

# Metaphors and Metonymies: *Parade's End* Between Prose and Poetry

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## ABSTRACTS

*The essay shows how Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy Parade's End, though displaying a general metaphoric structure, has ties belonging to the metonymic sphere as well. Metonymies dissolve into metaphors and metaphoric suggestions lead in turn to metonymic associations.*

*Through the use of time shift in interior monologues, Ford can vividly bring forth his characters' lives and memories, and while metaphors become the means to recover their past, metonymies are essential in evoking it and in setting it in motion again.*

*Il saggio vuole evidenziare come la tetralogia Parade's End di Ford Madox Ford, pur svelando una struttura generalmente metaforica, abbia un substrato appartenente alla sfera metonimica.*

*Le metonimie si dissolvono in metafore e le suggestioni metaforiche portano a loro volta ad associazioni metonimiche. Attraverso l'uso del time-shift nei monologhi interiori, Ford riprende e porta allo scoperto la vita e le memorie dei suoi personaggi, e mentre le metafore diventano il mezzo per recuperare il passato, le metonimie si rendono essenziali per evocarlo e metterlo nuovamente in moto.*

## PAROLE CHIAVE

## KEY WORDS

PARADE'S END; FORD MADOX FORD; METAPHORS; METONYMIES; RHETORICAL DEVICES

Recently I've been asked by students whether in Ford Madox Ford's use of language there was a real difference between his novels and his poems, between the technical devices he employs in either genre. I had no simple answer to offer. His prose had always struck me as being more poetic than prosaic, and I had never thought that there was a great qualitative difference between his poetry and prose. Ford's love for music, combined with his quest for a musical rhythm that would inform his writing, found formally similar expressions in his prose and his poetry. Ford's whole production is a mixture of the two genres and his prose may be defined as poetic prose, since it is replete with all kinds of poetic devices. Moreover, paragraphs that are structurally and metrically built like stanzas are aplenty.

By literary conventions the poem uses metric parallelism of verses and phonic equivalence

of rhymes to stress similarities and contrasts; while prose develops by contiguous relations. Hence, prose, the realistic genre driven by contiguity, tends to depend on metonymy, while poetry, which stresses similarities, tends towards metaphor.

Ford's works, and more specifically *Parade's End*,<sup>1</sup> rely more on similarity and substitution devices than on those of contiguity. In *No More Parades*, for instance, Ford compares a cookhouse to a cathedral's nave (p. 259), characters to objects (men to toys, men to nuts, p. 15), characters to animals (men to a snake, p.

1 F. M. Ford, (1924- 1926) *Parade's End*, The Bodley Head, London, 1980.

Unless otherwise specified, all subsequent references to *Parade's End* are to this edition, which includes *Some Do Not* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up* (1926) and appear parenthetically. The fourth volume *The Last Post* (1928) was not included in this edition, the Bodley Head series.

15, 43, 57), characters to natural elements (men to dust, p. 43, men to waves, p. 42), Tietjens to a lonely buffalo (p. 186), Sylvia to a snake (p. 68, 124, 117, etc.), to mention only a few.

Indeed the tetralogy is metaphoric, beginning with its book titles, its characters' descriptions and its characters' circumstances – such as Christopher's fall and his subsequent re-birth as metaphor for a whole dying social class seeking a new life.

I should add at this point that literary references in the tetralogy expand the scope of this metaphor, linking Ford's characters to other protagonists created by other writers, such as Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Eliot – to mention just a few clear evocations which I will discuss later.

Still, it would be wrong to read the tetralogy as a wholly metaphoric work since it is at times also metonymic – when characters express themselves through their interior monologues.

In short, the novels display a general metaphoric structure but it has ties belonging to the metonymic sphere as well. Metonymies dissolve into metaphors and metaphoric suggestions lead in turn to metonymic associations.

*Parade's End* evolves through a series of memories, of flashbacks. Through the use of time shift in interior monologues, Ford can vividly bring forth the life of his characters, their *temps perdu*, their 'remembrance of things past'. And just as in Proust, metaphors are the means to recover the past, but metonymies are essential in evoking it and in setting it in motion again.

For the sake of brevity, and because I have already discussed elsewhere the main metaphors of the central characters (that is, a snake for Sylvia, a white bulldog and a lone buffalo for Christopher, etc.)<sup>2</sup>, I have chosen to focus on only a few examples of Christopher's and Sylvia's interior monologues, and then move on to descriptive passages.

As a rule Christopher's thoughts develop through a metonymic process of contiguity, only to reach a metaphoric conclusion.

2 M. A. Calderaro, *A Silent New World. Ford Madox Ford's Parade's End*, Bologna, 1993.

Tietjens let the trunk of the body sink slowly to the floor. [...] He saw very vividly also the face of his girl who was a pacifist. It worried him not to know what expression her face would have if she heard of his occupation, now. Disgust?... He was standing with his greasy, sticky hands held out from the flaps of his tunic... Perhaps disgust! [...] (NMP, p. 30)<sup>3</sup>

The movement is metonymic: his girl's expression of disgust leads him to consider the reason of the supposed disgust, that is the dead soldier's blood. And then, through another metonymic association, from the dead soldier to soldiers who would be on duty the next day:

He remembered he had not sent a runner along to I.B.D. Orderly Room to see how many of his crowd would be wanted for garrison fatigue next day, and this annoyed him acutely. (NMP, p. 30)

From the soldiers' duty to his own at the camp and again to the soldiers and their 'present' activity with 'the girls':

He would have no end of a job warning the officers he detailed. They would all be in brothels down in the town by now... (NMP, p. 30)

By moral, unexpressed juxtaposition (that is brothels vs. Valentine), his thoughts go back to his girl and her possible facial expression, and from her face to the face of the dead soldier and to the reason he, Christopher, has denied the man a leave to go home:

He could not work out what the girl's expression would be. He was never to see her again [...] How would her face express disgust? He had never seen her express disgust. [...]... The face below him grinned at the roof – the half face! [...] If he, Tietjens, had given the fellow the leave he wanted he would be alive now!... [...].(NMP, p. 30-31)

Finally, the passage turns metaphoric, Christopher's mind swings from the dead soldier (betrayed by the wife and prevented from going home) to himself (betrayed by Sylvia and without a notice from home):

He was, anyhow, better where he was. And so was he, Tietjens. He had not had a single letter from

3 Abbreviations will be used parenthetically to refer to *Some Do Not* (SDN) and *No More Parades* (NMP).

home since he had been out this time! Not a single letter. Not even gossip. Not a bill.  
(NMP, pp. 30-31)

The metaphoric association between the two men is totally justified: both are openly betrayed by their wives and both are destined to meet the same fate: death.

In the second passage, another of Christopher's many interior monologues, the intertwining of metonymies with metaphors is more striking.

But, damn it, he, he himself, would make a pact with Destiny, at that moment, willingly, to pass thirty months in the frozen circle of hell, for the chance of thirty seconds in which to tell Valentine Wannop what he had answered back... to Destiny!... (NMP, p. 67)

From the frozen circle of hell and the pact with Destiny we are metonymically led to the figure of Alberigo dei Manfredi (Canto XXXIII, Circle IX) and to Dante, who wrote the *Inferno* and kicked Alberigo in the face.

What was the fellow in the *Inferno* who was buried to the neck in ice and begged Dante to clear the icicles out of his eyelids so that he could see out of them? And Dante kicked him in the face because he was a Ghibelline... (NMP, p. 67)

Through a metaphoric movement of similarity we move to Sylvia Tietjens, who undoubtedly is a good hater:

Always a bit of a swine, Dante... Rather like... like whom?... Oh, Sylvia Tietjens... A good hater!... (NMP, p. 67)

And here through a series of metonymies to the convent where she is supposed to be and the bed on which she is sitting, or, better, is «coiled»:

He imagined hatred coming to him in waves from the convent in which Sylvia had immured herself... gone into retreat... He imagined she had gone into retreat [...] He imagined Sylvia, coiled up on a convent bed... (NMP, p. 67)

With «coiled up» we re-enter the metaphoric sphere, since we may consider this a 'justified

comparison without second term'. The second term will appear a few lines later with «like the head of a snake», and adjectives that can be referred both to Sylvia and to a snake:

Hating... Her certainly glorious hair all round her... Hating... Slowly and coldly... Like the head of a snake when you examined it... Eyes motionless: mouth closed tight... (NMP, pp. 67-68).

As for the second passage, here too the opening movement is metonymic:

In Belgium... What had he been doing?... Trying to get the lie of the land... No... [...] The Belgian proprietor of the tobacco plants had arrived, and had screamed his head off over the damaged plants... (NMP, p. 251)

From the tobacco plants and their owner we are led by a metonymy to what one could see from there – the whole war and Germany; and from Germany, by another metonymy, to Wytschaete and the mines that blew that village:

But up there you saw the whole war... Infinite miles away [...] into Germany proper... [...] The German trenches before Wytschaete!... That was before the great mines had blown Wytschaete to hell... [...]. (NMP, p. 251)

From these explosions («Our artillery practice»), through a series of combined metonymies, to another bombing, this time of Poperinghe by the Germans. That town had a tea shop, and inside the shop (another metonymy), two girls were killed by the shelling:

Our artillery practice... Good shooting. Jolly good shooting! [...] Under the vast pall of quiet cloud!... There were shells dropping in Poperinghe... [...] The Huns were shelling Poperinghe! A senseless cruelty. [...] There were two girls who kept a tea-shop in Poperinghe... [...] The shells had killed them both... (NMP, p. 251-252)

What follows now is a long digression with sentences that are once again connected by a series of contiguous images. Still, Christopher's elaborate parenthetical thought ends with a very powerful metaphor:

That had been nineteen months before!... Now, having lost so much emotion, he saw the embattled world as a map... An embossed map of greenish *papier mâché*. The blood of O Nine Morgan was blurring luminously over it. (NMP, p. 252)

The world at war is reduced to micro-terms, to a mere piece of «greenish *papier mâché*», thus reducing also the soldiers' stature in that context (indeed, men at war are later compared to «toys»).

The next example is taken from one of Sylvia's interior monologues, and it also develops through a series of metonymies:

She was trembling... She looked, fumblingly opening it, into the little mirror of her powder-box of chased, very thin gold with a small blue stone, like a forget-me-not in the centre of the concentric engravings... (NMP, p. 143)

From the powder-box her mind wanders to Drake, who gave it to her and might possibly be her son's natural father, and then through the image of Michael to Christopher, his legal father:

Drake – the possible father of Michael – had given her. She had brought it down to-night out of defiance. She imagined that Tietjens disliked it... (NMP, p. 143)

The series of metonymies takes us back to Drake and the powder-box, the mirror inside and her own image reflected in it:

She said breathlessly to herself: perhaps the damn thing is an ill omen... Drake had been the first man who had ever... [...]... In the little glass her features were chalk-white... She looked like... she looked like... [...]. The breath was short between her white set of teeth... Her face was white as her teeth... [...] What was her face like? ... In the chapel of the convent of Birkenhead there was a tomb all of alabaster... (NMP, pp. 143-44).

Her «chalk-white» features, reinforced by the image of her «white» teeth and «white» face, lead us to the color of the alabaster chapel at Birkenhead and this becomes a justified comparison without second term, where the comparison with the alabaster whiteness is unexpressed but sufficiently clear to be established.

The three parts of the novel are mainly set in three different buildings: a hut, a hotel and a cook-house. Each is linked either through direct comparison or indirect suggestion to other types of buildings. The first two, the hut and the hotel, both introduced in the first paragraph of the opening page, are presented through a similar stylistic approach with a long sentence followed by a short one and a similar use of semantic units in order to create contrasting images.

When you came in the space was desultory, rectangular, warm after the drip of the winter night, and transfused with a brown-orange dust that was light. It was shaped like the house a child draws. (NMP, p. 9, Part I, the hut)

The passage has a strong poetical rhythm which appears to be drawn out only to come to an abrupt end with the prosaic brevity of «It was shaped like a house a child draws».

And talking of poetical rhythm, here one cannot but remember Ford's 1921 poem «A House»:

[...] I am the House!  
I resemble  
The drawing of a child  
That draws "just a house." [...]<sup>4</sup>

The comparison to a «house a child draws» is carried on throughout the first section of the novel, where paragraphs are connected through metaphors *a contrario*. The hut is «desultory», but it is like «the house a child draws», it is «warm» (and this impression is strengthened by words such as «brown-orange» and «light»), but it is the place where O9 Morgan will die. The tools of war – throughout the novel, but especially in the opening page – are defined by words of domestic associations. The noise of the bombing is compared to the voice of an «immense tea-tray», whose pieces said «Pack. Pack. Pack». Later on the deadly «iron-bar» of a shrapnel will be called a «candlestick» by one of the miners. Inanimate objects have always something to say in *No More Parades*, and most of

4 Ford Madox Ford, *New Poems*, William Edwin Rudge, New York, 1927, p. 7.

the time are referred to as domestic tools, reinforcing once again the ties with Ford's poem.

As for the hotel, the comparison is quite natural and can be established even though the second term is not even indirectly mentioned. Sylvia is introduced as a perfect exponent of the Ruling Class, described as a queen whose kingdom is the hotel. However, she certainly cannot be just 'any' queen, and the literary reference to one of the most famous modern texts of poetry is quite evident:

In the admirably appointed, white-enamelled, wicker-worked, bemirrored lounge of the best hotel in that town Sylvia Tietjens sat in a wickerwork chair [...]

And looked distantly into a bluish wall-mirror that, like all the rest, was framed with white-painted cork bark.

(NMP, p. 115, Part II, the hotel)

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,  
Glowed on the marble, where the glass  
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines,  
ll. 76-79

[...]

Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra  
Reflecting light upon the table as  
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,  
ll. 82-84 (T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, «A Game of Chess»)

The theme of the sterility of human contact and of the degradation of sexual relationships which is central to the second part of Eliot's work is also central to the tetralogy. The second part of *No More Parades* is dedicated to a civilian world that has no values or morals to refer to, and the case of Sylvia and Christopher is symptomatic of a world in which not only sexual and human relationships are degraded but also communication is no longer possible, just as in «A Game of Chess».

The references to Eliot's work in the second part of *No More Parades* are many, always striking and almost always associated with Sylvia. And this leads to another literary comparison, and another metaphor – set in the first book of the tetralogy, *Some Do Not...*

Sylvia's entrance into the hotel in Lobsheid brings to mind, in a flash, Lucifer's image in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The room Sylvia enters

is «lit but dim». This dimness, together with Sylvia's presence and threats to corrupt her own son, transforms the place into Lucifer's cave, with the «life-sized, coarsely daubed picture of a wild boar dying, its throat cut, and gouts of scarlet blood» (*SDN*, p. 53) hanging on the wall, and «other agonies of animals [going] away into all the shadows» (*SDN*, p. 53).

The metaphor Sylvia/Lucifer is central to the novel, as Sylvia is extensively linked to the figure of a snake – not only in the excerpts we've just read but almost every time she is mentioned.

The cook-house, where the action of the last pages of *No More Parades* takes place, is described through a direct metaphor. The passage is well balanced with terms belonging to the first term (the cook-house) in the opening lines, and then closing with terms belonging to the semantic field of the second (the cathedral's nave):

The cook-house was like a cathedral's nave,

The first sentence establishes the analogy defining the first and the second term of the metaphor.

aisles being divided off by the pipes of stoves.  
[this explains the analogy]

The second sentence refers to the cook-house, with a link to the second term through the word «shining» which a few lines below is also used to describe the «godhead»:

The floor was of coke-brize *shining* under French polish and turpentine. The building paused, as when a godhead descends.

With the third sentence, and through the synesthesia «breathless focusing of eyes», the metaphor is stressed further:

In breathless focusing of eyes the godhead, frail and *shining*, [Second Term] walked with short steps [First Term] up to a high-priest [Second Term] who had a walrus moustache and, with seven medals on his Sunday tunic [First term], gazed away into eternity [Second Term]. (NMP, p. 259).

The passage displays a complex balance of rhetorical devices, with images belonging to the

two poles of the metaphor alternating symmetrically, and is enriched by the oxymoron frail/godhead, which also sees the «godhead» walking with «short steps» and the «high-priest» with «a walrus moustache».

Notice that the «walrus-moustache» is today defined as a 'dead metaphor' that is an expression of common use whose etymological meaning does not register in our minds as a metaphor any longer. However, while in an earlier occasion, namely in the description of Sgt. Cowley, the «grey walrus moustache» went practically unnoticed, confirming the definition of 'dead metaphor', here the metaphor is brought to life again by Ford's emphasis and by the abrupt switch in the sentence.

So thus I argue that even when Ford wrote his novels, he was writing poetry. And in support I would like to use a passage I have often used and discussed at length but is a good demonstration of my claim.

It is a short passage, only a few lines, where the interplay of alliterations and rhetorical devices transforms a simple passage of prose into a tragic poem of war. Men are compared to an enormous serpent, and the metaphor is supported by an extensive use of alliterations and an onomatopoeic structure.

Let me take the liberty of cutting the paragraph into lines, or 'verses'. Indeed what strikes the reader is that the alliterations provide the paragraph with a poetical cadence:

He seemed to see them winding away/  
over a great stretch of country,  
the head slowly settling down,  
as in the Zoo you will see an enormous serpent/  
slowly sliding into its water-tank.  
(NMP, p. 15. Part I, Chapter 1) (my emphasis)

Notice the /U/ sound, the crossing of palatal and /S/, which I emphasized with italics and underscore, and how the men are not only compared to, but also visualized as a serpent through the use of poetical devices.

Concluding, let me quote Ford's own words, the words I borrowed to answer my students:

a poem must be compounded of observation of the everyday life that surrounded us; [...] it must be written in exactly the same vocabulary as that which one used for one's prose; [...] if it were to be in verse, it must attack some subject that needed a slightly more marmoreal treatment than is expedient for the paragraph of a novel; [...] if it were to be rhymed, the rhyme must never lead to the introduction of unnecessary thought, and, lastly, [...] no exigency of metre must interfere with the personal cadence of the writer's mind or the pressure of the recorded emotion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *Thus to Revisit*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1921, pp. 206-207