The Decline of the English Country Gentleman: Nostalgia in Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End*

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Introduction

As John Osborne wrote in his play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), “The old Edwardian brigade do make their brief little world look pretty tempting. . . . Always the same picture: high summer, the long days in the sun, slim volumes of verse, crisp linen, the smell of starch” (17). However, Osborne also tempers this statement with skepticism, adding: “What a romantic picture. Phoney too, of course. It must have rained sometimes”. For modern readers, the temptation of the past is a familiar sentiment. It seems to embody a simpler world, which one could navigate according to clear signs, as opposed to what feels like the constantly changing parameters of our modern world. Even though the Edwardians have all passed away by now, the Edwardian era and the years up until World War I still exercise great attraction upon the imaginations of the various generations of this age. The sheer amount of television series and movies (Atonement and Downton Abbey to name a few) devoted to this period, as well as its subsequent decline, are a testament to that fact. It was in fact Sir Tom Stoppard’s television adaptation of Ford Madox Ford’s tetralogy *Parade’s End* which first led me to reflect upon the nature of nostalgia and how it appeared in various guises in Ford Madox Ford’s work. Christopher Tietjens, the protagonist of *Parade’s End*, seemed to me a character who was living in the past amidst very turbulent historical events and I felt it would be interesting to analyze his reaction to cultural and social change. Christopher’s sense of alienation in his own society seems to appeal so much to modern audiences because it reflects the way people have to cope with the rapid changes of society today: in *Parade’s End* the first world war altered many aspects of its characters’ lives, and in the twenty-first century the progress of technology (the advent of the computer to name one example) has changed the fabric of society irreversibly. Christopher looks towards the
past in order to make sense of his present, but it is questionable whether this helps him achieve a better understanding of his situation. At the same time he is offset by two very modern female characters in the novel: his wife, Sylvia Tietjens and his love interest, Valentine Wannop. He is furthermore forced to deal with the horrors of the first industrial war, World War I. And at the same time, he needs to come to terms with the decline of his own social class, the landed gentry, who were dealt a final blow after the war with the Fourth Reform Act in 1918 (which included all men and certain women in the vote and ensured that political power was distributed evenly among the classes). The way the book portrays the encroaching modernity of the early twentieth-century, while taking as main character a man entrenched in the past (Tietjens calls himself a product of the “eighteenth century”) sparked my interest, and I felt that Ford’s work was a significant reflection on the nature of nostalgia. The psychologies of the characters of Parade’s End are explored in detail by Ford and therefore it seemed that an analysis of the novel could provide an insight on the human condition of nostalgia, as well as the possibility of gaining a new understanding of Parade’s End by studying it from the angle of nostalgia. I decided to focus on the following questions: how do the characters of Parade’s End experience nostalgia? What forms does nostalgia take in the novel? What is Ford’s view of nostalgia, and how does it fit into his own overarching conceptions of politics and history? Does he present these personal views in his writing?

In the studies done on Ford, there seem to be two main schools of thought. The first interprets Parade’s End as Ford’s critique upon English society, by using Tietjens as an observer who embodies Ford’s values. The Last Post is also interpreted as a celebration of the pastoral, which indicates a confirmation and renewal of the feudalism that Tietjens upholds. The second stream of thought that can be discerned in the scholarship on Parade’s
End acknowledges that while Ford does sympathize with the views Tietjens takes, he also criticizes these values and demonstrates that Tietjens is in need of adapting his ideals (Gasiorek, “Politics of Cultural Nostalgia” 54). I originally expected Parade’s End to be an expression of the author’s own nostalgia with Tietjens as a sort of spokesperson for Ford’s own ideals. Ford did in fact make several statements during his life that indicated his predilection for an older England. In his dedicatory letter to Stella Bowen (his mistress at the time) at the start of his novel, The Good Soldier, he likened himself to a “great auk” (289), feeling that his political and cultural views were extinct in the time he lived in, much like the species of the great auk itself. But Parade’s End paints a much more ambiguous picture. Although Tietjens himself is a determined eighteenth-century Tory man, other characters, such as Valentine Wannop who fights for women’s rights, show very progressive attitudes in the novel. Moreover, Tietjens’s outdated code of honour is frequently undermined, be it by other characters in the novel or by the turn of events, thus making him seem at times ridiculous and absurd. The changes brought about by the war are also depicted ambiguously, as the war seems to be a fundamental turning-point on occasion and at other moments just a distraction in the continuation of everyday life. I argue that although Ford sympathizes with a nostalgic point of view, he also undermines this approach through the use of irony, thereby creating a tension in the way the past is envisaged in the novel.

In this dissertation, I will attempt to illustrate the various manifestations of nostalgia in Parade’s End, as well as Ford’s own intentions for the way his novel connected with the past. The first chapter will explain the theoretical background of the concept of nostalgia, using Svetlana Boym’s work, The Future of Nostalgia (2001), as its critical foundation. I will expand upon the evolution of the definition of nostalgia and the possible causes of its shift in meaning, as well as some of the specific forms it has taken in literature and culture in
general over the years (I distinguish rural nostalgia from twentieth-century nostalgia in particular). In Chapter Two, I will discuss the character of Christopher Tietjens as a nostalgic figure, expanding upon his propensity for the eighteenth century, his personal conception of Toryism and the importance he attaches to his code of honour. In the third chapter, I will treat nostalgia in relation to the female characters of the novel and how Ford regarded the place of women in contemporary English society. This chapter will take into account the traditional gender roles that the female protagonists conform to as well as defy. The focus of Chapter Four will be the impact of World War I and its aftermath upon the characters of the novel. It deals with Christopher’s experiences at the front, as well as his subsequent memory loss and post-traumatic stress disorder. The broader social consequences of World War I are also discussed: the interwar period saw an influx of Americans in the English countryside, and the results of a number of invasive changes that were put into motion long before the war are illustrated as well. Finally, Chapter Five examines Ford’s own views upon the shifting social order in the early twentieth century, and to what extent he presents these views in Parade’s End. The chapter analyzes Ford’s overall nostalgic tone in contrast with his modernist and innovative style of writing, as well as his use of irony in portraying the character of Tietjens.
1. The Nature and Origins of the Nostalgic Phenomenon

1.1. The Historical Background of the Concept of Nostalgia:

Before analyzing *Parade’s End*, it seems necessary to examine the theoretical background of nostalgia as a concept. In her book, *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Svetlana Boym explains how the term ‘nostalgia’ was first used by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688 to describe a newly discovered disease that displaced persons suffered from; in short, the longing (Gr. *algia*) for home (Gr. *nostos*), a feeling which is in essence similar to what we would call ‘homesickness’ today. What is interesting and perhaps unexpected is that nostalgia was a condition first identified and treated by the medical world; not by the poets of that time. It was considered to be a disease of the mind that afflicted the body, and doctors tried curing it at first by sending their patients back to the source of their nostalgic yearning. From the eighteenth century onwards, nostalgia was considered to be less treatable. It was perceived as a general *mal-du-siècle*, and as such belonged more to the realm of culture than that of the medical world. According to Boym, this shift in perception was implicitly linked to changing notions of time. The progress-driven Industrial Age in particular altered the way European societies envisioned the concept of time. Dickinson and Erben compare pre-industrial societies in which time is still cyclical and repetitive (thereby containing the possibility of a return to the past), to industrial societies “with their continual social change, future orientation, tendency to secularization, and reactive systems of planning” (224), in which time is markedly linear and in which the past therefore appears completely inaccessible. The rapidity with which industrial societies have developed themselves also plays a role in why its citizens experience the feeling that they have lost
their past, but it is especially the linear perception of time which makes the past seem wholly cut off.

This leads us closer to a modern definition of nostalgia. In contrast to what nostalgia was believed to be before the industrial revolution, the modern-day definition of nostalgia shows evidence of a shift, as well as an expansion, in meaning. Nostalgia went from being understood as a unique medical condition to being a general feeling experienced by the inhabitants of the nineteenth century, and while nostalgia before the industrial revolution was specifically linked to a place, its definition expanded to include time as well, or even objects and feelings. The concept of nostalgia also experienced a shift in meaning as the longed-for locus also came to be considered as irretrievable as a result of the industrial, linear perception of time. As soon as something is experienced, it already becomes a memory one can never return to, and therefore nostalgia is a constant longing for a moment that will always remain lost. Boym calls it a “mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; […] a secular expression of a spiritual longing” (8), considering it the expression of a spiritual and moral loss experienced by the inhabitants of an industrial society. By the nineteenth century in any case, the feeling of nostalgia was no longer explored by doctors but by poets and philosophers. Like the nostalgic, the artistic community occupies a place in society where they are set apart from the great majority of the population (by their own volition or otherwise). The nostalgic also experiences a similar distance from their own community as they feel a more potent connection with whichever inaccessible locus they long to return to, and like the poets and writers, they are thus able to observe their own society more clearly. Nostalgia therefore became somewhat of a trademark of the Romantics, who dominated the literary and artistic circles of the time. Boym states that the “symptom of sickness came to
be regarded as a sign of sensibility or an expression of new patriotic feeling. The epidemic of nostalgia was no longer to be cured but to be spread as widely as possible.” (11). Nostalgia was not an illness any longer, but an outpouring of patriotic sentiment for one’s country, a feeling especially relevant with so many European countries that were forming at that point in time. Creating a strong feeling of national unity was a priority for these new countries, so nostalgia was not only an experience specific to poets and writers but was also sanctioned by the government, which used the phenomenon with a clear political agenda. The first museums and monuments were created, in order to collect and preserve the past, and in England movements such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) were founded to protect the country’s heritage. There was on the one hand a nostalgia that pervaded the arts and on the other hand a nation-wide, political nostalgia, both of which mutually influenced one another.

1.2. Rural Nostalgia:

Another aspect of nostalgia that has appeared frequently since the industrialization of Europe is rural nostalgia. The Industrial Age not only changed processes of production; it also changed the entirety of social structure. From having primarily rural populations, Europe went to a mostly urban population in roughly forty years. Cities grew rapidly, and were populated by thousands of factory workers who were no longer able to scrape by a living in the countryside. Consequently, the countryside and nature as a whole were seen as a respite from the chaos and filth of the city. The old rural way of life became an ideal that was no longer accessible in such an urban landscape, and as such, became idealized and desired. However, rural nostalgia is not specific to the Industrial Age. There have been variants of it throughout the history of literature, and although the term ‘nostalgia’ was only
established in the seventeenth century, there have been historical periods where the feeling of rural nostalgia was very prominent in the contemporary literary and artistic currents. Especially notable is the literary form of the pastoral which dates back to Theocritus, who wrote his bucolic poetry in the Hellenistic period. Brian Short writes in the *Handbook of Rural Studies* (2006) that:

In all these archaic and classical writers the concept of a blissful Golden Age of ease and comfort, with its spontaneous crops and docile animals, was used to make a contrast with the writers’ contemporary environments in which hard work and agricultural knowledge was essential to maintain that fertility of soil that was once divinely given (Glacken, 1967: 132). The concept of antithesis was an important one. Taking the concept one stage further, Varro (116-29 BC) was also to write in his *De Re Rustica*, ‘Divina natura dedit agros, ars humana ædificavit urbes’ (‘Divine nature gave the fields, human art built the cities’), thereby underlining the contrast even in his contemporary view, between town and country, or between the graces of primitivism and the degeneracy of urban life. (134)

In the history of Western literature, the tradition of the rural idyll has often been contrasted with the city, usually seen as an artificial creation and the source of human vice. In the pastorals of ancient literature the countryside even takes on a higher moral dimension as Short affirms, and nature was regarded as a source of moral purity to which one should strive, as opposed to the city, where leisure and vain pursuits dominated the interests of its inhabitants. Country folk were regarded as more in touch with nature (and therefore with the divinities that created the land) as well as embodying community values and a healthier way of life. There have been notable crisis points throughout history in which the appeal of
the countryside becomes a powerful force. As Short elucidates, “The concept of the rural idyll yields a great yet ambiguous power” (144), and he emphasizes the nostalgic appeal that the idea of a rural society has: it stands for community in natural surroundings, and the concepts of either nature or community are incredibly seductive in times of difficulty for an urbanized country. The immense appeal of this other, idealized way of life can therefore be used to great effect in politics, the media or in any sort of commercial mindset; be it simply by advertising the countryside as a tourist destination or by selling artisanal products and so on. The nineteenth century is a good example of how the countryside was gradually commodified; the elite classes, who had the means to reside in the countryside for purely recreational purposes came to see it more as a touristic destination than as an actual place to live and work; a “place of leisure rather than as working nature, places of consumption, not production” (DuPuis, 127). Interestingly enough, rural nostalgia implicates in its definition of nostalgia a focus specifically on place again. It is outside of the city, by returning to nature, where the nostalgic can be cured of the ills of urban life. In England particularly, the countryside became for the elite the place that most embodied ‘Englishness’, an ambiguous concept that had different meanings for different people. As Peter Mandler affirms, the countryside was “nostalgic, deferential and rural, 'Englishness' identified the squirearchical village of Southern or 'Deep' England as the template on which the national character had been formed and thus the ideal towards which it must inevitably return” (155). The unifying national ideals that the Romantics tried to find in the Middle Ages and in old folk tales became situated in a specific place, namely that of the English countryside. As Martin Wiener explains, the ‘English way of life’ meant a stable, intimate community set in a rural landscape; the English mindset was inherently conservative and valued its heritage and the traditions of the past. The English countryside was the antithesis to what English
industrialism had unleashed: “the English genius, [the countryside] declared, was (despite appearances) not economic or technical, but social and spiritual; it did not lie in inventing, producing, or selling, but in preserving, harmonizing, and moralizing” (6). England was considered at its most ‘English’ in the countryside, despite the fact that the majority of the population had never known a rural life. This again underlines the fundamentally cerebral condition of nostalgia; the longed for object or situation need not be for a time or place that the nostalgic is familiar with.

Nostalgia, as we have seen, is a complex and nuanced phenomenon. It seems that the locus of nostalgia (even if based on an actual experienced past) is highly idealized and in reality would no longer correspond to the nostalgic interpretation it has received. In any case, it is a situation the nostalgic can never return to, for better or for worse. It can take the form of a longing for a rural past, as in the case of the English upper classes of the late nineteenth century, or it can be the longing for a particular period or place, or even an object or a feeling. Nostalgia can also be purely personal, or it can take on a political role, as has been evidenced in many conservative policies. Rural nostalgia, as well as private and public nostalgia are present in Ford Madox Ford’s Parade’s End and this paper will attempt to explore these nuances.
2. Christopher Tietjens as a Nostalgic Figure

Christopher Tietjens is the highly intelligent protagonist of Parade’s End. He is a member of the upper classes, and comes from a wealthy landowning family who own Groby Estate, in Yorkshire. Out of all the characters in Parade’s End, Christopher most embodies the nostalgic tone that the novel takes, due to the fact that he is the main character and most of the story focuses on him. From his unique brand of Toryism to his predilection for the eighteenth century, Christopher is an anomaly among his peers and an anachronous character in the time he lives in. He is a nostalgic character, as evidenced by the way he often contemplates his love for rural England and the way he determinedly upholds his somewhat outdated code of honour. He feels a much deeper connection to the eighteenth century than to his own age, and it is perhaps this in particular which defines him as a nostalgic. The fact that he feels out of place in his own century also places him in the role of an observer; Christopher, with his eighteenth-century mindset, is able to see more clearly the flaws of his own society and thereby criticize them.

2.1. The Significance of the Eighteenth Century for Tietjens:

An aspect that is repeatedly underlined in the book then is the importance of the eighteenth century for Tietjens. He seems to uphold it as a century in which England was still great, on a political level as well as a social and cultural level. For him, the culture of his own age is one of degeneracy; the literary production is negligible, the old traditions are no longer upheld, and the quality of moral integrity found in the smaller, pre-industrial society of the eighteenth century no longer exists. According to Tietjens “there has been nothing worth reading written in England since the eighteenth century except by a woman. . .” (Parade’s End, 19); this woman is of course none other than Mrs. Wannop, the mother of
Valentine Wannop, his love interest in the tetralogy. In the book Christopher also has the remarkable talent of distinguishing the most valuable pieces of furniture, and this expertise also specifically focuses on the eighteenth century (Tietjens has an eye for Chippendale-style furniture). Tietjens in fact forbids Marie-Léonie, the mistress of his brother Mark, to keep her French Second Empire pieces outside of her own room in the cottage in *The Last Post*. Tietjens’s French is also so outdated that Marie-Léonie says he must have learned it at “the Théâtre Français whilst they still played *Ruy Blas*.” (*Parade’s End*, 701). He is moreover an avid equestrian, and is depicted several times with horses in the book, though he is never seen driving a car. Tietjens is completely culturally immersed in the eighteenth century, and can be said to reject the cultural products of his own age. Even more so than the culture of his age, Tietjens abhors its entire social structure. This is mostly linked to the shifts in class boundaries brought about by the Industrial revolution; the old families are no longer respected and no longer hold a self-evident position in society. Furthermore, the landowning class is no longer able to make a profit on their properties (compared to the industry in the cities). Tietjens is part of a society which increasingly features and reveres the figure of the self-made man. Instead of the old feudalistic stability of the past (and of the eighteenth century), there is a growing social mobility, which according to Tietjens undermines the sense of obligation and stability in the relationship between the upper classes and the lower classes. The great culminating point is of course World War I; more than any other occurrence in the twentieth century, it smashed apart any preconceptions of a clearly defined worldview and ensured that the eighteenth-century way of life would be irretrievable forever.

What is interesting about Ford’s depiction of Tietjens is that although Tietjens is a nostalgic, he also seems aware of the fact that his desired for locus – the great English
tradition of the eighteenth-century that he is so fond of – is built on nothing more than sentiment and idle fabrications. Some of the most pastoral passages in Parade’s End have a very marked ironic tone underlying the descriptions. This is, for instance, noticeable in the passage when Christopher and Valentine walk back to the Wannop’s home after having breakfast with the Duchemins: “Each knew the names of birds that piped and grasses that bowed: chaffinch, greenfinch, yellow-ammer (not, my dear, hammer! ammer from the Middle High German for ‘finch’), garden warbler, Dartford warbler, pied-wagtail, known as ‘dishwasher’. (These charming local dialect names.)” (Parade’s End, 105). That is only part of the description, which continues in the same vein as the narrator gives a sort of commentary that pokes fun at the way people tend to characterize the quaintness of the countryside. The narrator also comments on the pronunciation of the words, which indicates that he is addressing someone who is not familiar with the local dialect; presumably he is speaking to a tourist or someone who is not from that region. This passage is mirrored later on when Christopher is speaking to Valentine at the War Office. When Valentine questions Christopher’s love for his country, he contradicts her:

I love every inch of its fields and every plant in the hedgerows: comfrey, mullein, paigles, long red purples, that liberal shepherds give a grosser name . . . and all the rest of the rubbish – you remember the field between the Duchemins and your mother’s – and we have always been boodlers and robbers and reivers and pirates and cattle thieves, and so we’ve built up the great tradition that we love. . . .

(Parade’s End, 238)

Tietjens knows that the great tradition he loves is not worth the value he places upon it; it is only because of his tendency to romanticize the past, to feel nostalgic about it, that it seems
so much more glorious than the present. He loves it despite knowing it is all just “rubbish”. There is idealization on his part, but also recognition that he romanticizes the past. Christopher is most definitely an eighteenth-century man, but he acknowledges that the way of life and the values of that time are inaccessible, and might in fact have never existed at all. He is self-consciously nostalgic, being at the same time aware of the shortcomings of the historical England he idealizes, but still upholding it as a model for society to follow.

2.2. Tietjens the Tory:

As well as preferring the culture of the eighteenth century, Tietjens also has more in common with the politics of that time. He is a character with very specific political views, as Valentine remarks during one of their first conversations: “it’s the way your mind works. . . . It picks up useless facts as silver after you’ve polished it picks up sulphur vapour; and tarnishes! It arranges the useless facts in obsolescent patterns and makes Toryism out of them. . . . 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” (Parade’s End, 135). Christopher Tietjens is a “Tory man”, but his political beliefs have little to do with the Tory party of the twentieth century. As Valentine says, his Toryism is so old-fashioned that it is already obsolete and therefore inapplicable to the current age. Tietjens’ ideal society is in fact based on a form of feudalism, in which the community is organized with a clear hierarchy, led by a benevolent landowner who oversees and protects the livelihoods of his subjects. Andrzej Gasiorek identifies Tietjens’s particular political views as those of “Radical Toryism”. He asserts that “Tory Radicals defended paternalism; upheld landed society; tried to protect the poor; urged the moral economy of the ‘just price’; supported local self-government and small, hierarchically run, communities.” (“The Politics of Cultural Nostalgia”, 57). The fact that Tory
Radicals upheld these views in a time where they were no longer applicable to society is an instance where nostalgia becomes public and politicized. The politics of Christopher Tietjens take similar views, as illustrated further on.

There is an incident at the beginning of *Some Do Not.* . . . where Tietjens and Macmaster encounter a Liberal Cabinet Minister, Mr. Waterhouse, upon a golfing course. An enraged Tietjens decides to have a word with him about some statistics he was forced to fake for Mr. Waterhouse's department in order to pass his Labour Finance Act. Tietjens morally objects to faking the statistics, but is also very much opposed to the bill, which he feels is unsuited to the nature of the English working class. They end up having dinner however, and reconcile their political differences by agreeing on a few principles designed to protect the working class from the exploitative nature of industrialism: “over their port they agreed on two fundamental legislative ideals: every working man to have a minimum of four hundred a year and every beastly manufacturer who wanted to pay less to be hung. That, it appeared, was the High Toryism of Tietjens as it was the extreme Radicalism of the extreme Left of the Left.” (*Parade’s End*, 79). Tietjens feels the poor should be protected by their aristocratic superiors, and thus be guaranteed a humane standard of life (by giving every worker a minimum wage and so on); views which constitute the base of his Toryism. Interestingly enough, Tietjens’s Toryism is also compared to socialism in this passage, a link in fact made by many other characters in the book as well. Sylvia, Tietjens’ wife, even tells General Campion at one point that Christopher is a socialist, explaining it by saying that Christopher is “heir to one of the biggest fortunes in England, for a commoner, and he refuses to touch a penny” (*Parade’s End*, 411). Christopher refuses to touch his inheritance as a result of his principles; his brother and father believe rumours against him without verifying them, and as a consequence he refuses to take their money. This decision is
naturally perceived to be very odd among his peers, but unlike Sylvia’s interpretation of the situation, it is not due to any socialistic beliefs on Christopher’s part but due to his moral and ethical system. However, there are certain points on which Socialism and Tietjens’s form of Toryism overlap, and so Sylvia might be forgiven for her misconception. Gasiorek discusses the similarity between Socialism and Tietjens’s Radical Toryism. Just like Socialism, Radical Toryism was hostile to the unfair distribution of wealth and to the commercial mindset that was born along with the Industrial revolution. It was “humanitarian, anti-capitalist, anti-centralist, and anti-bourgeois; hostile to industrialism and the emerging middle class alike” (“The Politics of Cultural Nostalgia”, 57). The difference with socialism of course, lies in the fact that Radical Toryism was still very much for a separation of the classes. Tietjens is not a socialist, despite the fact that both political views resemble each other in certain respects. Although the aristocratic landowners considered themselves the “natural allies” of the working class, the difference with socialism lay in the continuation of the separation of the classes. Radical Toryism also attempted to reconstruct a social structure that had its origins in the feudal system, which was therefore a political stance defined by its nostalgia, as opposed to Socialism, which was a modern political party that looked primarily to the future and therefore rejected the past. In Parade’s End, Tietjens also believes that England can only be saved if it is in the responsible hands of the morally elevated upper classes, and he advocates a stable, hierarchically-defined society. In one significant passage, Tietjens muses playfully about what he imagines heaven to be; a visualization that seems to represent his ideal society.

the Almighty as, on a colossal scale, a great English Landowner, benevolently awful, a colossal duke who never left his study and was thus invisible, but knowing all about the estate down to the last hind at the home farm and the last oak; Christ, an almost
too benevolent Land-Steward, son of the Owner, knowing all about the estate down
to the last child at the porter’s lodge, apt to be got round by the more detrimental
_tenants; the Third Person of the Trinity, the spirit of the estate, the Game as it were,
as distinct from the players of the game; the atmosphere of the estate, that of the
interior of Winchester Cathedral just after a Handel anthem has been finished, a
perpetual Sunday, with, probably, a little cricket for the young men. Like Yorkshire of
a Saturday afternoon; if you looked down on the whole broad county you would not
see a single village green without its white flannels. That was why Yorkshire always
leads the averages. . . . Probably by the time you got to heaven you would be so worn
out by work on this planet that you would accept the English Sunday, for ever, with
extreme relief! (Parade’s End, 365)

It is noteworthy that this version of heaven is also set on a country estate; Tietjens’s ideal
society is not an urban society but a rural one. It seems markedly pre-industrial (as indeed,
his political views seem to be applicable only to a pre-industrial society) because the
community is still feudal and agrarian. God is the landowner himself, taking the position of
absolute power tempered with benevolence, and his faithful deputies include Christ and the
Third Person of the Trinity, who handle directly with humanity (human souls, it seems, take
the position of the tenants on the estate, emphasizing the natural divide that Tietjens
envisions between the upper classes and their subordinates). Tietjens also gives the Third
Person of the Trinity the role of the “Game” on the estate as opposed to the “players of the
game”. This is a recurring metaphor in the book, and Tietjens also uses it in reference to
World War I and the soldiers that take part in it. He particularly objects to the way that the
war (unique in the way that it is the first industrialized war Europe has ever experienced)
and the leaders of the war prioritize the “Game” above its players; the soldiers are treated
as simple cogs in a giant piece of machinery whose sole purpose is that of obtaining victory. Tietjens observes this phenomenon in contemporary society, and laments the fact that the players are barely given any importance. To him, the players should be the focal point of any government or society. However, Tietjens is also aware that his political stance is old-fashioned. Immediately after imagining his utopian Tory fantasy of heaven he thinks to himself,

> It was probably done with. Along with cricket. There would be no more parades of that sort. Probably they would play some beastly yelping game. . . . Like baseball or Association football. . . . And heaven? . . . Oh, it would be a revival meeting on a Welsh hillside. Or Chatauqua, wherever that was. . . . And God? A Real Estate Agent, with Marxist views. . . . He hoped to be out of it before the cessation of hostilities, in which case he might be just in time for the last train to the old heaven. . . . *(Parade’s End, 366)*

Tietjens’s version of heaven is no longer accessible, but he hopes to reach it just before the war ends (he hopes, in fact, to die in the war), ending with it the last remains of the old Edwardian social order. In predicting what the new heaven looks like he already anticipates the influx of Americans to England, represented by the replacement of cricket with baseball. God is compared to a Real Estate Agent with no attention for each individual under his care, much like how Tietjens feels the government of his time functions. The only way the old heaven is still kept alive is by a small group of nostalgic conservatives much like Tietjens, who steadfastly hold onto their outdated ideals, pictured as “a revival meeting on a Welsh hillside”.


The Importance of a Gentleman’s Honour:

It is clear that Tietjens is aware that his own society falls short of his personal ideals, and that he even expects these shortcomings. He sets for himself standards that he believes should be self-evident for every gentleman; which is none other than the notion that he calls “parade”. In short, “parade” is the proper behaviour a gentleman must assume in public; it implies the importance of doing every action properly or according to convention. Tietjens lives by a very strict code of honour which ends up influencing most of his actions in the book, but which also leads him to his downfall. In one passage, he explains this adherence to his principles as a way of reaching sainthood: “His private ambition had always been for saintliness: he must be able to touch pitch and not be defiled. […] And his desire was to be a saint of the Anglican variety . . . as his mother had been, without convent, ritual, vows, or miracles to be performed by your relics!” (*Parade’s End*, 187). As the passage suggests, it is important for Tietjens to be able to live in the corrupt society of the twentieth century and come away undefiled by it. He tries to accomplish this by living according to his principles and by doing the ‘proper’ or ‘gentlemanly’ thing, but in doing so he often creates difficulties for himself. What he himself considers ‘proper’ is not necessarily what the characters surrounding him think of as the right course of action; Tietjens’s code of honour is very specific to himself.

One of the most obvious examples of Christopher’s unyielding adherence to his code of honour is how he reacts when his wife leaves him to go off with one of her admirers, Potty Perowne. When he receives the news that Sylvia has left him, Christopher takes no action and refuses to divorce her despite the urgings of his friend Macmaster. Moreover, when Sylvia writes to Tietjens asking him to take her back, he does so without question. He
feels that only a "blackguard" would divorce a woman and subject her to such scandal. He even forgives Sylvia for the possibility that her child might not be his own, but Gerald Drake’s, a man who was Sylvia’s lover at the time of her marriage to Tietjens. He states: “I have always held that a woman who has been let down by one man has the right – has the duty for the sake of her child – to let down a man. It becomes woman against man: against one man. I happened to be that one man: it was the will of God.” (Parade’s End, 174). By acting in a way that he believes to be virtuous and merciful, he causes both his own deep unhappiness, as well as Sylvia’s. Sylvia cannot understand why Christopher won’t reproach her and why he continues to ignore her for most of their marriage. As a result she torments Christopher in every possible way, performing actions that are mostly designed to get Christopher’s attention. As Mark Tietjens reflects in The Last Post, “He, Mark, was perfectly ready to concede that even [Sylvia’s] infidelities, notorious as they had been, might have been merely ways of calling his unfortunate brother’s attention back to her – of keeping herself in his mind. After the marriage Christopher, finding out that he had been a mere catspaw, probably treated her pretty coldly or ignored her – maritally. . . .” (Parade’s End, 731). While Sylvia often appears deliberately malicious, certain passages in the book also show her suffering. After all, although Christopher has forgiven her all her wrongdoings, he refuses to engage in physical contact with her for the remainder of their marriage. When discussing their marriage one morning while Christopher is on leave from the war, Sylvia expresses her frustration with him:

But in the name of the Almighty, how could any woman live beside you . . . and be for ever forgiven? Or no: not forgiven; ignored! . . . Well, be proud when you die because of your honour. But, God, you be humble about . . . your errors in judgement. You know what it is to ride a horse for miles with too tight a curb-chain and its tongue cut
almost in half. . . . You remember the groom your father had who had the trick of
turning the hunters out like that. . . . And you horse-whipped him, and you’ve told me
you’ve almost cried ever so often afterwards for thinking of that old mare’s mouth. . .
. Well! Think of this mare’s mouth sometimes! You’ve ridden me like that for seven
years. . . . (Parade’s End, 173)

She describes her suffering by relating it to that of a horse in Groby estate (Sylvia knows
Tietjens well enough to recognize that his empathy is best reached at the thought of a horse
in pain; Tietjens and Sylvia are both excellent equestrians). Her own pain is caused by the
fact that instead of getting angry at her for her affair, or by just sharing his emotions with
her, Christopher completely closes himself off from her and ignores her. She criticizes him,
saying that he has indeed been honourable without a fault, but that it has led him to make
“errors in judgement”. Christopher’s code of conduct, in other words, has blinded him from
understanding Sylvia’s thoughts and emotions and his actions only serve to drive them
further apart.

Another example of Christopher attempting to live according to his values is when he
refuses to accept the income from Groby that is his due. In Some Do Not . . . various rumours
abound about how Christopher has exceeded his income (a rumour caused unknowingly by
Sylvia, as a banker friend of hers bounced two of Christopher’s cheques in an effort to win
her affections) and that he is having an affair with Valentine, the daughter of his father’s
oldest friend. Ruggles, who is the roommate of Christopher’s brother, Mark Tietjens, tells
Mark about the rumours and Mark tells Christopher’s father. The rumours are of course
untrue, but as Christopher’s brother and his father believe them without even asking
Christopher for verification, he finds it impossible to forgive them. The feud leads to
Christopher refusing his share of the Groby fortune, but this action has all kinds of unpleasant consequences for him. Most importantly, there is the fact that after the war Christopher is completely bankrupt, and when he decides to set up house with Valentine he is forced to work in the furniture dealing business. Not only is this not as profitable as he supposed it would be, it also puts him beneath his station, as a gentleman is not supposed to work for his income. As Christopher says at one point in the book, “Gentlemen don’t earn money. Gentlemen, as a matter of fact, don’t do anything. They exist. Perfuming the air like Madonna lilies. Money comes into them as air through petals and foliage. Thus the world is made better and brighter. And, of course, thus political life can be kept clean! . . .” (Parade’s End, 589). Gentleman receive money without having to work for it, which makes them – in Christopher’s eyes – better suited for politics as they are disinterested in material gain. However, this changes once he decides to live with Valentine, and the need to earn money signifies his moral degeneration as well. His household with Valentine is marked by poverty, and the end of the book is tinged with despair as she exclaims “‘How are we to live? How are we ever to live?’” (Parade’s End, 835). It is the great irony of Parade’s End that Christopher Tietjens, with his ever honourable intentions, manages only to make life worse for himself every time he acts according to his principles. His code of honour, though admirable, fails him time and again and this makes its value questionable. His principles obviously do not apply to the time in which Christopher lives, and in order to ‘survive’ his century he must either adapt himself, meaning he should discard his honour, or go into exile: although his rural lifestyle in The Last Post suggests that Christopher has reduced his circumstances, it seems he has chosen to go into exile rather than completely losing his honour in accepting the Groby money.
Another explanation for why Tietjens so conscientiously follows his principles is his public school education. In *No More Parades* Christopher and General Campion discuss why he is to be sent to the front, and what has led to himself getting into that situation in the first place. Christopher blames it on his education, saying that he has never been able to grow out of it.

Ruggles told my father what he did because it is not a good thing to belong to the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries in the twentieth. Or really, because it is not good to have taken one’s public school’s ethical system seriously. I am really, sir, the English public schoolboy. That’s an eighteenth-century product. What with the love of truth that – God help me! – they rammed into me at Clifton and the belief that Arnold forced upon Rugby that the vilest of sins – the vilest of all sins – is to peach to the head master! That’s me, sir. Other men get over their schooling. I never have. I remain adolescent. These things are obsessions with me. Complexes, sir! (*Parade’s End*, 490)

Like all of the upper classes, Christopher is a product of the public school system. However, Christopher still seems to apply to life the principles he learned at school, namely that it is unforgivable to “peach to the headmaster”. He will not tell anyone about Sylvia’s faults in their marriage, not even to save his own reputation, because that would be like ‘telling on her’. In doing so he would commit “the vilest of sins”, and according to Christopher it is still preferable to remain unhappy one’s whole life than to commit this sin. As well as in the eighteenth century, Christopher also lives in his own past. His boyhood priorities remain important for him, and we can therefore interpret him as also being nostalgic for his own childhood; Christopher experiences a personal and private nostalgia for his own past, as well
as a more general nostalgia for the cultural and political characteristics of the eighteenth century.

Another passage in the book sheds further light on the intricacies of his principles. In *No More Parades* Tietjens reflects upon Sylvia’s actions and finds himself shocked that she has allowed herself to sink so low as to humiliate him in public.

For, as he saw it, English people of good position consider that the basis of all marital unions or disunions, is the maxim: No scenes. Obviously for the sake of the servants – who are the same thing as the public. No scenes, then, for the sake of the public. And indeed, with him, the instinct for privacy – as to his relationships, his passions, or even as to his most unimportant motives – was as strong as the instinct of life itself.

He would, literally, rather be dead than an open book. (*Parade’s End*, 342)

Tietjens believes that emotions, or merely the smallest of thoughts, are private and that even the owner of these feelings should not analyze them or acknowledge them. “Parade” is all-important, and even the innermost of Christopher’s thoughts conform to this notion; the private is in fact linked to the public for him. The maxim of “no scenes” therefore applies even in the private sphere. In Tietjens’s case, his most intimate friends are not allowed to see his feelings, as the reader can ascertain when Sylvia leaves Christopher for the first time. He remains completely impassive towards his closest friend, Macmaster, and concerns himself with the mere practicalities of the situation. It is in fact what Sylvia most reproaches Tietjens for; she constantly describes him as a “lump”, a “block of wood” and even a “stiff dutch doll”, and her machinations are usually designed to make him show at least some emotion. A phrase that other characters are fond of using about Sylvia is “what she called pulling the strings of shower-baths. She did extravagant things, mostly of a cruel kind, for the
fun of seeing what would happen.” (Parade’s End, 731). Sylvia delights in performing some outrageous action, or saying something shocking or dangerous (giving the other person a feeling akin to being doused suddenly with the cold water of a shower) simply to see which reaction it would lead to. But throughout the book, her actions sometimes are not so much playful but more like desperate attempts to keep Christopher’s attention on her. Nevertheless, these outbursts of emotion are a sign of weakness for Christopher; “pulling the strings of the shower bath” is an action he personally would never sink to because it disregards the rules of the “parade” that gentlemen must conform to. Ford writes that “the basis of Christopher Tietjens’ emotional existence was a complete taciturnity – at any rate as to his emotions. As Tietjens saw the world, you didn’t ‘talk’. Perhaps you didn’t even think about how you felt.” (Parade’s End, 6). Indeed, Christopher seems to repress his emotions to the point that he is unable to even comprehend them. He is a character so paralyzed by convention that his code of conduct is more of a restriction to his mental health than a guidance. Ford seems to criticize this attitude as much as he praises it. Tietjens is obviously held up as a role model of English ‘uprightness’, but his absurdly strict principles prevent him from ever being truly happy. Sylvia again characterizes him perfectly when she exclaims to her mother “I tell you he’s so formal he can’t do without all the conventions there are and so truthful he can’t use half of them.” (Parade’s End, 32). Christopher finds himself in conflict between upholding English traditions and simultaneously being aware of their shortcomings. At one point the narrator notes:

It has been remarked that the peculiarly English habit of self-suppression in matters of the emotions puts the Englishman at a great disadvantage in moments of unusual stresses. In the smaller matters of the general run of life he will be impeccable and
not to be moved; but in sudden confrontations of anything but physical dangers he is apt – he is, indeed, almost certain – to go to pieces very badly. (*Parade’s End*, 178)

In the event of Christopher’s disastrous personal life, or during the more general absurdity and chaos of World War I which this passage anticipates, his “habit of self-suppression” will not be of any help to him. It is likely that these events would have had less of a lasting impact had Christopher allowed himself to feel his emotions more clearly, but he is absolutely rigid in following his principles.

A clear counter-example to Tietjens is his friend, Macmaster. Though Macmaster is only the son of a clerk from a fishing port in Scotland, he manages to work himself up the social hierarchy until he is a respected critic with a knighthood. He is an incredibly ambitious character, using Christopher’s calculations for their department for his own gain and eventually abandoning him when their friendship becomes too much of a social burden. Their friendship, in the end, means less to Macmaster than his ambition and place in the social hierarchy, which is something unfathomable to Tietjens. From the start of the novel, Macmaster’s ambitions are made very clear:

In the office they were mostly “born”, and not vastly sympathetic. There was a sprinkling, too – it was beginning to be a large one – of young men who had obtained their entry by merit or by sheer industry. These watched promotions jealously, discerning nepotic increases of increment and clamouring amongst themselves at favouritisms. To these he had been able to turn a cold shoulder. His intimacy with Tietjens permitted him to be rather on the “born” side of the institution, his agreeableness – he knew he was agreeable and useful! – to Sir Reginald Ingleby, protecting him in the main from unpleasantness. His “articles” had given him a
certain right to an austerity of demeanor; his book he trusted to let him adopt an almost judicial attitude. He would then be the Mr. Macmaster, the critic, the authority. And the first-class departments are not adverse to having distinguished men as ornaments to their company; at any rate the promotion of the distinguished are not objected to. (*Parade’s End*, 12)

Although Macmaster is not “born” into the office, he manages to establish himself on that side due to Tietjens. His every move is calculated to further himself, and it is even questionable whether his interest in the Arts is due to a genuine passion or whether it is merely a façade in order to appear distinguished. Macmaster represents the spirit of post-Edwardian England; he is ambitious and materialistic without scruples, attempting to rise above the station he was born to. Tietjens is not unsupportive of Macmaster’s ambitions (feeling that since Macmaster is Scottish, and therefore foreign, he is somehow not as strictly bound by the rules of English society), but it is in a rather condescending way as Tietjens assumes that Macmaster will never be, and could never be his social equal. The fact that Macmaster outranks Tietjens at the end of the story is only a testament to the values that have become more efficient in society; Tietjens, though honourable, is unable to succeed in a society based on material gain.

Christopher Tietjens is clearly a nostalgic character, with values inherited from what he considers to be the best of the English tradition, but it is also evident that Ford does not advocate this as a useful system to live by. Ford sympathizes with Christopher’s viewpoint, as Christopher is portrayed as a likeable character that the reader can definitely commiserate with. Ford also portrays his own society in a very unflattering light, indicating the author’s preference for Tietjens’s moral uprightness: the odious Macmaster is the chief
representant of the ills of English society in the early twentieth century as he embodies the dishonesty that comes along with ambition. He takes credit for Christopher’s achievements, and uses him until he is no longer an asset. But Ford’s portrayal of Christopher is not entirely positive either: Christopher’s code of honour hampers him in his actions, and his values simply do not apply anymore to the early twentieth century. His inability to adapt is neither practical nor beneficial; it is merely a guarantee for his ruin.
3. The Presence of Nostalgia in the Female Characters of *Parade’s End*

While Christopher Tietjens is most definitely a nostalgic figure, the female characters of the book are not so straightforward. Both Valentine Wannop and Sylvia Tietjens have quite progressive attitudes, albeit different ways of expressing them. Ford seems to support women’s rights, and this modern stance contradicts the romantic vision of the past that Tietjens embodies. However, Valentine and Sylvia are not simply counter-weights to Tietjens’s views on society and at certain points of the book they embody more traditional female roles as well.

3.1. Valentine Wannop and the Fight for Women’s Rights:

Valentine Wannop is perhaps primarily the embodiment of the ‘New Woman’ in *Parade’s End*. She is the daughter of Professor Wannop, who was Christopher’s father’s best friend, and as such has received an outstanding education and is practically fluent in Latin. She is also a suffragette, and is actually out demonstrating for women’s rights when she first meets Tietjens. Valentine is the picture of health and chastity, reflecting the adage *Mens sana in corpora sano*. She is healthy in body and therefore also in mind and throughout the novel her physical prowess is demonstrated: from the moment she meets Tietjens and leaps over a ditch, till later in the story when she works as a gym mistress for a school. What is perhaps most progressive about her are her political views however. Valentine is a supporter of women’s rights, and she explains why she became so early on in the novel:

I want to say this: I never talk about that stage of my career [working as a maid] because I’m ashamed of it. I’m ashamed of it because I think I did the wrong thing, not for any other reason. I did it on impulse and I stuck to it out of obstinacy. I mean
it would probably have been more sensible to go round with the hat to benevolent people, for the keep of mother and to complete my education. But if we’ve inherited the Wannop ill-luck, we’ve inherited the Wannop pride. And I couldn’t do it. Besides I was only seventeen, and I gave out we were going into the country after the sale. I’m not educated at all, as you know, or only half, because father, being a brilliant man, had ideas. And one of them was that I was to be an athlete, not a classical don at Cambridge, or I might have been, I believe. I don’t know why he had that tic. . . . But I’d like you to understand two things. One I’ve said already: what I hear in this house won’t ever shock or corrupt me; that it’s said in Latin is neither here nor there. I understand Latin almost as well as English because father used to talk it to me and Gilbert [Valentine’s brother] as soon as we talked at all. . . . And, oh yes: I’m a suffragette because I’ve been a slavey. But I’d like you to understand that, though I was a slavey and am a suffragette – you’re an old-fashioned woman and queer things are thought about these two things – then I’d like you to understand that in spite of it all I’m pure! Chaste, you know. . . . Perfectly virtuous. (Parade’s End, 82)

Valentine has worked as a maid, and as a gym teacher as well. She also looks after her mother and runs their household; cooking, cleaning and typing up everything her mother writes. She has, out of all of the women in Parade’s End, effectively known hardship and has dealt with it independently. She also earns her own income instead of living off of the benevolence of others. Valentine’s social status is fairly particular as a result. She is a character that seems to be removed from class boundaries; her family is not lower class, and nor does it associate with lower class families, but she and her mother become extremely poor after the death of her father and she is forced to become a maid (which is not at all a position normally occupied by someone of her heritage). As Christopher muses upon first
meeting her, “Miss Wannop was a tweezy maid. Say a lady’s help, by nature. She was of
good family, for the Wannops were first heard of at Birdlip in Gloucestershire in the year
1417 – no doubt enriched after Agincourt. But even brilliant men of good family will now and
then throw daughters who are lady helps by nature.” (Parade’s End, 87). For a man
grounded in the past like Tietjens, it is almost inconceivable that Valentine should retain the
social status given to her by her family name, and also be a maid. He comes to the
conclusion that Valentine is a “tweeny maid” by nature, rather than by circumstance. In
reality, Valentine’s situation is just one more sign of a changing society; class is becoming
less important and families that were previously recognized as being of ‘good birth’ can no
longer assume that they will be able to maintain their social standing. The changing social
hierarchy of England is becoming more and more based on personal merit and not title, as
the success of Macmaster and the failure of Christopher is a testament to. It is therefore a
system to which Valentine is much more suited than Tietjens.

As well as being capable of transcending social boundaries, Valentine is also shown to
be an independent woman who leads her life according to her own choices. At the end of A
Man Could Stand Up she chooses to live in sin with Christopher as his mistress, and
eventually bears his child, knowing it will be born out of wedlock. Christopher always treats
Valentine as his intellectual and emotional equal, and this rapport continues into their actual
relationship. Despite his initial assessment of her as “a lady’s help, by nature”, Valentine’s
intelligence soon proves this observation wrong. It is in fact Valentine who most often calls
into question Christopher’s views and ideals at the beginning of Parade’s End rather than the
other way around. When Christopher repairs the girth strap of Mrs. Wannop’s horse, she is
decidedly underwhelmed.
“I suppose you think that a mighty fine performance,” she said.
“I didn’t make a very good job of the girth,” he said. “Let’s get off this road.”
“Setting poor, weak women in their places,” Miss Wannop continued. “Soothing the horse like a man with a charm. I suppose you soothe women like that too. I pity your wife. . . . The English country male! And making a devoted vassal at sight of the handy-man. The feudal system all complete. . . .” (Parade’s End, 112)

By repairing the girth strap of the horse, Tietjens saves Mrs. Wannop from having her cart overturned, thereby rescuing her from a potentially life-threatening situation. Everyone is full of praise for Tietjens, except for Valentine, who sees his actions as a confirmation of Tietjens’s patriarchic role as the English country gentleman. Christopher places himself as the indispensable superior of not only the women in this scene, but also the handy-man; he situates himself as the aristocrat versus the working class man, and as Valentine says, “The feudal system [is] all complete”. She is clearly critical of Christopher’s nostalgic predilection for the feudal system: in his society there would be no freedom for social mobility, nor would there be rights for women. For Valentine, changing the old patriarchic society is essential and the changes must come as quickly as possible. A similar scene occurs when Valentine and Tietjens are returning to her cottage at night after having dropped off Valentine’s suffragette friend, Gertie, at her relatives’ house. Valentine criticizes Tietjens, telling him, “‘You know everything. . . . And you’ve worked everything into absurd principles. You think father was unsound because he tried to apply tendencies to life. You want to be an English country gentleman and spin principles out of the newspapers and the gossip of horse-fairs. And let the country go to hell, you’ll never stir a finger except to say I told you so.’” (Parade’s End, 135). Her remark is quite insightful, because she comments upon the fundamentally observational and passive nature of Christopher’s character, as opposed to
the way her own father tried to apply his own views to life (his emphasis on Valentine’s athletic upbringing is one example). Christopher’s Toryism is inapplicable to real life, because it is outdated, but this makes Christopher more capable of observing and criticizing the society he lives in. What Valentine objects to here is the fact that his observations have no actual concrete impact upon the society that he examines.

Whereas Valentine seems to be liberated in many respects, she does not seem to have the same sexual liberty that Sylvia Tietjens has, in the sense that Sylvia has more than one sexual partner. Valentine is constantly described as chaste, and Tietjens is in fact the first man she has a physical relationship with. It is worth thinking about the way in which Valentine’s activism for the suffrage movement relates to her depiction as a chaste woman. As Anne Marie Flanagan writes, “Many anti-suffragists, such as Mrs. Ward, who began an organized anti-suffrage campaign in 1908, helped to perpetuate negative descriptions of suffragettes as ‘sexless and neurotic,’ which appeared in Edwardian fiction in the years before the war. These stereotypes ‘reassured the public that the suffragettes were not real women, but social misfits – mannish, abnormal and obsessed.’” (240). This image of the “sexless and neurotic” suffragette was not a view solely held by the anti-suffragists. Flanagan adds that this negative stereotype was also propagated by the suffragettes themselves, some of whom felt that if they were to achieve independence, they must separate themselves entirely from men and maintain a state of chastity. The Edwardian feminists that Ford associated with and was influenced by (including none other than Violet Hunt, with whom Ford had had a relationship before writing Parade’s End), however, were against the suffragette notions of sexual purity. Flanagan maintains that Ford also took this view, and in the novel we see that while Valentine does not have the sexual allure and power that Sylvia has, she is not frigid and sexless either. When she waits for Tietjens at his home on Armistice
night she is “trembling with ecstasy” (*Parade’s End*, 648). And in an earlier passage she reflects upon her physical reaction to Christopher in terms of ‘convulsions’, ‘waves’ and ‘rushes’:

Of the physical side of love she had neither image nor conception. In the old days when she had been with him, if he had come into the room in which she was, or if he had merely been known to be coming down to the village, she had hummed all day under her breath and had felt warmer, little currents passing along her skin. [...] But, in these later days, much greater convulsions had overwhelmed her. It sufficed for Tietjens to approach her to make her feel as if her whole body was drawn towards him as, being near a terrible height, you are drawn towards it. Great waves of blood rushed across her being as if physical forces as yet undiscovered or invented attracted the very fluid itself. The moon so draws the tides. (*Parade’s End*, 266)

This passage clearly shows that she not only loves Christopher but also feels lust for him. He has a physical effect on Valentine when he is near her, and she is clearly aware of this. The fact that Valentine eventually lives with him as his mistress and bears his child confirms the physical nature of their relationship. When Valentine becomes a mother, the novel further underlines that she is not sexless and unnatural, but it does also undermine her position as a liberated suffragette. In *The Last Post* Valentine no longer works to support herself, but is instead dependant on the income that Christopher brings to the household. She no longer seems to be fighting for women’s rights, but is wholly occupied with her unborn baby and household issues. Flanagan explains that this ending is similar to several fates shared by the heroines of suffragette literature. Many of these heroines retreated from being actively engaged in the movement to a more domestic role at home. She explains that this was due
to what was perhaps a paradoxical view taken by the suffragettes themselves. Since the image of suffragette women was so negative, the movement tried to exaggerate the importance of family and the domestic sphere in order to counter the stereotypes of the ‘unnatural’ or ‘frigid’ suffragette; the movement “preached that women must break free from traditional roles, but [...] simultaneously venerated and idealized the family structure” (Flanagan, 242). If Ford manages to overcome the negative stereotypes about suffragettes when Valentine is first introduced into the novel, she is portrayed as embodying a very traditional female role towards the end. Though Ford is pro women’s suffrage, it is remarkable how he returns to traditional notions of gender roles.

Nevertheless, Valentine remains one of the most progressive characters in the novel. One could argue that it was her own choice to return to a traditional female role at the end of Parade’s End, just as it was her own choice to enter into a relationship with Tietjens. It should also be noted that this was not the easiest choice she could have made: living together with a married man and bearing his child was not at all socially acceptable at that time and it is only because Valentine is such a strong and liberated character that she could have made that decision. She is also subject to feelings such as lust as well as love, and Ford’s portrayal of female desire was incredibly modern at the time.

3.2. Sylvia Tietjens in the Role of the Femme Fatale:

Another modern woman in the novel is none other than Sylvia Tietjens, Christopher Tietjens’s wife. She is, like Valentine, progressive and liberated, but the two characters differ in a number of important ways. Unlike Valentine, Sylvia’s power comes first and foremost in the form of her influence over men. Sylvia is described as being extremely beautiful in the book, and her allure is such that only Tietjens is unaffected by it; however, this is only the
case after Sylvia has hurt him so badly with her infidelities so as to make Tietjens lose all affection for her. Although Sylvia is incredibly attractive, her real power seems to lie in the act of rejecting men. By denying the men she associates with, she shows that nobody but herself has authority over her own body. In this particular passage Sylvia demonstrates how forceful she can be in her rejections:

She practiced every kind of ‘turning down’ on these creatures: the really nice ones, with the Kitchener moustaches, the seal’s brown eyes, the honest, thrilling voices, the clipped words, the straight backs and admirable records – as long as you didn’t enquire too closely. Once, in the early days of the Great Struggle, a young man – she had smiled at him in mistake for someone more trustable – had followed in a taxi, hard on her motor, and flushed with wine, glory and the firm conviction that all women in that lurid carnival had become common property, had burst into her door from the public stairs. . . . She had overtopped him by the forehead and before a few minutes were up she seemed to him to have become ten foot high with a gift of words that scorched his backbone and the voice of a frozen marble statue: a chaud-froid effect. He had come in like a stallion, red-eyed, and all his legs off the ground: he went down the stairs like a half-drowned rat, with dim eyes and really looking wet, for some reason or other. (Parade’s End, 146)

Sylvia uses sex to control men, but it is the idea of sex she projects towards her suitors rather than taking part in the actual act that empowers her. With this facility Sylvia is then able to use her admirers to achieve her own ends, a feat at which she succeeds several times in the novel. She manages to get to the front during the war by travelling with Potty Perowne, her ex-lover, despite the fact that women were not allowed in the base camp.
General Campion, Tietjens’s godfather, is also completely wound round her finger, and for a long time he refuses to believe that Sylvia is the source of the problems in the Tietjens’ marriage. In his first appearance in the book he tells Macmaster that “Sylvia is a splendid girl. Straight as a die; the soul of loyalty to her friends. And fearless. She’d face the devil in his rage.” (Parade’s End, 49), and only accepts the truth about her character once Christopher is on the point of leaving to the front. Sometimes, her influence has unforeseen consequences; in the case of one of her suitors, namely a banker called Brownie, his desperation to win her affections leads to him bouncing two of Christopher’s cheques, thereby disgracing Christopher in the eyes of the gentlemen at his Club. However, Sylvia’s power over men also has its limitations. In The Last Post her attempts to make Fittleworth, the landlord of Tietjens and Valentine’s cottage, turn against them seem largely unsuccessful. And of course, she cannot control the one man she is most desperate to have power over: her husband, Christopher. He seems to be able to resist Sylvia’s attractiveness in a way that other men cannot. As he clarifies in one passage, “he had had physical contact with this woman before he married her; in a railway carriage, coming down from the Dukeries. An extravagantly beautiful girl! Where was the physical attraction of her gone to now? Irresistible; reclining back as the shires rushed past. . . .” (Parade’s End, 121). As is evident in this passage, Christopher once harboured a physical attraction towards Sylvia, which she used to manoeuvre him into marrying her. However, his attraction towards her did not last, probably as a result of Christopher’s realization that Sylvia used him as a way of marrying quickly because she was possibly with child. His uncertainty as to whether their child is really his, or another man’s, is also a factor in his waning attraction towards her. As Father Consett (Sylvia’s mother’s priest), suggests at the beginning of the novel, the men that Sylvia is able to hold power over are the men that most quickly bore her. In fact, only Christopher is able
to keep her attention and she acknowledges his superiority in comparison to the other men she consorts with. What especially characterizes Christopher is how disconnected he is from his own emotions, and how he prides himself on being a man of principle above all else. This makes him outdated certainly, but it also makes him better equipped to resist Sylvia’s charms. When confronted with the fact that her most effective weapons (she is described as a “dagger” in the novel) have no impact upon Christopher, Sylvia resorts to tormenting him in other ways, using the men enthralled by her to accomplish her actions. It could be argued that this makes Sylvia a less independent woman than Valentine; Valentine after all did not rely on anyone but herself when faced with problems. Sylvia, by contrast, relies on men, who do silly things for her even if she does not want it. Furthermore, she is dependent on her beauty; it is unclear if she would have the same sort of means (that is to say; men) to carry out her intentions were she not so beautiful.

Although Sylvia seems to be dependent upon men to get what she wants, this does not necessarily make her less empowered than Valentine. After her affair with Perowne, Sylvia decides to remain chaste, which lessens her opportunities to come into contact with men. She also visits numerous convents, where there are no men allowed at all. In Some Do Not . . . she reflects upon her decision to embrace chastity, attaching it to physical exercise and health.

she kept herself attractive by her skillfully selected exercises and cleanlinesses; and the same fatigues, healthful as they were, kept her in the mood for chastity of life. She had done so ever since her return to her husband; and this not because of any attachment to her husband or to virtue as such, as because she had made the pact with herself out of caprice and meant to keep it. She had to have men at her feet;
that was, as it were, the price of her—purely social—daily bread as it was the price of
the daily bread of her intimates. She was, and had been for many years, absolutely
continent. And so very likely were, and had been, all her Moiras, and Megs, and Lady
Marjories—but she was perfectly aware that they had to have, above their
assemblies as it were, a light vapour of the airs and habits of the brothel. The public
demanded that... a light vapour, like the slight traces of steam that she had seen,
glutinously adhering to the top of the water in the crocodile houses of the Zoo.

*(Parade’s End, 150)*

Sylvia is no less chaste than the women from other social sets, but she is aware that her class
in particular needs to have the appearance of sensuality in order to keep the interest of the
public (her “set” is the one that mainly fills the pages of the society papers). It is also
noteworthy that Sylvia decides to remain chaste solely out of “caprice”; she is not meant to
be a virtuous character and Ford portrays her as the complete opposite of Valentine.
Valentine is chaste out of cleanliness and virtue; Sylvia is only chaste for the time being
because she feels like it. She is also only chaste at this stage in her life; her past is filled with
sexual transgressions and her sexual appetite is depicted as being unnaturally voracious.
Sylvia is often described as being a ‘femme fatale’; that is to say, a seductive woman who
ultimately brings disaster to the men she associates with. No matter how chaste she is, she
still manages to bring ruin to Christopher, as evidenced in the case of Brownie as one
example. In *No More Parades* she is the cause of Christopher getting sent to the front, as she
gives Perowne permission to come to her room at night, which leads Christopher to throw
Perowne out of the room and consequently get into an argument with General O’Hara, the
officer in charge of the garrison police. All these actions give General Campion no choice but
to send Christopher to the front. And despite her chastity, Sylvia is unable to repress her natural sensuality. One passage states:

The miserable memory would come, ghost-like, at any time, anywhere. She would see Drake’s face, dark against the white things; she would feel the thin night-gown ripping off her shoulder; but most of all she would seem, in darkness that excluded the light of any room in which she might be, to be transfused by the mental agony that there she had felt: the longing for the brute who had mangled her, the dreadful pain of the mind. The odd thing was that the sight of Drake himself, whom she had seen several times since the outbreak of the war, left her completely without emotion. She had no aversion, but no longing for him. . . . She had, nevertheless, longing, but she knew it was longing merely to experience again that dreadful feeling.

And not with Drake. . . . *(Parade’s End*, 149)*

Sylvia seems to take pleasure in a certain type of mental anguish, at first triggered by Drake and subsequently by (presumably) Tietjens. She keeps her body chaste but cannot stop the memories of her past coming back to the surface of her mind, suggesting that she is repressing her sexuality. What Sylvia has understood, however, is the importance of image in relation to sexual power. She is not dependent on or subordinate to any man, but in order to be able to use men for her purposes she must exude the possibility of sex. She sees this as inherent to her social circle, and a necessary requisite in order to belong to it. Whether she then actually has sex with her admirers is a moot point; it is more about her seeming to do so than actually doing so.

Sylvia additionally defies the gender roles traditionally ascribed to women in the sense that she is an active character rather than a passive one. She is an unpredictable and
chaotic element in the storyline, and her actions direct much of the events that take place in the book. One of the key elements that drive the plot is when Sylvia “pulls the strings of the shower-bath”. Examples of this are when Sylvia tells General Campion that Christopher is a socialist, leaving Campion in shock over Christopher’s immoral political views and breaking his trust in Christopher. Another instance is when Sylvia allows Perowne to come to her hotel room in Rouen, condemning Christopher to leave for the front. She contrasts Christopher’s passivity; Christopher is mostly content to sit and pass judgement on the events around him, accepting his fate quietly. Sylvia by comparison, is always thinking up new ways to obtain what she wants and the outcome of her plans mostly affects Christopher’s life in marked ways. She is a character who is dangerously seductive, and acts mostly upon instinct and fleeting desires, mirroring Valentine’s modernity in the novel as well as contrasting her. Despite their differences, they are both products of their contemporary society, and call into question Tietjens’s anachronistic values throughout the novel.

Christopher Tietjens represents the nostalgic tendencies of the story, but when taking into account the female characters, *Parade’s End* shows a more modern attitude that contrasts this nostalgic outlook. Both principal female protagonists defy the traditional roles ascribed to women, and even Tietjens, who lives so steadfastly in the past, can be interpreted as being pro women’s rights. This is already evident from the start of the novel when he trips the policeman chasing after Valentine and her suffragette friend Gertie; Tietjens helps them without even knowing who they are, only that they are suffragettes. Later in the story, his actions show that he considers Valentine as well as Sylvia as his equals. He even remarks at one point that “she and Sylvia were the only two human beings he had met for years whom he could respect: the one for sheer efficiency in killing; the other for
having the constructive desire and knowing how to set about it. Kill or cure! The two functions of man.” (*Parade’s End*, 128). The nostalgia present in the novel does not in fact entirely dominate the story; it is evident that certain political changes are portrayed positively, namely the progress of women’s rights.
4. The Impact of World War I and its Repercussions upon the Characters of *Parade’s End*

One of the key events in *Parade’s End* is World War I. The Great War, as it was called, was the first industrialized war and far surpassed any other war until then in scale and destructiveness. In *Parade’s End* the effects of the war are not only visible on a personal level in the characters, but also on a larger social scale and the war itself can be read as a powerful catalyst of social change. More than any other event it ensured that a return to an older way of life would never be possible. Although the characters of the novel have nostalgic tendencies before the arrival of the war, the war puts into question these tendencies as each character is forced to deal with the reality of war and social change in their own way. Christopher Tietjens in particular, is obliged to reevaluate his entire social and ethical code of conduct after his experience as a soldier. Finally, the rural idyll Tietjens longs for throughout the novel as a place where he might finally be at peace falls short of his expectations in a number of ways, exposing Christopher’s trust in the past and in the authenticity of rural England as tenuous at best.

4.1. **The Reality of War:**

The most concrete manifestation of the detrimental effects of war on a personal level is Tietjens’s shell shock and loss of memory. Though he sustains a head wound at one point which has disastrous effects upon his long-term memory, Christopher is evidently traumatized as well. The first incident that leaves a great impact on him is the death of O Nine Morgan, a Welsh soldier who dies in Tietjens’s arms in the base camp. Tietjens is plagued by the thought that he could have prevented his death, because he denied O Nine Morgan leave to go see his wife: she had taken up with a prize-fighter, who would have
almost certainly killed O Nine Morgan had he gone to visit her. Tietjens decides to deny O Nine Morgan leave in order to prevent this from happening, but staying at the base camp kills the soldier anyway. When Tietjens is at the front he starts seeing visions of O Nine Morgan: “His nerves had been put in a bad way by that rotten strafe – that had been just for fun. He knew his nerves were in a bad way because he had a ghostly visit from O Nine Morgan, a fellow whose head had been smashed, as it were, on his, Tietjens’, own hands” (Parade’s End, 561). The constant stress of life at the front also takes its toll on Christopher and he is continuously afraid, hearing and seeing things that are not there.

What he dreaded at those normal times when fear visited him at lunch; whilst seeing that the men got their baths or when writing, in a trench, in support, a letter to his bank-manager, was finding himself unhurt, surrounded by figures like the brothers of the Misericordia, going unconcerned about their tasks, noticing him hardly at all. . . . Whole hillsides, whole stretches of territory, alive with myriads of whitish-grey, long cagoules, with slits for eyeholes. Occasionally one would look at him through the eye-slits in the hoods. . . . The prisoner! (Parade’s End, 550)

He sees hooded figures surrounding him during the most mundane activities, figures that are interestingly enough prisoners and not enemies; in one passage Christopher explains his disgust of prisoners as “the product of his passionate Tory sense of freedom” (Parade’s End, 620). Christopher lives in constant fear; he feels he is going to die and he keeps seeing threats that exist partly in his mind. Another striking apparition that plagues him are the picks that Christopher hears at night below him, just like in the coal mines of the North Country, but here he imagines it to be the Germans. He hears the picks communicating to one another “Like children in the corner of a schoolroom whispering nasty comments about
their masters, one to the other. . . . Girls, for choice. . . . Chop, chop, chop, a pick whispered. Chop? another asked in an undertone” (Parade’s End, 563). The pressure of war is evidently driving Christopher mad, and he exhibits clear symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, namely the fact that he keeps reliving his traumatic memories over and over again. His fellow soldiers suffer in numerous ways as well: McKechnie is already mad when Christopher first meets him, and has episodes at several intervals of the book. Aranjuez, a subaltern at the front who is deathly afraid of losing an eye and thereby having his face ruined, ironically ends up losing an eye. And then there are the countless dead, represented by the figure of O Nine Morgan. Tietjens reflects that “at the thought of dead that you have never seen dead at all. . . . Suddenly the light goes out. . . . In this case it was because of one fellow, a dirty enough man, not even very willing, not in the least endearing, certainly contemplating desertion. . . . But your dead . . . yours . . . your own.” (Parade’s End, 356). He feels a sense of responsibility towards O Nine Morgan despite the fact that Tietjens barely knew him or even liked him very much; O Nine Morgan is under his command and therefore belongs to Tietjens’s ‘own’ dead. Tietjens is also a character who, due to his Tory sensibilities, feels a direct sense of responsibility towards the lower classes who he feels should be guaranteed a basic standard of living by the ruling class. The fact that O Nine Morgan has died under his command is for Tietjens a personal failing as a Captain in the army but also as a member of his social class altogether. O Nine Morgan also reflects certain aspects of Tietjens’s own situation: O Nine Morgan is saddled with an adulterous wife, much like Tietjens, and is unable to divorce her (due to different circumstances than Tietjens, but the outcome remains the same). He is a reflection of the fact that although the domestic sphere and the war front are completely different worlds, they both have influence upon the other; Tietjens in particular experiences how his situation with Sylvia manages to influence his life in the
army. Before Sylvia arrives at base camp, Christopher remarks that “The amazing activities of which Sylvia would be capable were just the thing to send laughter raging like fire through a cachinnating army. She could not, thank God, get into France: to that place. But she could make scandals in the papers that every Tommie read.” (Parade’s End, 317). Try as he might, Christopher cannot disentangle his private life with his public life, and Sylvia’s actions have far-reaching consequences as it is because of her in the end that General Campion sends Christopher to the front.

Christopher’s experience at the front evidently leaves a large impact on him, as evidenced above. When he resumes his life again in England in The Last Post, Valentine notices that he dreams and talks in his sleep about the war, shouting “Bringt dem Hauptmann eine Kerze. . . . Bring the Major a candle,” (Parade’s End, 813), which seems to be another sign of post-traumatic stress disorder. Though seemingly different conditions, trauma and nostalgia have certain similarities. As Simon Legg explains, both conditions deal with the past and display a problematic relation to the past. He describes that while “nostalgia denotes a positive attachment to a past real or imaginary home, trauma denotes the negative inability to deal effectively with a past event.” (105). Tietjens has difficulty in dealing with his experiences of the war, which perhaps reinforces his nostalgia for the time before the war: nostalgia often relates to a place or time that existed before the traumatic experience. It is significant that Christopher reflects on pastoral visions of England while he is in the trenches more than in any other part of the book. There are several examples of these passages:

The name Bemerton suddenly came on to his tongue. Yes, Bemerton, Bemerton, Bemerton was George Herbert’s parsonage. Bemerton, outside Salisbury. . . . The
cradle of the race as far as our race was worth thinking about. He imagined himself standing up on a little hill, a lean contemplative parson, looking at the land sloping down to Salisbury spire. A large, clumsily bound seventeenth-century testament, Greek, beneath his elbow. . . . Imagine standing up on a hill! It was the unthinkable thing there! (Parade’s End, 567)

Christopher also finds that the stones and soil in the trench face bear a striking similarity to the butts above Groby; this thought reassures him. A little later in the book he also thinks about Valentine, and how he is walking with her along a country road,

Not a mountain road: not Yorkshire. Not a valley road: not Bemerton. A country parsonage was not for him. So he wouldn’t take orders! A dawn-land road, with some old thorn trees. They only grew really in Kent. And the sky coming down on all sides. The flat top of a down! (Parade’s End, 603)

The more Christopher is oppressed by his memories of death (especially by that of O Nine Morgan) and war, the more he also seems to think about pastoral England in all its seventeenth and eighteenth-century glory. These nostalgic thoughts are also what he projects onto his future, because in A Man Could Stand Up Christopher finally seems to have come to a point where he considers loosening his morals and living with Valentine if he survives the war. He in fact contemplates the possibility of having the freedom to “stand up on a hill”: a significant phrase in the book, as it takes on literal and metaphorical meanings for the characters. In its literal sense, the phrase reflects the way that the soldiers constantly had to crouch down in the trenches to avoid enemy fire, and did not have the freedom to stand on a hill as they would be killed. The phrase also takes on a metaphorical dimension however, signifying for Christopher the possibility of doing whatever one wishes to do most.
World War I for Christopher in particular brings about a turning point in his life and in his values. Through his experience in the war, he finally realizes how much the world has changed and how outdated his own principles are; his decision at the end of *A Man Could Stand Up* reflects this when he decides live together with Valentine, and in doing so, to abandon his principles in favour of his own happiness. In any case, whether it is trauma or nostalgia, Tietjens has a complicated rapport with his past. Even before becoming traumatized by the war, he has often shown an inability to deal with heavy emotions and experiences and at times seems incapable of even acknowledging or understanding his own feelings. He suppresses himself so habitually that when he is forced to deal with war (or serious matters of the heart) he finds that he is on the verge of a breakdown. During his time at the front, he attempts to maintain his sanity by thinking about the tranquility of the English countryside and by imagining his future, but to little effect. As Valentine says, “Men might stand up on hills, but the mental torture could not be expelled” (*Parade’s End*, 660); the war forever alters Christopher despite his decision to live differently.

4.2. Alienation in Post-War Society:

A peculiar form of nostalgia is also apparent in the soldiers who fought in World War I, and who upon returning to their country found themselves alienated and nostalgic for their time in the army. This is again a situation where trauma and nostalgia run very closely together; the traumatic experiences of war become a point in common for the soldiers who have returned to civilian life and find themselves estranged from their former lives and acquaintances. In *Parade’s End* the discrepancy between ex-soldiers and civilians is presented quite clearly; the people of England who did not participate in the war are unable to understand the depth of the horrors experienced by the soldiers in the war, and this
reinforces the feeling of nostalgia that some soldiers experienced for their time in the army. These men were bonded to other ex-soldiers in the sense that they had all suffered equally, and this feeling of identification with each other leads to a nostalgic longing for a time where as soldiers, they had a common purpose and place in the army. This is portrayed at the end of *A Man Could Stand Up*, when the soldiers of Tietjens’s former company reunite at his home, calling each other “The Pals! The old pals!” (*Parade’s End*, 671), and using their army nicknames for each other instead of their civilian names (“Hullo, Duckfoot. . . . Hullo, Brassface!” *Parade’s End*, 671). After the war is over, Tietjens and his fellow ex-soldiers seek out each others’ company, and evidently feel a bond with each other despite the mutual differences they keenly felt during the war (Tietjens’s frustration with McKechnie’s madness comes to mind). However, now that the war is over, they can no longer identify themselves as soldiers and must find a place to occupy in the post-war civilian hierarchy.

Tietjens also feels the difference in priorities between himself and the civilians of England several times in the novel. He severely criticizes civilian involvement in the war, saying to his fellow soldier Gibbs that he wishes “they would do something to checkmate the blasted civilians whose meddling with the processes of war had put them where they were.” (*Parade’s End*, 625). Gibbs agrees, saying that “civilian interference had lost the war”. The military hate for civilian interference is perhaps even stronger than what the soldiers feel against the enemy: “It was the civilian populations and their rulers that one hated with real hatred. Now the swine were starving the poor [Germans] in the trenches.” (*Parade’s End*, 628). The Germans are merely a nuisance, but civilians are the real enemy, interfering and meddling with situations to the point that the consequences are quite harmful for the soldiers. In *No More Parades* Tietjens gets into a serious argument with Lieutenant Hotchkiss over the proper handling of horses; Hotchkiss’s theories are very detrimental to the horses’
health but as he has the backing of Lord Beichan, a civilian with quite some influence in the army, Tietjens can do nothing about it.

Even Sylvia and Valentine, the women closest to him, are unable to understand Tietjens’s motives for going to war. Sylvia associates war with “a schoolboy’s game of make-believe” (Parade’s End, 437), calling it “an agapemone. . . . You went to war when you desired to rape innumerable women. It was what war was for. . . .” (Parade’s End, 397). For Sylvia, war is a place where free love is practiced, where men can let loose their sexual desires in a fantasy world no longer governed by conventional boundaries. Valentine more or less comes to the same conclusion, saying that “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. She knew that this view of Tietjens was wrong, but she cherished it.” (Parade’s End, 233). Valentine exempts Tietjens from this view, but she still automatically associates the figure of the soldier with crazed lust and sadism. Christopher does indeed experience the war as a loss of rationality, but for him that is what makes the war so terrible. For Tietjens especially, the ability to remain rational and unemotional about a problem is paramount. Sylvia and Valentine misunderstand and belittle the experiences of the soldiers in the war by assuming that the war provides them with the possibility of living out all their lust for violence (and, according to Sylvia, their desire to rape “innumerable women”) in a context that negates conventional social boundaries. In reality, the soldiers do not experience the war as liberating; on the contrary, it is destructive for their mental and physical well-being as has already been exposed previously.
Civilian England also rejects its soldiers after the war is over; Mark Tietjens thinks about his brother’s situation in *The Last Post*, noting:

[Mark] had of course been wrong – he had reckoned without the determined discredit that, after the war was over, the civilian population would contrive to attach to every man who had been to the front as a fighting soldier. After all that was natural enough. The majority of the male population was civilian and once the war was over and there was no more risk they would bitterly regret that they had not gone. They would take it out of the ex-soldiers all right! (*Parade’s End*, 742)

The place that the soldiers occupied in society before the war has been filled in while they were off fighting, and now the soldiers that have returned, including Tietjens, they find themselves excluded from the hierarchy of post-war English society. In the novel Tietjens finds himself friendless and alone upon his return to England. Macmaster, previously his closest friend, does not even speak to him anymore and only Valentine actually comes to visit Christopher. His only bonds remain with his family members (Mark), his love interest Valentine, and his old fellow soldiers.

4.3. **The Destruction of the Pastoral Idyll:**

For Christopher, the post-war England that he returns to has altered even further in comparison to what he regards as his ideal society, leading him to retreat into the countryside, which Christopher considers the foundation of English tradition. During his time in the war, Christopher constantly imagines living a rural life with Valentine, but it is questionable whether the life he envisages reflects the reality he finds after the war. Upon closer examination, the drastic social changes people experienced after the First World War were not exclusively caused by the war; the entire Industrial revolution already set the base
for what the structure of English society would become and therefore the rural ideal that Tietjens envisaged during his time at the front was already inexistent before the war. It is therefore arguable that the changes brought about by World War I were already set in motion long ago. As Richard Cassell writes, Edwardian England contained the seeds of its own destruction: “Edwardian England could still preserve the beautifully managed exterior: the landed gentry performing their traditional public rituals, living in the manor houses of their ancestors; the garden parties, the fox hunts, the high-stepping satin-shined cobs. But if the structure still held together, it proved to be an illusion sustained while the underpinnings silently crumbled” (266). Cassell describes how the Edwardian Period, despite the outward beauty of its way of life, was already a crumbling social structure. With the industrialization of England, the landowning class was unable to survive on rent and produce from their tenants and their land, and therefore the gentry life of country manor houses and high living, which still survived till the Edwardian Period, could not sustain itself for much longer.

Tietjens’s politics, which he models upon the eighteenth century, are already outmoded before he is born, as the world he longs for is modeled upon a pre-industrial society. In his paper on “Ford Madox Ford’s Modernism and the Question of Tradition” (2001), Andrzej Gasiorek maintains that Ford was opposed to industrialism as well as the war, along with many of his intellectual social circle. He states that “Ford argues that industrialisation, democracy, and urbanisation led on the one hand to materialism, commercialism, and standardisation, and on the other hand to a loss of values, a confusion of standards, and the shock of alienation.” (“Ford Madox Ford’s Modernism”, 5). Ford’s criticism of industrialization does indeed surface in Parade’s End, as well as what can only be called a celebration of the pastoral. The general nostalgia that underlines the novel takes on a specific form in the passages dealing with the newly industrialized world and the idealization
of rural England. One incident in the book especially underlines the harmfulness of an industrial world on a metaphorical level. In *Some Do Not* . . ., Christopher and Valentine return to Valentine’s home by horse and carriage after dropping off her friend Gertie. In the morning mist, General Campion’s car hits the horse and hurts it quite badly. This situation is a striking example of the clash between modernity and traditional values: the car is a product of the modern, industrial world and it literally and metaphorically crashes into the horse, which represents an older way of life. The horse has no chance against the car; it is infinitely more fragile and naturally comes away more damaged than the car. Tietjens is of course outraged; his affection towards horses is demonstrated several times in the novel, and he is also an eighteenth century man who has no love for the efficiency and brutality of a modern invention such as the car. But it is inevitable that tradition must succumb to modernity, as this passage suggests.

Another side-effect of the Industrial Revolution was the enormous demographic upheaval England experienced. A veritable rural exodus took place starting in the late eighteenth century, and by the time World War I started, the cities were where the majority of the English population lived. The countryside and the urban landscape are also two marked opposites in *Parade’s End*, and despite the tendency of the novel’s characters to uphold a rural way of life, the city (London in particular) or the industrialized landscape features quite extensively as a setting for the action of the book. This tension is also reflected in the characters’ attitudes towards the city and the countryside. Although Tietjens is the son of a landowner, he lives most of his adult life in London (as does his brother Mark, the heir to Groby). Moreover, he lives there in an apartment, which excludes the possibility of having a garden or any sort of link to nature. His brother Mark has lived all his adult life in London as well, and even says at one point in the book that “at a very early age he had
decided that he would chuck the country-gentleman business. He didn’t see that he was the one to bother with those confounded, hardheaded beggars or with those confounded wind-swept moors and valley bottoms. One owed the blighters a duty, but one did not have to live among them or see that they aired their bedrooms.” (Parade’s End, 737). Even though Mark is the eldest son, he is definitely not interested in keeping up Groby or playing the part of the country gentleman. Christopher however, thinks differently about this. Despite Christopher’s status as a city-dweller, or perhaps because of it, he constantly idealizes and longs for the English countryside. Mark concedes that Christopher would run Groby well, and that he would have liked doing so as well: “That ass was a terrific sentimentalist. Probably he would have liked to be a great landowner, keeping up the gates on the estate – […]. Yes – keeping up the gates and seeing that the tenants’ land gave so many bushels of wheat to the acre or supported so many sheep the year round. . . .” (Parade’s End, 741).

However when Christopher finally manages to return to a rural life in The Last Post, it is questionable whether the pastoral ideal really holds up. Although his and Valentine’s cottage is at first presented as idyllic, their life there is marked with hardship. When Christopher’s son comes to visit along with Sylvia, his mother, and the new American tenant of Groby, Mrs. de Bray Pape, the cottage is described from their point of view:

It was extravagantly green, sunk in greenery and the grass that came nearly to Mrs. Pape’s middle was filled with hiding profusions of flowers that were turning to seed. The four counties swept away from under her, hedges like string going away, enclosing fields, to the hills on the very distant horizon; the country near at hand wooded. The boy beside her took a deep breath as he always did when he saw a
great view. On the moors above Groby, for instance. Purple they were. (Parade’s End, 711)

The place that the cottage is situated in is literally breath-taking, but the fact remains that Tietjens now lives in a cottage instead of the kind of house he was accustomed to previously; the cottage is not Groby and Christopher is no longer a landowner. The household is also quite poor as their only source of income is the money that Christopher makes selling old furniture to Americans; however, his American partner is swindling him and Christopher is too honest to see this. It is only because of the efficient housekeeping of Marie-Léonie, Mark’s mistress, that they are not destitute, and Valentine worries constantly about how they will make ends meet once her child is born. When Christopher finally returns home in The Last Post she reproaches him so vehemently about some prints he has forgotten in a jar that Mark almost tells her, “Let him off, the poor devil’s worn out!” (Parade’s End, 835). Christopher seems utterly defeated, being described as “a dejected bulldog” and in this incident the reader can perhaps see recurrences from Christopher’s marriage with Sylvia; despite Valentine’s kinder nature, their relationship seems equally hopeless. Although Valentine and Christopher have much more complimentary natures than him and Sylvia did, it seems that the hardship of their surroundings is driving them apart as Valentine can only focus on Christopher’s failure to retrieve the prints. She does not rejoice that he has finally arrived home, and fails to realize that he is worn out; her only focus is the money they need because in their poverty, money has suddenly become an all-important issue. The country idyll that Christopher hoped for does not seem particularly ruined because of the war, but because of problems set in motion before the war and because Tietjens’s personal problems have followed him into the countryside. Ford seems to consider the countryside as untouched despite the war, and describes it in the novel as relatively unchanging. This
passage illustrates the ageless nature of rural life, described through the figure of Gunning, a peasant who lives near the Tietjens’ cottage:

The Gunnings of the land were the rocks on which the lighthouse was built – as Christopher saw it. And Christopher was always right. Sometimes a little previous. But always right. Always right. The rocks had been there a million years before the lighthouse was built, the lighthouse made a deuce of a movable flashing – but it was a mere butterfly. The rocks would be there a million years after the light went for the last time out. Gunnings had been in the course of years, painted blue, a Druid-worshipper, later a Duke Robert of Normandy, illiterately burning towns and begetting bastards – and eventually – actually at the moment – a man of all works, half-full of fidelity, half blatant, hairy. A retainer you would retain as long as you were prosperous and dispensed hard cider and overlooked his blear-eyed peccadilloes with women. He would go on. . . . (Parade’s End, 814)

Gunning is described as a constant; whatever surface changes might appear in the time they live in, according to Ford (and Valentine, as she is the character narrating this passage) there will always be a Gunning in the countryside in one form or another. World War I has not managed to alter the timelessness of rural life and the figures that populate it; they have only adapted to it and continued obstinately with their lives. In one of the first passages in which Gunning is introduced, he starts a quarrel with Young Hogben, the farmer. Their quarrel also has that same timeless quality, much like their characters: “They continued for long in the endless quarrel that obtains between tenant-farmer who is not Quality but used to brutalising his hinds, and gentleman’s henchman who is used to popularity amongst his class and the peasantry. The only thing upon which they agreed was that you wouldn’t think
there ‘adnt been no war.” (Parade’s End, 709). Both Gunning and Young Hogben are fulfilling a role; the “tenant-farmer” and the “gentleman’s henchman” have always quarreled and they will always continue to do so; they even agree upon the fact that the war hasn’t changed anything in their world. This scene contradicts the view of the war as a turning point in Western history, and it seems that Ford is illustrating the fundamental adaptability and endurance of the human race no matter how destructive the situations become that they subject themselves to. Ford is perhaps also commenting upon the enduring nature of the lower classes, which indicates the survival of the class divide despite the upheaval that the upper classes have experienced during the events of the early twentieth century. The keepers of political power may change, but the peasantry, which seems to represent the heart and soul of England, remains fixed in its rhythms of life. These passages demonstrate an aspect of the rural nostalgia in Parade’s End; it is significant however that the view of Gunning as a timeless figure is one taken by Tietjens (“as Christopher saw it” Parade’s End, 814), who we already know to be a nostalgic character in favour of class division.

Despite the portrayal of the countryside as seemingly unchangeable, there are some after-effects of the war that manage to reach Christopher and his household. Mrs. de Bray Pape is the new American tenant of Groby, one of many Americans in fact who came to England after the war. The English landed gentry no longer had the means to keep up their way of life from before the war, and many of the old houses and estates were therefore tenanted out to rich Americans. As Mrs. de Bray Pape tells Mark, “That is what Time and the New World have done to redress the balance of the old. It is we who are keeping up the status of the grands seigneurs of old in your so-called ancestral homes.” (Parade’s End, 718). Tietjens also makes his living selling old furniture to these Americans in England, who are intrigued and charmed by the life the upper classes previously maintained. Their
difference in mentality with the old English upper classes however, is made clear in the book. When Mrs. de Bray Pape comes down the slope towards Tietjens’s cottage she walks through standing grass, which was meant for hay, and tramples all the stalks in the process. Christopher’s son, who is following her along the path, still retains enough of his landowning heritage to recognize how destructive her thoughtlessness is: “Every fibre of his country-boy landowner’s soul was outraged as he saw the long trail of satiny grey that followed Mrs. de Bray Pape’s long skirts. How were his father’s men to cut hay that had been trampled like that?” (Parade’s End, 712). Mrs. de Bray Pape also explains at great length her intentions for Groby to Mark Tietjens while he lies paralyzed in his bed outside. She believes she is a descendant of Madame de Maintenon, and therefore intends “to keep up at Groby a semi-regal state” (Parade’s End, 720). She also “apparently approved of having footmen in powder and the children of the tenants kneeling down when she drove in and out in his father’s coach and six. Because she intended to use his father’s coach and six when she drove over the moors to Redcar or Scarboro’.” (Parade’s End, 721). Seen through Mark’s point of view, her intentions appear ridiculous and vulgar, and it is obvious that it is not her place to make the tenants kneel before her when she drives out. Mrs. de Bray Pape has misunderstood the social and cultural position of the landowner, equating it with semi-royalty whereas it really involves more of a paternalistic relationship with the tenants; most of the tenants actually called Christopher and Mark’s father by his first name. Mark reflects, “She would have a tough time of it. They weren’t her tenants; they were his and they jolly well knew it. These fellows who took houses and castles furnished thought they jolly well hired descent from the family.” (Parade’s End, 721). The Americans settling down in England can in fact never replace the old landowning class despite their riches; they are intrigued by its old-world charm, but will ultimately remain newcomers who – according to the book’s
logic – do not have the same respect or understanding for its tradition as the previous English landowners.

This lack of respect for the past is exemplified in one of the most pivotal moments of the tetralogy. Sylvia has managed to manoeuvre Mrs. de Bray Pape into cutting down Groby Great Tree; it is her final act of revenge against Christopher Tietjens. Mrs. de Bray Pape is unknowing and uncaring about the tree’s significance for Groby and the entire Tietjens family; for her the tree is not symbolic of anything, but merely an unsanitary nuisance that blocks the light coming into the house. The cutting down of Groby Tree is a very symbolic moment in *Parade’s End*, being a concrete display of the fact that the old traditions, the old way of life and Tietjens’s values, are now irrevocably destroyed. The event represents the old making place for the new, and shows the way that traditions must either adapt to the times they exist in or be destroyed. For someone like Christopher, the cutting down of the tree is unthinkable and tragic; it is “as nasty a blow as the Tietjenses had had in ten generations” (*Parade’s End*, 802) and Sylvia specifically aims in hurting Christopher by getting the tree cut down. But not all the Tietjens’s are affected by this. Christopher’s brother Mark does not much care about the tree one way or another: “He did not care. Groby Great Tree had never seemed to like him. It never seemed to like anybody.” (*Parade’s End*, 760). For Mrs. de Bray Pape, cutting down the tree is certainly positive; as an American she is more attached to the benefits of good sanitation than sentimental memories of the past: “Sanitation went before anything. She hoped to leave the world a better place before she passed over.” (*Parade’s End*, 711). Indeed, from a practical standpoint, cutting down Groby Tree seems desirable and the novel’s conclusions about the event are ambiguous. However, the fact that Christopher is the main character, and that Sylvia has pushed Mrs. de Bray Pape to cut down the tree only to vex Christopher, indicates that the novel sides with
Christopher. Groby Tree is indeed more than just a tree; it is linked to superstition and myth, and even has a ceremonial function as every local marriage has taken place under the tree for years.

Groby Great Tree was the symbol of Tietjens. For thirty miles around Groby they made their marriage vows by Groby Great Tree. In the other Ridings they said that Groby Tree and Groby Well were equal in height and depth one to the other. When they were really imaginatively drunk Cleveland villagers would declare – would knock you down if you denied – that Groby Great Tree was 365 foot high and Groby Well 365 feet deep. A foot for every day of the year. . . . On special occasions – he could not himself be bothered to remember what – they would ask permission to hang rags and things from the boughs. (Parade’s End, 733)

For the villagers, Groby Tree takes on mystical dimensions and it is an important part of their identity as tenants of Groby. Even the Tietjens family, while not as superstitious about it, sets great store by the tree, Christopher in particular. But the act of cutting down the tree can also be interpreted as a positive action, as the Tietjens are finally released from the past in all its romance but also in all its limitations. Sylvia worries for a moment that she has actually helped the family by releasing them from the so-called curse that lay over the house: “Perhaps in letting Groby Great Tree be cut down God was lifting the ban off the Tietjenses. He might well.” (Parade’s End, 802). And Mark notes that “it had always been whispered in Groby, amongst the children and servants that Groby Great Tree did not like the house. Its roots tore great chunks out of the foundations and two or three times the trunk had had to be bricked into the front wall of the house.” (Parade’s End, 758). The tree takes on ambiguous meanings, seeming at times sinister from the point of view of certain
characters, and being at other times the emblem and pride of Groby. The tree is symbolic of the past, and the novel’s uncertain stance towards it reflects Ford’s own complicated rapport with the past; the past is both longed for but acknowledged to be no worthier than the present, much like the way Groby Great Tree takes on value depending on which character standpoint the book depicts.

The immediate changes in society brought about by World War I, as well as the changes set in motion by the Industrial Revolution longer ago force the characters of Parade’s End to confront their surroundings, and in some cases, force them to finally adapt to the present at least in part as we can see in the case of the protagonist, Tietjens. The experience of war has led him to accept that his nostalgic vision of the past is not a tenable way to live his life, and he decides to abandon his eighteenth-century principles in favour of his own happiness with Valentine. He finds some solace in the countryside he always idealized previously, but this idyll is shattered as the hard reality of poverty prevents him and Valentine from truly being happy. Christopher’s last romantic notions of the past are severed forever with the cutting down of Groby tree, and this moment can be analyzed as the end of Christopher’s nostalgic viewpoint. The narrator presents this in an ambiguous light, and it is uncertain whether the reader should consider the ending, and the novel’s stance towards change in general, positively or negatively. It is interesting in this case to consider the author’s own intentions towards the novel, which are explored in the following chapter.
5. Ford in Relation to Nostalgia

5.1. The Influence of Ford’s Life upon his Writing:

Although the author’s own views and opinions do not necessarily advocate the message he is trying to convey in his work, it seems worth considering Ford’s own attitude to the changing times and society he lived in. Ford namely wrote *Parade’s End* with the intention of chronicling his own age, examining in particular the enormous impact that the First World War had upon his society and the previous ruling classes, in particular the landed gentry. As James Heldman states, it seems that Ford began *Parade’s End* with two distinct ideas in mind. Firstly, he intended to use as subject matter the end of the Victorian Age on a social, cultural and historical level; in his words: “the world as it culminated in war” (*It was the Nightingale*, 214). And secondly, he was interested in how his friend, the Tory mathematician Arthur Marwood, would have reacted to “witnessing the death of one civilization and the birth of another.” (Heldman, 271). Ford wanted to be a “historian of his own time” (*It was the Nightingale*, 199) in other words, and based his main character Christopher Tietjens on an actual person. Ford’s creation, Christopher Tietjens, also reflects quite a few aspects of Ford’s own character and life experiences. Ford participated in World War I himself, and he had an ill-fated relationship with an affluent socialite, Violet Hunt (Sylvia Tietjens is often said to be based on Hunt). He left Hunt for a painter called Stella Bowen (associated with Valentine), and the pair lived together in a cottage in the countryside after the war, where Bowen bore Ford a child. Ford’s political views also reflect those of Tietjens; as Andrzej Gasiorek argues, Ford is an old-fashioned Tory with a predilection for the feudal system:
In 1907, [Ford] observes in *England and the English* that the Revolution of 1688 ‘did away with the true Toryism which is Socialism, and rendered possible Individualism’; in 1908 he describes himself as ‘by temperament an obstinate, sentimental and old-fashioned Tory’; fifteen years later, he announces in the opening editorial to the *Transatlantic Review* that its ‘politics will be those of its editor who has no party leanings save towards those of a Tory kind so fantastically old-fashioned as to see no salvation save in the feudal system as practised in the fourteenth century – or in such Communism as may prevail a thousand years hence’; in *Return to Yesterday*, published seven years before his death, he notes that his ‘predilections have always been toward the Right’, maintaining that ‘when the world was a matter of small communities each under an arbitrary but responsible head the world was at its best’ and suggesting that ‘you cannot better the Feudal System’. (‘The Politics of Cultural Nostalgia’, 55)

Ford considered his politics to be so old-fashioned as to be obsolete, and advocated the value of the feudal system in which there was a stable community led by a disinterested, responsible member of the upper classes who had the best interests of his subjects at heart and provided for them accordingly. Tietjens’s political views run parallel to those of Ford, which according to Gasiorek, “suggests that *Parade’s End* employs the distanced figure of Tietjens to probe its author’s own beliefs at a time of far-reaching social crisis and change.” (‘The Politics of Cultural Nostalgia’, 60). These similarities between Ford and Tietjens are undeniably striking; the literary criticism surrounding *Parade’s End* also generally accepts the fact that Ford was inspired by his own life for the story he was writing. However, it would be too simple to consider Christopher Tietjens as Ford’s political and ethical spokesperson throughout the book. Tietjens is at times criticized and even ridiculed, and the novel ends
with Christopher being forced to change and adapt his ethical system. While *Parade’s End* clearly has a nostalgic mindset, Ford himself displays a self-awareness towards this mindset, acknowledging it to be limited and in need of reformation.

5.2. **Ford as a Modernist Author**

Another factor in Ford’s life that is important to keep in mind is that although Ford was influenced by the nineteenth-century artistic milieu (his grandfather was Ford Madox Brown, and as such, Ford was surrounded by many of the artists of the pre-Raphaelite movement while growing up) Ford came into contact with many modernist writers in his adult years. Ford was a modernist author, and was therefore a member of various artistic and intellectual social circles that were characterized by their cosmopolitan and radically innovative nature. One of the defining characteristics of modernism, in fact, is often considered to be the way it breaks with tradition and renews it. *Parade’s End* is also written in an experimental style, using ellipses and fragmented storytelling to convey the events of the novel. The writing is cyclical: the reader often gets a glimpse of a scene that has already happened and receives the detailed explanation of the action further on. An early example of this is the incident when Valentine and Gertie demonstrate for women’s rights on the golf course. The scene is alluded to at the start of Chapter Three of *Some Do Not* . . . , as Tietjens recounts the events of the day to himself, but it is only told in full in Chapter Four. As Randall Stevenson notes, Ford’s chapters take on a circular form, “beginning at a moment later than the events they go back to describe, ending with the story advanced again to the time at which the chapter began. The effect throughout is of a narrative that confronts the present only with some reluctance, preferring a recursive evasion of the immediate through its central character’s memories of the recent past.” (133). According to Stevenson, the form of
the narrative reflects the characters’ relationship towards the past and the present. In the case of Tietjens, it especially emphasizes his nostalgic disposition, exposed by the reluctance of the narrative to confront the present. Stevenson’s reflection does seem pertinent in relation to Tietjens’s nature; a large portion of the story is told through his point of view and therefore it follows that the narrative structure would reflect Tietjens’s fixation with the past.

Besides innovations in story structure, Ford also uses the stream-of-consciousness technique to depict what is going on in his protagonists’ minds. One example is when Valentine is lying in bed near the end of the book, thinking of her child, when she suddenly remembers she has to look for some prints: “Surely a child should lie gazing at what his mother had seen whilst she was awaiting him! And, where were those lost prints? . . . Four parallelograms of faint, silly colour. Promised for to-morrow morning. The margins needed breadcrumbing. . . .” (Parade’s End, 810). This technique is especially prevalent in The Last Post, where Ford uses it to explore the motivations and implicit influences that drive his characters. The Last Post, the last part in the tetralogy, has often been set apart from the other three books and was heavily criticized upon its apparition in 1928. Graham Greene refused to include it in the Bodley Head edition of Parade’s End (1962-1963) that he was editing, pronouncing it “a disaster which has delayed a full critical appreciation of Parade’s End”, on the grounds of the novel being overly sentimental. The literary criticism dealing with Ford’s work today considers The Last Post as an essential part of the tetralogy, and indeed, the way it is written marks it as a distinctive example of Ford’s modernist style. The Last Post contains very little action or plot; the entire book is set in one afternoon, and the thoughts of various characters are explored as they go about their lives. The main character of the previous three novels, Christopher, is conspicuously absent, although he is present in
many of the other characters’ thoughts. Ford combines modernist techniques with nostalgic themes throughout the tetralogy, such as the rural idyll and the decline of the English aristocracy. *The Last Post* in particular, builds on this by focusing almost completely on the thoughts and psychological depth of his characters, all the while framing them in a pastoral setting.

It is notable that despite the novel cycle’s nostalgic tone, it explores innovative forms and new methods of storytelling; Ford, for all his self-professed outdated opinions, writes in a modernist style that comes across as new and experimental and which therefore contradicts the traditional way of thinking he seems to uphold. This contrast between content and form is further highlighted by the implications of the technique of stream-of-consciousness itself: in exploring the inner consciousness of his characters, Ford also permits his narrative to focus more on the past as the human mind constantly refers to its memories and recollections, which is something the characters of *Parade’s End* do throughout the entire novel.

5.3. **The Problematic Sincerity of the Nostalgic Theme in *Parade’s End***:

The presence of nostalgia in *Parade’s End* takes on various forms, but it is debatable whether Ford intended the nostalgia to be taken seriously or not. It is clear that the nostalgic viewpoint of the novel is mainly a way of enabling Ford to criticize his own society; Tietjens himself is an outsider to his own society due to his eighteenth-century values, and this enables him to observe early twentieth-century society with sufficient distance. Ford effectively intended Tietjens to fulfil the role of critic in his novel, saying that “his activities were most markedly to be in the realm of criticism.” (*It was the Nightingale*, 217). As Gene Moore notes, Tietjens is “the last survivor of a vanished species” (52), and it is necessary for
him to be that way because by standing outside society he is able to embody what society should be: “his ‘criticism’ thus marks the extent to which society has fallen away from its own professed virtues.” (52). Ford uses Tietjens’s nostalgic gaze as a way of correcting what he sees as failings in his own society. However, he simultaneously questions the validity of a nostalgic point of view. Tietjens, as the figure of the nostalgic par excellence, is in fact often ridiculed in the novel, and his actions tend to lead to situations rich with irony.

As has already been discussed in Chapter Two, Tietjens’s code of conduct has a penchant for leaving him in situations that are more detrimental to himself than anything else. It is the great irony of Parade’s End that every time he acts according to his virtuous and outdated principles, Tietjens complicates his life even further. We see this throughout the book in the way that Tietjens reacts to Sylvia’s affair with Potty Perowne: instead of divorcing her he ignores her for the rest of their marriage and subsequently causes them both much pain. His refusal to counter the rumours spread by his brother’s roommate, Ruggles, about himself, so as to not implicate Sylvia, leads to his father’s suicide and Christopher’s own ensuing refusal of the Groby money (money that Christopher will desperately need when he returns from the war). Christopher is a character who obstinately refuses to act in accordance with what would probably suit his situation best. The point to which he upholds his values is almost hyperbolic; it seems impossible that any person could restrain their feelings in such a manner and Christopher’s Tory rationality is caricature-like. Ford links Christopher’s rationality to what he describes as a quintessentially English characteristic, explaining the English psyche as an exercise in self-control. And no character so conscientiously follows this English tradition as Christopher. Ford also implicitly criticizes this English characteristic by outlining the absurdity of Christopher’s way of thinking in the book through the outcomes of the situations he finds himself in: although Christopher
attempts to live virtuously, he ironically enough causes his own downfall by doing this. It is only at the end of *A Man Could Stand Up* that Christopher realizes that he has to adapt to his century in order to survive; and that it is perhaps better to simply be happy than to be honourable. The fact that Christopher is forced to change reflects Ford’s own awareness of the flaws in his character’s views.

An additional way that the author undermines his main character is the fact that Christopher’s claim to being the quintessential English country gentleman – a claim that is central to his life – is questionable upon closer inspection. The most important criterion that seems to figure in being part of a respectable family is its name and lineage. Christopher continually uses this to judge the respectability of the other characters he meets: while in the army at the base camp, he gets annoyed at Colonel Levin, a member of General Campion’s staff, because he is forced to treat Levin as his equal and Tietjens does not consider him as such. He remarks:

> For how off parade could this descendant of an old clo’man from Frankfurt be the equal of him, Tietjens of Groby? He wasn’t his equal in any way – let alone socially. If Tietjens hit him he would drop dead; if he addressed a little sneering remark to Levin, the fellow would melt so that you would see the old spluttering Jew swimming up through his carefully arranged Gentile features. (*Parade’s End*, 332)

Because Levin is only a generation or so removed from his foreign heritage, Tietjens automatically assumes he is not truly Gentile. His use of the wording “carefully arranged Gentile features” also indicates that Levin only appears to be part of the gentry due to the fact that he has worked at appearing so, not because it is in his blood or because it is his natural heritage. There is also the implication of racism; for Tietjens, Levin’s Jewish ancestry
prevents him from ever being a true member of the English upper class. This seems somewhat hypocritical of Christopher; his own family is much older than that of Levin’s, but his origins are just as foreign. The Tietjens’s of Groby came over with William of Orange’s army as soldiers in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and they were presumably ennobled after the revolution. Moreover, Groby estate was forcibly taken by the Tietjens from a Catholic family and a curse is said to hang over the house as a result. Christopher is undeniably of foreign origin; his name and his ancestors are Dutch, and Groby, despite the connection and sense of ownership Christopher feels towards it, only belongs to his family as property they stole from the Catholics during the Revolution. Their ownership of Groby is no more legitimate than Sylvia’s claims on Groby or anyone else for that matter, and the importance Christopher sets upon his own heritage seems unfounded and romanticized. In fact, Sylvia, with her catholic heritage, has more in common with the original owners of Groby than Christopher himself. As Gasiorek notes, “This unseemly fact undermines [Christopher’s] patrician Toryism, for it reveals not only that a supposedly high-born family is nothing of the sort but also that its birth as an English ruling family depends on an originary act of violence and despoliation.” (“The Politics of Cultural Nostalgia”, 64).

As well as commenting upon the hypocrisy present in Tietjens’s preoccupation with birth and lineage, Gasiorek notes another paradox in Tietjens’s political views. Tietjens upholds the Tory standpoints that were current in the eighteenth century, but the politics of the Tory party of that time were based on those of the Royalist faction that was defeated by the Glorious Revolution a century earlier. With the coming of William of Orange, a cause the Tietjens’ evidently supported as they fought in his army, the Tory aims of keeping the greater amount of authority in the hands of the king and not the English parliament was defeated. The Act of Toleration in 1689 also gave rights to Protestant dissenters; an action
that also undermined Tory policies in their aims to uphold the Anglican Church. The Tietjens family in fact owes its wealth and prestige to the Whigs and not the Tories, and therefore it is ironic how Christopher steadfastly maintains the views of a political party his own ancestors were ideologically opposed to. There is also the final irony that Christopher, for all his identification with a pastoral vision of England and his cultivation of the persona of an English country gentleman, owes his wealth to the coalfields owned by his family. The Tietjens family, as opposed to many other landowning families, have been able to stay afloat during the agricultural depression and the mounting land taxes because of the ample returns their coalfields have brought them. Of all the industries that flourished during the Industrial Revolution, coal mining is perhaps the most iconic representation of the filth and harmfulness of industrialization. Tietjens waxes lyrical about the moors above Groby, but at the same time, he remarks while fighting at the front that “He had been all his life familiar with the idea of picks going in the dark, underground. There is no North Country man who is not. All through that country, if you awake at night you hear the sound, and always it appears supernatural. You know it is the miners, at the pit-face, hundreds and hundreds of feet down.” (Parade’s End, 555).

If we take into account these paradoxes present in Christopher’s own views and origins, as well as the situational irony that his virtuous actions continuously lead him to, it is evident that Ford did not write Christopher as an ideal character whose views were meant to be endorsed. Rather, he questions the worth and validity of his own opinions, exaggerated through Christopher, and though he sympathizes with Christopher’s nostalgic longing for a different social order, Ford displays an awareness that a return is impossible. As Andrzej Gasiorek summarizes neatly, “Parade’s End appears to make use of a form of parodic nostalgia by combining a powerful desire to return to a superseded past with a wry
awareness not only that such a return is impossible but also that the imagined past was not quite so hallowed as the myth-making mind would wish.” (“The Politics of Cultural Nostalgia”, 71). The nostalgia in Parade’s End is undeniably present, but it undermines itself at the same time by displaying a self-awareness towards its own limitations and the limitations of the past it longs to return to. Ford criticizes his own society, but he also criticizes an attitude like that of Tietjens, which is too nostalgic and therefore limiting; it prevents Tietjens from ever being successful or reaching some form of self-actualization.
Conclusion

Ford’s intentions for *Parade’s End* are nuanced and he displays an ironic sympathy for his characters. His main character Christopher Tietjens is indeed a nostalgic figure, as he feels a stronger connection towards the eighteenth century than to his own time; he upholds the politics of romantic Toryism and longs for a frugal, rural life. His sense of alienation from his own time period permits him to observe and criticize his own society through the position of an outsider. The author’s sympathy partly lies with Tietjens, as he is presented as practically the last honourable man in England while the rest of the characters scheme and manipulate to achieve their ends. Tietjens also bears a striking resemblance to one of Ford’s friends, Arthur Marwood, and shares similar traits with Ford himself. Nevertheless, Ford also questions the validity and effectiveness of the way in which Christopher leads his life. In the book itself, Tietjens’s values are challenged by the two women that feature most prominently in his life. Valentine is a suffragette, and as a result, she is highly critical of the role Christopher assumes as a patriarchic country gentleman. Sylvia is equally critical of Christopher, but this seems due to the fact that according to Sylvia, Tietjens has let their marriage become marked with hate and misunderstanding in the name of behaving honourably. Christopher’s rigid values and his tendency to suppress his emotions are criticized, as these elements all lead him to make decisions that ruin him. Much of the book’s appeal in fact originates from the irony of Christopher’s constant desire to do the right thing, which then only results in failure. Christopher is both a tragic and ridiculous figure, whose obstinacy seems absurd to the reader and to the characters that surround him. Ford further undermines Tietjens by basing his ideals upon English traditions of questionable value themselves. Although Christopher puts great importance on heritage
and judges others by the illustriousness of their family line (or their lack of it), his own family is of foreign origin and came into Groby by stealing it from a Catholic family during the Glorious Revolution of William of Orange. His political ties also contradict what his ancestors stood for as they supported the Glorious Revolution, which was in opposition to the Tory party of that time. Christopher’s abhorrence of modernity and the effects of the Industrial Revolution are shown to be hypocritical, as his own family has earned its enormous fortune by operating several coalfields on its lands. Furthermore, Christopher’s veneration of rural life and the stability of the feudal system is shown to be an unfounded ideal when he personally experiences the misery of living in poverty in the countryside. Though his and Valentine’s cottage is indeed situated in a beautiful location, the strain of their situation shows in Valentine’s frustration with Tietjens at the end of the book, and in Christopher’s hopelessness. The memory of the war even manages to reach them in their remote setting, as the American tenant of Groby, Mrs. de Bray Pape – representative of the many Americans who came to England after the war – pays a visit to their cottage to inform the Tietjens that she wants to cut down Groby Great Tree. Christopher is dealt a last blow with the cutting down of Groby Tree, a final symbol of the unrelenting replacement of the old by the new, a fact which is ambiguously presented in the novel. Ford undeniably presents Mrs. de Bray Pape as a vulgar and unwelcome intruder in the social hierarchy of the English landowner and his subjects. Nevertheless, the Tree is not a positive force for Groby either, overshadowing the house and choking its walls. Furthermore, it was planted to commemorate the birth of Christopher’s great-grandfather, who died in a brothel, again discrediting the moral righteousness of the Tietjens family and their family tree.

Ford calls into question the feeling of nostalgia and his characters’ attachment to it, as they long for a past that does not correspond with the ideal vision they associate with it.
The past is no more glorious than the present, which Ford acknowledges with humorous insight, summing up the grand English tradition as “all the rest of the rubbish” (*Parade’s End*, 238). Ford is self-reflective towards the concept of nostalgia, displaying an awareness towards his own penchant for the phenomenon, but he is also simultaneously aware of its shortcomings. Change, while not always positive – as is evidenced by the horrors of World War I – is portrayed by Ford as inevitable and must be met with a flexible disposition. Tietjens learns this the hard way, as he reaches the very depths of misery in the trenches before he realizes that he must adapt his principles to his age. Because English post-war society is a society in which there will be “no more parades”, or more specifically, no more gentlemen to uphold the honourable behaviour that characterized the hierarchic society of the past, it brings a certain freedom (shown primarily through women getting the vote, as well as Tietjens deciding to leave Sylvia and live with Valentine). The final act of cutting down Groby Tree symbolically severs Tietjens’s bond to the past. This not only lifts the curse that was said to be on the family; it also implies that in the future, Christopher and his ménage will find some happiness after all.
Bibliography


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