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FORD'S RENDERING OF THE NATURE OF WAR IN PARADE'S END

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Abstract. Ford's rendering of World War One in Parade's End bears similarities with some of Clausewitz's observations on war's general nature. Both authors reject abstract reasoning and show how on the battlefield war turns into something incoherent and incomplete.

Keywords: abstract reasoning, dialectic, impressionism, abstract and literal war

Parade's End does not deal with one but with several kinds of war: the war between nations, the war between individuals, and the war in the mind, which reveals the underlying unity of the tetralogy's main conflicts. I propose to demonstrate that Ford's picture of actual war in *Parade's End* corresponds rather closely to some of Clausewitz's observations on the abstract and the concrete forms of war made in his classic *On War*, and I have in mind his first chapter in particular. As a result of that, a deeper understanding of Ford's rendering of war can be gained.

Clausewitz's work is a good point of reference for revealing the dialectical features of Ford's presentation of conflict in the tetralogy, since the philosophical basis for Clausewitz's inquiry is provided mainly by Hegel's dialectic. In my investigation some of Clausewitz's views on war's general nature are granted the status of a theory, which is subordinate to Hegel's philosophical system but also complements it in some respects.

To the best of my knowledge, no parallel between Ford and Clausewitz has been drawn so far, and to many readers this might seem an exercise in futility. Doesn't the Prussian military philosopher declare that war is the work of public life – it forms "part of man's social existence" (Clausewitz, 1993: 173), whereas, according to Charles G. Hoffmann, Ford considered war to be primarily the work of private life?

> *Parade's End is not a war novel in the sense of being concerned with the historical causes of war or with the reconstruction of actual battles; it is essentially a psychological novel in which the causes of war are traced back to psychological causes for conflict in man. Moral problems of individuals – and*

Ford ultimately saw war as a moral crisis for individual nations – are rooted in psychological ones, primarily sexual in origin.(Hoffmann,p.78)

Hoffmann fails to mention that Ford, who attributed great importance to economic factors, saws war also as an economic crisis, and makes Christopher express this view, a point which I will highlight later. Ohmann sums up Ford's uniqueness among his contemporary war novelists by pointing out that for Ford war is "both an effect symptom and a cause", whereas, according to Robie Macauley, whom Ohmann quotes, for Barbusse, Zweig, Remarque, Hemingway, Aldington, Sassoon war is only a cause (Ohmann, 1964: 124). Thus, Ohmann reveals that when confronted with literal war, Sylvia "sees, quite rightly, her own anarchy mirrored in the world around her" (ibid 124).

Parade's End testifies that Ford took a keen interest in the nature and in the conduct of war, as they are refracted in the individual consciousness, and provides deep insights into both. All critical interpretations with which I am familiar, lay special emphasis on Ford's rendering of those aspects of World War One which distinguish it from previous armed conflicts e.g. the abolition of parade, the mechanization of war on a large scale, where soldiers are viewed "as so many statistics in the strategy of power" (Hoffmann, 1990: 82). Besides, as Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy points out, *Parades End* exposes the Great War's "reifying logic" (McCarthy, 2009: 182), "where men are most clearly treated as reified packages" and "interchangeable commodities according to standards of efficiency" and production (ibid 190). Most importantly, McCarthy shows that Ford's series of war novels rejects the bureaucratic "mindset of reifying and instrumentalizing logic" that "came to dominate British culture" (ibid 181), and "through Tietjens and Valentine *Parade's End* offers communication as the way to free rationality from this "foul system" (ibid 197).

The prominence given to all of the above-mentioned aspects of war in the tetralogy and their strong impact on Christopher Tietjens (and on Ford himself) are indisputable. In his dedicatory letter to Gerald Duckworth Ford admits to the public aim of showing those who "did not experience the shocks and the anxieties of the late struggle: This is what the late war was like: this is how modern fighting of the organized, scientific type affects the mind"(MCSU,p.11). Ford's comments on the impact of mechanized warfare on the combatants' consciousnesses cannot be overemphasized. However, some critics have gone too far in this respect. Thus, Paul L.Wiley holds that the governing theme of *No More Parades* is "the obliteration by modern war of everything traditionally connected with military procedure and ceremony"(Wiley, 1962: 229), which is not quite true as far as military procedure is concerned. I will examine the numerous conventional aspects of World War One which are also rendered in *Parade's End* but have been largely overlooked by Ford critics. In my view, Ford's evocation of the Great War justifies the conclusion that, despite the undeniable changes that took place after Clausewitz's death in

1831 (which occurred two days after Hegel's), war in many of its key aspects had remained essentially the same when Ford wrote his tetralogy.

In their very different ways both Ford and Clausewitz show that the distinction between war and peace is relative. Both writers reveal that ultimately war is proceeds from peace and represents its outgrowth. As every reader of *Parade's End* knows, there Ford renders conflicts characteristic of the pre-War era, which culminate in the Great War. Taken together, the numerous manifestations of the relation of peace to war constitute a major dialectical moment at the centre of the tetralogy. The fact that peace carries that which negates it (i.e. war) within itself, testifies to Hegel's influence.

The Prussian military philosopher points out that war is never absolute because by nature it also represents a political instrument, and policy should be consistent with the operation of the instrument which it uses. The disastrous lack of harmony between British policy and the conduct of the war represents an important theme in *Parade's End*. Christopher and other characters deplore the machinations of the politicians in Whitehall, whose meddling is shown to be a betrayal of the combatants.

The Prussian military philosopher begins his inquiry into the general nature of war with an illustrative image:

> *War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imaging a pair of wrestlers. (Clausewitz, p. 83)*

Whereas Clausewitz regards war as a duel on an extensive scale, Ford presents the struggle between Sylvia and Christopher as a war on a small scale. The author makes the protagonist do justice to both parties, whose actions are strictly logical, which is in keeping with Clausewitz's idea of war in the abstract. At the same time, however, Christopher argues for the Victorian gentlemanly attitude, governed by decency and obedience to the will of God.

> *I don't care. I can't help it. Those are – those should be – the conditions of life amongst decent people. When our next war comes I hope it will be fought out under those conditions. Let us, for God's sake, talk of the gallant enemy. Always. We have got to plunder the French or millions of our people must starve: they have got to resist us successfully or be wiped out. ...It's the same with you and me...*
>
> *She exclaimed: "You mean to say that you don't think I was wicked when I ... when I trepanned is that what mother calls it? ..."*
>
> *He said loudly:*
>
> *"No! ... You had been let in for it by some brute. 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. But*

you were within your rights. I will never go back on that. Nothing will make me, ever!"(SDN, p. 199)

The first half of this passage can be compared with a portion the text of Ford's *No Enemy* (1929), a semi-autobiographical account of the war years. As far as the historical causes of the Great War are concerned, Gringoire lays special emphasis on economic factors. He says to his visiting friend "the compiler", "both serving as dramatic versions of Ford's experience and belief", as Paul L. Wiley points out (Wiley, 1962: 244), that "the war was in effect a hunger war" (NE, p. 91), and that, "as a food war", it "was in very truth a sad necessity for" Germany (NE, p. 92). In the same way Gringoire holds that "what danger there is to the world and us is a food danger" (NE, p. 94). With regard to a future war he stresses emphatically that "there will be no war till the world is driven to it by starvation" (NE, p. 95) and that "... if there were ever another war it would be a war purely and simply for food" (NE, p. 94). Christopher's words "We have *got* to plunder the French or millions of our people must starve: they have *got* to resist us successfully or be wiped out" (SDN, p. 199), which are similar to the above statements in many respects, prove that economic factors play a great part in his thinking about the causes of war in *Parade's End* as well. Both Christopher and Gringoire assume a civilized attitude towards the enemy, and the war veteran, gardener and poet refers at least to the German troops as "the gallant enemy" (NE, p. 91), an attitude that Ford also took, in contradistinction from the German war-mongers i.e. "the professors and publicists who preached that the only way to obtain bread was by invading Belgium ..." (NE, p. 92). Tietjens' prediction about the next war bears the stamp of his thinking in terms of extremes: the protagonist sees the war between two civilized nations as an act of force determined by dire necessity, when each of the interdependent belligerents will have only an "Either ... or" choice between two extremes: success or starvation and extinction. Compare this with Clausewitz's view that the more powerfully the whole existence of the belligerent nations is affected, the closer war will approach its abstract concept.

Essentially, Christopher's reasoning in the above passage is in keeping with the position taken at the beginning of Clausewitz's work and reflected by his presentation of war in its abstract form, which (as the Prussian military philosopher insists at the outset of his inquiry) applies both to the wars between savage peoples and to those between civilized nations:

War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will. (Clausewitz, p. 83)

The thesis, then, must be repeated: war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes. (Clausewitz, p. 85)

As in Christopher's reasoning, some of the key words associated with Clausewitz's pure concept of war are "necessity" and "extreme". War in the abstract is determined by the stringent laws of necessity and escalates to an extreme. The pure concept of war represents the strict logic of military thinking in absolute terms, which has not been modified by the realities of war. This logic has rigorous implications; its goal must always be the extreme, and it inevitably results in abstraction. Thus Clausewitz associates abstraction, extremes and war, which can help to throw light on the unity of the external and internal conflicts rendered in *Parade's End*.

> *Thus in the field of abstract thought the inquiring mind can never rest until it reaches the extreme, for here it is dealing with an extreme: a clash of forces freely operating and obedient to no law but their own (Clausewitz, p. 86).*

Pairs of contraries such as gentlemen/swine; Stoic/Epicurean; dervish/caliph; brain/body, testify that because of his entrenched habit of abstract reasoning, Christopher's mind finds rest in extremes both in time of peace and in time of war. In the relevant scene in *Some Do Not...* Tietjens regards his conflict with Sylvia as an abstract theoretician would, and there his habit of abstract reasoning is brought to bear on the subject of war. The extremes to which he runs as a result of that, make his position comparable to what Clausewitz describes as "the abstract concept of war."

The view which I would like to advance is that the protagonist's progress in *Parade's End* parallels the movement away from abstraction conveyed in some passages from *On War*, Book One, Chapter One: in both cases a jump is made from abstract to concrete. Both Ford (through Christopher) and Clausewitz take as their starting-point the position of abstract reasoning (Christopher applies it to various other subjects besides the next war between nations), which inevitably results in extremes, and both authors explore this logical consequence. Then, account is taken of the immediate realities of war, and they oust abstraction. Ford makes his protagonist undergo such a development. For Clausewitz the movement away from the abstract position means also that theory, which should be study, not doctrine, a general point of reference, not "an algebraic formula for use on the battlefield" (Clausewitz, 1993: 163) has to be modified in practice and adapted to the needs of real life, where one has to take into consideration a vast array of factors such as, for instance, the morale and emotions of the opposing armies.

As is well-known, Clausewitz's theory of war is influenced by Hegel's dialectic, and Hegel maintains that nothing is abstract, and anything which exists represents a concrete unity (*Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, vol. 1, p. 307). W. B. Gallie points out that like Hegel Clausewitz states that all abstract ideas are falsifications of the real (Gallie, 1978: 55), and quotes Clausewitz's words that "war in the abstract" or "war according to our conception of it" is "war on paper", a kind of "logical dreaming"(ibid 56). Gallie also remarks that according to Clausewitz a commander in action may "sometimes envisage his problem in highly abstract, mathematical terms" (ibid 46). (It is well-known that Christopher Tietjens was modeled on the gifted mathematician Arthur Marwood.) However,

as Gallie goes on to say, Clausewirtz also holds that "the truths of theory" are not "absolute inflexible laws". The military commander should be familiar with them, and, actuated by a sense of responsibility, modify and adapt them to the realities of war. Christopher Tietjens experiences this on the front when he ministers to the various needs of his men. In *Parade's End* Ford reveals the limitations of abstract reasoning, which is by an attitude that rejects abstraction but is ultimately based upon a theory i.e. to use Francis A. Schaeffer's terms, a transition is made from the classical "methodology of antithesis" to "the Hegelian methodology of synthesis".

Central to Ford's presentation of conflict is the concept of polarity. In this respect, too, Clausewitz can throw light on Ford, since, according to the former, the principle of polarity is of great importance for understanding the nature of war. This also testifies to Hegel's influence; the term polarity and Clausewitz's use of it are Hegelian. Hegel criticizes the mentality which regards the distinction between the positive and the negative as absolute. He maintains that thus Understanding operates with abstractions, whereas in reality "the positive is also the negative, and the negative – the positive *(Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, vol. 1, p. 306). While pleading for polarity to be recognized as a universal law of nature, Hegel gives the example of a debtor and a creditor, and points out that that which is something negative for the debtor (i.e. his debt), is something positive for the creditor. Therefore, according to Hegel, the positive and the negative are interdependent and exist only in relation to each other (ibid p. 306).

In order to reveal the dialectical relation between attack and defense, Clausewitz proposes a principle of polarity. It applies only to one and the same object when its positive and negative quantities cancel out completely. In a battle, where each side aims at victory, there is a true polarity, since the victory achieved by one of the sides makes the victory of the other impossible. Clausewitz points out that if war assumed only a single form, namely, if it was offensive and never defensive, "or to put it in another way, if the only differences between attack and defense lay in the fact that attack has a positive aim whereas defense has not, and the forms of fighting were identical" (Clausewitz, 1993: 94), then the advantage gained by the victorious side would give an exact indication of the defeat suffered by the other side. However, since there are two distinct forms of action in war: attack and defense, and "the two are very different and unequal in strength", polarity does not lie in them, but "in the object both seek to achieve" (Clausewitz, 1993: 94).

In a conversation with his future fifth queen, King Henry VIII applies the principle of polarity to the relation between her and Anne of Cleves: "What she (Anne of Cleves) hath thou losest" (PS, p. 337). One is reminded of the confrontation between the young celebrity and Mrs. Wannop, where the success of the former means the unsuccess of the latter and vice versa. In *No More Parades* Christopher Tietjens thinks of the outcome of the Great War in accordance with the same principle: a possible defeat of the British means that the Germans will be victorious.

> *"But success or failure," Tietjens said, "have nothing to do with the credit of a story. And a consideration of the virtues of humanity does not omit the other side. If we lose they win. If success is necessary to your idea of virtue – virtus – they then provide the success instead of ourselves." (NMP, p. 459)*

In contradistinction from so much propaganda in Britain during World War One, including Ford's two books of war propaganda (or the binaries created by Rudyard Kipling: "…there are only two divisions in the world today – human beings and Germans"), where the Germans were branded as wicked, Christopher is made to realize that both sides can vindicate the virtues of humanity.

Clausewitz's ideas will show more clearly that Ford's preoccupation with conflict as well as with uncertainty makes war an extremely suitable subject for him. In his rendering of the Great War Ford comes close to Clausewitz's insight that uncertainty forms part of war's very nature. The Prussian military philosopher stresses "how greatly the objective nature of war makes it a matter of assessing probabilities"(Clausewitz, 1993:96). He maintains that in actual war "the probabilities of real life replace the extreme and the absolute required by theory" (Clausewitz, 1993:89). In *Parade's End* Ford conveys the growing tendency for early twentieth-century man to move from his conviction of being in possession of absolute certainty to an awareness of the uncertain and the problematic. This transition, without which modernism would have been unthinkable, was facilitated by the First World War, and the tetralogy reveals how uncertainty intensifies under its impact.

Clausewitz calls attention to a large number of factors which determine the transition from the abstract conception of war to its concrete form, and increase the uncertainty that is inevitable in war. Ford also highlights many of these factors as the realities of war take over from the world of Christopher's abstract reasoning. Clausewitz maintains that

> *From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry. (Clausewitz, p. 97)*

And again

> *war is dependent on the interplay of possibilities and probabilities, of good and bad luck, conditions in which strictly logical reasoning often plays no part at all and is always apt to be a most unsuitable and awkward intellectual tool. (Clausewitz, p. 702)*

Clausewitz points out that inaction in the course of war is logically possible i.e. that no contradiction is involved here. He remarks that the more frequent the lulls in the fighting, the more war departs from the absolute and becomes a calculation of probabilities. This is precisely what one finds in the sections of *Parade's End* which deal with periods of relative calm on the Western front. Ford renders the periods of inaction, during which, as Clausewitz points out,

"significant engagements, even major battles, may take place" (Clausewitz, 1993: 260), and not the phases of active warfare, according to another polarity established by the Prussian military philosopher. In his dedicatory letter to Gerald Duckworth the author emphasizes that

> *... it should be remembered that great battles, taking months and months to prepare and to recover from, were of relatively rare occurrence. The heavy strain of the trenches came from the waiting for long periods of inaction, in great – in mortal – danger every minute of the day and night. (MCSU, p. 12)*

In the third novel of the tetralogy Christopher associates war with inaction and defines it as a "process of eternal waiting" (MCSU, p. 87). The protagonist becomes a spokeman for all of this Majesty's Armed Forces when he refers to "those eternal hours when Time itself stayed still as the true image of bloody War!..." (MCSU, p. 88).

In Clausewitz the transition from the abstract concept of war to its concrete form represents also the change from doing abstract calculations to calculating probabilities. A somewhat similar transition is also made by Christopher. Early on in *Some Do Not...* the author-narrator remarks that "Although Tietjens hated golf", "he could engross himself in the mathematics of trajectories", "he made abstruse calculations as to the flight of balls off sloped club-faces", "and as to theories of spin" (SDN, p. 74). At the front the strict rationality involved in war's madness is relaxed, and Christopher is preoccupied with possibilities and probabilities.

In the front line Tietjens's methodical mind assesses the possibilities inherent in the fact of the German barrage ("You naturally tried every argument in the unseen contest of wills that went on across the firmament" [MCSU, p. 128]). He reasons that it is either the beginning of an attack in force or merely a demonstration. As an attack it would be an example of the unusual in war; as a demonstration it would lead to the usual counter-demonstration. Tietjens experiences war as a tactical game played on a "chess-board" (MCSU, p. 129) of a battlefield, employing the concepts of the usual and the unusual:

> *But this game had only two resources: you used the usual. Or the unusual. Usually you didn't begin your barrage after dawn and launch your attack at ten-thirty or so. So you might do it – the Huns might be trying it on – as a surprise measure.*
>
> *On the other hand, our people might be sending over the planes, whose droning was then making your very bones vibrate, in order to tell the Huns that we were ready to be surprised: that the time had now about come round when we might be expecting the Hun brain to think out a surprise. (MCSU, pp. 128 – 129).*

He reckons that

> *the chance against being struck by a shell-fragment that day, if the Germans came in any force, was fourteen to one against. (MCSU, p. 64)*

Clausewitz lays special emphasis on the part played by chance in war, and maintains that

No other human activity is so continuously or universally bound up with chance. And through the element of chance, guesswork and luck come to play a great part in war. (Clausewitz, p. 96)

According to the Prussian war theorist only chance is wanting to make of war a game, and the subjective nature of war (which includes courage, mature consideration) contributes to this.

Clausewitz remarks

In the whole range of human activities, war most closely resembles a game of cards (Clausewitz, p. 97).

In *Parade's End* war is frequently associated with a game. When Tietjens debates with himself whether he should take over from the commanding officer, the position of affairs in the battalion strikes him as

a nightmare game of bridge with all hands exposed and all the players ready to snatch pistols from their hip-pockets. (MCSU, p. 106)

To Sylvia the military seem to be "all schoolboys playing a game" (NMP, p. 403). War is

...a schoolboy's game of make-believe. But of a make-believe that was infinitely formidable and infinitely sinister. (NMP, p. 443)

Besides, to the combatants civilian interfence in the war represents a game, too (MCSU, p. 152).

Being a game [although of annihilation, "a mug's game" (MCSU, p. 143) according to Christopher], war bears a resemblance to important aspects of life in pre-War Britain which likewise have some of the nature of a game. A gentleman is supposed to observe strict rules of conduct i.e. to play the game; Sylvia's intrigues represent a destructive game.

Having shed light on the logical aspect of war, Clausewitz points out that on the battlefield "strict logic" gives way to "impressions", and war "turns into something incoherent and incomplete" (Clausewitz1993: 701). It is noteworthy that here we have the same key words which will recur in so many twentieth-century discussions of impressionism.

Logic comes to a stop in this labyrinth (i.e. of factors etc); and those men who habitually act, both in great and minor affairs, on particular dominating impressions or feelings rather than according to strict logic, are hardly aware of the confused, inconsistent, and ambiguous situation in which they find themselves. (Clausewitz, p. 701)

The characters in Ford's tetralogy find themselves in "confused, inconsistent and ambiguous situations nearly all the time.

In *Parade's End* the opposition between impressionism and logic plays a great part.

One aspect of the impressionist method, which Ford evolved in collaboration with Conrad is, by the former's own admission, the "unalterable rule that we had for the rendering of conversations – for genuine conversations that are an exchange of thought, not interrogatories or statements of fact – was that no speech of one character should ever answer the speech that goes before it(*Joseph Conrad. A Personal Remembrance*, p.188). A case in point is the opening chapter of *No More Parades*, where self-engrossed men talk about what is uppermost in their minds without directly answering each other. While Christopher is at the front, his thoughts are often elsewhere and a division occurs in the protagonist's mind between his wartime experiences and his peacetime existence, which continually cuts across them. Ford's use of the element of surprise – his impressionist breaking up of the narrative into "little shreds, one contrasting with the other" (ibid p.190), – makes his work different from that of other war novelists.

In his book *Conrad in the Nineteenth* Century Ian Watt discusses Conrad's use of a number of impressionist techniques such as progression d'effet, the time shift, the juxtaposition of scenes, and delayed decoding . In fact, all of these are prominent in *Parade's End* and serve to render the immediate realities of war and of peace. Here is one of passages in which Ian Watt describes "delayed decoding":

> *By the time Conrad came to write Heart of Darkness,he had developed one narrative technique which was the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter's attempt to render visual sensation directly. Conrad presented the protagonist's immediate sensations; and thus made the reader aware of the gap between impression and understanding; the delay in bridging the gap enacts the disjunction between the event and the observer's trailing understanding of it. In Heart of Darkness Conrad uses the method for the most dramatic action of the story, when Marlow's boot is attacked, just below Kurtz's station. (Watt, pp.176 – 177)*

Ford also uses the method for some of the most dramatic action in *Some Do Not…,* for example in Book One, Chapter Six. Whereas in the great scene of the collision decoding is delayed very considerably, the tetralogy features many instances in which the semantic gap between perception and meaning is closed more quickly. Thus, on the night before he leaves for France, Christopher becomes aware that "in front of him existed one and a half pale parallelograms. They were the reflection of the windows of the mirror" (SDN,p.321). At the front, too, familiar things look strange and it takes some time before the mind identifies them.In the opening chapter of *No More Parades*, where the effect that war makes on the mind is powerfully rendered, "the parallelogram of black that was the doorway" and "a brown orange dust that was light" the decoding is not greatly delayed.

As a modernist work *Parade's End* reveals that uncertainty, confusion and inconsistency are typical of modern man, and intensify under the impact of the

Great War. Therefore, war is atprofoundly revealing about twentieth-century life as Ford sees it. Ford's novelistic series also fulfils both of Gringoire's requirements:

> *...the stuff of war-reminiscences concerns itself almost as much with what war has made of a man as with the pictures that he saw. (NE, p. 100)*

However, *Parade's End* is more than this. It seriously concerns itself not only with actual war, but also with the war between individuals, and with the war waged over the battlefield of the mind, which go on in peace as well. Different kinds of war cut across this tetralogy's outward peace-war-peace movement, as Ford traces England's passage from the acute tensions of the pre-War period through the Great War to the post-War world.

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ЛИТЕРАТУРНАТА ТРАКТОВКА НА ПРИРОДАТА НА ВОЙНАТА

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