



Article

The Pragmatics, Poetics, and Ethics of Pronouns in Ford Madox Ford's War Prose

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Abstract: This essay adopts a stylistic approach to delineate the various—and varying—pragmatic effects inherent in the use and interactions of pronouns in Ford's war prose. Ford's singular use of pronouns is shown to be instrumental in his practice of literary impressionism. In particular, the omnipresent second person is granted a variety of referents that coexist along a "continuum of reference" (as defined by Bettina Kluge), from a "you" that is speaker-oriented to one that is addressee-oriented. Sorlin's intersection of Kluge's continuum with a gradient from personalisation to generalisation (2022) is illuminating when examining the manifold significance of Ford's use of the second person, as it brings to light its ethical impact. Ford's war essays shift from the general to the particular and from the collective to the individual in a manner that opposes propaganda rhetorics. Furthermore, the gradient established by Sandrine Sorlin to account for the pragmatic effect of "you" also proves remarkably useful when applied to the pronoun "one". Scrutinising the interplay between these various pronouns allows us to investigate the multifarious relationships that Ford establishes in his war essays between the persona, the reader, those he often called "my men", and the collective ethos of wartime Britain.

Keywords: alterity; ethics; Ford Madox Ford; literary impressionism; second-person pronoun; stylistics; war writing



Citation: Brasme, Isabelle. 2024. The Pragmatics, Poetics, and Ethics of Pronouns in Ford Madox Ford's War Prose. *Humanities* 13: 48. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13020048>

Received: 24 January 2024

Revised: 24 February 2024

Accepted: 29 February 2024

Published: 8 March 2024



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1. Introduction

There is no doubt that Ford Madox Ford is best known for his fiction and has been celebrated above all as the author of *The Good Soldier* (Ford [1915] 1995) and *Parade's End* (1924–28). Both works frame the First World War and are concerned at varying degrees of directness with the civilisational, psychological, and moral reverberations of the war. While *The Good Soldier* was mostly written before the war, the recurring date of August 4 operates as a powerful tool in the modernist sleight of hand achieved by the narrative.¹ *Parade's End* is usually considered as Ford's most mature and masterful work of fiction. Between these two works stands the war, during which Ford hardly wrote any long-form fiction. After participating in the war effort through propaganda, Ford enlisted in July 1915 and joined the Western Front as Second Lieutenant in charge of transport in the summer of 1916, first in the Somme and later in the Ypres Salient. The form that he favoured to render his increasingly direct experience of the war, first as he reflected on it from London and then as he shared his views from the trenches, was the essay. Ford's establishment as a major force in pre-war literary London granted him a weekly column in the *Outlook* magazine; the numerous articles he published there, as well as his letters and other essays written from the front, grant us a close insight into his concerns and his evolution as a writer confronted with the collective and individual trauma of the First World War.

The arguments that inform this article germinated as I was completing a chapter for a recent book, *Writers at War* (Brasme 2023), in which I examine the impact of the First World War on authors who wrote from the spatial and temporal immediacy of—or proximity

to—the Western Front. The present article prolongs and refines the analyses I developed in the chapter focusing on Ford's war prose. In *Writers at War*, the chapter devoted to Ford's war writing addresses the predicament of an author who expressed the pangs of aesthetic aporia, first because he was too far from the theatre of war—"because of the hazy remoteness of the war-grounds; the impossibility of visualising anything" (Ford 1914, p. 334); and then conversely because his experience of the war as he joined the Front was sensed as cognitively and psychologically immeasurable, and as a result, impossible to convey through his pen. Ford was himself acutely aware of this double plight, lamenting: "One is always too close or too remote" (Ford 1918b, p. 59). Notwithstanding these scopic limitations, my recent chapter argues that Ford's war essays allowed him to acknowledge and navigate this witnessing and representational crisis; in the process, he enriched and updated his practice of literary impressionism in order to capture and render his experience of the war both as a British subject and as a lieutenant. I discuss how Ford's war prose allows us to delineate Ford's trajectory from *The Good Soldier* to *Parade's End*: though they ostensibly expressed his sense of uselessness as a man of letters in the world of the First World War, Ford's essays eventually paved the way for a renewal of his aspirations as an author and of his techniques as a novelist. Ford's updated aesthetics stemmed from an ethical urge to make the war and its participants as vividly present as possible to the reader's mind. His intention in this endeavour was twofold: firstly, he aimed to recreate a vivid memory of and pay tribute to the dead; secondly, he hoped to generate a sense of its horror in his readers so strong that no one may ever wish to reiterate such a conflict: his intent was "of aiding [. . .] in bringing about such a state of mind as should end wars as possibilities" (Ford 1927, p. 197). In the present article, I delve deeper into Ford's stylistic practices to examine specifically one of his idiosyncrasies that permeates both his war essays and his later prose work, especially *No Enemy* and *Parade's End*. This idiosyncrasy concerns his essays' tendency to unstable enunciative framing through a constant shift in pronouns, which I wish to demonstrate was carefully calibrated and stands as a powerful tool within Ford's arsenal of techniques that partake of literary impressionism and that are used to convey the war experience to the reader. In her analysis of *No Enemy*, Cornelia Cook has remarked on the "pronominal confusion" that pervades the narrative: "Free indirect speech, employed by the Compiler, promotes a notable slippage in pronouns: 'he [. . .] one [. . .] we [. . .] one' and sometimes 'you' merge their points of view" (Cook 2003, p. 194). Yet, this "slippage" has not been addressed in any further detail.

This paper draws from theories and analyses formulated in the field of stylistics and relies in particular on a recent study by Sandrine Sorlin (2022) that outlines the varied uses and pragmatic effects of the second-person pronoun in narratives. The present essay opens with a few theoretical preliminaries before investigating the manner in which Ford's war prose fluctuates between various enunciative structures through the use of the first-person singular, the second person, the indefinite "one" pronoun, and the first- and third-persons plural. These shifts have an impact on the reader's experience that proves crucial to Ford's practice of literary impressionism. The aesthetic consequences of this "slippage" will eventually lead to a reflection on the dual ethical consequences of the shift in pronouns, first as it opens up what was expected as a first-person account to alterity and secondly, as this shift has an impact on the reader that turns her into an "implicated witness" (Rothberg 2019).

2. Theoretical Preliminaries: The Pragmatic Impact of Pronouns

One of the most striking and consistent stylistic traits that permeate Ford's war writing is the fact that texts typically intended as autobiographical narratives of or reflections on his war experience are continually interspersed with pronouns that differ from the expected and conventional first-person singular. Ford's use of "you" is probably the most conspicuous.² According to Monika Fludernik, "You is typically ambiguous in its applications to self and other and to a definite or indefinite reading" (Fludernik 1994, p. 461). It is this ambiguity that Sorlin addresses, dissects, and eventually elucidates in

her monograph, *The Stylistics of "You"*. She starts by positing the impact of the choice of personal pronouns in any discourse and reminds us that pronouns "are instrumental in [...] attributing positions to both speaker and addressee" (Sorlin 2022, p. 5) and in "orchestrating focalisation and fostering projection into the different positions they set up" (pp. 7–8). The use of "you" in particular "tends to involve the reader in unprecedented ways" (p. 8), both in terms of psycholinguistics,³ pragmatics, and ethics.

The frequent use of "you" in Ford's war texts thus opens up the experiential frame to the reader, introducing an implicit dialogic structure. Yet, Sorlin demonstrates that the use and subsequent pragmatic effect of the second-person pronoun in narratives operates along a gradient on which "you" sits at varying degrees of distance between the poles of self and other on the one hand, and between the poles of personal and generic address on the other. Building from and updating Bettina Kluge's "continuum of reference" (Kluge 2016), Sorlin delineates six main types of "you" in second-person narratives. These types are thus organised on a gradient of distantiation from the self to the other in the wake of the continuum defined by Kluge, and Sorlin doubles this continuum with a vertical axis from personalisation to generalisation that will prove essential to elucidate the significance of pronoun shifts in Ford's war essays (See Sorlin, Figure 1, "The six points of reference in 'you narratives'").

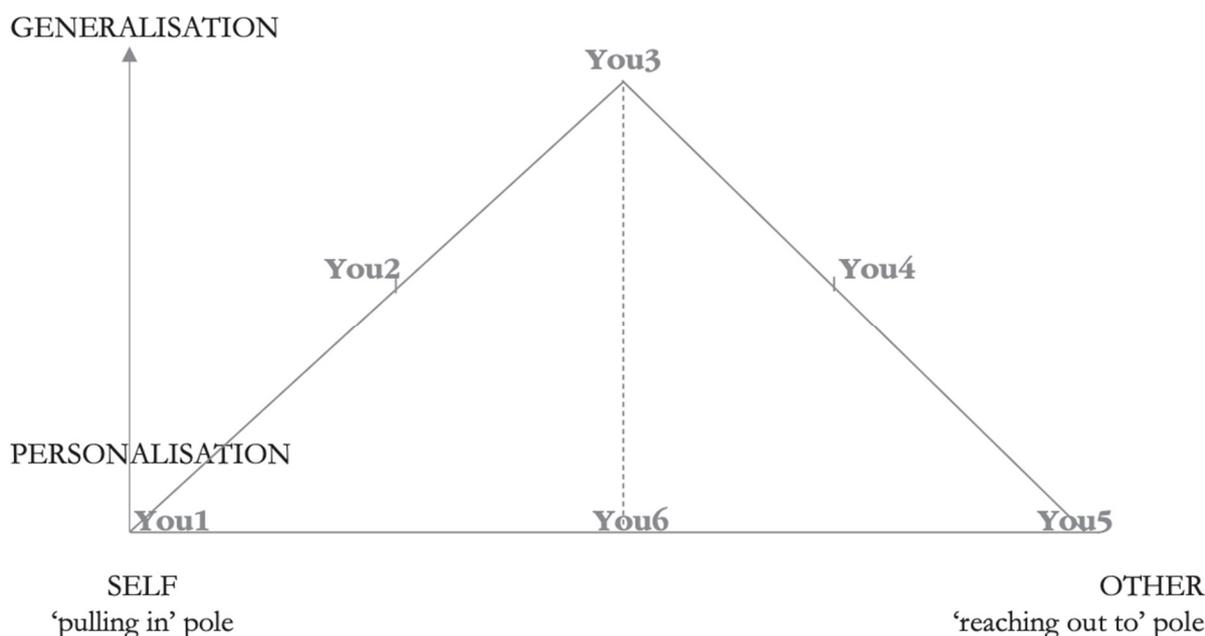


Figure 1. Sandrine Sorlin, "The six points of reference in 'you narratives'" (Sorlin 2022, p. 16). Reproduced with kind permission from the author.

Furthermore, I argue and will demonstrate in this essay that an analogous indefiniteness, instability, and expressive force apply to Ford's ubiquitous use of "one" in his war prose and that a similar gradient of distantiation can be observed in the case of "one" from a speaker-oriented, personal position to an other-oriented, generic stance. As a result, the types of double deixis that we encounter in both Ford's war prose and post-war writing about the war correspond alternately to those that Sorlin identifies as "You1", in which the "you" clearly refers to the speaker but has a "pulling-in" force that "incites the reader to share the self's experience" (p. 14); "You2", "used by a speaker speaking on behalf of a larger entity, presenting herself as a 'typical representative'" (p. 12); "You4", which in our case refers to Ford's "authorial audience"; "You5", which concerns an instance felt as radically other; the more singular "You6"; and the more generic "You3", which can mean "anyone", with a lower degree of identification to the speaker.

After this brief theoretical outline, I will now examine three of the texts that Ford wrote from France and Belgium at war to delineate the constant “slippage in pronouns” (Cook 2003, p. 194) and to assess the resulting shifts in distantiation and their pragmatic, aesthetic, and ethical consequences, as the essays travel constantly along a gradient that differentiates speaker- and reader-oriented discourses. The essays under scrutiny are “Arms and the Mind”, “Trois Jours de Permission”, and “Epilogue”.

3. From a Pragmatics of Pronouns to Literary Impressionism in “Arms and the Mind” and “Trois Jours de Permission”

During the battle of the Somme in late July 1916, as he was serving as Second Lieutenant in the Welch Regiment and stationed with the battalion transport in Bécourt-Bécordel, Ford was caught in an explosion, was wounded, and suffered a thirty-six-hour memory loss. A few weeks later in September 1916, Ford collapsed during a leave in Paris and was diagnosed with shell shock, but he decided to go back to his battalion; in the few days following this episode, he wrote “A Day of Battle” from the Ypres Salient.⁴ “Arms and the Mind” is the first in the pair of essays that make up “A Day of Battle”. Investigating the psychological aspect of “Arms and the Mind”, Alan Munton has established the essay as a self-diagnosis of a nervous breakdown: “Brain, mind, words, repetitive self-questioning: the incipient breakup is clear” (Munton 2008, p. 113). In this perspective, the constant shift from “I” to “you” in this essay may first be ascribed to psychological instability. Analysing the use of the second person in Jim Grimsley’s *Winter Birds* as a manner of “performing self-othering”, Sorlin posits that “[p]utting a distance between oneself and the self about whom one is talking via the second person is one possible means to address the ungraspable traumatic ordeal of one’s childhood” (Sorlin 2022, pp. 84–85). The “you” thus shifts from a self-referential “You1” to an alienating “You5” through which the self is considered as “other”.⁵ However, while this aspect is present to a degree in the use of the second person in “Arms and the Mind”, this use of “you” is not prevalent in the essay. Indeed, as will soon become apparent, the type of “you” present in the essay is never strictly self-referential (“You1” on Sorlin’s continuum). Although the constant shift in pronouns is an unquestionable component in performing self-othering, it primarily foregrounds the relationship between writer and reader and is a means of involving the latter in the former’s experience.

“Arms and the Mind” starts with an explicitly speaker-oriented enunciative frame, since its first word is “I”, and refers to Ford as a writer and as a lieutenant behind the lines; however, this “I” immediately appears as split, since it is doubled in the first few words of the text: “I have asked myself”, signalling from the start a self-division that contributes to the complex deictic system at work in the essay. “I” shifts to the indefinite “oneself” at the end of the first paragraph, with the phrase “[i]t is no very valuable claim to make for oneself” (Ford 1916a, p. 36). This first “one” is clearly self-referential since Ford is discussing the process of “visualising” through writing that is fundamental to his practice of literary impressionism. Conversely, the first “you”, occurring in the phrase “I could make you see”, that echoes Conrad’s famous tenet in the preface to the *Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* evidently refers to the reader as distinct from the author. On Sorlin’s continuum, the type of “you” here implied is a “You4”: it can be construed as an “authorial audience” as defined by James Phelan:

The authorial audience is neither wholly hypothetical nor wholly actual, but instead it is a hybrid of readers an author knows or knows about—or at least an interpretation of such readers—and an audience the author imagines. (Phelan 2017, p. 7, quoted in Sorlin 2022, p. 16)

The presence of “You” as “You4” in Ford’s texts on writing is not surprising, as the aim of his technique is to generate impressions in the reader: the writer–reader relationship is a prevalent concern in Ford’s theoretical essays on literary impressionism. Making the reader present through the recurrence of the second person is a way to enact and perform within the text this specific relationship between writer and reader. What is more significant is the

subtle shift from a different type of “you” in the next occurrence: “Now I could not make you see Messines, Wytschaete, St Eloi; or La Boisselle, the Bois de Bécourt or de Mametz”. Ford here moves from the generic reader implied in the Conradian “make you see” to the specific reader of his essay.

The enunciative shift to “one” occurs as Ford reminisces on the landscape of the Somme:

I remember standing at an OP during the July “push” on the Somme. It was the OP called Max Redoubt on the highest point of the road between Albert and Bécourt Wood. One looked up to the tufted fastness of Martinpuich that the Huns still held: one looked down upon Mametz, upon Fricourt, upon the Ancre, upon Bécourt-Bécordel, upon La Boisselle, upon Pozières. We held all those: or perhaps we did not already hold Pozières. (Ford 1916a, p. 37)

Significantly, the shift to “one” is associated with another verb of sight—“look”. When put in contrast with Ford’s ideal of “mak[ing] you see” a few paragraphs earlier in the essay, the use of “one” here aims to conflate Ford’s gaze with that of his fellow combatants into a joint scopic experience of the scene of war. “One” needs to be distinguished from the use of “we” in the next sentence: in Ford’s war essays, “we” typically refers to the army—sometimes even more largely to Britain—that is quite distinct from the shared embodied experience that is expressed through “one”. “We” refers to an abstract community—the idealized nation and army of the posters and propaganda—whereas “one” connects Ford’s intimate individual experience with that of his fellow soldiers: the use of “one” is particularly powerful as it generates a shared phenomenological space, conveying a graspable, communal experience. I argue that this shift from the individual experience of “I” to the no less embodied but collective experience of “one” allows Ford to navigate and mitigate the inability to share his experience with the noncombatant reader that is the crux of “Arms and the Mind”. In the next few paragraphs of the essay, the psychological blockage and resulting representational aporia are insensibly resolved as the pronouns shift from “I” to “one”—as distinct from the impersonal “we”—and finally back to “you”. Ford first uses the first-person pronoun to convey his inability to wholly take in the immensity of the two opposing armies in their respective trenches: “as for explanation I hadn’t any” (Ford 1916a, p. 38). As in the beginning of the essay, “I” here clearly refers to Ford as a writer. The frame then broadens to “one” in order to render a more generic trench experience: “the Will that had brought one there did not seem to be, much, one’s own Will”.

Although negligible at first sight, the pronoun “one” is replete with a multiplicity of unsaid meanings and deserves closer examination. Sorlin briefly addresses the use of “one” in George Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London* and notes that “one” has been addressed in scholarship as an indefinite pronoun that can carry some degree of definiteness. Sorlin emphasises the specificities of “one” vs. “you”:

Although the second-person pronoun seems to share with “one” this combination of potential indefiniteness and definiteness, there is a difference between the two pronouns: while “one” is an indefinite pronoun that can shelter “an element of definiteness”, “you” is inherently a definite pronoun (because of its original interpersonal base) that can include an element of indefiniteness. (Sorlin 2022, p. 48)

Despite the differences between the use of definite, interpersonal “you” and that of indefinite “one”, Ford’s conjoined and fluctuating use of both pronouns in his war pieces invites us to consider “one” as closer to “you” than is perhaps usual, as I now propose to examine.

As I translated “Arms and the Mind” into French a few years ago for a collection of essays on war by British, Irish, and American authors (Brasme 2017), my main predicament resided in rendering the distinctive and plethoric use of “one” in Ford’s writing. Although “one” may often be translated to “on” in French,⁶ their meanings do not quite coincide. Looking at their respective etymologies helps identify the specificity of the English pronoun. English “one” derives from Proto-Indo-European “*óynos”, a numeral that has also

given Latin “*unus*” and “*un*” in French, and it primarily signifies singularity. In contrast, French “*on*” derives from Latin “*homo*” and denotes genericity as it ultimately refers to human experience. If we were to focus on the vertical personalisation–generalisation axis on Sorlin’s continuum, French “*on*” would thus tend to be closer to generalisation, whereas English “*one*”, which mixes indefiniteness with singularity, would be closer to personalisation. Furthermore, French “*on*” corresponds to a degree to German “*man*”, in which the derivation from Proto-Germanic **mann-* (“person”) and the link to human experience⁷ is more transparent and thus perhaps more clearly felt in contemporary usage. The German term “*man*” may also have played a part in Ford’s extensive and idiosyncratic use of “*one*” in his English prose. This gives us an inkling of the extent to which Ford’s multilingualism, as an Anglo-German who was also deeply Francophile, brought added richness and nuance to his writing, in which echoes of German or French idioms abound more or less explicitly.⁸ In relation perhaps with his multilingualism and his resulting sensitivity to the nuances of “*one*”/“*on*”/“*man*” in each language, Ford’s use of “*one*” goes beyond typical English usage and is strikingly protean, as it is singular yet implies that while the action described is that of the speaker, of an “*I*”, it may also be that of *anyone*. As a result, “*one*” vibrates with a variety of degrees of involvement and is markedly mobile on the combined gradients from self to other and from the personal to the generic. In “*Arms and the Mind*” as in other instances of Ford’s war writing, “*one*” seems indeed to be the very locus where the shift takes place from Ford’s personal experience to that of any other soldier or lieutenant, and by extension, to anyone who might imagine being in this situation, which helps the reader identify with the experiences described despite their inevitable and unbridgeable distance. “*One*” may be considered the quintessential pronoun in Ford’s practice of literary impressionism, as it displaces the experience from an “*I*” that is subtly erased from the text to *any-one*, and it unifies the speaker’s actual and the reader’s imagined (or vicarious) impressions in an expression of singularity. If we take up Sorlin’s continuum from self to other and from personalisation to generalisation, “*one*” tends to be more comparable to “*You6*” (implying a profoundly personal experience that is yet equally relatable to the self and the other) than to “*You3*” (implying a generic experience)—although it evidently lacks the direct “addressive” function of the second-person pronoun. Going back to the etymology of French “*on*” (and German “*man*”), it might be ventured that Ford’s idiosyncratic use of “*one*”, condensing English and French (and perhaps even German) usage, is a privileged locus of Ford’s experience of himself as *homo duplex*—or indeed, *triplex*.⁹

The same process is at work in “*Trois Jours de Permission*”, which was published in *Nation* in September 1916. This essay has hardly ever featured in criticism except in relation with *No Enemy*, as it provides the basis for chapters VII and X (see Longenbach 1984, p. 154, n. 12; Saunders 1996b, p. 557, n. 13). It is a condensed account of Ford’s leave in Paris a few days earlier; its brevity and short, paratactic sentences aim to mimic the quick-paced and all-too-swift “weekend leave in Paris” (Ford 1916b, p. 50). Ford first uses “*one*” in the first paragraph, where the pronoun conveys the communal experience of a body of soldiers, much as in the beginning of “*Arms and the Mind*”. In the second paragraph, “*one*” is narrowed down to refer to the specific small group in the waiting room. This narrowing process intensifies in the third paragraph, which catalogues the manifold activities that Ford packed into his stay: these activities are unmistakably and increasingly specific to him, culminating in his “playing hide-and-seek with the children in the hotel hall, making a prodigious noise on the marble tiles” (Ford 1916b, p. 50), a seemingly gratuitous though vividly evocative detail typical of Fordian impressionism. Yet, in this third paragraph, the systematic use of the pronoun “*one*” as a subject for every clause ultimately allows the description to broaden in scope and become not just that of Ford’s but of any officer’s occupations on a three-day permission in Paris. Some might argue that because Ford in fact centres his account on his own experience, the use of “*one*” cannot operate as an instrument of intersubjectivity. I contend that the purpose of such specific detail is to eschew any depersonalisation that may occur for the sake of generalisation. Instead, the specific and seemingly trivial details allow the experience to appear all the

more relatable—because it is inherently human. Here again, the deft use of pronouns plays an essential part in the practice and success of literary impressionism. The use of “one” has a deeply connective force in Ford’s war essays. It allows him to detach himself from his personal experience so it may become part of a more general story—that of British officers on leave in Paris, or even beyond this, that of any human being in conditions of extreme stress. This may bring to mind Gertrude Stein’s aim in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, as elucidated by Lénárt-Cheng (2015). Stein favoured pronouns as they are “not really the name of anything. They represent some one but they are not it or his name. In not being his or its or her name they already have a greater possibility of being something” (Stein 1935, pp. 213–14; qtd in Lénárt-Cheng 2015, p. 281). To Lénárt-Cheng, Stein’s

strategic use of indefinite pronouns suggests more than imprecision or nonchalance. [...] [O]ne could argue that these statements were simply meant to satisfy Stein’s compulsive predilection for aphorisms. It is well known that Stein reveled in the simplicity of laconic phrases. The key to this simplicity is generalization. A statement such as “anybody is more interesting doing nothing than doing something” (Stein 1973, p. 109) works precisely because it is so open-ended that it can be applied to an infinite number of different situations. (Lénárt-Cheng 2015, p. 282)

The question of generalisation will be resumed and refined later, but I now propose we go back to “Arms and the Mind” and continue examining the shift in pronouns. The cursor on the gradient from self to other moves further to the right as the essay progresses: Ford eventually reverts to “you” to express the experience of a patrol officer, a Battalion Intelligence Officer, and finally an actual fighting officer—a role, it is worth noting, that Ford never had:

If you are patrol officer your limits are laid down: if you are Battalion Intelligence Officer up on an Observation Point, the class of object that is laid down for your observation is strictly limited in range. And, within the prescribed limits there is so much to which one must pay attention that other sights, sounds and speculations are very much dimmed. And of course, if you are actually firing a rifle your range of observation is still more limited. Dimly, but very tyrannically, there lurk in your mind the precepts of the musketry instructors at Splott or at Veryd ranges. The precepts that the sights must be upright, the tip of the foresight in line with the shoulders of the “V” of the backsight are always there, even when the “V” of the backsight has assumed its air of being a loophole between yourself and the sun and wind and when the blade of the foresight is like a bar across that loophole. And the dark, smallish, potlike object upon whose ‘six o’clock’ you must align both bar and loophole has none of the aspects of a man’s head. It is just a pot. (Ford 1916a, pp. 38–39)

Unlike the “you” used earlier in the phrase “make you see”, in which the reader is addressed as clearly distinct from the writer (“You4”), the use of the second person here corresponds to “You6” as it expresses a deeply personal experience that sits right between self and other—between the lieutenant-writer and the reader. Ford’s endeavour to bring the experience closer to the reader is all the more striking as he is not strictly the “I” implied in this paragraph but projects himself into the experience of a fighting officer with such acumen that anyone not versed in the details of Ford’s service at the Front may be led to believe that he actually fought—a skill that belongs of course to Ford as a novelist and comes to negate the writerly impasse that the entire essay explores and deplors. So, in effect, although performing as “You6”, the “you” in this paragraph turns out to be the projection of a deeply personal yet fictitious experience that provides the reader with the means to bridge this otherwise unfathomable experience. This page illustrates to what extent pronominal interplay performs as a fundamental and efficient tool in Ford’s literary impressionist technique—one designed, above all, to “make you see”.

The recurring use of “you” is also notable in Ford’s post-war narratives of the war such as *No Enemy* and *Parade’s End*.¹⁰ The second-person pronouns scattered in the texts operate as tools of the sensory and experiential implication of the reader and are again fundamental to Ford’s impressionist technique. *No Enemy* thus deploys terrain observation through precise landmarks that bear a marked resemblance to “Arms and the Mind”, though the landscape this time is not that of the Somme but of the mining country of Nord-Pas-de-Calais: “If you looked over the hedge you saw Bailleul, Armentières, away to queer, conical, grey mountains that were the slag-heaps near Béthune, and away, farther, toward the Somme itself” (Ford [1929] 2002, p. 72). The specific enunciative frame of *No Enemy*, with its layering of narrative—and readerly—instances that highlight both the process of witnessing and storytelling and that of receiving this testimony, demonstrates Ford’s intent commitment to and experimentation in transmitting his experience to the reader in as close and vibrant a manner as possible. Laura Colombino has investigated the way in which *No Enemy* explores and foregrounds the role of Ford’s experience of the war in his development of “empathy” (Colombino 2019). I would argue that one of the main markers of this empathy is the fluctuation between pronouns, especially the use of “you” and “one”. Given that these pronouns conflate the speaker and the addressee, one may wonder whether this empathy does not also imply an internal, reflexive form of empathy—where Ford addresses his own traumatised self from an external stance that aims at a compassionate understanding of what he went through while in service. This appears all the more apt when we consider how “Arms and the Mind” begins: “I have asked myself”.

A similar process can be noted in *Parade’s End*. While the first part of *Some Do Not . . .* (Ford [1924] 2010) takes place before the war and the second part remains confined to 1917 London, the narrative in *No More Parades*, the next volume in the tetralogy (Ford [1924] 2010), shifts abruptly to the trenches. Significantly, the first pronoun in the volume is “you”—here is the volume’s first sentence: “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” (Ford [1925] 2011, p. 9). The result is a direct implication for the reader that is quite different from the openings of parts 1 and 2 in *Some Do Not . . .*, where the third-person narrative sets the action at a distance from us. The use of “you” invites the reader to figuratively enter the scene—to be dropped right into the trenches as she is made to “c[o]me in” rather than look at it from the outside. It thus appears that in the essays he wrote from the Front, Ford was effectively trying out new tools to help him convey his experience: these tools were then honed and perfected in his post-war fiction. I now propose to examine the consequences on the reading experience and to consider how the resulting experiential involvement of the reader is driven by an ethical intent on the part of Ford.

4. The Ethical Force of Pronoun Shifts in “Epilogue”

Unusual pronoun choice and pronoun shifts play no small part in the ethical impact of Ford’s war prose. Sorlin has addressed the ethical aspect of “you narratives”:

“You”, as it has been described by many philosophers, is the relating pronoun par excellence, linking one human to another as interdependent beings and as such it has an ethical dimension. In his ethics of alterity, Levinas (1991), for example, has emphasised the role of the second-person relationship, entailing recognition of the vulnerability and fragility in the summons of an “other”, calling for ethical responsibility. [. . .] In the specific way “you narratives” construct encounters between reader and character, they undeniably make an ethical demand on readers to show some responsibility or at least compassion for the “other”. (Sorlin 2022, p. 24)

“You” narratives prompt an active and embodied reading experience as they invite the reader to feel *with* the other, rather than *through* him or her.¹¹ This matches what Meghan Marie Hammond has identified as the shift from “sympathy” to “empathy” in literary

modernism. Noting that the word “empathy” was coined in 1909, at much the same time as literary modernism, and that “‘sympathy’, once understood as the core of moral life, came to be widely understood as a ‘feeling for’ that is inferior to empathic ‘feeling with’” (4), she argues:

we should be attentive to the ways in which we can see that difference developing in literary modernism. Indeed, [. . .] both the new psychologies and literary modernism attempted to expand and reconfigure how we understand intersubjective experience. It is not surprising that in the wake of their contributions the new word seemed appropriate. In other words, while the writers I study did not yet have the vocabulary to separate sympathy from what I identify as empathy, their work in fact enacts that separation. (Hammond 2014, p. 7)

Hammond argues that Ford was consistently concerned with “sympathetic imagination”, a term that can be construed as a precursor for “empathy” and that is at the heart of Ford’s impressionist technique. In *The Good Soldier*, however, Hammond argues that the call for an empathetic listener/reader foregrounds the limitations of empathy: “When the urge to empathise is satisfied in that book, the result is a violent linguistic breakdown that fractures minds and the connections between them” (Hammond 2014, p. 126). This matches my earlier brief analysis of the use of double deixis in *The Good Soldier* (see note 10). Turning to Ford’s post-war *A Man Could Stand Up*—(1926), Hammond demonstrates that Valentine and Tietjens “surrender to the same affective state, each trusting that the other feels the same way”, thus “privileging [. . .] affective empathy over cognitive empathy, [. . .] emotional oneness over mental oneness” (Hammond 2014, p. 145). Hammond’s identifying a shift in empathy from *The Good Soldier* to Ford’s post-war fiction is deeply relevant to the present essay. I argue that Ford’s complex use of double deixis in his war prose is both a signal and an instrument of Ford’s working out, both psychologically and in his writing, the increased challenges to—but also the heightened need for—empathy posed by the war experience.

In this respect, it may be useful to compare the use of “you” in Ford’s war prose with that at work in the contemporary 1914 recruitment poster—aptly mentioned by Sorlin (2022, p. 6)—in which Field Marshal Kitchener points his finger at the viewer and a large caption reads: “Your country needs YOU”. In *De L’interpellation*, Jean-Jacques Lecerclé (2019) has analysed the implicating process at work in this poster: while some aspects are common to the involvement of the reader in Ford’s war essays, the purpose and nature of this involvement ultimately differ. In Kitchener’s poster, orality is emphasised by the quotation marks framing the slogan: as Lecerclé points out, “this writing insists on its primitively and mainly oral character as it is between quotation marks” (Lecerclé 2019, p. 15, my translation). Lecerclé demonstrates that the injunction inherent in the message performs at three levels. At the pragmatic level, the slogan has a conative function,¹² aiming to have a direct impact—an action—on the reader. At the semantic level, through the double second person (“your” and “you”), the sentence creates an assumption that then appears to become irrefutable: “since this is *your* country, *you* are called out, and you know what you have to do” (Lecerclé 2019, p. 16, my translation, emphasis Lecerclé’s). This ineluctability is generated by the affirmative sentence: Lecerclé refers to what Barthes called “imposed meaning” and to “his provoking sentence: ‘language is fascist’” (16, my translation). Lecerclé further analyses the use of “you” in Kitchener’s poster through the lens of Louis Althusser’s theorisation of interpellation. To Althusser, through interpellation, ideology turns individuals into subjects: “We suggest ideology ‘acts’ or ‘works’ so that it ‘recruits’ subjects among individuals [. . .], or ‘transforms’ individuals into subjects [. . .] through this very specific operation that we call *interpellation*” (Althusser 1976, p. 113; qtd in Lecerclé 2019, p. 19, my translation). To Lecerclé, the subject in Althusser’s text is “mainly subjected” and “the free subject, centre of consciousness, action and responsibility, is an illusion” (Lecerclé 2019, p. 21).

It may seem ironical to bring together the use of the second person in such a famous propaganda poster with that at work in Ford’s essays, in which Ford quickly expressed his

distance from the authorities' cynical use of soldiers as cannon fodder for political purposes. In fact, the use of the same pronoun only enhances Ford's alternative usage of double deixis. Although Ford's use of "you" also bears an undeniable conative force, its intent is markedly different; the difference lies in Ford's resistance to genericity and in his promotion of singularity. This appears in many of his essays as well as in *No Enemy* and *Parade's End*¹³ and is perhaps most forcefully in effect in a seldom-studied yet thought-provoking essay, "Epilogue" (Ford 1918b).¹⁴ All of the phenomena analysed earlier in "Arms and the Mind" and "Trois Jours de Permission" are present in this piece—one of the most-quoted phrases from this otherwise little-known essay is the sentence "*one* is always too close or too remote" (Ford 1918b, p. 59, emphasis mine). Yet, the process deepens and gains an added layer as Ford, who has taken pains to describe the life of Rosalie Martin—an apparently nondescript woman from Northern France and the transparent inspiration for Rosalie Prudent in *No Enemy*¹⁵—through a minutely detailed third-person narrative so as to render the singularity of her suffering as a civilian in a territory at war, suddenly makes the voice of Rosalie more forcibly present through the shift from indirect to direct speech:

And gradually it seemed to Rosalie Martin that she had lived all her life in the washhouse of 27 Rue de la Gare—that that was her life. So at least she said in a sudden burst of speech that came from her when she had nearly finished sewing the second cuff of my shirt.—And she continued:

"One gives oneself so much trouble to bring men children into the world, and one gives so much trouble in order to keep them alive and in the straight road. And the days go on and the years go on and the fields are there and the troops come marching, over them. And one's male children are gone . . ." (Ford 1918b, pp. 58–59)

The paradox—which might be considered as characteristically Fordian—is of course that the use of direct speech does not lead to the expected first person but to the indefinite "one". Direct speech is thus employed not simply to highlight the poignancy of Rosalie's personal experience but to foreground her—or Ford's?—own consciousness of how common her own experience is and to enact its resulting shareability and relatability. Rosalie's worry goes beyond that of a mother for her sons: it may be shared by any noncombatant for the soldiers at war. Earlier in the essay, Ford expresses his own worry for his company through the pronoun "one" as he has just heard the distressing rumour that his battalion may have been shelled: "one wants to be near someone of one's own battalion when a lot of one's own men have gone West" (Ford 1918b, p. 54). Through the joint use of "one", Ford's chronicle of his own experience thus coalesces with that of Rosalie, and his overlaying worry for his "men" while he listens to Rosalie becomes interwoven with that of Rosalie for her "men children". It is worth noting that as this passage was rewritten in *No Enemy*, Ford opted to retain the "one" pronoun: "And I ask you, *M. l'officier*, for what purpose is it that *one* brings men children into the world if this is to be the end?" (Ford [1929] 2002, p. 130, emphasis mine).

I have recently demonstrated that the ethical force at the heart of "Epilogue" lies in Ford's rejection of the collective morality of the nation at war as dictated by government propaganda and instead in his advocacy of singular experience as founding the basis for an ethics of alterity (Brasme 2023, pp. 33–38). The pronominal interplay here confirms this and operates as a powerful device within this process. In his war essays, Ford strives to acknowledge—and to have us acknowledge—the individual out of the collective but also the collective experience of the individual. It is Ford's acute interest in the singularity of Rosalie's face, which to the current reader cannot fail to evoke Levinas's theorisation of the ethics of alterity, and his detailed account of Rosalie's individual experience that lead in turn to a consideration of universal suffering. In Ford's war fiction as in his nonfiction, this consideration is never generic and abstract but embodied in concrete, individual experience. This interaction between the particular and the universal is addressed in explicit terms in the rest of "Epilogue", where it appears that Ford's encounter with Rosalie Martin has

worked as a trigger, allowing him to crystallise his own ethical stance towards the people caught in the war and to work out the manner in which he means to write on and for them. His resistance to generalisation is articulated in terms of his distrust of politicians for whom individuals do not matter: “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?” (Ford 1918b, pp. 62–63).¹⁶ The choice of the second-person pronoun is here again, ethical: the reader is not simply addressed but called upon or “interpellated” as a responsible subject—a subject that is however quite different from the sub-jected¹⁷ “subject” developed in Althusser’s theorisation of interpellation, as she is urged to detach herself from the generalising posture that precisely disengages from an empathetic and embodied relationship to the other. This exhortation is activated as much through the sentence’s direct message as through the specific enunciative frame that Ford so often favours and that is central to the principles of literary impressionism: it is when going through a singular experience that “one” can hope to fathom forms of human experience so radically unfamiliar as that of being at war but also to sense the collective experience of the individual.

Though largely unstudied until now, the subtle and constant interplay of pronouns in Ford’s war writing is one of the stylistic strategies that allow him to come to terms with the predicament of writing of those he called the “untold millions” (Ford 1927, p. 70). His urge to “make [us] see”, and feel, the individuality and experience of the people at war brings added relevancy to his impressionist technique. This essay has established that Ford’s updating and refining of his impressionist technique were enacted in part through his exquisitely nuanced and singular pronoun usage—one that took on particular salience in his nonfictional war essays and that paved the way for the rejuvenation of his writing technique in his later work. This essay thus demonstrates that although it first led to the fear of a loss of articulateness and relevance, the war experience proved instrumental in Ford’s maturation as a writer and in his finding a renewed sense of significance. There is much more to explore on the topic of pronoun usage in Ford’s war prose and more largely in his practice of literary impressionism; while the present article has but brushed the surface, it is aimed as a starting point towards a much larger study of Ford’s singular use of pronouns in his fictional and nonfictional writing and of the evolution of his usage from earlier, pre-war writing to his later works. It would be useful to investigate further the hypothesis that Ford’s trilingualism played no trifling part in his idiosyncratic writing style. It is also worth pondering to what extent Ford’s commitment to rendering the collective human experience might be related, in other works, particularly his critical essays, to his own deep attachment to the republic of letters. Ford was acutely aware of the writing and creative communities from which his own formation and inspiration stemmed, and his critical and editorial works are testament to the fact that his own aesthetics take place within a large community of artists past and future. Analysing pronoun usage in his literary—and artistic—criticism might prove fertile in demonstrating that his sense of embedment within an aesthetic collective is ingrained in the very syntax of his writing.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ On the recurring date of August 4 in *The Good Soldier*, see Stannard (1995, p. x); on the inconsistent use of the date, see (Moser 1980, pp. 161–62; Saunders 2012, pp. xxxvii–xlili); on the erroneous use of the date, see (Brasme 2015, pp. 85–6).
- ² While this paper focuses on Ford’s war writing, the second-person pronoun also features conspicuously in *The Good Soldier*, which was written before Ford had any experience of the Western Front. The type of ‘you’ encountered in the novel, however, is different than that of Ford’s nonfictional war writing, the foremost reason for this being the difference in enunciative frame from fictional narrator to autobiographical prose. While the present article is devoted to Ford’s testimonies of the war in the context of

this issue of *Humanities*, I acknowledge that there is a much wider study waiting to be done on the evolution of pronoun usage in Ford's writing as a whole; and I plan on conducting this work in the years to come. See also note 10 below.

- 3 Sorlin: "The 'you' pronoun used in fictional texts has been shown in psycholinguistic research to be a better attractor than other pronouns because the personalisation it implies appears to have an impact on depth of processing and thus on memory (Sanford and Emmott 2012, p. 255)" (Sorlin 2022, p. 8).
- 4 In *A Dual Life*, Max Saunders informs us that Ford was on leave in Paris from 9 to 11 September and was back to Ypres by 13 September (Saunders 1996b, p. 21), and reminds us that "A Day of Battle" is dated 15 September 1916 (p. 20).
- 5 "Grimsley's use of self-referential You1 at times could also be interpreted as a You5 addressed 'other'" (Sorlin 2022, p. 85).
- 6 Ford himself uses "on" quite liberally in his French essay "Pon . . . ti . . . pri . . . ith" (Ford 1918a).
- 7 Although "*Mensch*" is an apter representation of humankind as a whole, the masculine "*Mann*" has often been used in German to refer to humanity, much like "man" in English. I am not condoning this usage but merely remarking on a use of the word that was particularly prevalent in previous centuries, and therefore relevant to Ford.
- 8 On Ford's being "fluently trilingual", see for instance Saunders (1996a, p. 33). I believe there is much to uncover in regard to the influence of French and German over Ford's writing, which would benefit from the input of scholars fluent in French and/or German.
- 9 On the analysis of Ford as *homo duplex*, see Saunders's introduction to *A Dual Life* (Saunders 1996a, pp. 2–3) and the eponymous collection of essays, *Homo Duplex: Ford Madox Ford's Experience and Aesthetics of Alterity* (Brasme 2020).
- 10 To follow up on the second footnote, there is a clear discrepancy between the pervasive use of 'you' in *The Good Soldier* and its use in *Parade's End*, which is largely due to the difference in the narrative stance. In *The Good Soldier*, the first-person narrator is openly unreliable and the pervasive use of 'you' aims at manipulating the narratee; Dowell is engaged in a fictional conversation with the reader. As a result, this addressed reader ends up developing into a fictional stance herself, almost a character in the narrative, and as such, becomes distinct from the actual reader of the novel. This fictional reader corresponds to Sorlin's "You4", or even "You3", which sits highest on the personalisation to generalisation pole—becoming an abstract stance. This does not however preclude an inevitable involvement of the actual reader through the recurrent use of double deixis in the narrative. I would argue that this blend of the fictional, abstract narratee and the actual, real-world reader participates of the singular reading experience that *The Good Soldier* occasions; but this would warrant a whole other paper.
- 11 Sorlin also quotes Gallese: "[W]e do not only mentally entertain an 'objective' third-person account of what others are, do to us and with us. When relating to others, we also experience them as bodily selves, similar to how we experience ourselves as the owners of our body and the authors of our actions" (Gallese 2014, p. 5; qtd in Sorlin 2022, p. 46).
- 12 "Orientation toward the addressee, the CONATIVE function, finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative" (Jakobson 1960, p. 355).
- 13 I have discussed the ethics of alterity and singularity in *Parade's End* in an earlier essay (Brasme 2013).
- 14 "Epilogue" remained unpublished until Saunders included it in *War Prose*. Saunders tells us it was composed 'after February 17, and before 7 January 1919' (Ford 1999, p. 52), adding that it was probably composed as an epilogue to "Women and Men", published by Pound in the *Little Review* in 1918. This explains why I have chosen "1918?" as a tentative publication date.
- 15 It is worth noting that in his introduction to his edition of *No Enemy*, Paul Skinner remarks on the erasure of boundaries between "Rosalie"—the *Poilus'* nickname for their bayonet—and Rosalie Prudent, the civilian, especially as Gringoire uses the phrase "stick it" to refer to both: this contributes to "the slippage between war and peace, or rather, between the destructive work of war and the constructive work of art" (Skinner 2002, pp. xviii–xix).
- 16 See also Ford's article entitled "Preparedness": "Normally we do not count—we, the decent quiet subjects or citizens of great empires. We are in the hands of politicians over whom we have no influence, they being unable or disinclined to know what we are thinking" (Ford 1927, p. 70).
- 17 From Latin *sub-jectus*, "thrown under".

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