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Chapter 10

Parade's End

Isabelle Brasme

Parade's End – the tetralogy comprising *Some Do Not . . .* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up* – (1926) and *Last Post* (1928) – depicts the end of an era, the decay of a society and of its values, which the First World War both exposed and deepened. *Parade's End* may be construed at least partly as a portrayal of Englishness put to the test of war. Using characters from the upper and upper-middle classes, Ford explores their multifarious responses to the ideological changes correlated with the war.¹ However, whilst the war stands very much at the core of the tetralogy, *Parade's End* cannot be considered merely as a war novel. The war reveals rather than triggers the ideological, aesthetic, psychological and ontological upheavals that inform the four novels.

This chapter will first briefly mention the genesis of *Parade's End*. We shall then move on to Ford's choice of characterisation and to the organisation of the characters along a spectrum of various ideological stances. The narrative technique developed in the tetralogy will prove particularly rich and telling of the way in which Ford's art reaches new heights in this text. Finally, we shall see how, through its persistent and deliberate instability, the text is constantly moving towards an aesthetics whose contours are merely suggested, and which, while being undoubtedly modernist in its aim and spirit, seems to reach beyond the conventional boundaries of the modernist canon.

¹ An ideology is a set of ideas and beliefs shared by a group. The concept of ideology implies that our grasp of and opinion on the world can never be immediate and unbiased: it is unavoidably filtered by a whole set of views that are conditioned by the social group we belong to. For further reading on the notion of ideology, see David Hawkes, *Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2003).

Genesis

As is argued by Andrew Frayn in the previous chapter, *Parade's End* is very much the offshoot of Ford's direct experience of war and of his acute sense of the changes it wreaked upon humanity, individually and collectively; it is also the product of Ford's private struggles and achievements in the late 1910s and early twenties. As Max Saunders posits in his chapter on 'Ford's Lives', Ford brought a lot of himself and his own relationships into his novels. Some parallels between Ford's life before and during World War I and the novels are very transparent in *Parade's End*, by Ford's own account. Many elements in the narration may hint at Ford's own predicaments in the 1910s; much has been said in particular to compare Sylvia to Violet Hunt and Valentine to Stella Bowen, Ford's companion as he was writing *Parade's End*. A cross-reading of *Parade's End* with Ford's correspondence with Stella Bowen during and after the war is quite enlightening of the extent to which *Parade's End* owes to their relationship; as Sondra Stang states, 'the letters reveal, in their detail, much of the raw material of *Parade's End*'.²

Furthermore, many of the paradigms that are prevalent in *Parade's End* can also be linked back to some of his earlier novels. *The Fifth Queen* (1906–08) thus centres on a man endowed with an all-encompassing mind and loaded with immense responsibilities (Henry VIII), caught between his dead first wife (an earlier version of Sylvia Tietjens) and the hope brought about by a young, educated, nurturing woman (Katherine Howard, to whom Valentine Wannop bears a strong resemblance). *The Good Soldier* (1915) likewise deals with a man trapped in a dysfunctional marriage with an impostor (Dowell and Florence) and with a man perhaps unjustly condemned for his adulterous tendencies,

² Sondra J. Stang, Introduction, Ford Madox Ford, *The Correspondence of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen*, ed. Sondra J. Stang and Karen Cochran (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xii.

misunderstood by society, steeped in a feudal ideology, and apparently unfit for twentieth-century modes of conduct (Ashburnham). Christopher Tietjens may to some extent appear as a combined study of Dowell and Ashburnham, as a further exploration on the part of Ford of the potentialities already at work in the cast of *The Good Soldier*. To a large extent, therefore, *Parade's End* may appear to crystallise many of Ford's deep-seated concerns as well as his own inner struggles.

Characterisation and Ideological Stances

Characters in *Parade's End*, however, are more than mere avatars of previous characters or actual persons in Ford's life. On a larger and less personal scope, they are organised along a range of varied and contrasted responses to what can be considered as Ford's vision of the Edwardian mindset. References to Englishness will be purposefully limited here, as this notion is covered in Chapter 13; I will focus instead on the characters' varied relationships to tradition and modernity.

The notion of heritage plays a crucial role for the characters as it allows them to be connected to what precedes their own existence, and thus to insert themselves within a reassuring continuity. The importance of descent is made clear from the opening pages of the first volume: the protagonists are first and foremost presented through their lineage. This is clear in the initial description of the main character, Tietjens: 'The youngest son of a Yorkshire gentleman, Tietjens himself was entitled to the best – the best that first-class offices and first-class people could afford'.³ The word 'entitled' is redolent of a feudal system that still seems to be ruling most social relations in *Parade's End*. The

³ Ford Madox Ford, *Some Do Not . . .*, ed. Max Saunders (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2010), p. 6. All further references are to this edition.

syntax of this sentence is also telling: lineage transcends identity since it is mentioned before the character's own name; this initial descriptive clause conditions the entire ensuing portrait of Christopher in this opening chapter of the tetralogy. The omnipresence of lineage as the prominent way to determine characters is highlighted by Valentine Wannop, in the final volume:

It was astonishing the descents they all had! She herself was descended from the surgeon-butler to Henry VII – Henry the Somethingth. And of course from the great Professor Wannop [...]. . . . And Christopher was eleventh Tietjens of Groby with an eventual burgomaster of Scheveningen or somewhere in some century or other: time of Alva. Number one came over with Dutch William, the Protestant Hero!⁴

Individuals are thus first and foremost defined backwards, as it were – by what predates them. Characters in the narration indeed aspire to define their identity thanks to landmarks that are issued from the past, as these seem to warrant more stability. This need to ensure one's identity may be ascribed to the far-reaching social and economic changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: these challenged the individual's ability to position himself or herself within the mutating society.

The Ritual of Tradition: The Duchemins and the Macmasters

Faced with these changes, the characters representing the Establishment harden their ideological stance and practice, in order to reassert their differences from the lower classes. The Duchemins and later the Macmasters display a stable ideological discourse and *praxis* throughout the tetralogy; they may be considered as embodying the dominant

⁴ Ford Madox Ford, *Last Post*, ed. Paul Skinner (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2011), pp. 174–5. All further references are to this edition.

ideology within the society depicted in *Parade's End*, one that is being shared by most characters in the novels. Etymologically, 'identity' means permanence of the same (*idem*); the individual's attempt to define himself in a world that is characterised by change and flux since at least the eighteenth century is a recurring trait in English literature.

However, in *Parade's End* – and as the title suggests – a shift occurs: rather than identity itself, most characters strive to define and maintain its semblance. This is illustrated to the point of caricature by Vincent and Edith Macmaster. Valentine realises that their relationship is solely built on appearances: 'it was a sort of parade of circumspection and rightness' (*Some Do Not . . .*, p. 293). This parade involves above all an ostentatious respect of tradition. Yet the 'sort of' qualifier used by Valentine signals that the *parade* is no longer quite functional – it is indeed already at an *end*. The Duchemins' environment, as is later that of the Macmasters', is a ritualised replication of the past: it is no coincidence that Mr Duchemin is a clergyman and lives in a parsonage, which is presented as a sanctuary of conventions. The Duchemins' Saturday breakfast may be construed as a replacement of the Sunday mass – as a rite saluted in the pre-war English elite as glorifying tradition. This corresponds to what Eric Hobsbawm called 'the invention of tradition'. Hobsbawm differentiates between genuinely ancient traditions – 'customs' – and 'invented traditions', which are generated in modern times to recreate landmarks in a world threatened by instability, when the continuity with the past is broken:

The very appearance of movements for the defence of or revival of traditions, 'traditionalist' or otherwise, indicates such a break. Such movements, common among intellectuals since the Romantics, can never develop or even preserve a living past (except conceivably by

setting up human natural sanctuaries for isolated corners of archaic life), but must become ‘invented tradition’. [...] Where the old ways are alive, traditions need neither be revived nor invented.⁵

The ostensibly celebrated traditions at the Duchemins’ and the Macmasters’ are thus a construct. Their flaunted continuity with the past reveals precisely that the link with the latter is in fact broken.

The Macmasters’ and their circle’s response to the outbreak of the war is to close in upon themselves and remain impervious to the rest of the world, in the name of the preservation of culture – or more rightly, of their ideal of a fossilised culture. One of them thus asserts, in *Some Do Not . . .*: ‘it’s one’s sole duty to preserve the beauty of things that’s preservable’ (p. 285). The polyptoton⁶ of the words ‘preserve’ and ‘preservable’ illustrates and pinpoints a circular, solipsist mode of thinking. The satirical mode grows more acute in the mention of the letters sent by ‘men of genius’ to Mrs Duchemin during the war: they are ‘written, as a rule, from the Continent or most distant and peaceful climates, for most of them believed it their duty in these hideous times to keep alive in the world the only glimmering spark of beauty’ (p. 294). Satire is palpable in the clichéd phrases and the hackneyed metaphor of beauty as light.

The environment thus contrived by the Macmasters is utopian:⁷ in their attempt to abolish the line between past and present, the Macmasters, leading in their wake the mainstream elite depicted in the novel, inhabit a world that exists neither in the past – since it is inescapably over and can never be fully reconstituted – nor in the present, since

⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 7–8.

⁶ A polyptoton is a stylistic device where various words derived from the same root are being used, thus creating an effect of repetition.

⁷ The etymological meaning of ‘utopia’ is ‘non-place’: οὐ (‘no’) + τόπος (‘place’).

it is denied existence. The theatrical dimension of the Macmasters' mode of existence is patent: their seemingly stable sense of identity is sheer performance. A clear instance of this is Mrs Duchemin dressing up in Pre-Raphaelite attire: 'her dress [...] had certainly been dark blue – and certainly of silk [...]. And it contrived to be at once artistic – absolutely in the tradition! And yet well cut! Very large sleeves, of course, but still with a certain fit' (p. 70–1). This dress bears an unmistakable resemblance to that painted by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in *Jane Morris (The Blue Silk Dress)* (1868).⁸ The tension between the 'artistic' feel of the dress and its up-to-datedness, contrived by the cut and the 'certain fit', encapsulates the pretence of Edith's whole lifestyle.

An Equivocal Champion of Modernity: Valentine

While I won't tackle specifically the question of gender as it is dealt with in Chapter 12, it is worth pondering to what extent the complex opposition between the two main female protagonists, Valentine Wannop and Sylvia Tietjens, crystallises the ideological ambivalences of the Edwardian and post-war era.

Within the community staged in *Parade's End*, Valentine is the character most openly opposed to conventions. This is made obvious from her very first appearance in *Some Do Not . . .*, as a suffragette defying patriarchal order by trespassing on an eminently male territory, the golf course. Her active stance, emphasised by her confronting men 'in [...] the bright open' (p. 82) as opposed to the traditionally feminine indoors, is articulated in her long, peremptory speeches. Valentine's opposition to established order is made

⁸ For more on the connections between Duchemin and Rossetti's work, see Isabelle Brasme, 'Articulations of Femininity in *Parade's End*', in Ashley Chantler and Rob Hawkes (eds), *Ford Madox Ford's Parade's End: The First World War, Culture, and Modernity*, International Ford Madox Ford Studies 13 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), pp. 173–85.

even more blatant in the third volume, when Armistice is announced in London. The first part of *A Man Could Stand Up* – consists entirely of an interior monologue on the part of Valentine, which is itself a token of her will to have a voice in the world. The recurrence in this part of negative phrases such as ‘no more respect’ or indeed ‘no more parades’ demonstrates the deliberate and even programmatic nature of Valentine’s irreverence: ‘She was not going to show respect for any Lady anything ever again. [...] She was never going to show respect for anyone ever again. She had been through the mill: the whole world had been through the mill! No more respect!’⁹ Besides the recurrence of negative terms that bespeak Valentine’s will to do away with rules, the anaphora of ‘she’ as a subject emphasises Valentine’s feeling of empowerment; so does the continuous tense, which lays the emphasis on the subject’s intentions. There is a plethora of such passages in *A Man Could Stand Up* –. Valentine believes it her intellectual duty to relentlessly question the validity of the social, political and cultural *status quo*. Such a questioning is inseparable in her mind from feminist claims:

If, at this parting of the ways, at this crack across the table of History, the School – the World, the future mothers of Europe – got out of hand, would they ever come back? The Authorities – Authority all over the world – was afraid of that; more afraid of that than of any other thing. Wasn’t it a possibility that there was to be no more Respect? None for constituted Authority and consecrated Experience? [...] No more respect. . . . For the Equator! For the Metric system. For Sir Walter Scott! Or George Washington! Or Abraham Lincoln! Or the Seventh Commandment! (pp. 17–18)

The accumulation of capitalised words is ironic, since the notions thus highlighted are being challenged precisely as they are given this semblance of importance. The

⁹ Ford Madox Ford, *A Man Could Stand Up* –, ed. Sara Haslam (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2011), p. 12. All further references are to this edition.

incongruous juxtaposition of notions, historical people and places, all placed on the same level, generates a feeling of meaninglessness: each of these words appears as interchangeable and therefore valueless. As this passage makes clear, Valentine believes that the collapse of established order to do away with the mistakes that led to World War One rests upon the rebellion of women – ‘the future mothers of Europe’ – against a patriarchal order: all the historical figures Valentine mentions are men, and the Seventh Commandment, dealing with adultery, may be construed as the basis of patriarchal order, relying on the exclusive possession of one woman by one man.

However, Valentine’s view is itself an ideological construct that is based on prejudice. This is apparent in the following passage from *Some Do Not . . .*: ‘She had an automatic feeling that all manly men were lust-filled devils, desiring nothing better than to stride over battlefields, stabbing the wounded with long daggers in frenzies of sadism’ (p. 284). Valentine’s conception of the masculine is itself fantasised. The phallic allusion through the ‘long daggers’ is so blatant that it exposes the hackneyed character of Valentine’s vision. It seems that she fights a pre-established system of values only to replace it with another set of equally questionable constructs.

Besides, Valentine’s advocacy of ‘modernity’ is itself relative. The feminist principles she defends, with her obsession on a physical as well as an intellectual education, come straight out of eighteenth-century feminist texts such as those of Mary Wollstonecraft.¹⁰ Above all, the Valentine staged in *Last Post*, the final volume of *Parade’s End*, is considerably less uncompromising towards established order. In spite of her formerly triumphant rejection of the Seventh Commandment, Valentine is in fact far from comfortable in her role as the adulterous woman, since she conceives of it as

¹⁰ See, for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 257.

living ‘in open sin’ (p. 182). Furthermore, Valentine now considers herself an instrument in the preservation and continuity of patriarchal order. She is convinced that the child she is bearing is a boy, imagining him as a miniature replica of Christopher, with the same bulging blue eyes – ‘spinning pebble-blue eyes’ (p. 176); and she wants him to have the same name as his father, to perpetuate the Tietjens dynasty. Her obsession to see him born in an antique bed is particularly telling: ‘She passionately desired little Chrissie to be born in that bed with the thin fine posts, his blond head with the thin, fine hair on those pillows’ (p. 173). Interestingly, the same phrase, ‘thin, fine’, is used both to describe the ancient bed and the newborn child, which illustrates the fantasised continuity between present and past.

The discrepancy between Valentine’s attitude here and that seen in the first three volumes is also blatant. One has to work hard to find traces of the assertive, independent woman previously portrayed: Valentine is now shut up indoors, locking herself inside her room, and expecting bitterly of Tietjens that he provides for his family. In a stark contrast with her first appearance as a suffragette beating a dozen men to a run in the open, Valentine is now voluntarily a recluse and absorbs herself in materialistic concerns.

Sylvia, or the New Woman

Sylvia Tietjens’s relationship to conventions and to the dominant ideology is characterised by inconsistency and ambivalence. Sylvia resists any stable categorisation. On the one hand, and even though she outwardly professes to despise them, she can be associated to the Macmasters’ circle insofar as she also adopts a reactionary stance during the war. In her will to escape the topicality of war, she removes herself from the world,

in a convent, and focuses on pre-war literature: ‘she spends nearly all her time in retreat in a convent reading novels of before the war’ (*Some Do Not . . .*, p. 283). Her withdrawal from the world is thus both spatial and temporal. Yet her very handling of literature encapsulates her ambivalent relation to time. In contrast with this display of nostalgia, Sylvia confesses later to hating rereading novels:

almost always taking up with a man was like reading a book you had read when you had forgotten that you had read it. You had not been for ten minutes in any sort of intimacy with any man before you said: ‘But I’ve read all this before. . . .’ You knew the opening, you were already bored by the middle, and, especially, you knew the end. . . .¹¹

A tension is thus at work within Sylvia between conservatism and the fear of monotony. Sylvia’s yearning for newness corresponds to the newly-developed craze for disposable items, whose emergence coincides with the time of the story. Indeed, Sylvia is also portrayed as the embodiment of the New Woman. An avid consumer of fashion, she electrifies Tietjens’s eighteenth-century home. During the war, and in stark contrast with her convent retreat, Sylvia also becomes a major feature of fashion magazines, which reproduce photographs of her *ad infinitum*: through this, she turns her own image into a mass-produced, disposable object.¹²

Sylvia is thus split between two irreconcilable attitudes to modernity. Her son’s description of her at the end of *Last Post* captures this ambivalence: ‘His mother was splendid. Divinely beautiful; athletic as Atalanta or Betty Nuthall’ (p. 56). Betty Nuthall was a popular tennis player after the war, and one of the first sportswomen to be given heavy media coverage, standing therefore as an icon of the growing access of women to

¹¹ Ford Madox Ford, *No More Parades*, ed. Joseph Wiesenfarth (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2011), p. 128. All further references are to this edition.

¹² See, for instance, *Some Do Not . . .*, p. 183.

traditionally male fields. Sylvia thus combines both the figures of a mythical and intemporal athletic woman through Atalanta, and that of a woman anchored within the specific *mores* of the twenties.

The Case of Christopher Tietjens

Tietjens's stance requires a specific analysis; not only is his relationship to time deeply ambivalent, but it grows more and more complex as the narration unfolds. From the outset, Tietjens is consistently presented as a man of the past; in *Some Do Not . . .*, Valentine considers him a museum piece: 'I've never met a Cambridge Tory man before. I thought they were all in museums and you work them up again out of bones' (p. 169). Tietjens is indeed constantly shown as a fossil from another temporal strata that doesn't belong in the current times. More specifically, he is associated to eighteenth-century culture: 'Tietjens [was] an eighteenth-century figure of the Dr. Johnson type' (p. 188); like Johnson's multifarious influence on his times, which was intellectual, philosophical, political and moral, Tietjens's attachment to the eighteenth century is simultaneously intellectual (through, for instance, his corrections of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, an epitome of the Enlightenment)¹³ and political, as when he asserts, in *No More Parades*: 'I've no politics that did not disappear in the eighteenth century' (p. 235). The two negations, strengthened by the negative prefix in the verb 'disappear', is telling: Tietjens has no business in the twentieth century. In this, his relationship to time and to contemporary ideology is fundamentally different from that of the Macmasters and their circle: their own cult of tradition is a shallow kowtow to a fashionable construct. With the

¹³ See *Some Do Not . . .*, pp. 13–14.

Macmasters, ‘what is lost is the pastness of the past’;¹⁴ conversely, Tietjens treasures the past for what it is – irretrievably gone. As Philip Davis writes, in an illuminating article on Tietjens’s relation to the past:

For such figures, history is something lost – the lost potential of a race’s ancient thoughts – or something which, if retained, is retained only as hidden within the individual’s memory, in the latent mixed-up store of inherited things that seem nonetheless utterly and personally instinctive. Such half-buried retention means that, even so, there is the possibility of resonant things coming through to us, like half-recognised forward memories, demanding development, seeking re-incorporation and adaptation in the persons and times they find.¹⁵

Tietjens’s self-imposed duty is to commemorate the past’s lost virtues, to deliberately alienate himself from his contemporaries through a ‘loyal oppositional memory’;¹⁶ in this respect, he embodies what Davis calls the ‘saving remnant’.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Tietjens’s view of tradition is far from idealistic. He ‘despise[s] people who use [...] works of reference’ such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (*Some Do Not . . .*, p. 14); he also believes that the war is due to a surfeit of eighteenth-century values: ‘It’s the incidental degeneration of the heroic impulse: if the heroic impulse has too even a strain put on it the incidental degeneration gets the upper hand’ (p. 200). Tietjens is thus aware of the absurdity of his attachment to eighteenth-century values.¹⁸

Additionally, Tietjens’s viewpoint evolves throughout the first three novels. His tentative, questioning voice as regards traditional values, be it within inner speeches or to

¹⁴ Catherine Belsey, ‘Reading Cultural History’, in Tamsin Spargo (ed.), *Reading the Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), p. 106; much of Belsey’s analysis can be applied to the handling of tradition in *Parade’s End*.

¹⁵ Philip Davis, ‘The Saving Remnant’, in Dennis Brown and Jenny Plastow (eds), *Ford Madox Ford and Englishness*, *International Ford Madox Ford Studies* 5 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 20.

¹⁶ Davis, ‘The Saving Remnant’, p. 22.

¹⁷ For an in-depth analysis on this topic, I strongly suggest reading the whole of Philip Davis’s article.

¹⁸ For further discussion of *Parade’s End* and the eighteenth century, see Sara Haslam, ‘From Conversation to Humiliation: *Parade’s End* and the Eighteenth Century’, in Ashley Chantler and Rob Hawkes (eds), *Ford Madox Ford’s Parade’s End: The First World War, Culture, and Modernity*, *International Ford Madox Ford Studies* 13 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), pp. 37–51.

Valentine, may appear to constitute the main musical theme of the novel. Tietjens is constantly caught between the imperative to respect, and the impulse to reject, the codes issued from the past. This dilemma is of course encapsulated in the ‘Some do’/‘Some do not’ alternative that is made explicit in the title of the first volume. Tietjens belongs to ‘the sort that. . . *do not*’ (p. 344), who refuse to act on their impulses; yet the negative turn implies a lack, a void that demands to be filled for the character to lead a satisfying life.

However, when this lack seems to be fulfilled when Tietjens lives with Valentine in *Last Post*, Tietjens is anything but a triumphant hero. More shall be said on this in the final section of this chapter.

Narrative Technique

A major aspect of narrative technique in *Parade’s End* is of course related to literary Impressionism, which is tackled in Chapter 5 of this volume. Laura Colombino’s analysis of Ford’s Impressionist technique as a locus of tension between ‘objectivity and visionariness, perception and memory’ fits to some large degree the aesthetics at work in the tetralogy. Due to space constraints, I will not be able to deal with this notion at length here; I have argued previously that while *Parade’s End* may appear at first to be an exercise in Impressionism akin to *The Good Soldier*, it seems on closer analysis to negotiate a transition between Impressionism and a more markedly modernist aesthetics.¹⁹

¹⁹ Isabelle Brasme, ‘Between Impressionism and Modernism: *Some Do Not* . . . , a Poetics of the *Entre-deux*’, in Andrzej Gasiorek and Daniel Moore (eds), *Ford Madox Ford: Literary Networks and Cultural Transformations*, International Ford Madox Ford Studies 7 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 189–99.

To my mind, Ford's aesthetic project in *Parade's End* deepens and exceeds his Impressionist theory. As Max Saunders makes clear in his indispensable critical biography of Ford:

Part of the great achievement of *Parade's End* is to let order from confusion spring. Its palimpsest of plots and motives is always on the verge of incoherence; it perpetually appears about to repeat, to contradict itself, or to digress. Yet, as in the magisterial command of syntax, there is always an architectonic intelligence at work, holding together the glinting and jarring details, fusing clarities of detail into clarity of design.²⁰

Since literary Impressionism does not directly narrate a story, but renders its reverberation upon the characters' consciousnesses, an Impressionist narration is necessarily retrospective: the event has always already taken place and the focus is on its effect. Ford in *Parade's End* (as in *The Good Soldier*) deepens this process by centring most often not on a direct impression but on its memory – or on the impression caused by the re-emergence of a memory. Narration in *Parade's End* is thus inevitably vectorised towards the past. This is most striking at the beginning of parts or volumes, when the reader is put *in medias res* and has to painstakingly reconstruct the ellipses. A telling instance is the beginning of Part II of *Some Do Not . . .*, because the reader's unearthing of past events follows that of Tietjens, as he gradually recovers his memory after being shell-shocked.

However, just as a perfect reflection of the past on the part of the characters eventually transpires to be sterile, similarly, from a narrative point of view, the ideal of a satisfactory reconstitution of past impressions turns out to be futile. The whole aesthetic direction of the novels may thus appear as mirroring the characters' own journeys within the story. *Parade's End* is marked by an aesthetic eclecticism that matches the constant

²⁰ Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), II, pp. 220–21.

oscillation between past and present: Ford both salutes past influences and demonstrates an openness to more innovative techniques, via a collage of miscellaneous aesthetics. Narratively speaking, analepses find a counterpoint in the many prolepses scattered throughout the text.²¹ They involve two main motifs: that of the relationship between Christopher and Valentine, and that of the war. Soon after her appearance in *Some Do Not . . .*, Valentine asserts: ‘the right man for me [...] will be a married man’ (p. 106), which initiates a series of utterances heralding the upcoming denouement. Proleptic speeches are also supported by visual scenes; on the same day, Valentine and Tietjens are caught in a kissing-gate:

They were jammed in together: face to face, panting! An occasion on which sweethearts kiss in Kent: the gate being made in three, the inner flange of the V moving on hinges. It stops cattle getting through, but this great lout of a Yorkshireman didn’t know, trying to push through like a mad bullock! (p. 137)

The situation is proleptic on multiple levels; lexically, first, through the choice of ‘kissing-gate’, which heralds the forthcoming relationship between the characters. The ambivalence of ‘kissing-gate’, whose usual and trivial meaning refers to cattle but whose literal meaning is sentimental, mirrors the characters’ position, in a seemingly loving or even sexual posture: ‘face to face, panting’; yet we are also acutely aware of the grotesqueness of the situation, through Valentine’s likening of Tietjens to a ‘mad bullock’ (perhaps a periphrasis for ‘mad ox’ and a tongue-in-cheek hint at the author’s middle name?). This kaleidoscope of meanings prefigures the complex relationship between

²¹ Analepsis is the narrative device through which narration goes back in time, through a ‘flashback’ effect; prolepsis is the opposite device, heralding events that have not yet occurred at the time of the narration.

Tietjens and Valentine, which is until the end characterised by a mixture of attraction and derision.

The same is true of the many hints foreshadowing the war in the first part of *Some Do Not . . .* The narration is thus far from merely retrospective; the reader constantly needs to anticipate fragments of the narration as much as relate others back to past events. The narration is thus built as a network, with elements being interwoven in opposite directions. This corresponds to what Peter Nicholls considers as typical of ‘high modernism’: ‘This strand of modernism casts the self as the bearer of a troubled history and makes writing a medium in which different temporalities intersect’.²² David Lodge similarly associates this ‘cross-reference backwards and forwards across the chronological span of the action’ to modernist aesthetics.²³

This endless vibration between past and future, however, may eventually appear to petrify narrative time. We can find a metatextual metaphor for this when Tietjens and Valentine’s cart collides with Champion’s car at the end of part I of *Some Do Not . . .*: the shock between the horse-drawn vehicle, belonging to the past, and the car, an epitome of modernity, provokes a suspension of temporality: ‘The cart turned up, the horse emerged from the mist, head and shoulders, pawing. A stone sea-horse from the fountain of Versailles! Exactly that! Hanging in air for an eternity’ (p. 174). The horse, frozen into a statue, acts as a metatextual comment both on the characters’ predicament of being caught between two eras and on the narration’s constantly contradictory directions. Prolepses and analepses in *Parade’s End* are not mere stylistic devices: they act as the main structuring agent of the novels. Linearity is merely adumbrated and present only

²² Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 252.

²³ David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 46.

sporadically; it is constantly broken by these relentless leaps into the past or into the future. Narration in *Parade's End* is a collage of fragments.²⁴

A Deliberate Indecision

Yet these fragments never fully add up; though the time-shifts act as the only structural frame for the narration, they turn out to be unsatisfactory. Similarly, the various perspectives offered through Impressionism never meet up, so that we are left with an unbridgeable gap between the characters' various impressions.²⁵ This needs to be related to the kaleidoscope paradigm, explored in depth by Sara Haslam: 'A key Fordian modernist image is that of the kaleidoscope. "You carry away from [a train]", he writes in 1905, a "vague kaleidoscope picture – lights in clusters, the bare shoulder of women, white flannel on green turf in the sunlight, darkened drawing rooms"'.²⁶ In a conversation with Valentine in *Some Do Not* . . ., Tietjens comments on the innovative use of advertisements at the time to illustrate the absence of convergence between the characters' perspectives:

Do you know these soap advertisements signs that read differently from different angles? As you come up to them you read 'Monkey's Soap'; if you look back when you've passed it's 'Needs no Rinsing.' . . . You and I are standing at different angles and though we both look at the same thing we read different messages. Perhaps if we stood side by side we should see yet a third. (pp. 284–5)

²⁴ On the notion of collage in Ford, see Todd Bender, *Literary Impressionism in Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, and Charlotte Brontë* (New York : Garland, 1997), particularly chapter 2, 'Impressionist Verbal Collage'.

²⁵ This is discussed in detail in Brasme, 'Between Impressionism and Modernism'.

²⁶ Sara Haslam, *Fragmenting Modernism: Ford Madox Ford, the Novel and the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 7. Quotation from Ford is from *The Soul of London* (London: Alston Rivers, 1905), p. 120. Chapter 2 of *Fragmenting Modernism* is particularly relevant to the kaleidoscopic narrative mode in *Parade's End*.

Tietjens here describes a process of anamorphosis, according to which there is no single stable truth; ultimately, this very instability constitutes the only system at work in *Parade's End* – certainly paradoxical, but for this very reason, in keeping with the tetralogy's vibrations and instabilities. The process of anamorphosis, of which Holbein's *Ambassadors* is the best-known example,²⁷ is also relevant to Ford's aesthetic eclecticism – from the Renaissance to Cubism, from the Pre-Raphaelite²⁸ influence of his grandfather to cinematic montage.

In this respect, Ford's writing is certainly akin to high modernism, but it also appears to go beyond it. In high modernist works such as those by Joyce and Woolf, crisis is usually followed and redeemed by an ultimate epiphany of form coalescing with meaning. Patricia Waugh explains the importance of metatextuality in high modernism when she mentions:

the modernist concern with the mind as itself the basis of an aesthetic, ordered at a profound level and revealed to consciousness at isolated 'epiphanic' moments. At the end of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), for example, Lily Briscoe suddenly perceives a higher (or deeper) order in things as she watches the boat return. Her realisation is translated, directly and overtly, into aesthetic terms. Returning to her canvas, with intensity she draws the final line: 'It was finished. Yes she thought laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision'.²⁹

Conversely, *Parade's End* does not conclude on any satisfying epiphany, either of form or of meaning. *Last Post* appears as an ironic and burlesque counterpoint to the first three volumes, especially to the brilliant ending of *A Man Could Stand Up* –. From a

²⁷ See Ford Madox Ford, *Hans Holbein* (London: Duckworth; New York: Dutton, 1905).

²⁸ See Ford Madox Ford, *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London: Duckworth, 1907).

²⁹ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 23.

metatextual standpoint, the upcoming birth of Valentine and Tietjens's son, seemingly the result of a union between a modern woman and a man steeped in tradition, may appear an ideal symbol of reconciliation between the contrasting ideologies and aesthetics at work in the tetralogy. Yet Valentine is shown as everything but happy about her state; besides, as seen earlier, her stance as a modern woman is deeply questioned by her own choices and attitude in this volume. Another potential epiphany of meaning that is ultimately debunked is the image of Tietjens flying over the scene during most of this last volume. Max Saunders highlights this symbolism: 'Christopher is doing more than standing on a hill: he is flying over one having attained a god-like (or novelist-like) omniscient perspective'.³⁰ Yet Christopher is useless to the action because of this very position, as is decried by every other character. He is therefore a mere grotesque and impotent avatar of Christ or the novelist. In this last volume, any possibility of an aesthetic resolution is undermined by excess and irony.³¹ The redemption through form that we find in other canonical modernist works is here denied to us; something is reached that goes beyond – or runs deliberately parallel to – high modernism.

Conclusion

With *Parade's End*, Ford is searching for a way to face and articulate the crisis of meaning inherent in the First World War. Simultaneously, he invites the reader to come to terms with the loss of our usual horizon of expectation and of an omniscient, objective narration; the only way to make sense of chaos in *Parade's End*, both on the characters' and on the

³⁰ Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, II, p. 252.

³¹ For more on the ways in which *Last Post* derides and debunks the first three volumes, see Isabelle Brasme, "'A caricature of his own voice': Ford and Self-Editing in *Parade's End*", in Jason Harding (ed.), *Ford Madox Ford, Modernist Magazines and Editing*, International Ford Madox Ford Studies 9 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 243–52.

reader's part, is a patient and hopeful reconstitution of fragments, while remaining forever aware that these will never fully make sense along a linear, stable organisation.

What ultimately differentiates *Parade's End* from a work of high modernism is a stance of humility on the part of Ford. Far from pretending to reach an epiphany, the text constantly defuses any possibility of a stable and satisfying form. At the end of a reading process that endlessly adumbrates potential answers, yet never fully unveils them, it behoves the reader to embrace the tensions of the text and to relinquish the temptation of flattening out the inconsistencies. The promise contained in the reading of *Parade's End* never falls short, since it is never exhausted.