



Article

Beautiful Birds and Hun Planes: Ford Madox Ford in the Early Age of Flight

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Abstract: Reactions to the Wright brothers' achievement of the first sustained, controlled powered flight in December 1903 ranged from complete indifference to voluble celebration and evolved into convictions that ranged from a belief that war would be rendered impossible to confident predictions of invasion and widespread destruction. The policies and perceptions of institutions, governments and individuals were subject to constant revision and often abrupt reversal. When war came, the aeroplane, which began as an instrument of reconnaissance, rapidly became one more hazard among many for those at the front and a further point of division between combatants and civilians, for whom airships and air raids tended to loom larger. The first dynamic phase in the story of the aeroplane overlaps with the major early modernist period. This essay seeks to map, within that wider context, the experiences and responses of Ford Madox Ford. He began, like many others, with images of beauty and the natural world in that early stage when a functioning range of descriptive or comparative terms had yet to emerge. He encountered them next in the theatre of war during his service in France. His ambivalence towards aeroplanes was both similar to and different from his earlier responses to trains, cars and telephones. Their relative rarity, as well as their both physical and metaphorical distance, and Ford's own apparent immunity to the glamour and dynamism of aviation enabled him to view them retrospectively and employ them in anecdote, autobiography and fiction as both threat and saviour.

Keywords: Ford; modernism; aeroplane; First World War; flight; No Enemy; Parade's End



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Writing to Stella Bowen in November 1918, Ford Madox Ford assured her that 'the old novel will get itself written when I haven't any other bothers. Of course it's a fairy tale written to please you. I suppose I have always been writing fairy tales to please you—waiting for the person whose Favourite Author I shd one day be.'¹

That 'old novel', then two months into the writing, was 'True Love & a GCM'. Stella would remain the 'true love' for several years, but the General Court Martial did not materialise, since Ford abandoned the work some four months later.² By June 1919, when he wrote to his old friend Charles Masterman, the Liberal politician who had been in charge of the War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House, he could tell him, 'I have made a rather beautiful garden with the work of my own unaided hands, & subsist rather largely on its products. I am also writing some rather pretty stuff.' (Ford 1965, pp. 95–96).

This 'rather pretty stuff', 'about the country—gardening, birds and the like', was 'English Country', published as three essays in the *New Statesman*, then radically revised in the autumn of 1919, finally appearing, though only in the United States, as *No Enemy* in 1929.³ Its genre has been defined, debated and redefined numerous times; Ford himself described it to Hugh Walpole as 'a perfect paean to the English countryside in the middle of war reminiscences', adding in the same letter that he thought it 'the best prose I ever wrote' and 'a tribute to the country and my comrades in arms.'⁴ Initial reviews stressed the autobiographical aspects of the text, and Herbert Gorman remarked that, of all Ford's books, 'this one may be selected as peculiarly his book, the book of himself. He is the observant Compiler and he is the poet Gringoire'.⁵

The three *New Statesman* pieces are voiced in the first-person, and there is no mention of ‘Compiler’ or ‘Gringoire’.⁶ Ford continued to work on the manuscript and, in a short letter to James Pinker in October, which accompanied ‘the complete m.s. of “English Country”’, he wrote: ‘I have changed it a good deal—altogether in form: but I think it reads better.’⁷ The phrase ‘altogether in form’ strongly implies a shift to that doubled or split narrator which, in various forms, Ford employed so often. Cornelia Cook has discussed the ways in which the ‘double act of Compiler and Gringoire calls attention to the mechanics of narrative construction’, and other critics have also focused on the interplay between them.⁸

The immediate postwar Ford is not only rebuilding his memory; he is reconstructing his ability to articulate what he has seen and heard. Two hugely significant essays from 1916 and 1917, posthumously published as ‘Arms and the Mind’ and ‘War and the Mind’, concern the inability to write about what is before one’s eyes and the states of mind and levels of consciousness that enable or prevent that writing. If much of the matter of *No Enemy* is not exactly recollected in tranquillity, it is recalled sharply and lucidly, and much of its content is close to its author’s lived experience; it was perhaps felt at the time to be a little closer than desired, as with ‘True Love and a GCM’, the material of which Ford may have felt ‘too painfully self-exposing’.⁹

It is the self-appointed task of the ‘compiler’ to elicit Gringoire’s experiences of the late war, the lessons learned, and the implications for the wider world. One of those implications, though it was perceived at the time by relatively few people, concerned the emergence of the aeroplane, of powered flight, which was first achieved barely fifteen years before the armistice. It was on Ford’s thirtieth birthday, 17 December 1903, that Wilbur and Orville Wright, in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, achieved the first sustained, controlled power flight in four successful attempts, the first traveling around 120 feet and the fourth and last carrying the pilot 852 feet in 59 seconds. Orville’s telegram to his father, Bishop Wright, reporting their four successful flights into a 21 m.p.h. wind, concluded: ‘home Christmas.’ (Stoff 1996, pp. 13–14). It also requested that the Bishop ‘inform Press’, an initiative that was met with either disbelief or lack of interest. Only in 1909 did the US Government finally purchase the Wrights’ flying machine for \$30,000, after Orville’s demonstration flights under the proposed contract were judged to be successful (McCullough 2015, p. 238).

The same year saw the first great international air shows, and, in an event that was perhaps of more immediate significance, Louis Blériot, encouraged by Lord Northcliffe’s 1908 offer of £1000 for the first flight across the English Channel, achieved this goal on the morning of 25 July 1909, ‘after which it was clear that England “was no longer an island”’.¹⁰ In 1914, Robert Delaunay, ‘the painter of the Eiffel Tower’, exhibited his *Hommage à Blériot*, in which, Robert Hughes observes, all Delaunay’s ‘favourite emblems of newness (Tower, radio telegraphy, aviation) are swept together into a paean to the man he called, significantly, ‘le grand Constructeur’, because, with his flight across the English Channel, Louis Blériot ‘had “constructed” a bridge more imposing than any physical structure could be.’ It is, Hughes concludes, ‘almost a religious painting, an angelic conception of modernism’.¹¹

Blériot’s ‘bridge’ had other implications, as some observers realised. While Winston Churchill, then Home Secretary, showed great interest in the possibilities of aerial reconnaissance in warfare, the War Office took some convincing that the utility of aeroplanes extended much beyond that. Were they even, perhaps, a bit unsporting? Before the conflict began, General Grierson reportedly observed to George V, “‘I think, sir, that those aeroplanes are going to spoil the war. When they come over I can only tell my men to cover their heads and make a noise like a mushroom.” (Winter 1979, p. 127). The linking of war and sport had a long pedigree: William Somerville’s ‘The Chase’ (1735), a poem in four books, had traced the pre-Conquest history of hunting, ‘the sport of kings;/Image of war without its guilt’. There was also the implied necessity for fairness, gentlemanliness—even chivalry. Towards the end of August 1916, when Wilfred Owen thought of applying for a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps, he wrote to his mother, ‘To battle with the Super-Zeppelin, when he comes, this would be chivalry more than Arthur dreamed of.’¹² Mark Girouard observed

that the war 'both brought Victorian chivalry to its climax and helped to destroy it', and Owen's terms of reference were not unusual (Girouard 1981, p. vi). 'It was like the lists of the Middle Ages', Cecil Lewis recalled, 'the only sphere in modern warfare where a man saw his adversary and faced him in mortal combat, the only sphere where there was still chivalry and honour.' (Lewis [1936] 1977, p. 45). In the 'resolutions of thanks' given in both Houses in 1917, Lloyd George remarked that the Air Service 'formed the knighthood of the war', while Lord Curzon, in the Upper House, saluted the 'knights of the air' who had 'revived the spirit of knight errantry'.¹³ Those conquerors of the air were seen as 'a special breed—that of the ultimate hero' (Paris 1993, pp. 124–25).

Although H. G. Wells had once thought it improbable that aeronautics would ever 'come into play as a serious modification of transport and communication', by 1908, he had published *The War in the Air*, and he later suggested that the Government urgently set about 'building ten thousand aeroplanes'.¹⁴ Responding to Colonel G. F. Stone's 1909 address, 'Defence of Harbours against Naval Airships', to the Royal United Services Institute, Major Sir Alexander Bannerman, Bart., 'an experienced balloonist', was sceptical of the views put forward by the Colonel. Emphasising the difficulty of hitting a target from the air, Bannerman doubted whether 'one shot in 10,000 will, from a height of 5000 feet, hit a battleship'. But then, at the 1911 Hendon Air Display, Claude Graham-White several times dropped a 100-lb sandbag onto 'the outline of a battleship whitewashed on the grass' from a height of 2000 feet, an exploit that noticeably concerned at least one of the distinguished spectators, Admiral Fisher.¹⁵

In the early stages of the First World War, pilots were most often observers, armed with cameras and notebooks rather than military hardware. Air warfare, as John Laffin observes, 'was a direct product of trench warfare', since shell-holes, barbed wire, the churned up ground, the defensive strength of the trenches themselves, all made it impossible for cavalry to 'fulfil its traditional role of scouting'.¹⁶ Airmen's gestures towards offensive action began as fairly crude and small-scale efforts: revolvers, occasional grenades and even darts.¹⁷ In the British raid on Cuxhaven on Christmas Day 1914, *The Guardian* reported, 'They threw bombs upon German warships lying in the roads there and upon the gasworks'.¹⁸ By the spring of 1915, the Germans had developed the mechanism required to synchronize machine guns firing forward through propeller blades, and dogfights became increasingly common.¹⁹ Soon after the armistice, British forces were carrying out aerial bombardments in Somaliland, Afghanistan and Iraq. Thereafter, 'the training runs for future conflicts would continue, aircraft flying higher, faster and further, into the realms of what was regarded as technically impossible and morally unthinkable only a few years earlier'.²⁰ In effect, the aeroplane would become normalised, increasingly a barely remarked element of the physical and mental landscape.

This essay seeks to map, within this wider context, Ford Madox Ford's experiences and responses, drawing on both fiction and autobiographical writings. His ambivalence towards aeroplanes was both similar to and different from his responses to trains, cars and telephones. They were representative of that modernity whose elements he continued to interrogate. He was never intoxicated by speed, rather the reverse. It was C. W. R. Nevinson, 'the English Futurist painter', whose 'aeroplane pictures', Sue Malvern wrote, compelled 'an identification with the war machine rendered into a modern democratic hierarchy of working men overseen by airmen, recently promoted to the status of the new Gods'.²¹ Additionally, though Ford had ironically praised Marinetti and other Futurists for their radical energies, he was largely immune to the glamour and dynamism of aviation and would not have endorsed their more general hymning of machinery, nor the dismissal of history or the glorification of war.

The aeroplane was, as Stephen Kern remarked, 'but one variant of the technology that sundered protective frontiers and created new spatial dynamics' (Kern 1983, p. 242), and those 'frontiers' were not only national borders. Cubists and Futurists fractured or dissolved the picture frame, and, for many writers as well as painters, envisioning a world seen from thousands of feet up—or a world potentially without end, seen from

below—was exhilarating and artistically stimulating. Ford’s case was a little different, both psychologically, given his history of agoraphobia (Moser 1980, pp.137–42; Saunders 1996, I, 178–80, 186–88; Beaumont 2010), and artistically, given his desire always to maintain the human scale, keeping his reader in mind and in sight.²² He had several times in his earlier writings employed the image of the bird’s eye view, in the 1905 *Soul of London* and in an editorial column in the *English Review*; additionally, around the end of the war, he wrote of the ‘theorists’ who generalised about it: ‘But I don’t see upon what hill they can stand in order to get their bird’s eye views. Of course there are remote persons who stand aloof from humanity—but if you stand aloof from humanity how can you know about us poor people?’²³

Describing the landscape of a down behind Albert, *No Enemy’s Gringoire* evokes both Second Lieutenant Ford Madox Hueffer in 1916 and his several recollections of W. H. Hudson’s *Nature in Downland*:²⁴

Tiny and incredibly pretty, like films of gold dust floating in blue water and like peach blossom leaves—yes, incredibly pretty in the sunlight—aeroplanes were there. Because the—just as pretty—little mushrooms that existed suddenly in the sky, beside the sunlit dragonflies and peach blossoms, were pearly white, one officer said,

“Hun planes!”²⁵

The abrupt and brutal monosyllables that rupture an ostensibly idyllic scene echo in a later reversal or inversion. In *Return to Yesterday*, Ford recalls his visit to Germany in 1913, accompanying Charles Masterman and his wife Lucy (also with Ford’s then-partner, Violet Hunt, though she is not mentioned).²⁶ Ford and Masterman are lying on the turf at the top of a hill in Trèves—the French name of Trier—which gives a ‘great view, going into France’:

Seven hundred feet below us a great, beautiful white bird, with the tips of its wings turned back, glided noiselessly along above a green field. It dipped with supreme grace to rest. I had never seen an aeroplane before. So the first I ever saw was a German war-plane and I saw it from above.²⁷

This alignment of the aeroplane with the natural world—dragonflies, peach blossoms, white bird, green field—is there too in Ford’s 1914 *Outlook* column, ‘The Classic Muse’: ‘Anyhow, it was very tranquil and sunny and early, and from the not distant marshes came the thin bleating of the flocks . . . Classical. . .’

And then there arose on the air a sound, not in seeming unclassical—a sound like the humming of a bee-god, persistent, musical, more and more musical, more and more persistent. I have never heard a seaplane sound so like a Jew’s harp. The great beautiful thing in the sunlight, against the blue of the sky and the immense clouds, was coming over the arm of the sea from Portsmouth—going over the house, God knows whither. And I assure you that there was nothing unclassical in the vision. Against the sky and the clouds it was as clear in outline and in illuminated beauty as is the Victory of Samothrace. . .²⁸

Ford’s choice of reference here is suggestive. He had recently written, ‘whichever side prevails—and I guess that it will not be my side—there remains the uniting bond, the doctrine that a bowler-hat purchased in Oxford Street to-day is as good as the helmet of Pallas Athene.’ That ‘side’, however, was a cultural rather than a military one, and the article appeared more than three weeks before the outbreak of war (Ford 1914b).

In 1916, the poet Ivor Gurney wrote to his friend and sponsor Marion Scott in terms not unlike those of Ford’s *Gringoire*: ‘Tonight an aeroplane has been sailing high up in the blue—right over the German lines, and occasionally leaving at his back a flock of tiny white clouds; looking so innocent as they unfold, that unless one has caught the tiny flash of the explosion it is perfectly impossible to think that these are anything but the tiny clouds of Summer W H D[avies] loves to sing of.’²⁹ Edward Thomas, in February 1917, wrote, ‘Enemy plane like pale moth beautiful among shrapnel bursts’, and ‘Four or five planes hovering and wheeling as kestrels used to over Mutton and Ludcombe.’ (Thomas 1983, pp. 160, 163). In Mary Borden’s ‘The Bombardment’, the ‘defenders of the town’ attempt ‘to shoot to death a mosquito floating in boundless heaven’, and ‘The little clouds that burst in the sunlight were like materialised kisses.’ (Borden 1929, p. 9; Sinclair 1915, p. 86;

Mottram 1927, pp. 524, 706). A Taube hovering above the city of Ghent prompted May Sinclair's reflection that: 'Up there, in the clear blue sky it looks innocent, like an enormous greyish blond dragon-fly hovering over a pond. You stare at it, fascinated, as you stare at a hawk that hangs in mid-air, steadied by the vibration of its wings, watching its prey.'

This writing contains a stress on beauty, implicit or explicit gestures towards the celestial, clouds, birds, and insects. Several of these writers had, of course, written often of rural life, but, as Ford's memory of Trêves suggests, such terms of comparison resulted primarily from their having seen aeroplanes so rarely, if at all, prior to the war. Nor were they unusual in this: the first great international air shows of 1909, at Rheims and then Brescia, made such an impact on their vast crowds because hardly any of the spectators had ever before seen an aircraft in flight. The novelist R. H. Mottram, too, has an aeroplane 'dipping like a swallow'. What else, after all, might such 'a miracle' be compared to? Flight had always been the prerogative of birds—or gods, or demons. One of the notable features of the Wright brothers' achievement was that, unlike Leonardo da Vinci and countless inventors since, they began not with birds, but with kites.³⁰

If British artists seemed less energised than some of their European confrères by this particular 'newness', a significant factor was the imperative, certainly for Wyndham Lewis, to differentiate Vorticism from other movements in a crowded field, especially Futurism. This imperative contributed to Lewis's assertion that 'The Latins', in large part due to their 'Futuristic gush over machines, aeroplanes, etc.', were then 'the most romantic and sentimental "moderns" to be found.' He concluded 'The Melodrama of Modernity' by demanding, 'Cannot Marinetti, sensible and energetic man that he is, be induced to throw over this sentimental rubbish about Automobiles and Aeroplanes, and follow his friend Balla into a purer region of art?'³¹ In his foreword to the catalogue of the 'Exhibition of English Post-Impressionists, Cubists and Others', held from November 1913 to January 1914, Lewis began with a swipe at the Futurists and commented a little later that 'Man with an aeroplane is still merely a bad bird'. In *The Caliph's Design*, he argued that dynamic shapes such as aeroplanes essentially developed 'in accordance with a law of efficient evolution as absolute as that determining the shape of the tiger, the wasp, or the swallow. They are definitely, for the artist, in the category of animals.'³²

Aircraft—the words, if not the machines themselves—had drifted into view in several pre-war Fordian texts. The magistrate in *Mr Apollo*, confused by the 'sailing down through the air' testimony of Police Constable 742L, imagines 'that the prisoner must be a competitor in a distance competition for balloonists who had discovered an actual aeroplane.' (Ford 1908, p. 20). In *The New Humpty-Dumpty*, Count Macdonald 'looked at the King. "Come along, Mr Spenlow," he said, "we'll be down at Brooklands by half-past twelve all right. And I guess if you want to do a kingly action you will ask Miss Dexter and Mrs Pett to come with us. They haven't either of them seen an aeroplane.'"³³ Also in 1912, *The Panel* had Major Brent Foster, just returned from India to 'a most extraordinary world' of social reformers, declare, "'There's my aunt that I'm going to, dear old soul, who knows about as much of evil as an egg knows of aeroplanes, and she's the secretary of the Society for the Suppression of Sin.'" (Ford 1912b, pp. 29–30). Again, characters who have never seen an aeroplane.

Even after that first sighting in Germany, though, the shadow of flying machines fell very rarely across the many pages that Ford produced in the first year of the war. He responded with great rapidity to Antwerp's surrender to German forces on 9 October, his poem—then called 'In October, 1914'—appearing in *Outlook* in that same month.³⁴ *The Good Soldier* was published by John Lane in March 1915, and Ford was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Welch Regiment in August. His first propaganda volume, *When Blood is Their Argument* had appeared in May, the second, *Between St Dennis and St George*, in September, and on 18 November 1915, the collaboration with Violet Hunt, he published *Zeppelin Nights: A London Entertainment*. Collecting two dozen previously published 'historical vignettes', it ranges in time from the Battle of Marathon to the 1910 coronation of George V, with commentaries, apparently provided by Hunt, linking the stories told by

Serapion Hunter, 'a fictionalized Ford', as Max Saunders observes, 'having an affair with "Candour", a non-shrinking Violet'.³⁵ The closing discussion ends very much in Ford's own present: "'Oh, don't you understand?" Candour cried out. "Serapion enlisted this morning. He put his age down at thirty-three and they jumped at him." And she went out of the room crying.'³⁶

After training at Tenby and Cardiff, Ford arrived in France in July 1916, two months after the death of Arthur Marwood (partial model for *Parade's End's* Christopher Tietjens) and mere days after the Welch Regiment's appalling loss of life in Mametz Wood. On 28 July, he wrote to Lucy Masterman that he had seen only 'occasional aeroplanes. The Germans do not seem very enterprising in this department & rarely come over our lines. I have only seen three since I have been here & one was brought down.'³⁷ On that day or the next, he was blown into the air and concussed by a high explosive shell; he lost his memory for several weeks and could not recall even his own name for some thirty-six hours. He was sent to a Casualty Clearing Station at Corbie when the battalion went into rest camp, then rejoined the 9th battalion, then stationed in the Ypres Salient near Kemmel Hill. The shelled church and stained glass that he wrote of in a September letter to Joseph Conrad would reappear in *No Enemy*, though shells are not there the immediate cause: 'Whilst we were passing under the immense Madonna and Child that hung over the Cathedral steps, a Hun plane dropped a couple of bombs right into the body of the church [. . .] But what was really interesting to hear was the sifting tinkle of broken stained-glass of the windows that went on rustling, tinkling, sifting, and rustling down into the rubble in the body of the church until we were out of earshot' (*No Enemy* 93).³⁸

For frontline troops, enemy aircraft were one more threat to life that must be withstood, less frequent than artillery barrages, less chillingly personal than a sniper's bullet. But they were still 'deathly, dreadful things': 'For there was nothing more terrifying in the whole war than that span of lightness, swaying, approaching a few feet above the heads of your column of men: instinct with wrath: dispensing the dreadful rain!'³⁹ As the only direct experience of hostilities for most civilians, they inevitably loomed larger in their lives, whether as threat or stimulus.⁴⁰ W. B. Yeats, genuinely unsettled by the raids on London, was happy to spend the winter of 1915–1916 'tucked away' in Ashdown Forest with Ezra Pound, but wrote 'An Irish Airman Foresees his Death' when Lady Gregory's son Robert was killed.⁴¹ Rudyard Kipling's 'Mary Postgate' has the son of her employer killed during a trial flight, a child killed by a dropped bomb and an injured German pilot who calls for medical assistance while Mary waits for him to die, during which time 'an increasing rapture laid hold on her.'⁴² Katherine Mansfield, caught up in a Zeppelin raid in Paris, wrote, 'It is absurd to say that romance is dead when things like this happen'. Making tea after the 'All Clear', she felt that 'a great danger was past' and 'longed to throw my arms round someone—it gave one a feeling of boundless physical relief like the aftermath of an earthquake'.⁴³

In *It Was the Nightingale*, Ford recalled at length his own experience of a major air raid, probably that of 28–29 January 1918, when several enemy aircraft penetrated to the capital. He commented that, 'In the line we were used to consider that air-raids over London must be trifling enough.'⁴⁴ However, he had found this one 'sufficiently frightful and disagreeable, and hilarious and a nuisance and an occasion for prayer. With all the range of emotions of the line enhanced'. This 'baptism of fire' had put 'the final seal' on the city's 'dignity'—yet it had necessitated the 'unlovely DORA', the Defence of the Realm Act and its extensions, the long-term effects of which strengthened government control of industry, enabled press censorship and restricted individual liberties (through measures such as those governing public house opening hours and the strength of beer); the cumulative effects, Ford maintained, robbed London of the characteristics he had so valued before the war.⁴⁵

The impingement of enemy aircraft on Ford's army life unsurprisingly increased after that first letter to Lucy Masterman. In his account of a long weekend in Paris, the city is 'in darkness, out of deference to Zeppelins and airplanes, so that it was all a heavy, velvety

black beneath a pallid sky' (*No Enemy* 86).⁴⁶ Of Gabriel Morton, his central character in 'True Love & a GCM', Ford wrote, 'He had been pretty bad eleven months before; but, no longer, the moment he shut his eyes in bed did he hear the picks and drills of the German mines going beneath him; he didn't, any more, feel a vague but very real malaise at the droned sounds of aeroplanes in the summer evening skies, and all the doors of a house could slam in a draught without making him spring out of an armchair' (*War Prose* 81).⁴⁷ In *No Enemy*, he referred to Hazebrouck, 'where, whilst we waited for a connection, a German plane was dropping bombs on the goods line and Cochín-Chinese in furred silk hoods were working as plate-layers' (133). The later 'Supper Reminiscences' enormously expands this, employing it as framework for the story of a significant meal which, 'as I remember, marked rather a turning point of my career' (*War Prose* 242). His personal experience of flying emerges in an anecdote he told about the aftermath of a mix-up that arose between Maurice Hewlett and himself due to the similarity of their novel titles. 'I felt no great annoyance', Ford commented, 'If he did he was vicariously avenged'. He recalled that after he was sent to the Severn Tunnel station for 'instruction in observing trenches', he was taken up by Hewlett's son for three-quarters of an hour, during which Ford suffered 'an agony of dread.' He had never afterwards been able 'to enter or remain in an aeroplane without a return of that fear', so 'if his father needed revenge he had it, for I had to go up several times after that' (*Return to Yesterday* 291).⁴⁸ Less stressful was the occasion, ten days before the Armistice, when, Ford wrote to Stella Bowen, 'A nice boy called Pat Brain that I used to know very well at Cardiff turned up this morning & took me out over the sea in a Blimp'.⁴⁹

Last Post's composition dates have Ford beginning the book in Paris on 7 June 1927, a little over two weeks after Charles Lindbergh, in the *Spirit of St Louis*, had made the first solo transatlantic flight, which took thirty-three and a half hours and brought him from New York to Paris. By the time of writing the book, nearly nine years after the Armistice, the aeroplane has become an assured *fictional* resource.

The aeroplane contributes to the delineation of the character of Marie-Léonie, the wife of Christopher Tietjens' brother Mark. Wondering 'what was to be said against such innocent things as the reading-desk, the revolving hut and the aeroplane. Yes, the aeroplane!', she is told that it is too late in the season to procure seeds of her desired 'navets de Paris' because it would take a month to do so. She reflects that, 'supposing they had sent a letter by aeroplane, requesting the dispatch of the seeds equally by aeroplane, to procure them, as all the world knew, would be a matter merely of a few hours' (*Last Post* 31, 32).⁵⁰ The aeroplane explains in part the absence of Christopher and the opportunity this absence affords his estranged wife Sylvia to enter the property. It also offers a point of comparison with which the appalling Mrs de Bray Pape can hector the silent Mark Tietjens and provides the occasion for Valentine's perceiving or divining what is in Christopher's mind as he gazes up into the sky—thus confirming that their thoughts continue to echo one another's as they had done so significantly before, particularly in the preceding volume: 'Their thoughts marched together; not in the least amazing' (*A Man Could Stand Up*—192: see also 190, 191). Although Christopher is able to fly to Groby in an attempt to prevent the cutting down of Groby Great Tree, he notably fails to do so. Aircraft may help that small community at Tietjens to make a living, but Valentine reflects that 'It was an extraordinary thing to live with Americans all over you, dropping down in aeroplanes, seeming to come up out of the earth. . . There, all of a sudden, you didn't know how' (*Last Post* 174). The doubled sense of height and depth mirror the height of the tree and the depth of the well at Groby, respectively 320 ft and 160 ft, according to Lance-Corporal Duckett.⁵¹ Additionally, although Ford considered the idea of Christopher Tietjens' death in an aeroplane crash, he decided against it in typescript (*Last Post* xlv fn. and textual note, 232 n.103). This choice was not only an artistic decision to eschew such an obviously dramatic ending, a decision perhaps related to his strong dislike of the 'big scene' in Victorian serial fiction; it also responded to the feeling attributed to Valentine Wannop, who 'did not know what

she wished, because she did not know what was to become of England or the world' (*Last Post* 176).

When *No Enemy's* Gringoire notices the aircraft escorting 'an immense plane, appearing in the firmament above Bailleul', he notes that 'at that date, the poor bloody Infantry were not brought much in contact with the air force.' The 'Compiler' adds that, 'apart from their spectacular, picturesque, or dangerous aspects, they hardly came within the scope of Gringoire's professional attentions. "Airmen," he said, "were brilliant beings, who treated us with contempt and carried off the affections of our young women. Otherwise they lived in the air whilst we plodded amongst mud and barbed wire. Professionally, they rivalled the cavalry; obtained information for the Artillery—but, as for co-operating with us, we were below their notice.'" The plane, at this point still a 'great, beautiful machine', passes overhead 'without Gringoire's thinking of more than that it was beautiful' (*No Enemy* 41).

That near-absolute separation between airmen and infantry was significant; it was not only elemental—earth and air—but demarcated the individual from the collective. 'I applied for a transfer to the Air Force', Ernst Toller wrote, 'not from any heroic motive, or for love of adventure, but simply to get away from the mass, from mass-living and mass-dying.'⁵²

It was significant in another sense. The infantryman in the trench watching a dogfight might see one combatant appear to fall, whether hit or pursuing evasive action. However, the man or men in the plane 'can so seldom be seen that you do not, it must be confessed, feel all the exultant and poignant sympathy that you feel with comrades fighting near you on the earth.'⁵³ Ford stressed many times and repeatedly indicated in letters, articles and memoirs his close identification with his fellow officers and the men under their command. Nor was this at all unusual, but it did depend on physical proximity, visibility and familiarity. The pilot of the aeroplane was simply too distant, both physically and metaphorically.⁵⁴ Flying south towards Boulogne in March 1916 in a B.E.2C (a single-engine two-seater biplane used primarily for reconnaissance), Cecil Lewis remembered seeing beneath him fields, woods, roads, houses—and men. 'I saw them for the first time with detachment, dispassionately: a strange, pitiable, crawling race, to us who strode the sky.'⁵⁵

For all his many references to Heaven, whether humorous or serious, Ford was essentially earthbound. The instances of other worlds in his work—*The Inheritors*, *Mr Apollo*—entail celestial descent rather than human ascent. Rather than the godlike figure of the aviator, Ford's focus is on a more human scale and a nearer terrain, though some possibility or intimation of the divine may always be at hand. Thus, Gringoire, striding downhill through the thistles amidst innumerable swallows, feels like a Greek god; so too will Christopher Tietjens when that passage essentially recurs (*No Enemy* 24, 25; *A Man Could Stand Up*–167).⁵⁶

If Ford's early responses or accounts of first sightings, were—not untypically—lyrical or romantic, they were soon overtaken by sometimes bitter experience and tempered by the instincts and resources of the novelist. They readily become, in fact, one of those symbols of modernity—the aeroplane, the wireless telegraph, the white-tiled bathroom—those 'glamours' which were regarded by many as assurances of 'civilization'.⁵⁷ Ford himself locates such assurances elsewhere, in literary or artistic achievement and aspects of the art of living well: kitchen gardening, food and wine, good conversation, and amity among neighbours. Never a passive consumer of modern technologies, his stance towards them, characteristically sceptical or wary, was directed by the personal or literary context. Their deployment reflected positive choices, negative reactions, and tryings outassays comparable to his approach to modernist styles and techniques, in which he retained what worked for him and discarded what did not; this stance was not, in fact, dissimilar to his earlier reactions to cars or trains, which he viewed as both threat and promise, the doubling of implication and response always present to the writing mind.⁵⁸

Trains occur in his very first published volume; telephones appear in the Edwardian fiction, beginning with the collaborative *The Inheritors*; motor cars are present from *The Benefactor* onwards.⁵⁹ Aircraft emerge more slowly and never as significantly, not least

because much of Ford's Edwardian fiction was historical, ruling out such modern trappings. Though he encountered them relatively rarely, even when he was on active service in France, for Ford, as for others, they soon became—and still are—one of the recurrent background sights and noises of modern life, often unremarked, familiar, generally assumed benign, an assumption edged or shadowed by residual memories of the most recent or outrageous airborne atrocity, and occasionally, in the wake of disaster or at times of heightened international tension or conflict or crisis, shifting abruptly, and sometimes devastatingly, from periphery to centre. We are, of course, on *this* side of Guernica, the Blitz, Dresden, Coventry and later horrors. Ford completed *It Was the Nightingale* in the summer of 1933, and he wrote there (254), 'A finished book is something alive and, in its measure, permanent. But until you have written the last word it is no more than a heap of soiled paper. I fear preposterous things—that one of the aeroplanes that are forever soaring overhead here might drop a spanner on my head. . . . Anything. . . .'

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Notes

- ¹ Stang and Cochran (1994, p. 52). They date the letter, which was mistakenly dated 4/1/18 in Ford's holograph, [4 January 1919] but there are strong arguments against this dating also, as discussed by Saunders (1996, II, 564 n.4).
- ² Ford (1999, pp. 77–139). Details of the text are echoed on numerous occasions in Ford's later writings, both fictional and autobiographical.
- ³ Ford's contract with the American publisher Macaulay retained the title 'English Country' and alternative titles were still being discussed two months before publication: Ford (Ford [1929] 2002, p. xiv).
- ⁴ *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, 191. The phrase 'the country' should perhaps be approached warily. Richard Ludwig, in his prefatory list of Ford's books, termed it 'Autobiography described as fiction' (xv).
- ⁵ Gorman review in *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 5 (29 December 1929): see Harvey (1972, p. 385). In Ford (1921), Ford cites a 'friend' sending a letter, addressing him as 'Gringoire' and, recalling the Imagist dinner of July 1914, asks: 'Do you remember, Gringoire?' (pp. 79, 176).
- ⁶ The published volume has some fifty emendations from the first instalment alone, even aside from those necessitated by the shift from the first-person narrator.
- ⁷ Ford to Pinker, 9 October 1919 (The Huntington Library, California: Ford Madox Ford Letters, mssFMF1-316). The letter in which he expresses concern that Pinker views it as a novel rather than 'a piece of writing' was dated 22 January 1920: Ford (1986, pp. 478–79).
- ⁸ Cook (2003, pp. 191–205, 194–95). See also Saunders (2014, pp. 109, 111). The interplay of Gringoire and the Compiler is a central concern of Rummel (2018, pp. 54–64).
- ⁹ Max Saunders, introduction to 'True Love & a GCM', *War Prose*, 77. He discusses 'A Day of Battle' as 'one of the key documents in the genesis of *Parade's End*' in *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, II, 197–201. The essays are a central reference point in the first section, 'Ford Madox Ford's Unrelatable Narrative of War', of Brasme (2023, pp. 16–54), and are discussed by several scholars in Haslam et al. (2019), including Laura Colombino, 'Ford, vision, and media', 402–3; see also O'Malley (2015, pp. 118–20).
- ¹⁰ Searle (2004, p. 506). He notes that the phrase had been used by Northcliffe about the first recorded flight in Europe, made by Alberto Santos-Dumont in October 1906. It was widely used in the press—British, French and German—immediately following Blériot's historic half-hour journey.
- ¹¹ Hughes (1991, pp. 38, 40). Marjorie Perloff observes that 'Delaunay's colorful celebration of those biplanes' circling the Eiffel Tower 'seems curiously devoid of any inkling that the airplane might have uses quite different from those of transport or spectacle': Perloff (2003, pp. xvii–xviii).
- ¹² Hibberd (2002, p. 194). Owen spoke to his Colonel about it again in December but still nothing came of it (201).
- ¹³ *The Times* (30 October 1917), 10.
- ¹⁴ Wells (1902, p. 32, n.12). A suggestion cited approvingly by Wyatt (1915), who stressed that the development of aviation had made command of the sea obsolete as a final means of defence against attack.
- ¹⁵ Gollin (1989, pp. 102–3, 172). Fisher returned to the Admiralty as First Sea Lord in October 1914 but fell out with Churchill over the proposed Dardanelles campaign and resigned in 1915.

- ¹⁶ Laffin (1997, p. 120). David Pascoe quotes the French philosopher Paul Virilio's 1989 *War and Cinema*, on aviation, just prior to the outbreak of war, "'becoming one way, or perhaps even the ultimate way, of seeing"; in effect, the Air Force emerged out of the art of reconnaissance': 'Warplane', Piette and Rawlinson (2012, p. 368).
- ¹⁷ Even earlier, though, in another war, that between Italy and the Ottoman Empire, Italian pilots in Libya not only carried out reconnaissance flights (October 1911) but dropped four bombs on the town of Ain Zara, on 1 November.
- ¹⁸ This was the raid in which Maurice Hewlett's son, Francis ('Cecco') Hewlett, took part; forced to ditch in the sea, he was posted as 'missing', but was picked up by a Dutch trawler and made his way back to England. The novelist Erskine Childers instructed the seaplane pilots on navigating by means of landmarks and the stars.
- ¹⁹ 'Over the sepulchral, catacombed city, aeroplanes flew and fought in the cold winter sun', Edmund Blunden wrote of Ypres in early 1917: Blunden (Blunden [1928] 2015, p. 135).
- ²⁰ David Pascoe, 'Warplane', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century British and American War Literature*, 367.
- ²¹ So Marinetti referred to Nevinson in 'A Futurist Manifesto: Vital English Art': see Walsh (2002, pp. 76–77). Stressing that aviation was ideal for an artist seeking 'novelty, originality and dynamism in his subject matter', and also lent itself to 'Futurist principles', Walsh identifies Nevinson's *A Taube Pursued by Commander Samson* [1915] as one of the 'first ever attempts to capture in paint the entire concept of aviation and aerial conflict' (117). Samson (then a Lieutenant) had become one of the Royal Navy's first qualified pilots, in April 1911, after just two months' instruction. Malvern (2004, p. 57).
- ²² Increasingly so, in fact: see Max Saunders, 'Ford in 1922', *Last Post: A Literary Journal from the Ford Madox Ford Society*, I, 8–9 (Spring & Autumn, 2022), 1–19 (particularly 6–10).
- ²³ 'Epilogue' (written between early 1917 and January 1919), 62–63, though unpublished at the time: see *War Prose*, 52–63. It was rewritten to form part of a chapter in *No Enemy*, 'Rosalie Prudent'.
- ²⁴ Particularly the opening chapter, 'Thistle-Down'. See Ford Madox Ford, 'The Work of W. H. Hudson', *English Review*, II, v (April 1909), 160; *Thus to Revisit*, 77; *Return to Yesterday* (London: Gollancz, 1931), 26.
- ²⁵ *No Enemy*, 32.
- ²⁶ In Ford's telling, Masterman in 1913 was already predicting war with Germany. When it began, Masterman was placed in charge of the propaganda department based in Wellington House, previously the premises of the Insurance Commission. A first Wellington House conference, primarily of writers who promised their services, was held in early September 1914: Masterman (Masterman [1939] 1968, pp. 272–73). Ford was not among those present: the likely reasons for his absence are discussed by Borkett-Jones (2019, pp. 83–84).
- ²⁷ Ford, *Return to Yesterday*, 422–23. This is oddly reminiscent of Arthur Ransome's memory of his friend William Canton's delight, on the long hill into Shaftesbury in 1911, 'at looking down on a kestrel hovering high over the valley below': Ransome (1976, p. 143).
- ²⁸ Ford (1914a, 1915). That votive monument is usually named 'The Winged Victory': Ford omits what the aircraft has rendered superfluous but may also allude to the Futurist Manifesto of February 1909, in which Marinetti asserts: 'a roaring car that seems to ride on grapeshot is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.' The last of the numbered sections of the Manifesto closes by hymning 'the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd': Manifesto (1972, pp. 41, 42).
- ²⁹ Ivor Gurney, letter of 21(?) June 1916, in Gurney (1991, p. 102). See W. H. Davies' 'Clouds': 'My Fancy loves to play with Clouds/ That hour by hour can change Heaven's face;/ For I am sure of my delight, / In green or stony place'.
- ³⁰ As did Ludwig Wittgenstein, then an aeronautics research student at Manchester University. 'It was his apparent intention to construct, and eventually to fly, an aeroplane of his own design': Monk (1991, p. 28).
- ³¹ Balla (1914, pp. 41, 144). Giacomo Balla was one of the most prominent Futurists. Lewis asserted that Balla 'is the best painter of what was once the Automobilist group.'
- ³² Michel and Fox (1969, pp. 56–57, 146). Lewis did, though, admire the wartime paintings of aeroplane scenes by John Turnbull, which used 'a near-abstract, geometrical style' (102).
- ³³ Ford Madox Ford [as Daniel Chaucer], Ford (1912a, p. 248). Brooklands, in Surrey, was a motor-racing circuit and aerodrome which opened in 1907, was requisitioned by the War Office in 1914, and by 1918 had become the largest aircraft manufacturing centre in the country.
- ³⁴ Referring to its imminent publication in an unpublished letter to C. F. G. Masterman (21 October 1914), Ford commented: 'Now, if you would have eighty million copies of my poem about the Belgians, which will appear in next Saturday's Outlook, distributed about the globe from aeroplanes you might do something' (Ford Madox Ford collection, #4605. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library). Around fifty of Ford's weekly articles in *The Outlook* appeared between 4 August 1914 and Ford's departure for training in Tenby.
- ³⁵ Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, I, 484.

- 36 Hunt and Hueffer (Hunt and Hueffer [1915] 1916, p. 405). That choice of age—thirty-three—may prompt thoughts of Sylvia Tietjens asserting to General Campion that Christopher desires ‘to model himself’ upon “our Lord Jesus Christ”: Ford (Ford [1925] 2011, pp. 148–49). Among the several Serapions of the classical world is the second century’s martyred Serapion of Macedonia.
- 37 Letters of Ford Madox Ford, 67. To his mother in August he remarked: ‘we hardly ever see one of their planes’: *War Prose*, 224.
- 38 Letter to Conrad of 6 September 1916: Stang (1981, p. 173). The ‘sifting’ glass appears too in Ford’s ‘Preface’ to Violet Hunt’s *Their Lives*: see *War Prose*, 190.
- 39 Ford (Ford [1926] 2011, p. 137). On this see Ford (1934, p. 196): ‘Wounds, rain, fear, and other horrors are terrible but relatively simple matters; you either endure them or you do not.’
- 40 As Modris Eksteins remarked, ‘From its start, the war was a stimulus to the imagination’: Eksteins (1990, p. 208). For a recent discussion of the impact of air raids on the civilian population, see Grayzel (2023, pp. 583–98).
- 41 Longenbach (1990, p. 180); Yeats (1994, pp. 184–85). Gregory was shot down by an Italian plane in error, a fact not immediately known: Foster (2003, p. 117).
- 42 Kipling (Kipling [1917] 1987, p. 355). His earlier ‘The Edge of the Evening’ (December 1913), has two foreign spies killed in an altercation after their biplane develops engine trouble and lands in the grounds of an English country house. He had published ‘With the Night Mail’ in 1905 and ‘As Easy as A. B. C.’ in 1912 (its first draft written five years earlier).
- 43 [21 March 1915], Mansfield (1990, p. 26). Mansfield’s responses to this and other air raids are discussed in Kelly (2020, pp. 129–33).
- 44 Cf. Herbert Read in October 1917: ‘I was thoroughly “fed up” with the attitude of most of the people I met on leave—especially the Londoners. They simply have no conception whatever of what war is really like and don’t seem concerned about it at all. They are much more troubled about a few paltry air raids’, Read (1963, p. 112).
- 45 Ford, *It Was the Nightingale*, 76–84. He mentions the damage to the premises of *John Bull* magazine and people killed in a shelter. Reports in the 30 January issues of the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror*, and the notice from *John Bull* in the *Evening Standard*, confirm the date. The raids were among those singled out by Peel (1929, p. 147).
- 46 A briefer version of this visit is ‘Trois Jours de Permission’, written almost immediately after the events described, in *War Prose*, 49–51.
- 47 Sounds of ‘pickaxes beneath his flea-bag’ and a German officer’s voice under his camp-bed, calling for a candle, are among the manifestations of Christopher Tietjens’ nervous strain in *A Man Could Stand Up*– (82–85).
- 48 Hewlett’s *The Queen’s Quair* was published in 1904; Ford presumably refers to his own *The Fifth Queen* (1906). Hewlett’s wife Hilda was the first woman in the United Kingdom to gain a pilot’s licence, in 1911.
- 49 Stang and Cochran, *Correspondence of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen*, 28. ‘Blimph’ appears to be Ford’s error for ‘blimp’, a small airship used for scouting and observation. The word was later associated with a pompous and rigidly conservative ex-army officer, popularized by David Low’s cartoons of ‘Colonel Blimp’.
- 50 ‘Air Transport and Travel’, then Daimler Airlines, Imperial Airways and others offered flights to Paris from 1920–1922: Pugh (2008, p. 316).
- 51 *A Man Could Stand Up*– 170. *Last Post* offers another version, Groby Great Tree 365ft high, Groby well 365ft deep, though this declaration depends on the Cleveland villagers being ‘really imaginatively drunk’ (80).
- 52 Ernst Toller, *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* (1933), translated as *I Was a German* by Ford’s friend Edward Crankshaw (John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1934), excerpted in Glover and Silkin (1990, p. 273).
- 53 C. E. Montague, in his introduction, ‘War Aeroplanes’, to *British Artists at the Front. I: C. R. W. Nevinson* (Country Life, 1918).
- 54 ‘But we stand down below’, Franz Kafka wrote of the 1909 airshow, ‘quite left behind and insignificant and we watch this man’: ‘The Aeroplanes at Brescia’ [1909], Kafka (1992, p. 8).
- 55 Cecil Lewis, *Sagittarius Rising*, 54.
- 56 Sara Haslam observes that ‘In both cases the effect depends on the sense of mortality that is also made present by Ford’: *A Man Could Stand Up*– xxiii. Karolyn Steffens, in ‘Impressionism and Psychoanalytic Trauma Theory’, notes the later avoidance of explicit mentioning of the dead beneath the thistles: Chantler and Hawkes (2015, pp. 44–46). Ford’s poem ‘The Iron Music’, mentions ‘Dust and corpses in the thistles’ and is dated ‘Albert 22/7/16’, just days after his arrival there.
- 57 The ‘glamours’: so phrased in Ford (1926, p. 195, 184).
- 58 See Sara Haslam, ‘Ford’s Training’, in *Ford Madox Ford’s Modernity*, 35–46; Paul Skinner, ‘Tietjens Walking, Ford Talking’, in *Ford Madox Ford’s Parade’s End: The First World War, Culture, and Modernity: International Ford Madox Ford Studies 13*, edited by Ashley Chantler and Rob Hawkes, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), particularly 132–33.
- 59 On telephones, see Philip Horne, ‘Absent-Mindedness: Ford on the Phone’, in Hampson and Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford’s Modernity*, 17–34; Kate McLoughlin, ‘Interruption Overload: Telephones in Ford Madox Ford’s “4692 Padd”, *A Call and A Man Could Stand Up*–’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 36.3 (2013), 50–68.

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