

The Art of Fiction and the Art of War: Henry James, H. G. Wells, and Ford Madox Ford

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The house of fiction has . . . a number of possible windows. . . . At each of them stands a figure . . . with a field-glass, which [insures] to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other.

—Henry James

Almost a year after the war broke out between the Allied Forces and the Central Powers in August 1914, a battle was fought between Henry James and H. G. Wells on the literary front. These two instances of hostility, although vastly different in their significance, are nevertheless not unrelated. France, for instance, was the object of attack in both the military and literary campaigns. For Kaiser Wilhelm II, France was the cultural capital of Europe which, in its pride, looked down upon Germany; for H. G. Wells, France threatened England because Henry James—American scion of Balzac, Flaubert, and de Maupassant—sought to disseminate a foreign aesthetic in preference to the indigenous one espoused by Wells himself. So just as the German emperor sought to conquer and humiliate France, the British novelist sought to conquer and humiliate Henry James, who, along with Joseph Conrad, a Pole; Stephen Crane, an American; and Ford Madox Ford, an Anglo-German, formed for Wells “a ring of foreign conspirators” (Seymour 14) who were plotting to overthrow the English novel.

The long and “affectionately quarrelsome friendship” (88) between James and Wells ended suddenly in July 1915 when Henry James wrote to H. G. Wells, saying that he had received the copy of a new book that Wells had left for him at the Reform Club. That book was *Boon*, which satirized James himself and parodied his fiction. *Boon* was Wells’s response to James’s criticism of him the year before. James had argued in his essay “The New Novel”—an essay actually written in response to a manifesto of Wells’s¹—that the novels of both Arnold

Bennett and of Wells himself showed little if any artistry in their storytelling. Doing as he did in many of his late essays, James spoke of technical matters in metaphorical terms. This time the metaphor was food and drink. He said that the technique of Wells and Bennett was like that of someone who squeezed oranges. Their novels suggested to James "the act of squeezing out to the utmost the plump and more or less juicy orange of a particular acquainted state and letting this affirmation of energy, however directed or undirected, constitute for them the 'treatment' of a theme" (*Essays* 132). Moreover, James said that the new novelists give us a slice of life, buttered thick and dripping with jam, which allows true-believers, as it did the Israelites of old, to carry on yet another day. James was unhappy, however, because he felt that Bennett and Wells and their followers paid not the slightest attention to the way their slice was cut or from what loaf it came; therefore, its significance as an illustration of life was unclear. Wells, for his part, thought James was much too fussy a head chef to plan menus for the house of fiction. And in *Boon* he said, in so many words, that oranges and bread are themselves more important than the way they are squeezed and sliced.

Wells argued that James was "the culmination of the superficial type" of novelist who is more interested in how a novel is written than in what a novel is written about (*Boon* 453). The characters in James's novels, according to Wells, were "eviscerated people": they had neither stomachs nor bowels nor sweat glands nor sexual organs. Wells asserts that characters in James's novels "never make lusty love, never go to angry war, never shout at an election or perspire at poker; never in any way *date . . .*" (*Boon* 453). James's is therefore a fiction in which great technical skill goes into telling stories about nothing of any importance. Henry James's novels show us, brilliantly, how a hippopotamus "pick[s] up a pea" (*Boon* 456). Wells continues, "The thing [James's] novel is *about* is always there. It is like a church lit but without a congregation to distract you, with every light and line focused on the high altar. And on the altar, very reverently placed, intensely there, is a dead kitten, an egg-shell, and a bit of string" (455).² That is what happens when a novelist thinks of himself as an artist rather than as a journalist; that is what happens when

a novelist tries to create a world that he should be more properly recording.

Boon next demonstrates the basics of a Jamesian novel in "The Spoils of Mr. Blandish," which takes its title from James's novel, *The Spoils of Poynton*. The Blandish story tells of subtly mysterious doings in a country house that appears to harbor a ghost; but it does not. It harbors a butler who quietly in the dead of night drinks himself unconscious in the wine-cellar. This novel of lights and shades, impressions and trepidations is simply another "Whodunit" in which, as usual, the butler did it. Nevertheless, trite as it is, Boon's "Spoils of Mr. Blandish" ends with "a beautiful flavour, ripe and rare, rich with opulence, [hanging] *diminuendo mōriendo*—in the air . . ." (Boon 469). Needless to say, this rare and ripe flavour, that diminishes and dies away, has nothing to do with fresh bread or juicy oranges.

When he read Wells's assessment of his theory of fiction and the parody of his novel, Henry James was not amused. He responded to Wells's defense of life at the expense of art on 10 July 1915 in a letter made memorable by one of its sentences. "It is art that *makes* life," James wrote: "It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance, . . . and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process" (*Letters* 4: 770). If that is the case, Wells wrote back to James, "When you say 'it is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance,' I can only read sense into it by assuming that you are using 'art' for every conscious human activity" (*Letters* 4: 770n1). Wells's assumption was correct. James subscribed to "the theory of the imagination as the creative faculty, the faculty by which man brings something new into the world, something which was never there before" (Langbaum 6).

For James art was a conscious human activity that gave life a new intensity even outside of works of art themselves. The artist's habit of mind permitted James, whether he was standing within or outside the house of fiction, to see life from a certain point of view and in a generic context. Events shaped themselves in James's imagination as situations in genres like comedy and tragedy and romance. His artistic consciousness so shaped James, for instance, that it galvanized him to see the First World War as a tragedy that required intense feelings to produce heroism at home as well as at the front itself. He

responded, therefore, to the Belgian refugees who came to England as an actor would to his fellow actors in a great tragedy: "Questions . . . as to a range of form and tradition, . . . not our own, dwindled and died before the gross fact of our having here an example of such a world-tragedy as we supposed Europe had outlived, and . . . nothing . . . mattered but that we should bravely and handsomely hold up our quite heavy enough end of it" (*Within the Rim* 47). With the Great War being enacted upon the stage of the world everyone was required to enter into the tragedy and play his part without pretense or excuse.

When Wells told James, half-apologetically, that he had written his parody of him in *Boon* "as the first escape I had from the obsession of this war" (*Letters* 4: 768n2), James could not be sympathetic with him. James had already written to Hugh Walpole that his point of view in this tragedy was that of "the Cause [of England, France, and Belgium] and what becomes of it" (4: 751). "That is the only thing that exists for us," James told his niece Peggy, "it crowds the whole sky from pole to pole" (4: 725). Whether he was "well or ill," Violet Hunt reported of James during the war, "it was understood that we talked in these days of war and nothing but war" (Hunt 271). James himself told Edith Wharton that the war had made him feel "more and more, instead of less and less" (*Letters* 4: 741). And he wrote to Clare Sheridan, whose husband had just gone to fight at the front, "Feel, feel, I say—feel for all you're worth, and even if it half kills you, for that is the only way to live . . ." (4: 755). There is no better or more precise example of art making life than this exhortation which recalls the scene in Gloriani's garden in *The Ambassadors* where Lambert Strether exhorts little Bilham to "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to" (21: 217).

James pitched himself into war activities, intensified his feelings, and tried to make what he felt intelligible to the common man. He wrote the essays that were published posthumously in *Within the Rim*, and he summoned Violet Hunt to him to ask whether his essay entitled "France" was written in such a way that even the man in the street could understand it. This had never been a concern of James's before. He even wrote his essay on "The American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps in France" as a letter to an editor, and it turned out to be so intelligible on a first reading that even James

himself must have been surprised by the success of his efforts. But in this as in all the essays in *Within the Rim* James can only make himself understood as an artist. He talks of action "that affirms life and freshly and inveterately exemplifies it" (*Rim* 77): in other words, he talks of art making life and thereby representing it more intensely. He sees in France "a beauty that is tragic" and a symbol of universal dignity: "What happens to France happens to all that part of ourselves which we are most proud, and most finely advised, to enlarge and cultivate and consecrate" (89). France stands as an epiphany of the mind and imagination, just as Belgium stands as an epiphany of suffering: of "the exquisite in the horrible" (50). And one young mother with a child in her arms, arriving in Rye as a refugee, presents herself as the epiphany of Belgian suffering itself: "her cry is still in my ears, . . . and it plays, to my sense, as a great fitful, tragic light over the dark exposure of her people" (59). James here brings together the point of view of a Rye resident, the genre of tragedy, and the technique of epiphany. He shows how completely he could feel an event, render it in an aesthetic category, and, at the same time, make its significance clear to any reader.

As the honorary president of the American Volunteer Motor-Ambulance Corps in France, Henry James did succeed, occasionally, in making himself understood by the man in the street. "Greater love [than this] hath no man," said Violet Hunt of James, "than [that] he lay down his *style* for a friend." "I said, 'Mr. James! . . . I did not know that you could be so—*passionate!*' I had sought and found *le mot juste*" (Hunt 270). And James also sought and found the precisely right word in responding to her: "Ah, madam, you must not forget that in this article I am addressing—not a Woman, but a *Nation!*" (271, italics added). James further intensified his passion when he laid down his American citizenship to sharpen his point of view: "*Civis Britannicus sum,*" I am a British citizen, he writes to Edmund Gosse on 26 July 1915 (*Letters* 4: 772). So now he can speak of "We—with a capital" (Hunt 269) as he faces the "horrors [that] encompass us" (*Letters* 4: 758).

Henry James absolutely refused to escape from the war. He intensified his sense of it as a "tragedy" (*Letters* 4: 713), adapted the Allied "Cause," specified his place in it as a British citizen, and made

himself from this chosen point of view feel the tragic immensity of life more intensely. He thereby answered H. G. Wells's attempt to escape the war by entering more totally into it. The very aesthetic point of view that Wells so pitilessly parodied actually led James to live more intensely than he would have otherwise found possible. "Of course for myself I live, live intensely and am fed by life," James told Wells in his final letter to him, "and my value, whatever it be, is in my own kind of expression of that" (*Letters* 4: 769). Whereas at the war's outbreak James was so disillusioned that he regretted that he had lived to see 4 August 1914 (*Letters* 4: 758), he recovered and lived to visit hospitals, read to the wounded, collect and distribute tobacco, write to soldiers, encourage their widows, and, as he said, throw "his poor old ponderous, and yet so imperceptible, 'moral weight' into the scale" (*Letters* 4: 758). He was able to do these things, at least in part, because he allowed aesthetic categories like tragedy and point of view to shape his life. Henry James at war presents himself as the most apt illustration of how, as he told H. G. Wells, "art makes life."

This is no surprise to anyone who has read his fiction. James's attentive readers know him as a novelist who, in one way or another, was always in the battle zone. "When he walked out of the refuge of his study into the world and looked about him," his last secretary Theodora Bosanquet wrote, "he saw a place of torment, where creatures of prey perpetually thrust their claws into the quivering flesh of the doomed, defenseless children of light" (33). Similarly, Ford Madox Ford wrote that "Mr. James . . . has looked at life with its treacheries, its banalities, and its shirkings and its charlatanries, all of them founded on the essential dirtiness of human nature" (*Henry James* 137). Moreover, for Ford, *The Spoils of Poynton*, the novel that Wells parodied in "The Spoils of Mr. Blandish," was the "greatest book" that Henry James wrote (35). Ford knew that dead kittens and egg shells and bits of string are the very things out of which Henry James made great novels. James's characters, Ford argues, "will talk about rain, about the opera, about the moral aspects of the selling of Old Masters to the New Republic, and those conversations will convey to your mind that the quiet talkers are living in an atmosphere of horror, of bankruptcy, of passion as hopeless as the Dies Irae. That

is the supreme trick of art to-day, since that is how we really talk about the musical glasses whilst our lives crumble to pieces around us" (153).

Wells wanted James to write a more popular and less attenuated fiction that would encourage more readers to improve themselves socially and morally. Ford knew that James could not write such didactic fiction. Ford knew that James was a novelist of upper-class, not lower-class, manners: an Uptown, not a Downtown, novelist in New York; a West End, not a City, novelist in London; a Right Bank, not a Left Bank, novelist in Paris. Within those limits Ford's James was more socially incisive than any government report ever written. Like Balzac, Ford said, James sought to "beat the Blue Book out of the field" (119). Although Ford saw that James wrote about the best that civilization had achieved, he was sure that James showed society just as it is: "averagely sensual, averagely kindly, averagely cruel, averagely honest, averagely imbecile" (*English Novel* 122). So that if James was sure that "the soul's immortal," Ford concludes, James was equally sure that "most people have not got souls—are in the end just the stuff with which to fill graveyards" (141).

The irony is that Henry James comes at the end of an era of British fiction that has incessantly produced heroes and heroines scrambling up the social ladder to achieve the bourgeois dream of riches and social position. Dickens' Pip and Thackeray's Becky Sharp are the most outstanding instances of the type, and Wells was to create another in Artie Kipps. But what James shows in his novels is that life at the top is not worth the scramble. "But as for duchesses with souls—well, most duchesses haven't got them!" (*Henry James* 142). "If," writes Ford, extracting the essence from James's fiction,

If, in short, this life is not worth having—this life of the West End, of the country-house, of the drawing-room, possibly of the studio, and of the garden party—if this life, which is the best that our civilization has to show, is not worth the living; if it is not pleasant, cultivated, civilised, cleanly[,] and instinct with reasonably high ideals, then indeed, Western civilization is not worth going on with, and we had better scrap the whole of it so as to begin again. (62-63)

This, as a matter of record, is exactly what society did eight months and three days after Ford published his monograph on Henry James

when German troops, on route to invade France, crossed the border at Gemminich and invaded Belgium on 4 August 1914.

Ford Madox Ford, then, gives us a Henry James who is very different from H. G. Wells's superficial novelist who created eviscerated characters. Ford gives us a novelist who is writing about the very things that made the First World War inevitable. Ford's James writes about the disappearance of moral value in a society that was more shadow than substance. Reflecting on Henry James some years after the Master's death, Ford said that James "needed to stand on extraordinarily firm ground before he would think he knew a world. And what he knew he rendered, along with its amenities, its gentlefolkishness, its pettiness, its hypocrisies, its make-believes. He gives you an immense—and an increasingly tragic—picture of a leisured society that is unavailing, materialist, emasculated—and doomed. No one," Ford continues, "was more aware of this" than Henry James himself ("The Old Man" 52).

France, of course, was the real issue of the war. The Kaiser sought to conquer and humiliate France. The German military command saw Sarajevo as a pretext, Belgium as a pathway, and England as a neutral. But England refused to be neutral, and France came to preoccupy the minds and hearts of James and Ford. "I think that if there is a general ground in the world," James wrote, "on which an appeal might be made, in a civilized circle . . . the idea of what France and the French mean to the educated spirit of man would be the nameable thing" (*Rim* 83). France was for James the guardian of reason and the aesthetic sensibility in the Western world: "it sums up for us, . . . and has always summed up, the life of the mind and the life of the senses alike, taken together, in the most irrepressible freedom of either" (89). He had published *A Little Tour in France* in 1885, a book that lovingly evokes the rich heritage of French town and countryside; and earlier in 1878, James paid tribute to French literature in *French Poets and Novelists*, which comprises the merest handful of the ninety-six essays and reviews he wrote on French writers. Ford alludes to both of these books in his monograph on Henry James: the one "in its nice appreciation of surfaces and forms," which does more for the visitor, say, to Carcassone, "than anything written by the hand of man" (*Henry James* 104); the other, in marking

James's "formal confession" of losing his romantic illusions: "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats—all human life is there" (140). *French Poets and Novelists* marks for Ford James's determination, in spite of himself, to be a realist. In a word, the French tradition made Henry James into the novelist that we, like Ford, value.

Ford himself wrote three books on France. *Between St. Denis and St. George* (1915) was written as propaganda to emphasize British-French ties during the war, and it was quickly translated into French. *A Mirror to France* (1926) is a celebration of French life ranging from the housewife's pursuit of the sou in the marketplace to the "glories . . . of the arts and Pure Thought" (*Mirror* 30). The book is a broad-based, insistent, celebration of French realism: "they know, extraordinarily and beyond the knowledge of most people, which things are real and which illusions" (32). It is a tribute, eight years after the war, to those killed in it fighting for France: "To have died for France is very nearly to have secured immortal life!" (24). *Provence* (1935), Ford's last book on France, presents his formula for the survival of Western civilization just prior to the Second World War: it is to adopt the French way of life as it manifests itself from the south bank of the Seine, *la rive gauche*, to the Mediterranean.

Given the extraordinary predilection of Henry James and Ford Madox Ford for France, it seems quite possible that James, who referred to Ford as "le jeune homme modeste" (*Return* 31), should be moved to bid him farewell in St. James's Park, saying, "Tu va te battre pour le sol sacré de Mme. de Staël!" And, "putting one hand on his chest and just bowing," James added, "that he loved and had loved France as he had never loved a woman!" (*Thus* 125). Ford probably "doesn't expect us to take this scene as literal fact" (Lindberg-Seyersted 73). In dedicating his first book of memoirs, *Ancient Lights* (1911), to his daughters, Ford told them that it "is full of inaccuracies as to the facts, but its accuracy as to impressions is absolute" (xv). The impression that the scene in St. James's Park seeks to convey is one of decided harmony between James and Ford in this last meeting of theirs sometime before Ford went to do battle for the France that both men loved. So, what Ford said elsewhere, we might have to say here of this scene in St. James's Park: "Nothing could be more

literally false but nothing could be more impressionistically true" ("Techniques" 61).

If indeed James never did send Ford off to war with his blessing,³ then, given their long acquaintance and their similar devotion to France and to the art of fiction, one might say with James what James said when his fiction was criticized as untrue to life: "So much the worse for that life!" (*Art* 222). For though James and Ford quite undeniably had their differences, each looked to France for his inspiration in life and art. Wells, however, denounced James for his preference for French literary models over English, and he ridiculed Ford in *Boon* for denying that Charles Dickens was a novelist (*Boon* 450). Wells found both James and Ford so devoted to the French passion for the novel as a work of art that, unable to write like them, he declared himself a journalist, not an artist. "I revolted altogether and refused to play their game," Wells said. "I am a journalist . . . I refuse to play the "artist." If sometimes I am an artist it is a freak of the gods" (*Experiment* 2: 623). H. G. Wells clearly and unambiguously repudiated what made Henry James famous and what inspired Ford Madox Ford: the conception of the novel as a work of art.

In *The English Novel From the Earliest Days to the Death of Joseph Conrad* (1930), Ford placed James in "the main stream of the international novel" (102) that originated in Richardson, who "worked with the simplest materials and manoeuvred only the most normal of characters in the most commonplace of events and yet contrived to engross the minds of a large section of mankind" (83). This realistic stream of fiction in Richardson flowed into France through Diderot, enlarged itself in Stendhal, and was redirected by Flaubert. Ford writes that "it was Flaubert who most preached the doctrine of the novelist as creator who should have a creator's aloofness, rendering the world as he sees it, uttering no comments, falsifying no issues and carrying the subject—the Affair—he has selected for rendering, remorselessly out to its logical conclusion" (123). Turgenev embraced the same tradition and Henry James went to school to him and thus diverted the undiluted stream of French fiction as realism and art to England. That is the development of what is truly the "Novel." The whole of the rest of nineteenth-century British fiction, except for Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope, is the tradition of the "Nuvvle." What

distinguishes the Novel from the Nuvvle is that the Novel renders its subject while the Nuvvle relates it. In the Nuvvle, on one hand, you find "a more or less arbitrary tale so turned as to ensure a complacent view of life . . . carried on by characters that as a rule are—six feet high and gliding two inches above the ground" (103). In the Novel, on the other hand, "You have at your disposal heredity, environment, the concatenation of the effects of one damn thing after another that life is—and Destiny who is blind and august. Those are the colours of your palette: it is for you to see that line by line and filament of colour by filament, the reader's eye is conducted to your culminating point" (141). Here in celebrating the novel as a work of art Ford uses the language of painting. He uses the very metaphor for fiction that Wells objected to in *Boon*. For Wells the novel as painting leads the eye to the dead cat, the egg shell, and the string. For Ford the novel as painting leads to a consistent representation of life, just as for James, in "The Art of Fiction," the business of the novelist is to "try and catch the colour of life itself" (*Essays* 65).

Ford was a novelist like Henry James. What is generally considered his best novel has been called by John Rodker "the finest French novel in the English language" (Ford, *Soldier* xx). Ford began writing it on his birthday, 17 December 1913. "So," he tells Stella Bowen, "on the day I was forty I sat down to show what I could do," having never before "put into any novel of mine *all* that I knew about writing." And "the *Good Soldier* resulted" (xviii). This was the first novel that Ford wrote after completing *Henry James: A Critical Study*, which was published a scant three weeks after *The Good Soldier* was begun. The novel ends with a girl gone crazy and uttering the word "shuttlecocks." James uses this word to describe the daughter of Ida and Beale Farange: Maisie, James writes, "was the little feathered shuttlecock they could keep flying between them" (*Maisie* 14). Ford also quotes in his *Critical Study* the passage from the Preface to *What Maisie Knew* in which James speaks of Maisie as a "shuttlecock" set in motion by her parents (160). Ford's own Nancy Rufford is similarly kept flying between Edward and Leonora Ashburnham till Edward, the good soldier, cuts his throat and Nancy loses her mind and wanders about muttering, crazily, "shuttlecocks." James's *not juste*

becomes Ford's, each rendering life as a battle in which the same human missile hits first one combattant then another.

Life [James wrote] is, in fact, a battle. On this point optimists and pessimists agree. Evil is insolent and strong; beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in great places, people of sense in small, and mankind generally, unhappy. But the world as it stands is no illusion, no phantasm, no evil dream of a night, we wake up to it again for ever and ever; we can neither forget it nor deny it nor dispense with it. We can welcome experience as it comes, and give it what it demands, in exchange for something which it is idle to pause to call much or little so long as it contributes to swell the volume of consciousness. In this there is mingled pain and delight, but over the mysterious mixture there hovers a visible rule, that bids us learn to will and seek to understand. (*French Writers* 998)

This is as good a description of the ethos of Henry James's fiction as exists, although James wrote it about Turgenev's fiction. Life as a battle explains what Theodora Bosanquet meant when she spoke of James stepping out of his studio and seeing "the doomed, defenseless children of light" with claws thrust into their "quivering flesh." Life as a battle explains in part James's sense of Sainte-Beuve's genius because the French critic saw "nothing but wars, struggles, destructions and recompositions" once he penetrated "under the veil of society" (688). Life as a battle explains what Ford meant when he said that James's novels suggest that Western civilization needs to be destroyed and reinvented. Life as a battle is the unmistakable metaphoric texture of *The Spoils of Poynton*, as the word *Spoils* indicates. And life as a battle is also the metaphoric texture of *What Maisie Knew*, the book of James's that Ford said inspired him to write *Parade's End*, his great novel about the First World War.

Reflecting on *What Maisie Knew* in his semi-autobiographical narrative *No Enemy*, Ford presents it as

the story of a child moving amongst elemental passions that are veiled. But, of course, elemental passions can never be veiled enough not to get through to the consciousness, if not to the intelligence of the child in the house. So, in an atmosphere of intrigues, divorces, prides, jealousies, litigations, conducted as these things are conducted in this country, by what it is convenient to call "the best people," Maisie always "knows." She knows all about concealed relationships, as she knows all about intrigues, processes,

and the points of view of old family servants. It is, of course, a horrible book, but it is very triumphantly true. . . . (178)

The hero of *No Enemy* is a Frenchman named Hippolyte Gringoire. He sends for *What Maisie Knew*, just as Ford had done (see "Escape"), while he is serving at the front during the war to see, literally, how the novel holds up under fire. As a footnote to Gringoire's taking *Maisie* to war, it is well to remember that James more than anything else, from 4 August 1914 until his death on 28 February 1916, wanted to share in the war effort. Violet Hunt reports that James "talked Army, thought Army, and died Army" (269). "He said *We* so hard, took the affairs of *Us* so much to heart, that it gave him the stroke from which he died" (269). And yet, the way James got even more personally into the war was through his window in the house of fiction. *What Maisie Knew* went into Ford's French officer's pocket in *No Enemy*. *What Maisie Knew* was also the novel from which Ford drew inspiration in writing *Parade's End*. And *Parade's End* was the single novel that Ford wrote with a specific purpose in mind. It was for him "a work that should have for its purpose the obviating of all future wars" (*Nightingale* 225).

Ford's intention was not to compromise his artistic principles to satisfy the goals of H. G. Wells's journalistic fiction. Rather it was his intention to present the war as he witnessed it from his own specific point of view: "if I could present, not merely fear, not merely horror, not merely death, not merely even self-sacrifice . . . but just worry; that might strike a note of which the world would not so readily tire" (226). "If the world could be got to see War from that angle there would be no more wars" (226). Because *What Maisie Knew* is a novel of intense worry, it helped Ford get the angle he needed. So James's most lasting war-work occurred seventeen years before the First World War broke out when he wrote, in 1897, this novel about a little girl growing up in the harsh atmosphere of parental hostilities. And that novel of 1897 may itself have taken its own inspiration as early as 1884, in "The Art of Fiction." James at that time found himself in a situation that later duplicated itself more outrageously in the attack that H. G. Wells launched on him in *Boon*. The attacker in 1884 was Walter Besant, and James defended the novel

as a work of art open to any subject the novelist chooses to write about. And it was in that context that James declared that "the moral consciousness of a child is as much a part of life as the island of the Spanish Main" (*Essays* 61-62). Ford's *Parade's End*, published from 1924 to 1928, is an outstanding vindication of James's defence of art making life in 1884.

Parade's End focuses on the staggering worries of Christopher Tietjens, who abandons his eighteenth-century principles and accepts the harsh actuality of modern existence amid the social hostilities of London; the marital hostilities of his beautiful and bizarre, unfaithful and sadistic wife; and the actual hostilities of the trenches on the Western Front. Just as all of *What Maisie Knew* is projected from Maisie's point of view, *Parade's End* is principally projected from Christopher's point of view. And when he is not the center of vision, the novel focuses precisely on what he will have to worry about when he once again becomes the center of vision. Just as we witness every phase of Maisie's moral and emotional growth, we witness every agonizing phase of Christopher's. Just as the climax of her story is Maisie's choosing with whom to live her life, so also the climax of Christopher's story is his choosing with whom to live his life. For Maisie, life is metaphorically a battle; for Christopher, life is literally a battle too. Both girl and man have to get at the truth of their lives and come of age. He has to do it during the war.

What Maisie Knew, Ford said, was "a romance of the English habit of trying to shift responsibility" (*Henry James* 147). The same could be said of *Parade's End*. In James's novel, Maisie is the one who chooses to be responsible; in Ford's novel, Tietjens is the one who chooses to be responsible. For both responsibility pays spiritual, not material, dividends. Maisie gets her moral sense along with the fiscally shaky Mrs. Wix for companion. Tietjens gets one piece of furniture. So that at the end of *Parade's End* we can see Ford paying homage to *The Spoils of Poynton*, that novel of James's which Ford described as "a romance of English grab" (147). Its subject is a family fight over a collection of precious furnishings. It ends with the heroine being offered one item from Poynton for herself. But even that goes up in smoke before she can get it. There is a duplication of the romance of English grab at the end of *Parade's End* when Christopher's

impeccable collection of antique furniture is grabbed by his estranged wife who leaves him only one small eighteenth-century cabinet for himself, and this he must sell for money to live on. But Christopher's victory, like Maisie's, is one of the spirit; therefore, it ends in a celebration that invokes the memory of Henry James in three ways: first, it strikes the French note; second, it takes place in London, where James principally did his war-work; third, it invokes a child's point of view as Tietjens dances to the music of a French street song:

Ainsi font! font! font! les petites marionnettes!
 Ainsi font! font! font!
 Trois petits tours et puis s'en vont!

With a nod to *Vanity Fair* Ford ends the third volume of his war novel with a reference to puppets, just as Thackeray ended his novel of the Napoleonic Wars by putting his puppets away. Tietjens' old pals from the trenches sing, "Les petites marionnettes, Font! font! font!" (674). But Ford's characters are not toys that can be put away at a showman's whim. Between *Vanity Fair* and *Parade's End* came the French tradition and the novels of Henry James. Better than anyone else in his time, Ford Madox Ford understood the value of Henry James's fiction. He lays it out impressionistically in his monograph on James and he dramatizes it brilliantly in his war novel. Without *What Maisie Knew* and *The Spoils of Poynton* there would be no *Parade's End*.

Parade's End, therefore, asks us once again to look at H. G. Wells's parody of Henry James in *Boon*. If the house of fiction has many windows, so too does the house of criticism. Wells stood at one that showed him little of value in James's restlessly aesthetic approach to life and art. Ford stood at another that gave him a view of James's fiction that permitted him to write a novel as socially engaged as any of Wells's and yet as artfully shaped as any of James's. If Wells was wrong about James in *Boon*, as I would suggest history has shown him to be,⁴ he was right about Ford when he proclaimed *The Good Soldier* a "great book" and Ford an "exceptional" writer (Harvey 599). This, I think, history has also come to recognize. For what Ford said of James and Stephen Crane taken together can now be said of Ford taken alone: he shows you "that disillusionment is to be found alike

at the tea table . . . and on the tented field." "That," Ford remarked—in what we can take to be a radically political understanding of James's defense of art making life—"That," Ford remarked, "is of great service to our Republic" ("The Old Man" 53). If we can embrace that as a truth today, neither Henry James, nor his most imaginative and creative critic, Ford Madox Ford, will have fought their wars in vain.

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NOTES

¹The details of the initial publication, revision, and republication of the works of James and Wells that became part of this controversy are given in Edel and Ray 32-38. Interpretations of the quarrel are presented by Delbanco 137-79, Edel 533-38, Seymour 260-68, and Anthony West 40-52.

²When Rebecca West wrote her monograph on James the next year—a book that annoyed Wells considerably because it was so favorably disposed toward James (see Anthony West 50-51)—she adopted this language to criticize the late James. Of "the crystal bowl of Mr James' art," she writes: "He had but gilded its clear sides with the gold of his genius for phrase-making, and now, instead of lifting it with a priest-like gesture to exhibit a noble subject, held it on his knees as a treasured piece of bric-a-brac and tossed into it, with an increasing carelessness, any sort of subject—a jewel, a rose, a bit of string, a visiting-card—confident that the surrounding golden glow would lend it beauty" (*Henry James* 115). James's great admirer, Ford Madox Ford, may have unwittingly inspired Wells himself when he, Ford, wrote that Yeats's "earlier work" suggested "a territory all of mist, through whose swathes there gleamed here and there a jewel, a green cap, or a white owl's feather" ("Mr. W. B. Yeats" 784).

³The case against the version of events that Ford gives is made by Lindberg-Seyersted (72-73). The announcement of Ford's commission appeared in the London *Times* on 14 August 1915, the day he cites for the meeting with James. But Ford did not actually go to France the first time till "about five months after James's death" (73). Lindberg-Seyersted concludes, however, that "at one time or another, James expressed sentiments reflected in Ford's fictionalized scenes" (73). That conclusion reflects Ford's sense of the absolute rightness of his impressions, not of his facts. Seymour, however, accepts Ford's account as factual (269-70).

⁴Anthony West, H. G. Wells's son by Rebecca West, presents a totally different version of the events than I do in his biography of his father. West's history makes Wells the champion of democracy and James the effete aristocrat, "who liked to surround himself with toadies and who was consequently used to having his boots licked" (42). West's James is an "old fat cat" with "papal pretensions" (43) who launched a "spiteful and ungenerous attack" on his father.

But perhaps we shouldn't hold it against James because he "had begun the slide into the senility that was soon to allow him to believe he was the Emperor Napoleon and resident in the Tuileries" (48). West's considered opinion of the phrase "art makes life" is that it is "the confused utterance of a very sick man" and is "pathetic" (49). Wells, West tells us, did not defend himself more vigorously against James because James showed "a dying man's confusion and distress" and was "on the brink of losing touch with reality altogether" (49).

West speaks with such intimate first-hand knowledge and authority on these matters without mentioning that he was one year old when the quarrel between James and Wells took place. Perhaps that is why he places the Napoleonic James of February 1916—the James who had suffered a stroke—on his deathbed in July 1915, when James was writing with great lucidity about the war. West is manifestly in a polemical mode when he presents his version of the James-Wells friendship and quarrel. Delbanco (137-79) and Seymour (73-106, 260-68) are both more dispassionate and reliable guides. Moreover, West's statement that the notion of art's making life is the "confused utterance of a very sick man" shows little knowledge of literary history or the philosophy of aesthetics. Oscar Wilde, for instance, in "The Decay of Lying" indicates that life has "an imitative instinct" (75) and that art "makes and unmakes many worlds" (73). "Literature," Wilde insists, "moulds . . . [life] to its purposes" (75). Furthermore, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* shows why James and Wilde, who were so dissimilar as artists and who didn't much like each other, could think similarly about the shaping power of the creative imagination (see Crawford, esp. 168-78).

As early as 1918, Ezra Pound saw that shaping power as motivated by James's passion for human liberty when he spoke of "the major James, of the hater of tyranny; book after early book against oppression, against all the sordid petty personal crushing oppression, the domination of modern life; not worked out in the diagrams of Greek tragedy, not labelled 'epos' or 'Aeschylus.' The outburst in *The Tragic Muse*, the whole of *The Turn of the Screw*, human liberty, personal liberty, the rights of the individual against all sorts of intangible bondage." Pound then went on to exclaim, "The passion of it, the continual passion of it in this man who, fools said, didn't 'feel.' I have never yet found a man of emotion against whom idiots didn't raise this cry" (296).

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