – transcend the destiny of human beings and preserve our humaneness for generations to come: "the real lives of men are enshrined in their products. To kill a poet is a small thing; to destroy his work is an irremediable offense" (Ford 1984: 109). Therefore, "[i]t is horrible to see houses go down in ruin under artillery fire; it is horrible to see fields mutilated and rendered infertile" (110). No longer the poet, whose life the war has revealed as tragically precarious, but rather poetry, nature and human artefacts are, for Ford, "the rock of defence for human nature" (Wordsworth 1992: 77): by destroying them, we jeopardise our possibility of remaining human.

In the essay "War and the Mind", written in 1916, Ford discusses what does or does not present an image to the "visualising mind" in the context of the war. He describes a "division" in his inner self between, on the one hand, the mind of the "Battalion Intelligence Officer" – constantly "observant", alert and engrossed in mapping the territory or performing other military tasks – and, on the other, the "quiescent mind [...] of the Impressionist in Letters" (Ford 1999: 42-43). In the disorienting landscape "obscured by clay" (Ford 1984: 22), only instrumental observation can sustain the self in the act of survival: "things were not objects that one looked at for themselves. They were landmarks" for the "workaday frame of mind" (Ford 1984: 23-24, 29): the land represented nothing visual to this kind of intelligence whereas the mind at rest – in the few moments when the usual preoccupations were somehow suspended – could contemplate the landscape in aesthetic terms. "So Gringoire had four landscapes, which represent four moments in four years when, for very short intervals, the strain of the war lifted itself from the mind. They were, those intermissions of the spirit, exactly like gazing through rifts in a mist" (Ford 1984: 24): these visions bring into focus a particular moment during his military service when the omnipresent thought of the



war receded from his consciousness and he was able to appreciate the landscape in itself in all its vividness.

The first is in England, at the outbreak of the war, a “day in 1915 when Kensington Gardens suddenly grew visible” to Gringoire. He has a trance-like vision of “old, stiff marionettes, rather homely courtiers and royalties” stepping out of the tall windows of the “Dutch orangery” and pirouetting on the lawn (Ford 1984: 25). This fanciful reverie is brief, suffused with the sense of a possible future invasion of England by a “mud-colored tide pouri[ng] toward us” (Ford 1984: 26). Marionettes, a frequent avant-garde motif also in Ford’s pre-war writing, may allude to the mechanization of humanity produced by the war; yet here they appear poeticised by the playful quality of this vision, so that the reification becomes innocent and surreal, a childlike spectacle.

The second landscape appears when, in a railway station, Gringoire is informed of Lord Kitchener’s death. The news sets him in a peculiar state of mind: the whole world seems, as it were, suspended and there is nothing for him to think of but visible objects: “No war: an empty mind; a little open shed with benches; a hatchway in one plank wall where they served out tickets; a bit of platform; a high, brick signal-box with clocks or things ticking; a brick house, no doubt the stationmaster’s....The whole world, that was! And noiseless; and immobile” (Ford 1984: 34).

Then comes the third intermission of the spirit, which occurs after Gringoire’s worst shock of the war. A gunwheel has lifted the corrugated iron roof of the dugout where he is dozing and has crushed it down again. Miraculously unscathed, he walks downhill through thistles in hot sunlight and finds himself surrounded by swallows which fly at waist-height around him, concealing the corpses scattered on the ground underneath and screening them from his full awareness. In a moment of post-traumatic exaltation, he cherishes the illusion of the inviolability of his body:

And an innumerable company of wallows flew around him, waist high, just brushing the thistledown. “They were so near”, Gringoire said, “that they brushed my hands, and they extended so far that I could see nothing else. It is one of the five things of the war that I really see, for it was like walking, buoyantly, in the pellucid sunlight, waist-high through a sea of unsurpassed and unsurpassable azure. I felt as if I were a Greek God. It was like a miracle [...] I remember thinking [...] that there were a good many dead amongst the thistles and that I must be putting up a huge number of flies. But that again was the thought of my subconscious mind (Ford 1984: 44–45).

Finally, close to the Somme, the fourth landscape takes the shape of “a rhomboid of deeper, brighter green [...] precisely as you will see the colored image cast on a sheet by a magic lantern, then slowly, it hardened and brightened, took shape as a recumbent oval, like eighteenth century vignettes”. This image doesn’t connote a specific locality but the more abstract idea of the country as “a sanctuary” (Ford 1984: 66-67).

Contemplation, regression, eternity and protection are what these landscapes encapsulate. All of them are almost surreal, “like one of these visions that one’s eyes, when tired, will see just before one falls asleep” (Ford 1984: 66). They are moments which emerge to

awareness through the layers of the mind. The “subconscious” registers these visual aspects and the “unconscious” associates them not only with the fear of “death: a profound and unforeseen disaster” (46) but also with the attendant desire of inviolability. Yet, we wonder, are such spots of time purely solipsistic reveries or are they signals of a common experience?

Only at the beginning of Part Two (“Certain Interiors”) is the narrator able to visualise humanity at war – no longer as the affectless image of sheer matter but as the nightmarish vision of a vast territory populated by minute, ephemeral human creatures who become one with the wounded landscape. This time, feeling for the landscape (or rather for the entire earth) becomes one with feeling for the whole humanity at war. This all-embracing emotional empathy is so intense that it becomes almost unbearable:

stretching away under the high skies, in the August sunlight, millions, millions, millions of my fellow men were moving – like tumultuous mites in a cheese, training and training, as we there were training – all across a broad world to where the sun was setting and to where the sun was rising – training to live a little, short space of time in an immense, long ribbon of territory, where, for a mile or so the earth was scarred, macerated, beaten to a pulp, and burnt by the sun till it was all dust....The thought grew, became an immense feeling, became an obsession” (Ford 1984: 128).

The grief for a humanised landscape foreshadows the powerful empathy (psychologists would probably categorise it as ‘cognitive’) which comes as a revelation at the end of the book, when Gringoire has an insight into the mind of those who died. As in “the old catholic idea that a man may find salvation between the saddle and the ground”, he expresses his belief that, in the moments preceding their death, soldiers must have found consolation in the thought of their own “imagined sanctuary” (Ford 1984: 277).

It becomes finally clear that the book has traced a journey towards the awareness of the feelings and aspirations common to us all. In the incipit, Gringoire is doubtful “if [his] experience of the war has been that of many people” (19). But the retrieval of his visual memories and the analysis of the workings of his mind has led him to conclude that we share the same way of thinking: under pressure or when approaching death, we need “the herb of oblivion” (139) and to be able to visualise an inviolable nook of the Earth, or, as Ford defines it in the Preface to the poetry collection *On Heaven* (1918):

a materialist’s Heaven. I know at least that I would not keep on going if I did not feel that Heaven will be something like Rumpelmayer’s tea shop, with the nice boys in khaki, with the haze and glimmer of the bright buttons, and the nice girls in the fashions appropriate to the day, and the little orchestra playing, “Let the Great Big World....” For our dead wanted so badly their leave in a Blighty, which would have been like that – they wanted it so badly that they must have it. And they must have just that. For haven’t we Infantry all seen that sort of shimmer and shine and heard the rustling and the music through all the turmoil and the mire and the horror? [...] that imagination is stronger than death (Ford 1999: 259).

This earthly paradise is a safe nook which can be real, as in the case of Gringoire's cottage, or imaginary, a figment of our mind between life and death, vigil and dream. At the end of *No Enemy*, musing on the many who died in the battlefields, Gringoire "hope[s] it is not a heresy to think that, as the eyelids of those who fell closed on their glory, they had long, long visions, like that green vision that came to me from time to time" (Ford 1984: 277), childlike pictures of marionettes and gingerbread cottages, delicate and frail as hopes and dreams are. Through this insight, the poet Gringoire, who dwells in his ramshackle post-war cottage, feels one with those who fell. His sympathetic imagination is finally reconstructed through the belief that, in our shared desire for this heavenly vision, lies our common humanity. The reconstruction of space (the possibility of inhabiting in tranquillity) is the condition for the restoration of vision just as this restored vision is essential for the reconstruction of an empathic imagination.

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