

THE PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE FICTION OF  
FORD MADOX FORD

by

KAREN-MARIE TRIMMER  
B.A., University of Victoria, 1984

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS  
in the Department  
of  
English

ACCEPTED


DIES


AN

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

  
(Dr. Charles Doyle, Supervisor)

  
(Dr. Evelyn Cobley, Departmental Member)

  
(Dr. Wesley T. Wooley, Outside Member)

  
(Dr. Angelika F. Arend, External Examiner)

© KAREN-MARIE TRIMMER, 1987

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced  
in whole or in part, by mimeograph or other means,  
without the permission of the author.

Supervisor: Professor Charles Doyle

ABSTRACT

Women play major roles in most of Ford's novels, yet little critical attention has been paid to their presentation in his fiction. Through a close examination of three of Ford's works, The Fifth Queen trilogy (1906-1908), The Good Soldier (1915), and the Parade's End tetralogy (1924-28), this study establishes that Ford was strongly claimed by several considerations in his presentation of female character, which considerations he articulated only very generally in his advocacy of "realism" in their portrayal. Taking Ford's realism as a starting point, this study utilizes several criteria to determine what would theoretically constitute an acceptable presentation of female character, and applies them to Ford's writing as a means of measuring his accomplishment in the three works considered.

Allowing for the independent and very real artistic

achievement which each of these works represents, the presentation of women in each is explored in a different chapter. In "Katherine Howard: The Creation of a Personality," Ford's engaging portrayal of an historical personage is probed and the limitations of his creation - for in a very real sense he does indeed "create" this woman, disregarding as he does most historic accounts of her character - are delineated. In "The Good Soldier: Some Edwardian Women," Ford's masterwork of literary Impressionism, the complex, and not untroubling, accomplishment of presenting female character through a male narrator who is himself the embodiment of many of the ills of Edwardian society, and, most especially, the constraints under which Ford's female characters live in a society preoccupied with the forms of propriety, are the focal points of the inquiry. And, in "The Women in Parade's End," two of Ford's most compelling female characters, and their relation to the society in which they live, are treated in some depth.

In the final analysis, Ford's sensitivity to the complexity, difficulties, and limitations which define the female relation to society is made manifest through his presentation of female character in these works, and is appreciated for the considerable achievement that it is.

But it is an achievement which is tempered by the fact that Ford chose not to explore what things in society needed to be changed in order to remove, or substantially lessen, the difficulties and limitations which characterize the relation of women to the society in which they live.



---

(Dr. Charles Doyle, Supervisor)



---

(Dr. Evelyn Cobby, Departmental Member)



---

(Dr. Wesley T. Wooley, Outside Member)



---

(Dr. Angelika F. Arend, External Examiner)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	v
Dedication	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One KATHARINE HOWARD: THE CREATION OF A PERSONALITY	11
Chapter Two <u>THE GOOD SOLDIER</u> : SOME EDWARDIAN WOMEN	30
Chapter Three THE WOMEN IN <u>PARADE'S END</u>	74
Conclusion	116
Notes	122
A Selected Bibliography	126

DEDICATION

To Kerry for his help, and Keegan for his hindrance.

## INTRODUCTION

...very few male novelists have been able to imagine so completely what being a woman is like. To read [Ford's] novels is to see how far it is possible for a man writing about women to<sub>1</sub> project himself imaginatively into male and female selves.

Ford Madox Ford was an exceptionally uneven novelist but three of his works stand out as works of considerable literary merit, and richly reward critical engagement. Although the unevenness of his output precludes unqualified statements regarding development or progress in his writing, The Fifth Queen trilogy (1906-1908), The Good Soldier (1915), and the Parade's End tetralogy (1924-1928), are also of interest in that each work belongs to a different decade of Ford's writing.

The presentation of women in Ford's fiction is worth exploring. In the ever-increasing though still fairly

limited number of critical engagements with his work, no specific work deals with this aspect of Ford's writing in any depth. Yet, for at least two reasons, this issue should be a central critical concern. To begin with, virtually all of Ford's novels treat of male-female relations, and, in view of the critical attention already paid to the male characters in his work, surely the remaining half of that dynamic is deserving of critical engagement. Secondly, Ford's obvious abilities as a novelist raise the expectation that he be able to present characters well, be they male or female, as this is an integral part of the novelist's art. Some would urge an investigation of Ford's presentation of women on the grounds of the considerable information we have regarding his personal and professional relations with them. Let me state very plainly that I am not claimed by this 'reason,' and choose, instead, to look at the works independently of the life.

When one reads Ford's fiction, one cannot but be struck - usually very favourably - by the largeness and diversity of the roles accorded to female characters. Ford's women are capable of great determination and powerful intellectual and emotional commitment; they are forces to be reckoned with, like Katharine Howard in The Fifth Queen, who stands for what she believes in at the

cost of her life, and Sylvia Tietjens in Parade's End, whose capacity for destruction is her principal trademark. There is something to like, or at least to demand understanding, if not active sympathy, in each of Ford's major creations. Where there is emotional emptiness, as in Florence Dowell in The Good Soldier, there are reasons for that emptiness. Where there are reserves of emotional wealth, there is an appreciation of that potential, as with Valentine Wannop in Parade's End, and a great sadness at its waste or frustration, as is the case with Nancy Rufford in The Good Soldier.

The presentation of women in Ford's fiction is neither overtly biased nor polemically charged. The women he presents are complex engaging individuals and they are creations in which his investment of energy, sensitivity, and intelligence is manifest. Although his female characters frequently share certain qualities from novel to novel (both Katharine Howard and Valentine Wannop, for example, are pre-eminent Latinists in their respective eras), each is independently conceived and fully realized through a process of imaginative assimilation / identification. This process consists in an author's submergence in his creations, a submergence which, of its very nature, replaces narrow, judgemental tendentiousness with understanding acceptance. Simply put, Ford is a

little in love with each of his female characters: not the love which enables us, however temporarily, to overlook the loved one's flaws and to see what we choose to see, but a love which comfortably co-exists with a recognition of those same flaws. And, although the "painterly" effect Ford achieved in his best novels is evident in his masterful rendering of the physical presence of his female characters, these characters were created and are understood from the inside out and not as mere exercises in literary portraiture.

Ford was concerned that the women he presented in his fiction be realistic. In "The Woman of the Novelists" (The Critical Attitude, 1911), he decries the patent lack of realism which has marred the presentation of women in English works of fiction and drama. He went so far as to suggest that this lack of realism had serious social and political repercussions for women:

You see this terrible creation, this Woman of the Novelists has you both ways. Man has set her up to do her honour, and you, how foolishly and how easily you have fallen in the trap! - you, women, too, have aided and applauded this setting up of an empty convention.... In the interests of inflated virtues you have sacrificed the practical efficiencies of life, you are content to be called hysterical, emotional and utterly unworthy of a place in any decently ordered society, in order that you may let men bamboozle themselves into thinking that in other ways you are semi-divine. Well, this has recoiled upon your own heads and now the average man,

whilst believing that in certain attributes you are semi-divine, believes that in the practical things of life you are more incapable - the highest and most nearly divine of you is more incapable of exercising the simplest functions of citizenship than the lazy and incompetent brute who carries home your laundryman's washing. I do not know which of you is more culpable. The novelist, being a lazy brute, has evolved this convenient labour-saving contrivance. You, thinking it would aid you in maintaining an ascendancy over a gross and stupid creature called man, have aided and abetted this crime against the Arts...

Ford's claim that women "have aided and abetted this crime against the Arts" - and against themselves - is unconvincing, but the high value he placed on realism is clear: Ford considers the lack of realism in female characters portrayed in fiction an artistic crime and he condemns the novelist who perpetuates this literary specimen as a "lazy brute". For him, realism is an integral component of art. Thus realism may justifiably be used as a criterion by which to judge his achievement in three major works of fiction. In terms of the degree of realism achieved in each, there is noticeable development. As well as standing as evidence of Ford's capacity to both "capture" a time and the informing spirit of that time, The Fifth Queen trilogy is a tour de force of historically accurate details, peculiarly but effectively coupled with romantic imaginings/invention. Katharine Howard, the central female character, is an engaging creation but, at the same time, she remains distant and somehow unreal. In

The Good Soldier, Ford's brilliant exposé of the emptiness of Edwardian social conventions, there is psychological realism and an admirable understanding of how environment influences character, yet we never come into direct, unmediated contact with the female characters in that novel; everything we know about them is provided courtesy of a narrator whose own lack of self-knowledge cannot but detract from his capacity to judge and even to fairly represent the character of others. The final work considered, the Parade's End tetralogy, has two female characters who are intensely real. In this work, which is arguably his crowning achievement, Ford presents his most memorable and compelling women, women in whose complexity and engaging combination of strengths and weaknesses is manifested his ultimate success in creating realistic female characters.

Analysis of the point of view Ford utilized in each of the three works herein discussed is integrally related to the criterion of realism. In The Fifth Queen the action is narrated, albeit by an "unseen" narrator; this is the most artificial point of view and it is responsible for the atmosphere of pageantry in the work which makes virtually impossible any depth of contact with the characters, male or female. We are the observers, they are the observed: little emotional involvement is either required or, indeed,

permitted. In The Good Soldier, written roughly a decade after the trilogy, Ford utilizes the limited point of view of a first-person narrator, a faulty medium through whom the other characters are presented. The Good Soldier exemplifies fictional impressionism and its chief characteristic is its inwardness. While the women in this novel form much of the ostensible subject matter, they are secondary. The Good Soldier is really a study of its ambiguous narrator, a figure whose attempts to account for the behavior of others reveal more of his personality - especially its deficiencies - than they afford in the way of insights into his fellow characters. It is not until the Parade's End tetralogy that Ford achieves a realism of unquestioned depth and intensity in the presentation of his female characters. Parade's End is a happy mixture of novelistic devices: Ford uses shifting points of view, moving with purposeful ease from straight presentation of dramatic action and the detachment afforded by a third-person narrative, which he uses with great effect to depict the social milieu of the work, through to the intimacy of the interior monologue where he relates thought directly, in a manner akin to stream of consciousness. His technique in this work allows him to present Valentine Wannop and Sylvia Tietjens from every conceivable angle: we see them with the eyes of the casual observer, through the eyes of Christopher Tietjens and other main characters, through the

eyes of one another, and, from what is surely the most engaging angle, we are afforded the opportunity of seeing them exactly as they see themselves.

Ezra Pound, a contemporary of Ford's, said: "The critic who doesn't make a personal statement, in re measurements he himself has made, is merely an unreliable critic. He is not a measurer but a repeater of other men's results."<sup>3</sup> My "measurements" consist in two criteria which I shall be employing in an attempt to determine Ford's success in achieving what I deem to be an acceptable presentation of female character, or, for that matter, of any fictional character, male or female, in the three works considered in this thesis.

These criteria are based on my own formulation of what I hold to be of the most importance in presenting character, and they focus on that most complex and all-encompassing of human relations: the relationship of the individual to the social environment in which she/he lives. My criteria and, by extension, my criticism, are unabashedly personal in nature. One might argue against such criticism by saying that Ford did not asked to be criticized on such terms and that I am, therefore, quite arbitrarily applying my own values in judging another's

work. In response to such objections I should like to refer to another statement made by Pound, one in which there is, I believe, profound truth:

Literature does not exist in a vacuum. Writers as such have a definite social function exactly proportional to their ability AS WRITERS. This is their main use. All other uses are relative, and temporary, and can be estimated only in relation to the views of a particular estimator.

I wish to state my two criteria explicitly at the outset. I agree with Ford on the primary importance of realism in character portrayal, but it is necessary to elaborate further on just what does constitute realism. Realism can only be achieved when the author consistently shows her/his awareness of the profound influence of environment on character formation. In the case of portraying female characters, such an awareness would demand that the author depict the relationship a woman has with the environment in which she lives, and such writing would be deeply informed by a sensitivity to the particular constraints some human beings, by virtue only of their belonging to a particular sex or social class, labour under.

My second criterion for an acceptable presentation of female character is a recognition by the author of the common potential of every human being, regardless of sex.

Included under this are what we have seen Ford referring to as a capacity for "the practical efficiencies of life," and "the simplest functions of citizenship." But the criterion ranges even more widely, and might be described generally as: sensitivity to the most deeply felt human needs and motivations. Such a sensitivity would connect up with the first criterion mentioned, in an awareness of the constraints on the fulfillment of said needs, and it would make clear the fostering conditions required to help such needs - be they emotional, physical, intellectual, or spiritual - to be equitably realized. In brief, such a recognition would be both critical and constructive.

## Chapter One

### KATHARINE HOWARD: THE CREATION OF A PERSONALITY

The Katharine Howard Ford Madox Ford presents in his Fifth Queen trilogy (1906 - 1908) is a far cry from the woman of historical report and the criticism which has been written on this work concentrates on pointing out the discrepancies between Ford's creation and the historical portrait based on the limited number of "facts" and accounts of Henry VIII's fifth wife. Few critics however have made any effort to explain the liberties Ford takes in his presentation of Katharine Howard. One notable exception is H. Robert Huntley who, in his work The Alien Protagonist of Ford Madox Ford, accounts for Ford's conscious departures from historical fact by suggesting that they were essential because of what might be termed Ford's own "prejudices", namely his very decided formulation and understanding of medieval man - and,

indeed, of men of other ages - to the extent that he viewed the progress of humanity as a succession of archetypes. Huntley maintains that "Ford's entire handling of historical fact falls within the precincts of Aristotelian 'probability'..."<sup>5</sup> and this determined the manner in which Ford presented his female protagonist:

In all of his historical alterations Ford's primary concern was to create a Katharine Howard who embodied the temperament and virtues he, rightly or wrongly associated with feudal England. And to do this he had to alter perceptibly Katharine's character as history had recorded it. This is not to argue that Ford was engaged in an uncritical historical whitewash simply to document his historical thesis, for he hardly expected his protagonist to excite the readers' unqualified respect any more than she did his; this was simply his objective judgement upon history and its random use of human nature.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the Katharine Howard presented in The Fifth Queen trilogy is not so much the re-creation of an historical woman based on extant contemporary accounts - although Ford does selectively employ these "facts" as a skeletal framework for his story - as she is the creation of Ford's historio-romantic imaginings. But considering the very limited nature of the material Ford had to work with<sup>7</sup>, the amount of sheer invention involved in his creation of Katharine is not surprising; what is surprising is the turn that Ford's inventing took. The standard, widely accepted view of Katharine Howard is that she was a frivolous, semi-literate beauty who, to her great

misfortune, happened to catch the King's eye, but in The Fifth Queen she is transposed into a learned and serious-minded woman.

Lacey Baldwin Smith, who in his account of Katharine's character attempts to justify the rather exaggerated title of his book A Tudor Tragedy: The Life and Times of Catherine Howard, is fairly unimaginative in the cause of garnering sympathy for his "heroine". He agrees with the common account of Katharine, stating that: "...in the case of Catherine Howard the records reveal neither grand passion nor high ideals. Catherine's life was little more than a series of petty trivialities and wanton acts punctuated by sordid politics."<sup>8</sup> But his efforts to present Katharine as an average girl misused by cruel circumstances are frequently interrupted by overemotional outbursts:

...she [Katharine] was certainly not the illiterate and neglected damsel of the history books. She was as well-educated as most of the ladies of the period, and could both read and write, which is more than can be said for other ladies-in-waiting at Henry's court.<sup>9</sup>

If Smith hastens to Katharine's defense, albeit on the rather unconvincing grounds of Katharine's normality, Ridley has no scruples about "writing her off" for much the same reason. But the fact remains that in The Fifth Queen

Katharine Howard, whom Ridley derides as "this weak and silly girl"<sup>10</sup>, is presented as a woman of strength and intelligence. Contrary to Huntley's previously mentioned argument that the Katharine Howard who appears in the trilogy is emblematic of Ford's "objective judgement upon history and its random use of human nature," Katharine is a morally charged embodiment of much that Ford himself was deeply attracted to in his understanding of the medieval mind and she also holds for her creator a very subjective appeal. Not unlike Pygmalion, Ford is unable to resist the power of his creation: he becomes absorbed in her and the characteristics he does attribute to her are, for the most part, positive, even unrealistically so (i.e: Ford makes Katharine Howard one of the best Latinists in the realm - an accomplishment which ties her to his later creation Valentine Wannop in Parade's End), much as any lover in the first flush of love tends to exaggerate the good qualities of the beloved. In all fairness to Ford, however, he was far too intelligent a writer not to temper his presentation of Katharine by making apparent the difficulties inherent, both for the possessor and for those with whom she is involved, in the possession of such traits as the profound intellectual and religious idealism portrayed as so fundamental to Katharine's character.

Certainly Ford does attribute great beauty,

intelligence and determination to the character he creates, but one does not emerge from reading this work with the sense that Katharine was a woman without equal: indeed, at times she is absolutely insufferable in her self-righteousness, irritating in the extent to which she is obsessed with the necessity to achieve her objectives, and maddeningly lacking in the balanced perspective which a person with more of a sense of humour and self-knowledge might have had. The Katharine Howard of The Fifth Queen is no cardboard creation nor is she, as Huntley would have us believe, a character whose development is limited to the last book of the work.<sup>11</sup> The three books of the trilogy depict a process of maturation: Katharine's development book by book is consistent with her growing experience. While her principles and the objectives which they determine certainly do not alter markedly, Katharine becomes increasingly subtle and saddened in response to what she sees going on about her.

Of all the female characters in Ford's fiction, it is Katharine Howard in The Fifth Queen trilogy who has the strongest sense of purpose and who sets out to achieve her major objective, namely the reinstatement of Catholicism as the state religion of England, without any attempt to deceive anyone as to her goal. That Katharine is a woman with a mission who feels no need to be reticent about her

cause becomes apparent early in the first book of the trilogy with her unequivocal statement: "I am for the Old Faith in the old way."<sup>12</sup> On the way to achieving her objective of a Catholic England, Katharine openly sets herself an appropriately related "noble task" as an indication of her strength of purpose. This task, selected in response to Cromwell's insistence that she serve him in spying on the Lady Mary, consists in attempting instead to "soften the mind" of Mary towards her father. To achieve this end, Katharine intends to employ her considerable learning as if this were an adequate means of bending the will of a woman so wronged as Mary:

Such knowledge as I have of goodly writers  
 should aid me rather to persuade her heart  
 towards her father; for I know no texts that  
 should make me skilful as a spy, but I can give  
 you a dozen from Plautus alone that do inculcate  
 a sweet and a dutiful love from daughter to sire.  
 (p. 130)

Whenever Katharine's objectives are considered it becomes apparent that in her relation to them, that is, in respect of her formulation of them, the means she chooses to employ in order to achieve them, and her deep belief in their goodness, she is a thorough idealist. Ford's Katharine Howard is willing to depend quite utterly on the efficacy of good letters, and she believes that the end and the means used to achieve it must be of the same moral calibre; thus, in achieving her primary objective of a

Catholic state she is only prepared to use those means she recognizes as good, namely prayer and Christian example, and Classical learning dedicated to this higher purpose. This tendency in Ford's protagonist would make for a very dry and, in all likelihood, a very tedious account of an English martyr were it not for the fact that Katharine has another side to her nature, quite different from this purposeful nobility, which serves to liven things up considerably. Along with Katharine's idealist objectives and her dedication to them there is her sense of perspective born of her experience of a harsh reality, a reality of cold, hunger and emotional deprivation. This intense realism, verging as it does on cynicism is the counterpart of Katharine's idealism. But cynicism does not temper her idealism for the fundamental reason that each "perspective" is operative in a different realm: Katharine's idealism is firmly entrenched in and limited by the area of her objectives, in the work she has cut out for herself or believes God to have selected her for; her cynicism is operative in her relations with others.

In a very real sense the Katharine Howard Ford presents us with in his trilogy has a divided nature and it is this division in her nature, the opposition between her intense idealism and her equally intense cynicism which humanizes and makes real the woman who is given such short

shrift in the history books. It is Katharine's unbending adherence to the fulfillment of her objectives which precipitates such difficulties for her in a world in which, as Ford would have it, Machiavellian pragmatism has usurped the power and position once held by religious idealism. Through the agency of Throckmorton, Cromwell's chief spy, the impolitic nature of the course Katharine sets for herself is pointed out. In one brief sentence Throckmorton delineates the "flaw" at the core of Katharine's difficulties: "It is a folly to be too proud to fight the world with the world's weapons" (p. 154). It is typical of Katharine's nature that she should react to Throckmorton's eminently practical suggestion that she use an invented treason to bring about the downfall of her arch enemy Cromwell with a sizeable burst of highflown rhetoric undignified by any greatness of purpose and laughable in its excessiveness:

'Evil dreams make thy nights hideous!' she cried out... "Thou art such dirt as I would avoid to tread upon; and shall I take thee into my hand?' She was panting with disgust and scorn.... 'Thou art so filthy that if thou couldst make me a queen by the touch of a finger, I had rather be a goose-girl and eat grass. If by thy forged tales I could cast down Mahound, I had rather be his slave than thy accomplice! Could I lift my head if I had joined myself to thee? thou Judas to the Fiend. Junius Brutus, when he did lay siege to a town, had a citizen come to him that would play the traitor. He accepted his proffered help, and when the town was taken he did flay the betrayer. But thou art so filthy that thou shouldst make me do better than that

noble Roman, for I would flay thee, disdain to be aided by thee; and upon thy skin I would write a message to thy master saying that thou wouldst have betrayed him!'

(p.155).

Throckmorton's response to Katharine's torrent of elevated insults is to give way to laughter and then to utter the following prophetic words to her: "You will have a short course in this world." (p. 155).

Throckmorton is very much a stand-in for Ford himself. He is Ford's vehicle for insightful, to-the-point commentary on the other characters in the trilogy, and in his conversations with Katharine he makes strikingly and entertainingly apparent the obstacles presented by her rigid idealism to the fulfillment of her major objective. For instance, in pointing out Katharine's annoying self-righteousness and the problems it is likely to create in her relationship with the King, he draws forth a simple yet telling reply:

... 'Why, even so, you were in grievous fault to his Highness that is a prince much troubled. As thus: You were certain of the rightness of your cause.'

'It is that of the dear saints,' Katharine said.... He touched his bonnet with three fingers.

'You are certain,' he repeated.

(p. 170)

And in response to Katharine's tendency to use classical examples as if they invariably provided valid commentary on

contemporary events, he gives the following rejoinder:

"...those were the days of a black and white world; now we are all grey or piebald" (p. 171). Throckmorton's criticism of Katharine's overly simplistic vision of the world proves an effective counterpoint. He most aptly characterizes her nature as "simple and brutal" (p. 172), and he is the only man with whom Katharine has converse whose native wit, objectivity, and self-knowledge show her at a clear disadvantage:

'Why,' he answered, 'hear me you shall. And I must mock, since to mock and to desire are my nature. You pay too little heed to men's natures, therefore the day will come to shed tears. That is very certain, for you knock against the whole world.'

'Why, yes,' she answered. 'I am as God made me.'

'So are all Christians,' he retorted. 'But some of us strive to improve on the pattern.' She made an impatient gesture with her hands...

(p. 172)

It is in her conversations with the Lady Mary that Katharine's absolute dedication to her objective of returning England to the Catholic faith shows most clearly. In her interviews with this bitter woman, her seriousness of purpose and clear sense of priorities enable her to maintain self-control in the face of Mary's harsh cynicism and her taunts. In their interview in "The King Moves", Part Three of The Fifth Queen, Katharine requests Mary to write a letter which could precipitate the demise of their

mutual enemy Cromwell. Mary repeatedly refuses, mocking Katharine's arguments and the motives behind them, and Katharine eventually "breaks down" and assumes her most characteristic dramatic pose, that of the suppliant:

Three times before she had reined in her anger: now she stretched out her hands with her habitual gesture of pitiful despair. Her eyes looked straight before her, and, as she inclined her knees, the folds of her grey dress bent round her on the floor.

'Here I have pleaded with you, and you have gibed me with the love of the King. Here I have been earnest with you, and you have mocked. God help me!' she sobbed, with a catch in her throat. 'Here is rest, peace and the blessing of God offered to this land. Here is a province that is offered back to the Mother of God and the dear hosts of heaven. Here we might bring an erring King back to the right way, a sinful man back unto his God. But you for a parcel of wrongs of your own.... (p. 207)

Mary finally stays Katharine's speech and grants her request, belittling it by calling it "a matter of a farthing or two" (p. 207), and Katharine's pose has proven itself effective once again. By referring to those dramatic gestures Katharine is so obviously predisposed towards as "poses" I do not mean to suggest that Katharine is in any way "acting" when she uses them. Dramatic speeches are second nature to her, although she is certainly not above "prepping" for them as we see on occasions when she invests considerable energy in memorizing suitable quotes with which to plead her case. It should not then be accounted unnatural or unrealistic

that she is given to larger than life gestures: as every rhetorician knows, words accompanied by appropriate gestures and expressions are far more effective than words alone. Certainly the education Ford attributes to Katharine would have emphasized this and her passionate belief in what she pleaded for, coupled with her training in rhetoric, together lead me to conclude that her use of the standard pose of the supplicant is justified by her genuine investiture of feeling in what might otherwise be a highly inappropriate pose.<sup>13</sup>

In her relationships with the other characters in the trilogy, the complex nature of Katharine Howard becomes most apparent. The manner in which she relates to other women differs markedly from the way in which she conducts her relations with men. To put it simply, she is much kinder, more generous and lenient to the members of her own sex. Katharine treats Cicely Elliott, another of the Lady Mary's maids, with greater decency and respect than she treats most men and the relationship between these two women is an interesting one. Cicely's bitter humour and her self-knowledge provide a telling contrast with Katharine's rather limiting brand of idealism. Cicely is, in many ways, the female counterpart to Throckmorton: it is she who aptly calls Katharine a "Queen of dreams and

fancies" (p.471), and who incessantly admonishes Katharine to take a more realistic view both of her situation and the situation of the realm.

In her relationship to her own maid, the large and loyal Margot Poin, is made evident Katharine's sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others. But this sensitivity cannot hold sway when it comes up against Katharine's principles. It is her rigid adherence to these principles which leads her to uphold Udal's rather comical marriage to the Widow Annot against the claim the pregnant Margot has on him, and to effectively sentence Margot to a life in retreat and the stigma of being an illegitimate parent.

In the Lady Mary, Katharine meets her match in terms of determination. To some extent the Lady Mary is Katharine but she is a Katharine Howard sans beauty, softness and grace. Mary personifies principles taken to an extreme and she is fully cognizant of the realities of the brutal world in which she lives, something which Katharine turns a blind eye to as it suits her.

An integral feature of Katharine's presentation is her profound distrust of men. She makes numerous generalizations regarding them, focussing specifically on their tendency to use women in efforts to achieve their

ends: "... she knew that it is the nature of men calmly to ask hateful sacrifices of women" (p. 59), and, "No man cometh to a woman without seeking something from her" (p. 147). But if her analysis and experience of the human situation suggest to her that men exploit women, she is equally ready to assert there is a limit to such exploitation and that limit has its roots in the fundamental independence of female nature/will: "... as her philosophy had it, you may make a woman your tool, but she will bend in your hand and strike where she will, for all that" (p. 204).

The animosity which colors Katharine's perception of men is nowhere more evident than in her lively exchanges with her would-be servant Throckmorton. In these exchanges, the extent of and substantitive base for Katharine's animosity also become apparent as the sexual tension which pervades their conversation is just as evident in Katharine's rude rebukes as it is in Throckmorton's self-mocking protestations of lust and desire for her. When she in effect tells Throckmorton to "get lost," she gives as her reason the fact that she is "meat for his masters" (p. 147). This provides some insight as to how Katharine feels she is perceived by men: she is a desirable good, qualitatively valuable in much the same way that a side of prime venison would be deemed

valuable, differing, if at all, only in the degree of value which is placed upon her as a young and very desirable woman. She is, in effect, something which appeals to the appetitive aspect of men, something to be used. Her awareness of the appeal she holds for men is also apparent in her statement that "I stand on my own legs, and no man can touch me" (p.148). In saying this, she is denying the previously stated position, i.e.: she is not something to be used by men but is rather, because of the strength of purpose inherent in her nature, and which purpose is also typified in her selection of an upright rather than a supine posture, a woman who is proof against male power and the male tendency to misuse women. This statement cannot but conjure up its opposite image and whet Throckmorton's appetite. But although it is impossible to disregard the evidence of Katharine's feelings of distrust and sexual animosity towards men it would be ludicrous to accept at face value the disclaimer she makes to Mary while trying to prove her loyalty to that lady. When she swears that "No man is aught to me," she is effectively denying the quite genuine feeling behind the kindnesses which she has already shown to her troublesome cousin Thomas Culpepper. Leaving the moot question of whether or not Katharine had indeed been sexually involved prior to their coming to court, once there her behavior to him is nothing if not sisterly.<sup>14</sup> There is no suggestion of a sexual attraction to him on her

part. When she claims in her final speech, which Ford based on extant accounts of her scaffold speech, that she would rather have been Culpepper's wife than Henry's, she is quite simply pointing out the different calibre of the love the two men had for her:

And this, I will add, that I die a Queen, but I would rather have died the wife of my cousin Culpepper or of any other simple lout that loved me as he did, without regard, without thought, and without falter. He sold farms to buy me bread. You would not imperil a little alliance with a little King o' Scots to save my life. And this I tell you, that I will spend the last hours of the days that I have to live in considering of this simple man and of his love, and in praying for his soul, for I hear you have slain him.

(p. 591).

Katharine's relationship with the King, though certainly less interesting than her titillatingly volatile relationship with Throckmorton, merits some consideration. Her conception of a king is greatly at odds with the reality of the man that Henry is:

The King stood above these plots and counter-plots. She imagined him breathing a calmer air that alone was fit for her. To one of her house the King was no more than a man. At home she had regarded him very little. She had read too many chronicles. He was first among such men as her men-folk because her men-folk had so willed it: he was their leader, no more majestic than themselves, and less sacred than most priests. But in that black palace she felt that all men trembled before him. It gave her for him a respect: he was at least a man before whom all these cravens trembled. And she imagined herself

such another being: strong, confident, unafraid.  
(pp. 165-166).

Katharine's felt association with the King is the basis for some serious errors in judgement: in conversations with the Lady Mary and Throckmorton she excuses Henry from culpability for his actions and shifts all blame to Cromwell and his minions, and she chooses to overlook his crucial characteristics of changeability and inconstancy and regards him instead as a stalwart ally in her cause:

'Belike I am enamoured of the King: belike  
the King of me, I do not know. But this I know:  
he and I are minded to right the wrongs of God.'  
(p.286)

Katharine's protestation of love for Henry, made to Margot Poins, reveals a good deal of her character. She claims that she loves him enough to "humble mine own self in the dust," but that she will not, in doing so, "stoop in evil ways," and deny any of the principles by which she lives. This is a woman who holds her principles dearer than all else, dearer even than human life and love. Her love for Henry is not the informing value in her life but, as long as it can be achieved without offense to her principles, she will fulfill her "itch" to become queen.

After she does become Henry's wife, she permits herself to revel briefly in her new sense of power and, at

the beginning of The Fifth Queen Crowned, she is depicted as relaxed, gay, and even slightly coquettish in Henry's presence (p. 436), but the decline in her level of confidence, though unaccompanied by any decline in dedication to her objective, soon comes and it is precipitous. As Lascelles' plot against her takes form, she is increasingly alienated from the King, and in her moving confrontation with him at the novel's end she openly admits that her objective - which she pointedly gives as the only reason for her union with him - is lost:

I came to you for that you might give this realm again to God. Now I see that you will not - for not ever will you do it if it might abate you a jot of your sovereignty, and you never will do it without that abatement. So it is in vain that I have sinned.

(p. 589).

In her defeat Katharine Howard is glorious and at her most appealing. That she emerges so well in her final speech is a measure of Ford's infatuation with his creation. This wilful, intelligent woman with her single-minded dedication to her objective may not be Ford's most likeable heroine, but although her dedication to principle at the expense of all else may prove too extreme to hold much of an attraction for the average reader, it cannot but elicit some degree of admiration. The fact remains, however, that it is impossible to feel the same degree of closeness to this character that one might feel to

Valentine Wannop, or even to Sylvia Tietjens! Not only is she and her motivations peculiar to a distant epoch, but we never, as it were, get inside her mind. For Ford she is very much an object of interest. His attempted imaginative identification with her is never really achieved; he is too preoccupied with distinguishing her as an archetypal Medieval character, and the fact that he renders her as an exceedingly attractive woman only complicates matters. The portrait Ford paints of Katharine Howard is vivid and engaging but it is limited by its use of a conventional objective point of view and by its consequent lack of inwardness. The reader is always uncomfortably conscious of the fact that he/she is watching a predetermined drama unfold and, despite its 600 page length, one ends The Fifth Queen without feeling significantly closer to Ford's creation - no degree of intimacy is achieved. Ford is rather too attached to his creation to let her speak for herself and so she emerges as much more limited than some of his later creations. Katharine Howard is a testing ground of Ford's ability to create a convincing female character. As such she is a testament to the extent of his early skill as well as a valuable marker by which to judge his later achievements.

## Chapter Two

### THE GOOD SOLDIER: SOME EDWARDIAN WOMEN

If propriety expresses the forms of morality without the convictions, then the Edwardian period was an Age of Propriety, of propriety carried to absurd extremes. Conventional standards of behavior which had developed from the evangelical ethics of a century earlier had become rigid and empty gestures of decorum, important not because they implied moral rightness, but because they seemed to protect social stability, public morals, religion, and the British Empire against the threat of change.<sup>15</sup>

In the first line of The Good Soldier Ford Madox Ford provides us with some idea as to the personality of his narrator, John Dowell. When Dowell begins his "tale of passion" by saying that " This is the saddest story I have ever heard ,"<sup>16</sup> something clicks in a responsive reader. It is distinctly uncommon for someone to preface the story of a personal experience - experience which to any considerable degree affected his life - with such an impersonal statement. Hearing is not the same as feeling

for it implies a second-hand experience but once we admit this we must ask just who it was that told Dowell this story. The question of the teller of this "saddest story" is intriguing. In a very straightforward response we might say that Dowell is referring to Leonora who certainly fills him in on a good number of things, which his peculiar form of social blindness had allowed him to overlook for a very considerable length of time. But this story is not Leonora's story - it is very much the story of John Dowell as his deficiencies as a human being emerge in its telling, and may be said at times to overshadow his subject matter, and Dowell is of concern to us as he is the filter through which Ford presents the women in The Good Soldier. I would suggest that this is a sort of self-reflexive "hearing": for all intents and purposes, Dowell is both hearer and teller of "the saddest story" and this first sentence is thus emblematic of his self-encapsulated nature. As a human being, Dowell is so deficient that the only role he can play in life is that of a detached observer; his lack of involvement with the story he tells is evident from the beginning of his re-creative effort. Only through the act of recounting the experiences of others - experiences which he only ostensibly shares - can Dowell "live" or feel himself to be alive. In telling this story he is in fact living vicariously: his superficially admirable ability to empathize with the other characters, coupled with his

inability to make any final moral determination as to their behavior and what it all means, are evidence of his personal emptiness. Indeed Dowell is a model of empty-headed, morally bankrupt propriety and, as such, he embodies the ills of Edwardian society.

That Dowell is not "decent" in any morally charged use of that term becomes apparent fairly early on in his tale. Three closely linked incidents demonstrate his moral insensitivity and the extent to which he is utterly "caught-up" by the decidedly narrow, self-interested concerns which are presented as peculiar to his class. Two of these incidents occur in the first part of The Good Soldier when the Ashburnhams and the Dowells are embarked on their memorable little "excursion to M-----" (p. 43) in order to look over "the archives of the Schloss in that city" (p. 43).

In the first incident Dowell sees one cow tossed by another and says of this that it "was a real joy to me" (p. 44), and he seems to get a good deal of amusement out of this event. It certainly is possible, given the right timing and mood, to find such a thing amusing. What is interesting here is that in regard to this particular incident, Dowell seems to have a tiny case of retrospective scruples saying "I suppose I ought to have pitied the poor

animal; but I just didn't. I was out for enjoyment. And I just enjoyed myself" (p. 45). In contrast, the second incident doesn't elicit even the slightest twinge of guilt; Dowell is totally unaware of the flagrant social injustice in which he plays a passive role: he mentions how he found it pleasant "to hear Florence bargain energetically with the driver of an ancient droschka drawn by two lean horses," and he is one of the party who "were drawn in a sort of triumph, for five marks without any trinkgeld, right up to the castle." (p. 45, my emphasis). The feeling of "triumph" is troubling here as it relates very obviously to a more than monetary triumph of rich over poor. Florence is an independently wealthy woman and Dowell is also possessed of considerable wealth, yet they not only see nothing wrong in paying the driver less than what he with his "lean" horses and "ancient" droschka probably needs, but they also derive significant satisfaction from Florence's bargain. Dowell does not direct any retrospective pity or qualm of guilt towards either the animals or their driver/owner. Coming as it does immediately after the "flying cow" incident, this insensitivity is even more pronounced.

The third incident which provides evidence of Dowell's moral insensitivity is significant in that it involves neither an animal nor an unknown stranger, such as

the droschka driver, but rather a man with whom Dowell has presumably had a close and long-standing relationship, albeit one with a monetary basis, namely his manservant Julius. While recounting the story of his "elopement" with Florence, Dowell describes an incident in which Julius, who had been entrusted with the care of Florence's "very precious leather grip... which contained her drugs against heart attacks" (p. 87), makes an error through which he becomes the recipient of his employer's wrath:

Julius was so overcome with grief at being left behind that he must needs go and drop the precious grip. I saw red, I saw purple. I flew at Julius. On the ferry, it was, I filled up one of his eyes; I threatened to strangle him. And since an unresisting negro can make a deplorable noise and a deplorable spectacle, and, since that was Florence's first adventure in the married state, she got a pretty idea of my character.  
(p. 88)

What is most striking about Dowell's recounting of this episode is the fact that he is not in the least apologetic for his behavior. He does not seem to feel any need to justify his actions - if that were possible - as it is not until the end of the "anecdote" that he mentions, with no aura of an excuse about it, that "the medicine grip... was the symbol of the existence of an adored wife of a day" (p. 88). Significantly, the only one of these incidents which Dowell, even in retrospect, feels somewhat troubled by involves not another human being but a cow! In

regard to the two other incidents, Dowell is unable to see any evidence of social injustice or inhumanity in his behavior. The idea of his own superiority, or rather the superiority of the class to which he belongs as an accident of birth, is so deeply ingrained in him as to render him immune from even the slightest twinge of guilt. He knows that Julius' profoundly hurt feelings are at least partly responsible for his dropping the grip but this is obviously of no real significance to him as it doesn't even lead him to what is surely the very natural step of questioning his own feelings for Julius, or, rather, the lack thereof.

The beating Dowell metes out to Julius is startlingly brutal, yet Dowell describes it in his characteristically off-hand, dispassionate tone. He records the fact that Julius was "unresisting" even though he had the audacity, it would seem, to make a "deplorable spectacle" of himself. Dowell's language provides irrefutable evidence that he does not regard himself as part of this "spectacle": he was certainly beating Julius but he was not the one making a scene. If one needs any more proof of Dowell's moral insensitivity, he provides it in the very next paragraph in which he presents his "reasons" for believing that the fear of him engendered in Florence as a result of witnessing this brutal scene was entirely unfounded:

You must remember that she was a New Englander, and that New England had not yet come to loathe darkies as it does now. Whereas, if she had come from even so little south as Philadelphia, and had been an oldish family she would have seen that for me to kick Julius was not so outrageous an act as for her cousin, Reggie Hurlbird, to say - as I have heard him say to his English butler - that for two cents he would bat him on the pants.

(p. 88)

If Dowell harbours such obvious and deep-seated prejudices against blacks, surely it is too much to hope that his treatment of all other human beings is entirely without prejudice. And indeed if one pays any attention at all to what Dowell says and to the manner in which he says it, it soon becomes obvious that his perception of women is equally warped by prejudice.

That Dowell is extremely uncomfortable with female sexuality emerges full force when one considers his relationships with the various women in The Good Soldier: he regards Leonora as cold and sexless and claims never to have had "the beginnings of a trace" of any sexual feelings for her; he writes Florence off as an unfaithful whore despite the fact that he is as responsible as she is for the sexual discord which warps their life together; as for Nancy, her virginity plays such a major role in his conception of her that he is unwillingly to treat her sexual awakening with any seriousness and portrays it as

something silly, romantic and decidedly childish.

It is not only in the nature of their sexuality that women are confounding creatures for Dowell. Early on in the novel he makes the following statement: "Ah, she [Florence] was a riddle; but then, all other women are riddles" (p. 28). Moving without so much as a breath from the particular to the general, Dowell is guilty of taking the easy way out. He cannot comprehend Florence's behavior - probably it is the intellectual/emotional effort essential to such a task which deters him - and so he "writes off" the whole of her sex as unfathomable. That Dowell comes up with such a trite "answer" is hardly surprising: on the surface the statement that all women are riddles might even be said to have something of the air of a compliment about it. Women (and men) are quite used to the insistence that women are mysterious creatures and such an insistence is often preferable to some of the decidedly more blunt and unflattering alternatives which have presented themselves throughout history. In reality, however, it is always better to have something concrete to work with (or, more usually, against). To call all women "riddles" is to try and make them something other than human beings, something which one does not regard as worth the investiture of intellectual energy required to achieve any degree of understanding. A value judgement is implicit

in Dowell's deceptively simple statement. It is used here as a guise for not wishing to recognize women as human beings with very real appetites and needs, strengths and weaknesses.

Continuing in his superficial perusal of female nature, Dowell ponders the question of what it is in a man that attracts women. Actually the case which really concerns him is Edward Ashburnham's attraction for women and, while attempting to answer the question of why Edward gets all the women, Dowell sounds like a rather petulant and jealous adolescent:

Good God, what did they all see in him? For I swear there [sic] was all there was of him, inside and out; though they said he was a good soldier. Yet, Leonora adored him with a passion that was like an agony, and hated him with an agony that was as bitter as the sea. How could he arouse anything like a sentiment, in anybody?

(p. 31)

As Dowell ponders this attraction, he comes to the conclusion that Edward "exudes" some sort of sentimental appeal which draws women to him like bees to the proverbial honey. In a very disparaging way, Dowell equates Edward's capacity to feel with silly sentimentality: "And he loved, with a sentimental yearning, all children, puppies, and the feeble generally..." (p. 32). He says this as if it were a

slur on Edward's character and, by extension, it serves as a criticism of the women who, according to Dowell's analysis, find this "sentimentality" attractive and endearing.

What Dowell finds to criticize in Edward is one and the same with what women find attractive in him. A case in point is Dowell's description of Edward's eyes:

I had forgotten about his eyes. They were as blue as the sides of a certain type of box of matches. When you looked at them carefully you saw that they were perfectly honest, perfectly straightforward, perfectly, perfectly stupid.  
(p. 33)

What Dowell is trying to do here is fairly obvious. In the final sequence of adjectives he is equating honesty and straightforwardness with stupidity. The significance of this lies in what it reveals about the man who can make such an equation. If to be honest and straightforward is one and the same with being stupid for Dowell, then it is no longer wholly accurate to say that he is morally insensitive: he is also emotionally and morally defective.

Finally, Dowell's conception of women shows a deep-seated insecurity, especially when he makes generalizations regarding their relationships with one another. Initially

he seems to see such relationships as predominantly characterized by a spirit of competitiveness. The relationship between Florence and Leonora is certainly one based not a little on competition for a prize, namely Edward, but as Dowell progresses further in the telling of his story, he begins to view female relations in a very different light and, instead of seeing women as engaged in bitter competition with one another, he comes to see them as co-conspirators in a plot to control men and thereby undermine all male attempts at independence and happiness. Thus "the curious discounting eye which one woman can turn on another..." on p. 164, becomes transformed into "the swift solidarity that attaches woman to woman" (p. 216), and our narrator comes to sympathize more intensely with Edward as he is "persecuted" by Leonora and Nancy:

Those two women pursued that poor devil and flayed the skin off him as if they had done it with whips. I tell you his mind bled almost visibly. I seem to see him stand, naked to the waist, his forearms shielding his eyes, and flesh hanging from him in rags. I tell you that is no exaggeration of what I feel. It was as if Leonora and Nancy banded themselves together to do execution, for the sake of humanity, upon the body of a man who was at their disposal. They were like a couple of Sioux who had got hold of an Apache and had him well tied to a stake. I tell you that there was no end to the tortures they inflicted upon him.

(p. 215)

This solidarity is considered by Dowell to be rather more

integral to female nature than the competitive tendency which had formerly impressed him. As Dowell deliberates further on this aspect of "female solidarity" his prejudices are more fully exposed and, though he tries to downplay what he refers to as his "generalizations" by excusing himself with his stock statement that he "know[s] nothing of life", what he is saying contributes fundamentally to forming a complete picture of him:

For, though women, as I see them, have little or no feeling of responsibility towards a county or a country or a career - although they may be entirely lacking in any kind of communal solidarity - they have an immense and automatically working instinct that attaches them to the interest of womanhood. It is, of course, possible for any woman to cut out and to carry off any other woman's husband or lover. But I rather think that a woman will only do this if she has reason to believe that the other woman has given her husband a bad time. I am certain that if she thinks the man has been a brute to his wife she will, with her instinctive feeling for suffering femininity, 'put him back', as the saying is. I don't attach any particular importance to these generalizations of mine. They may be right, they may be wrong; I am only an aging American with very little knowledge of life. You may take my generalizations or leave them.

(p. 219)

The differences between men and women, at least as they are perceived by Dowell, become manifest in this paragraph. The positive "masculine" qualities of a "feeling of responsibility towards a county or a country or a career" are not shared by women who are instead operating purely on

an instinctual level. And the instinct which reigns supreme in each and every female breast is tied into the "interest of womanhood" which, if one is to judge by what follows, consists quite simply in having claim to a man [usually a husband], a claim whose legitimacy rests in a woman's not giving that particular man what Dowell obscurely refers to as "a bad time". As long as a woman fulfills this one nebulous condition she is entitled in the eyes of other women to retain her man. Thus, what scruples women do have are instinctive in nature; they are not based on reason. This far from subtle undermining of the feminine capacity or supposed lack of use for reason is not all that is going on here: Dowell is also presenting his account of the nature of male-female relations. Just as in the previously quoted paragraph, where we were presented with a very ugly picture of two nasty women victimizing a defenseless man, merely because he is a man and is, therefore, outside of their conception of humanity, in this paragraph Dowell once again makes apparent his belief that women regard men as something less than human. His mention of the phrase "put him back", which reduces the man to an object, as does some of the other language in the passage, is calculated to point out just how men are used/abused by women who are following the higher dictate of a peculiar form of allegiance to their fellow women.

What is going on here is not simple by any means. While Dowell, by suggesting that women are guided by instinct and not by reason, is attempting to reduce women to a sub-human level, he is simultaneously voicing what amounts to a paranoia on his part: he is convinced that women regard men if not as animals (i.e: " the man has been a brute..." ) certainly as objects/things to which they owe a lesser debt of consideration than they do to other women. This is also how Dowell accounts for Nancy's "quite atrocious telegram from Brindisi" (p. 220). He argues that it is part of "her official aspect of hatred" and that her utterly casual wording was part of an attempt "to prove that she had feelings creditable to a member of the feminine commonwealth" (p. 220).

It is in his relation to Nancy, however, that we come closest to seeing the very real limitations of John Dowell. What is perhaps most remarkable is that Nancy is a complex and well-realized female character in spite of the fact that she is presented by a narrator with what amounts to a compulsion to see the world and its inhabitants in black and white terms - a narrator who is openly puzzled by Nancy whenever she moves beyond the role he has set for her of a simple and somewhat simple-minded virgin/child.

John Dowell professes to be rather surprised by the

sudden realization of his love for Nancy. This realization certainly "hits" him at a remarkable time: upon learning of his wife's death, the first concrete idea he manages to dredge up from his state of numbness is put forth in his self-described "singular remark" of "Now I can marry the girl" (p. 103).<sup>17</sup> This unprefaced, unthinking remark is addressed by Dowell to his only confidant, Leonora, who later takes it upon herself to put the question to Nancy of whether she would like to marry Dowell. Nancy's response, which Dowell learns of only after Edward's death, is "that she would marry [Dowell] if she were told to" (p. 200). Yet it at no point occurs to Dowell that Nancy's feelings, or rather her lack of feeling for him, might prove an obstacle to what he envisions as their happy union. At one point, however, Dowell acts on the idea that his twelve-year sojourn as Florence's nurse-maid might have softened him up to the extent that he requires:

... a little fighting with real life, some wrestling with men of business, some travelling amongst larger cities, something harsh, something masculine. I didn't want to present myself to Nancy Rufford as a sort of an old maid. That was why, just a fortnight after Florence's suicide, I set off for the United States.

(p. 115, my emphasis)

Dowell's recognition that he is a less than acceptable candidate for marriage with Nancy in his present form is vaguely endearing; less appealing is the way he passes off

any scruples he may have as "certain negligible complications." The motivating force behind Dowell's decision to "get back into contact with life" is to try and make himself more desirable to Nancy, presumably by metamorphosing from a passive, asexual being into an active and decidedly masculine one. The somewhat dubious medium he immerses himself in to achieve this is the rough and ready world of American business.

The strangely detached manner in which Dowell deals with probable objections to his marrying Nancy makes clear just how truly self-preoccupied this man is in his relation to her. Foreseeing the objection on the basis of age difference - he is slightly more than twice Nancy's age - Dowell summarily dismisses this as a matter of very little importance, yet the fact remains that he is very conscious of this difference: he repeatedly refers to Nancy as "the girl" or "the young girl," and one is forced to conclude that Nancy's youth plays a major role in the attraction she holds for Dowell. That Dowell is unable or unwilling to see Nancy as anything more than a young girl is particularly obvious when he states that "[he] could make a young girl happy. I could spoil her as few young girls have ever been spoiled" (p. 115), and later on when he elaborates on just how he could make Nancy happy, several other things become evident:

All I wanted it [money] for was to be able to give Nancy Rufford a good time. I did not know much about house-keeping expenses in England where, I presumed, she would wish to live. I knew that her needs at that time were limited to good chocolates, and a good horse or two, and simple, pretty frocks. Probably she would want more than that later on.

(p. 180)

Although Dowell concedes the possibility that Nancy's needs might increase later on, he makes no allowance for a change in their nature: the needs he attributes to Nancy are material, and they are probably accurate as far as they go but it is Dowell's understanding of Nancy's needs and not the needs themselves which are limited. Surely it must be obvious to Dowell that what Nancy needs more than anything else is a relationship in which her capacity to give and receive love is challenged to the full. Dowell's failure to attribute to Nancy any emotional or sexual needs constitutes a failure to confront what he knows to be his own inability to meet those very real needs. He is clearly avoiding an issue which should be first and foremost in his mind: his own sexual inadequacy. That he knows this to be a problem is hinted at in one paragraph of musings, ostensibly on Nancy's sexuality/virginity, which end in a rather disturbing and disturbed "joke":

She [Nancy] seemed to have an odd quality of sainthood, as if she must inevitably end in a convent with a white coif framing her face. But

she had frequently told me that she had no vocation; it just simply wasn't there - the desire to become a nun. Well, I guess that I was a sort of convent myself; it seemed fairly proper that she should make her vows to me.

(p. 115)

Dowell's limited view of Nancy bespeaks his own limitations and these are probably quite clear to Nancy who, from the very beginning of their relationship, is consistent in her treatment of him. It is obvious from what Dowell himself tells us of their relationship that for her he is nothing more than a harmless confidant. He is the kind family friend who makes her small, entirely appropriate gifts of money and, as such, is the deserving recipient of her letters - letters whose contents show the absolute absence on Nancy's part of anything but the most clear-cut friendly intentions. She has no romantic or sexual feelings for him, and at Leonora's suggestion that Dowell might wish to marry her, Nancy's response is just what one might expect of a girl raised in a segment of society which places such a premium on filial/female obedience: she would comply with whatever she were told but the suggestion is that her emotions would certainly not be invested in any degree in such compliance for immediately afterwards she also says that "If I married anyone I should want him to be like Edward" (p. 200).

Women in The Good Soldier appear to be a very mixed lot. They are deceitful bitches, fantastic martyrs, and

innocent angels. The variety of roles they play is, if not quite astounding, certainly not in immediate danger of being labelled stereotypical: they can be kindly mothers who provide their "sons" with the added bonus of sexual relations; chaste-as-ice wives who take it upon themselves to "pimp" for their adoring husbands; phoney invalids for whom only illicit sex has any kind of appeal; and indoctrinated Catholic orphans, barely old enough to put up their hair, who offer themselves to their beloved guardians as instruments of sexual salvation.<sup>18</sup> Such classification of Ford's female characters is easy, appealingly so, yet it is indicative only of a relatively superficial engagement with the work in question. The obvious next step consists in a close analysis of the presentation of the female characters in The Good Soldier.

None of the women in The Good Soldier has what we might call a career, yet Florence, Leonora, and Nancy each has one or more objectives which engage a good deal of their energy, energy not tapped by the otherwise leisurely lifestyle to which they subscribe as a result of their social standing. Along with her major objectives, each of these women is also characterized by those social conventions which, in the form of ideas and desires, present themselves to her as obstacles in the way of her

pursuing her objectives. The fundamental distinction I should like to make between these two discrete "sets" is that the first set, that of objectives, involves an exercise of the woman's will and conscious decision-making on her part whereas the other set, that of obstacles, "controls" the woman as her energy is countermanded by those things which may render the pursuit of an objective difficult or be at cross-purposes with it.

The woman's point of view is of crucial importance in making this distinction between objectives and obstacles. Her objectives are viewed by her as something positive, as a desirable good; therefore, the objectives she chooses are important and valuable points to analyze as they are, in a very real sense, indicative of her world view as well as, in a much more specific sense, of the choices which she perceives as being open to her as a woman in a particular society.

Analysis of the obstacles which interfere with a woman's fulfillment, with her achieving her chosen objectives, is just as fruitful as the analysis of those objectives, for both function very importantly as social barometers. The obstacles which prevent, or threaten to prevent, the realization of objectives are symptomatic of social pressures in much the same way as are the objectives

held by the woman, the major difference being that with one set of social pressures the woman feels herself to be in accord whereas with the other set she feels herself to be quite at odds and out of sympathy.<sup>19</sup>

One of the first things we learn about Florence is that she is a graduate of Poughkeepsie, a small college in New Jersey, and that she considers herself an educated woman, a claim which Ford treats as thoroughly pretentious and highly ironical. One of Florence's objectives is to make sure everyone she encounters is well aware of her educational superiority. This is made quite clear in Dowell's description of his first meeting with her:

First I had drifted in on Florence at a Browning tea, ... I don't see why Florence should have gone to that sort of spelling bee. It wasn't the sort of place at which, even then, you expected to find a Poughkeepsie graduate. I guess Florence wanted to raise the culture of the Stuyvesant crowd and did it as she might have gone in slumming. Intellectual slumming, that was what it was. She always wanted to leave the world a little more elevated than she found it.

(p.21)

Florence's ostensible objective is the pursuit and subsequent "distribution" of knowledge. She takes upon herself the role of the lady of culture and imparts her esoteric bits of knowledge, all of which have some

transparently cultural content, to a carefully selected audience. The members of the little "four-square coterie" are the recipients of a good deal of Florence's civilizing efforts. In particular, Florence directs her stream of cultural commentary, as well as her own person, towards that poor receptacle - Edward Ashburnham: "...I have heard her lecture Teddy Ashburnham by the hour on the difference between a Franz Hals and a Wouvermans and why the Pre-Mycenaean statues were cubical with knobs on top. I wonder what he made of it? Perhaps he was thankful?" (p.21). Even if Ashburnham was thankful, we learn that Leonora was not. Her evident polite uninterest in Florence's impartings as well as her implied superiority of learning is a source of real irritation to Florence. Competition between the two women is not limited to the matter of physical possession of Edward, it extends to the intellectual possession of that poor tool. Florence is engaged in the none too promising task of playing intellectual Pygmalion to him while Leonora is busy maintaining the uselessness of such an effort as well as managing to induce in Edward a fear that intellectual prowess might interfere with something a good deal more important to him, namely, his physical prowess. This decidedly cruel display of wit on Leonora's part opens the way for an equally cutting remark made by our sheep-like narrator:

I fancy that his wife's irony did quite alarm poor Teddy; because one evening he asked me seriously in the smoking-room if I thought that having too much in one's head would really interfere with one's quickness in polo. It struck him, he said, that brainy Johnnies generally were rather muffs when they got on four legs. I reassured him as best I could. I told him that he wasn't likely to take in enough to upset his balance.

(p.42)

Florence's program of educating Edward Ashburnham and indeed her entire objective of cultural/intellectual enlightenment is really quite secondary. Her primary objective, the one which has the most meaning for her, is to obtain a place in English society. American society seems to hold little charm and the glimpse of English life afforded her during travels with her uncle impresses and captures her admittedly limited imagination to such an extent that she marries Dowell simply because he, as a man of means without an occupation, represents for Florence nothing more or less than a means to an end:

...Florence was coldly and calmly determined to take no look at any man who could not give her a European settlement....She meant, on her marriage, to have a year in Paris, and then to have her husband buy some real estate in the neighborhood of Fordingbridge, from which place the Hurlbirds [Florence's family] had come in the year 1688. On the strength of that she was going to take her place in the ranks of English county society. That was fixed.

(p.77)

Now to her credit, Florence is very direct with John

Dowell about her objectives. She is not responsible for any delusions he may have as to what marriage represents to her: a mere social convention, based upon convenience, namely hers. Florence has enough money to attempt to fulfill her objectives on her own, but enough knowledge of how society works to know that a woman with husband in tow would stand a much greater chance of acceptance than would a single, hence predatory, female. John Dowell in his undemanding acquiescent way might prove a useful 'husband'.

In spite of the obstacles which prevent her achieving it, Florence holds true to her objective of attaining a place in English society. In a very real way, these obstacles are all internal. Externally, all indications would seem to point to smooth sailing: Florence has money, looks, lineage and an affable husband. She should be able to enter the society of Edwardian England with little trouble for she is more than willing to give lip-service to the conventions which comprise it and which, having no hard moral core, demand nothing more than lip-service.

However, Florence has her own nature to contend with and the circumstances which arise as a result of her internal obstacles make for a lovely bit of black comedy. The conflict between Florence's need to keep up appearances, to play the role of a lady of considerable

social standing, and her illicit sexual desires, prevents her from ever achieving her objective and, on a more final note, precipitates her suicide. She is a product of her society but she is little else; for her, society is all and as all her society is comprised of its appearances, appearances are the sum total of her being. The fact that Florence is the one character in The Good Soldier for whom few readers can ever dredge up a sympathetic reaction is indicative of her shallowness. She is free to engage in utterly indiscriminate and undeniably destructive sexual relations, in which she is unable to invest any feelings other than jealousy and possessiveness, as long as she can simultaneously keep up appearances. When, through the revelations made by the suitably loathesome Mr Bagshawe to her husband, she is in imminent danger of no longer being able to maintain appearances, she imbibes her little vial of prussic acid and then arranges herself "quite respectably" on her bed to die: even in her final act her concern with appearances is foremost in her mind.<sup>20</sup>

Dowell's analysis of the reasons for Florence's suicide places a good deal of emphasis on what he terms Florence's "superstitious personality"(p.113). The events he enumerates as having occurred on subsequent August 4ths, aside from the first which is Florence's birthdate, all carry the potential of damaging Florence's carefully

contrived world of appearances. Particularly threatening to her is the idea that Dowell might come to learn of her tawdry affair with Jimmy, of her having "surrendered to such a low fellow" (p.112). It would be unbearable to her to have Dowell come to an understanding of what she is, for he has served not only as her entrée into society, he is also a believer in that society - he sees convention as reality and is the only one of the "four-square coterie" who believes for a very considerable length of time that Florence is what she pretends to be. One of the final comments Dowell makes regarding Florence, and in the second half of the novel she is virtually unmentioned, shows that he does indeed come to an appreciation of her true character or, rather, characterlessness:

... Florence was a personality of paper... she represented a real human being with a heart, with feelings, with sympathies and with emotions only as a bank-note represents a certain quantity of gold. I know that sort of feeling came to the surface in me the moment the man Bagshawe told me that he had seen her coming out of that fellow's [Jimmy's] bedroom. I thought suddenly that she wasn't real; she was just a mass of talk out of guide-books, of drawings out of fashion-plates.  
(p. 114)

The conflict between Leonora's objectives and the obstacles in their way is emblematic of a very deep division in her nature, a division recognized by Dowell when he tells of Leonora's reaction upon realizing that her husband will not touch Nancy: "She relaxed; she broke;

she drifted, at first quickly, then with an increasing momentum, down the stream of destiny. You may put it that, having been cut off from the restraints of her religion, for the first time in her life, she acted along the lines of her instinctive desires" (p. 184). These desires are, when we look at them, not terribly different from Florence's objective of a place in English society, though it would seem that Leonora desires rather more of the accoutrements of such a position: "She desired children, decorum, an establishment; she desired to avoid waste, she desired to keep up appearances. She was utterly normal even in her utterly undeniable beauty" (p. 215). It is significant that Dowell presents these desires to us as normal female objectives for by the end of his narrative "normal" has become a distinctly pejorative term, inextricably bound with the maintenance of a society which his whole "dialectic" has led him to be critical of:

Society must go on, I suppose, and society can only exist if the normal, if the virtuous, and the slightly deceitful flourish, and if the passionate, the headstrong, and the too-truthful are condemned to suicide and madness .... Yes, society must go on; it must breed, like rabbits. That is what we are here for. But then, I don't like society - much.

(p. 227)

This passage functions as Dowell's synopsis of the situation in which he finds himself and of the role each character plays in relation to society. If "passionate",

"headstrong", and "too-truthful" refer respectively to Edward, Florence and Nancy, then the preceding three adjectives may be applied to Leonora (as each is indeed applied at different times throughout the course of the narrative). And Leonora's identification with society does not end there but is further emphasized by the rabbit-breeding remark, as she is, at the time the remark is made, carrying the child of Rodney Bayham, a man who has been described as resembling a rabbit.

Leonora's objectives are so "normal" that Dowell underlines their triteness by referring to them as "jobs". Her first job emerges when after six years of marriage with Edward, Leonora's need for financial security is threatened by what she begins to perceive as Edward's extravagant generosity. To counter this, Leonora begins practising relatively minor household economies but this only precipitates further trouble as "Edward [begins] to perceive a hardness and determination in his wife's character"(p.135). This apparent lack of sympathy is ostensibly responsible for driving Edward into the arms of other women - first the unwelcoming arms of a maidservant, which event causes a bit of a scandal, then into the welcoming but very expensive arms of La Dolciquita, the Spanish Dancer. All at once poor Leonora is faced with not one but two jobs: she assumes control over Edward's

financial affairs - "a pretty elevating job for her" (p.55) - and she takes on "the impossible job of making Edward Ashburnham a faithful husband." (p.60).

The job of keeping Edward solvent proves to be something Leonora is very proficient at:

Leonora, at any rate, had managed his money to some purpose. She had spoken to him, a week before, for the first time in several years - about money.... The mortgages were all paid off, so that, except for the departure of the two Vandykes and the silver, they were as well off as they had been before the Dolciquita had acted the locust. It was Leonora's great achievement.

(p. 160, my emphasis).

Through hard work and self-denial Leonora restores the Ashburnham estates to their former financial integrity and recovers "an establishment" which, on the material level at least, enables her to achieve her objective of keeping up appearances. The job of making Edward a faithful husband is, however, quite another matter, and it is in studying her efforts in this direction that the obstacles become most apparent which ultimately hamper Leonora in her attempts to achieve all her objectives.

The Catholic Church is a cornerstone in Leonora's conception of society, hence maintaining the sanction/approval of that establishment is one of the most important components of her objective. Decorum sans Church

approval is really inconceivable to Leonora. For this reason her job of getting Edward back and making him faithful to her is complicated by the same religious concerns which make it so necessary:

... you have also to remember that her getting him back represented to her not only a victory for herself. It would, as it appeared to her, have been a victory for all wives and a victory for her Church. That was how it presented itself to her. These things are a little inscrutable. I don't know why the getting back of Edward should have represented to her a victory for all wives, for Society and for her Church.  
(p. 169)

Just how does Leonora set about getting this job done? On the advice of her spiritual advisors, she 'responds' to Edward's love affairs with a peculiar form of passive resistance and more or less waits for him to come to his moral senses. But she does more than wait. While part of her solution seems to be that of doing nothing but suffering silently, her behavior cannot be termed totally passive. When, while planning their return from Chitral, India, Edward breaks down and suggests to Leonora that they take his latest flame, little Maisie Maidan, back with them to Nauheim, Leonora informs him that she has already made arrangements to do so. She is, as Dowell baldly states, "pimping for Edward" (p.68), as she approves of some of his choices rather more than others and sets about to make these approved specimens more accessible to him. The methods she uses to try and make Edward faithful to her and

thus uphold the sacrament of marriage are obviously unsuccessful, but what might have worked, what might have prevented a good deal of suffering, is not open to her and I am not referring to the option of divorce but rather to the simple option of honest communication. Unfortunately, Leonora believes that one of the primary womanly virtues is unquestioning obedience and silent acceptance of those sorrows which one must endure:

She had been drilled - in her tradition, in her upbringing - to keep her mouth shut. But there were times, she said, when she was so near yielding to the temptation of speaking that afterwards she shuddered to think of those times. You must postulate that what she desired above all things was to keep a shut mouth to the world, to Edward and to the women that he loved. If [s]he spoke she would despise herself.  
(pp. 162-163)

It is a biting indictment of her society that reserve and the maintenance of external order are more important than open communication and a spoken recognition of the truth. If Leonora had not felt that it was more important, more valuable to "keep a shut mouth" than to tell Edward that certain of his behaviors were deeply distressing to her, then "the saddest story" would never have come into being. A society which frowns upon truthfulness, regarding it as something vulgar and antithetical to order, and which regards with approbation only those behaviors distinguished by a concern for convention and propriety is a society

without room for anyone possessed of dreams, passion, or a desire to live fully. But, while Leonora's failure to do anything positive or meaningful about her husband's infidelities is at least partially accounted for by her allegiance to the virtues instilled as a result of her upbringing, this does not relieve her of all responsibility for acting in the way she does. As the above passage shows, her behavior is the result of a choice: she is tempted to speak but decides not to.

Nancy Rufford, the young girl "adopted" by the Ashburnhams, is a character who is too often either ignored or lightly glossed over in critical dealings with The Good Soldier. She has a very simple objective, yet perhaps the objective least easily fulfilled in the society depicted in The Good Soldier: she wants to be loved. Her experiences as a young child make this objective very understandable. The description Dowell gives of her family life prior to the Ashburnhams becoming her guardians provides ample reason for her strong love and regard for that couple:

Her father was a violent madman of a fellow, a major of one of... the Highland regiments. He didn't drink, but he had an ungovernable temper, and the first thing that Nancy could remember was seeing her father strike her mother with his clenched fist so that her mother fell over sideways from the breakfast-table and lay motionless. The mother was no doubt an irritating woman and the privates of that regiment appeared to have been irritating, too,

so that the house was a place of outcries and perpetual disturbances.

(p. 118)

Most human beings start life with strong emotional needs. In favourable circumstances a child's need for love is consistently met and the child thus develops a modicum of emotional security which enables him or her to "move on" and adopt different objectives. In the unfortunate event that this need is not met it remains the primary objective and the child's energies remain focussed on achieving it. Because of her profoundly insecure childhood environment, Nancy Rufford continues to have as her main objective the goal of being involved in secure, loving relationships with others. Apart from her "tortured mouth, [and] agonized eyes" (p.116), and the few odd lapses precipitated by reencounters with her unpleasant past in the form of the occasional verbal outburst from her visiting father, Nancy seems to have achieved her objective of feeling loved and, on the surface of things, she is sailing along quite nicely: "Why she was like the sail of a ship, so white and so definite in her movements." (p. 120). But her emotional equilibrium is a fragile thing and it is soon upset for a second time with profoundly tragic consequences.

What upsets Nancy's emotional equilibrium and her objective, for both are obviously closely linked, is a series of events which drive home to her that the obstacles

in the way of her achieving her objective are insurmountable just because these obstacles are nothing more or less than the conventions of the society in which she lives. Nancy's simple faith in love and her belief in the goodness and ultimate value of the emotional life of which it is a vital part are challenged by her encounters with an unappealing and decidedly antagonistic social reality. After Edward, Leonora, and Nancy return to Teleragh Branshaw in the autumn following the summer at Nauheim and Florence's suicide, tension becomes the most pervasive feature in what had formerly seemed to Nancy to be secure and extremely pleasant surroundings. Leonora takes to her bed with those terrible migraine headaches so symptomatic of repression and Edward isolates himself in an alcoholic haze. One would have to be utterly without sensitivity not to notice this discord, and whatever Nancy may be, she is certainly not insensitive and so, as much as she craves emotional security, she is forced to admit that something is terribly wrong. The process through which Nancy is forced into recognizing exactly what is wrong is one of the most precisely timed and carefully presented sequences in The Good Soldier and as it is simultaneously the process through which she realizes the practical impossibility of ever achieving her objective, it merits close attention.

Nancy's awareness of Leonora's and Edward's marital incompatibility is precipitated by Edward's gift of an old Irish cob to a young man who, as a result of financial misfortune, is without a horse. Nancy views this act "...as a splendid instance of Edward's quick consideration for the feelings and the circumstances of the distressed" (p. 188), and trots off to inform Leonora of what a wonderful husband she has in Edward. Leonora's reaction is to exclaim that Edward's generosity will be their ruin and to "...burst into a passion of tears" (p. 188-89). As well as her omnipresent headache, Leonora's jealousy at having earlier heard Edward and Nancy return from the hunt, exchanging cheerful banter, are partly to blame for her uncharacteristic loss of control, but it is also clear that she wishes to hurt Nancy and since the option of horsewhipping her and marking her physically is not open to Leonora in light of her concern with keeping up appearances, she decides instead to inflict a mental wound: "Well, she left a lasting wheal and her words cut deeply into the girl's mind..." (p. 190).

Leonora's outburst greatly influences Nancy in the next four weeks and Leonora's comment to the effect that she wished Edward were Nancy's husband instead of hers is, no doubt, working its way around Nancy's brain as she sits "...thinking and thinking" (p. 195), while nursing her aunt

through her headaches. During this period, Nancy is also closely observing the obvious suffering of Edward and following an account of a divorce case in the papers. This divorce case causes Nancy to confront some rather unpleasant realities. It is very important to note that the parties in the Brand case are all known to Nancy: they are a part of her social circle and she has fairly concrete impressions of them, impressions which, it turns out, represent only a very partial, incomplete picture of reality. Through her reading, supplemented by a few answers to questions she asks of Leonora, Nancy is jolted into a painful recognition of the impermanent and limited nature of love in society. This recognition is inimical to the notion of security through love which is Nancy's objective and it, as a matter of course, affects her entire world view:

Her blue eyes were full of horror: her brows were tight above them; the lines of pain about her mouth were very distinct. In her eyes the whole of that familiar, great hall had a changed aspect. The andirons with the brass flowers at the ends appeared unreal; the burning logs were just logs that were burning and not the comfortable symbols of an indestructable mode of life.

(p. 198)

Nancy is forced to confront some rather unappealing facts about her society: people of her class, people who seem to be pleasant and happy, can actually be guilty of cruelty and adultery, and marriage is, after all, not an

indestructable bond of love but often simply an arrangement which, when it ceases to be convenient, may be broken at will. And, it is inevitable that she should connect what she has learned with the situation in which she finds herself.

At this point yet another incident occurs which adds to the emotional upheaval that Nancy is experiencing, as Edward, without warning, announces his decision to send Nancy away to India, on the pretext that she should be spending more time with her father, Major Rufford. By proposing to reunite Nancy with one of the human sources of her childhood insecurity and suffering, Edward creates the most obvious obstacle to the fulfillment of her objective of being loved. As Nancy resigns herself to the practical impossibility of achieving the loving security which is her objective she adopts instead a sort of romantic fatalism fused together from the materials she has at hand: bits and pieces of things she has read and of songs she has heard which she has categorized as romantic. Were it not so pathetic and were not the suffering behind it so real, Nancy's experiments in "romanticism" might be quite comical - and on one level they may indeed be seen as comic/ironic - but the fact is that she is very serious and profoundly troubled as the conclusion she arrives at shows: "She knew nothing - nothing of life, except that one must live sadly.

That she now knew" (p. 203). Although she realizes the strength of Edward's determination to send her away and, on the basis of this realization, decides that his decision must be right, she shows signs of an independent nature as "...her mind mutinied and revolted" (p. 203) at his decision. However Nancy is not to be let off this "easily". Barging into her world of romantic suffering comes a letter from her mother, who Leonora had informed her was dead, a letter calculated to induce guilt in her deserted offspring. Nancy manages to fit this letter into her romantic scheme of things by translating it into proof positive that she, the possibly illegitimate daughter of a fallen woman, is doomed to a life of suffering. In keeping with her new philosophy, Nancy first allies herself with her mother (e.g. : "We're no good my mother and I") and then, at Leonora's insistence that she must be with Edward, she allies herself with that embodiment of suffering, saying "But we're not worth it Edward and I." Beneath this superficially silly and pretentious language there is a profound recognition: Nancy sees that the love she experiences, or rather wishes to experience, and that Edward will not allow himself to experience is something which society and all its conventions are opposed to. She lives in a society which is quite unprepared to tolerate the expression of true feelings, a society which finds it less appalling that three people should suffer tremendously

trying to uphold its empty conventions than that two people, separated only by a numbing conception of propriety and the bloody-minded determination of a bitter woman to live with propriety as it represents all that she values, should enjoy a relationship which, we have every reason to believe, would be mutually fulfilling.

The problem of Nancy's madness consists quite simply in trying to determine why she goes mad. In one of his comments on her madness, Dowell states that "Nancy was a splendid creature, but she had about her a touch of madness. Society does not need individuals with touches of madness about them" (p. 214). Dowell would seem to be maintaining that her madness is a quality inherent in Nancy, a quality quite apart from her relation to society but the whole drive of the narrative, in particular the events which I have just discussed above, goes against what Dowell seems to be claiming. Nancy's madness is a reaction to the society in which she perforce lives. Indeed it would not be going too far to say that her madness is her supreme act of rebellion - it is almost, but not quite, a political statement akin to that made by Mark Tietjens in The Last Post, when he refuses to speak again after learning that the Allies did not intend to occupy Berlin and that his country is guilty of "mental cowardice." What Nancy reacts to is the moral and emotional cowardice

of the society in which she lives. By this I hardly mean that it is a conscious or calculated move: Nancy does not say to herself "That's it! I refuse to take any more of this nonsense," and then simply become "mad". Nancy's madness is caused by her gradually dawning perception of the obstacles in the way of her ever achieving love but this in and of itself is insufficient to force her "over the edge". For this she needs a catalyst and Nancy's catalyst, like her knowledge of divorce, comes through the newspapers, in whose impersonal columns she reads of Edward's suicide:

It appears that at Aden Nancy had seen in a local paper the news of Edward's suicide. In the Red Sea she had gone mad. She had remarked to Mrs. Colonel Luton, who was chaperoning her, that she believed in an Omnipotent Deity. She hadn't made any fuss; her eyes were quite dry and glassy. Even when she was mad Nancy could behave herself.

(p. 211)

Prior to her learning of Edward's death and upon her arrival at Brindisi, Nancy had sent a telegram to the Ashburnhams. In the telegram she adopts an very casual tone, unmarked by even a hint of suffering but it is also a tone calculated to punish Edward for sending her away. They had parted, as Dowell remarks, with a great show of propriety and the telegram implies that that is all he can now expect of her: utter propriety backed by her "acceptance" of conventional standards. Nancy even throws

in a colloquialism, "rattling," to make this all the more clear. When she learns of Edward's death she must feel guilt and responsibility as well as a terrible sense of loss. With Edward's death, she immediately arrives at the stark realization that there is no longer any basis for believing that her objective might one day be fulfilled.

Nancy's move into madness is a statement of the fact that she is not willing to be actively involved in a society in which she cannot fulfill her simple objective of being loved. Her madness is also one of the most profoundly ironic things in The Good Soldier for, as the last sentence in the above quoted passage shows, Nancy's madness does not detract from her ability to behave herself - that is, to behave with propriety. Behind her quiet, fairly conventional exterior there is nothing: in her madness she is a parody of the society which has destroyed her.

Prior to her becoming mad Dowell had summed up Nancy's appearance by saying "You might put it that at times she was exceedingly grotesque and at times extraordinarily beautiful" (p. 116). It is most interesting to note that with her madness Nancy's appearance seems to take rather a turn for the better: "She is very well dressed; she is quite quiet; she is very beautiful" (p. 212) and:

It is very extraordinary to see the perfect flush of health on her cheeks, to see the lustre of her coiled black hair, the poise of the head upon the neck, the grace of the white hands - and to think that it all means nothing - that it is a picture without a meaning. Yes it is queer.

(p. 228)

And it is queer that when Nancy's reason departed so did her grotesqueness. All that is left is a perfectly appealing aesthetic object. Apparently what made Nancy grotesque is also what made her a most appealing human being, namely her fears, her desires and her objectives. Bereft of these she is reduced to a mere object, albeit a uniformly beautiful one, no longer characterized by moments of looking "exceedingly grotesque".

But something is going on beneath Nancy's beautifully bland exterior and that something is evident in the only words Nancy speaks: two utterances which bespeak the opposition paradigmatic of Nancy's nature. As soon as she becomes mad Nancy's first words are "Credo in unum Deum omnipotentum"; as she is a deeply religious person these words may be understood to form a sort of doctrinal answer to a course of action which Nancy is tempted to follow, namely suicide. Although Nancy's first reaction upon learning of Edward's suicide is most likely that of wanting to follow his example, suicide is not an option just because her faith explicitly forbids it. Her statement

"shuttlecocks" is something else again. Dowell explains it on the basis of a statement which Nancy once made to Leonora: "...the poor girl said she felt like a shuttlecock being tossed backwards and forwards between the violent personalities of Edward and his wife" (p. 226). However when Nancy repeats this word several times during her madness - and it is significant that she only utters the word for the first time after she has already been mad for a while - she is really enunciating the germ of a rather profound social criticism: she is decrying the degradation of human life and love at the hands of her society and its paramount concern for propriety. We are all of us shuttlecocks - and this explains why the single becomes plural - only some of us get hit rather harder than others or tend to feel it more intensely. Nancy's madness is then an alternative to accepting the social norms so antithetical to her nature.

In reading The Good Soldier one is always aware, often uncomfortably so, that the characters of Nancy, Florence, and Leonora are presented through the medium of an exceedingly ambiguous narrator. The women in this novel are at no time permitted to speak for themselves; instead, they are "interpreted" by a narrator whose interpretive ability is never established. This is a record of one man's impressions; it is an impressionist novel in the

purest sense. Ultimately what realism there is in this work lies in the presentation of one of the most singular narrators ever created. One is left in the rather awkward position of being unable to arrive at a final determination regarding the reality of the women in this novel as they have no existence independent of the medium of John Dowell.

### Chapter Three

#### THE WOMEN IN PARADE'S END

In his memoir It Was the Nightingale (1933), Ford recounts several of the incidents and impressions which had been "worked up" into his tetralogy. As Ford tells it there is some reason for believing that the character of Valentine had preceded in his invention both the character of Tietjens and his "lasting tribulation" whereas Sylvia was the creation of a moment:

And I had my two central female characters. One I had long ago thought of. She was... Miss Dorothy Minto who had played in the Silver Box of Galsworthy's and was also one of the principal actresses in a play about Suffragettes... and admirable at that.... She would have to be a militant if my book ever came to anything. She was small and blonde and light on her feet....

....

And suddenly, in Amiens station, I had my other.... She stood before me in the shadows above the luggage barrack and the waiting passengers as the train ran into the station.

She was in a golden sheath-gown and her golden hair was done in bandeaux, extraordinarily brilliant in the dimness. Like a goddess come in from the forest of Amiens!

I exclaimed:

"Sylvia!" So I didn't have to cast about for a name.

Putting aside the intriguing question of the reliability versus the convenience of Ford's "memory", it is significant and true to the spirit of Parade's End that Valentine should begin as something of an intellectual response and that her physicality should be a rather secondary concern whereas Sylvia, from the moment of conception, is physicality emphasized and elevated.

Some Do Not... : The Lines Are Drawn.

Opposition - in nature, objectives and appearance - is the keynote of the presentation of women in Ford's tetralogy, Parade's End. In The Fifth Queen trilogy much of the momentum was achieved by depicting the intellectual and spiritual opposition between Katharine Howard and the other characters; this dynamic of opposition is found in its most concentrated form yet in the battle lines drawn between the characters of Sylvia Tietjens and Valentine Wannop. And whereas the female voices in The Good Soldier

were muffled by the medium of an inconclusive, self-absorbed narrator, the women in Parade's End, hearkening back once again to the strong, vocal female characters in The Fifth Queen, speak for themselves. In their brilliantly depicted interior monologues as well as in their actual converse with others they emerge as powerfully convincing presences.

In Some Do Not... Christopher Tietjens makes clear what he perceives as the fundamental opposition inherent in the natures of Sylvia and Valentine:

...she [Valentine] 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. If you wanted something killed you'd go to Sylvia Tietjens in the sure faith that she would kill it: emotion, hope, ideal; kill it quick and sure. If you wanted something kept alive you'd go to Valentine: she'd find something to do for it... The two types of mind: remorseless enemy, sure screen, dagger ... sheath!

Perhaps the future of the world then was to women? Why not?<sup>22</sup>

In Some Do Not... Tietjens' reasons for his assessment of Valentine and Sylvia become clear. That he associates Sylvia with destruction is hardly surprising considering all the trouble she has managed to heap on his head. To begin with, she has "trepanned" him into a

marriage which he knows even before the ceremony to be a lie - curiously he does not blame her for this, as is made abundantly clear throughout the text, indeed he claims to respect what he views as Sylvia's efforts to provide a de jure if not a de facto father for her child. More recently she has taken the enormous social risk of running off with another man, a man carefully calculated by his absolute lack of substance to give offense to Tietjens' feelings. As her long record shows, Sylvia has used every means at her disposal and within her warped sense of propriety to injure her long-suffering behemoth of a husband.

In contrast to the unpropitious beginning which fairly indicates the entire course of the relationship between Tietjens and Sylvia, Valentine's relationship with Christopher begins in circumstances which call for straightforward behavior and which don't allow for pretences on either side. Neither is favourably impressed with the other during their initial encounter on the golf course: Tietjens writes Valentine off as "a perfectly negligible girl except for ...[her] frown" (p. 66), and Valentine later describes Gertie's champion as "a fat golfing idiot with bulging eyes" (p. 83). These inauspicious first impressions are modified over the course of the following day when they encounter each other again, this time as social equals. They engage in conversation

and Valentine, irritated by Tietjens' condescending manner, takes the opportunity to criticise him in what is obviously also an attempt to draw out this rather intriguing man and engage with him on more than a merely superficial level:

'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....'

(p. 112).

When Valentine becomes more emotional and more serious in pleading the suffragette cause, Tietjens' taciturnity asserts itself and he repudiates Valentine's "display":

Her emotion vexed him, for it seemed to establish a sort of fraternal intimacy that he didn't at the moment want. Women do not show emotion except before their familiars.

(p. 115)

It would seem that Tietjens is comfortable dealing with Valentine's rather provocative criticism but he is unwilling to entertain her serious polemics. Valentine's desire to communicate on a level with more meaning than that circumscribed by convention is, however, equal to Tietjens' determination to avoid the same and her motives are, at this point, relatively disinterested ones although she is later sufficiently moved to try and establish a bond of intimacy with him. It is during their night-long drive

under the cover of the obscuring mist that Tietjens is claimed by the intelligence, the playfulness and the charm of Valentine's personality to the extent that he feels the desire, which he barely represses, to kiss her. For her part, Valentine is drawn to Tietjens by his understanding which she describes as "...amazing: for a man who tries to be a sea-anemone!" (p. 136), and she is later moved to behave with warmth towards him, a warmth which he is aware of his inability to reciprocate just because of his problematic allegiance to the very conventions which pain him:

Miss Wannop had her arm over his shoulder. "My dear!" she said, "you won't ever take me to Groby... It's perhaps... oh ... short acquaintance; but I feel you're the splendidest..."

He thought: "It is rather short acquaintance."

He felt a great deal of pain, over which there presided the tall, eel-skin, blonde figure of his wife....

(p. 143).

Just prior to his departure for France, Tietjens does show his high opinion of Valentine when he shares with her in the Macmaster's drawing room "things I have put to no other soul" (p. 236), and proceeds to present his philosophy as regards the war. This is a clearer statement of the strength of his feelings for Valentine than is his rather clumsy, half-hearted attempt to establish physical intimacy with her before he leaves. Valentine is the one person

with whom Tietjens is willing to expend the effort necessary to establish a relationship of any degree of intimacy, be it intellectual or physical.

No More Parades : Sylvia's Book

Although Ford presents Sylvia Tietjens as an intelligent, quick-witted woman, her intelligence is neither rigorous nor is it the basis for sound decisions and constructive behavior. Sylvia is, however, possessed of a certain limited degree of self-knowledge: she is, for example, acutely aware of the effect she has on others, particularly on men, and she is also well aware of the tenuous nature of the charms on which this attraction hinges: "One grows skinny - my sort - the complexion fades, the teeth stick out" (p.38). It is her capacity for self-deprecation, and awareness of her limitations, coupled with self-absorption and her frequently validated belief that her terrible beauty can absorb others as much as it does herself, which combine to make her such a compelling presence in Parade's End.

No More Parades is Sylvia's book, the book in which Ford concentrates most explicitly on presenting Sylvia and her complicated relation with Tietjens. In his intelligent analysis of Ford's war novels in The Invisible Tent, Ambrose Gordon, Jr. argues for the appropriateness of Sylvia's presence in No More Parades :

Though a pacifist who hates war, Sylvia has a curious affinity with it. It is fitting, I think, that where Valentine Wannop is unimaginable in wartime France, Ford should bring Sylvia across the channel and develop her line of destruction in counterpoint with that of the war. She herself seems half to realize that they are one flesh, one perverse will, when she perceives (as she puts it) that she is "in the very belly of the ugly affair"..<sup>23</sup> In her, peace and war meet cruelly and absurdly.

Some background to No More Parades is essential to forming an appreciation of the dynamics of the relationship between Sylvia and Christopher Tietjens. In her denunciation of Tietjens in Some Do Not... in their second to last interview before his return to France, Sylvia gives her opinion of Tietjens' role in the miserable failure of their relationship:

"If...you had once in our lives said to me: 'You whore! You bitch! You killed my mother. May you rot in hell for it....' If you'd only once said something like it... about the child! About Perowne!... you might have done something to bring us together...."

(p. 172)

So Sylvia goes into retreat at a convent in Birkenhead after striking Tietjens during their final interview in Some Do Not..., and Tietjens is fool enough to believe that she has left him for good. When she turns up again in No More Parades, Sylvia is determined to get her husband back. She is, as Ambrose Gordon, Jr. so aptly puts it, intent on "what amounts to the rape of her husband."<sup>24</sup> It would seem that convent life has only increased Sylvia's appetites, and she describes herself in what is surely one of the most strangely amusing passages in all of Parade's End as being in the grip of a "pure sexual passion":

Emotion was going all over Sylvia... at the proximity of Tietjens. She said to herself: "Is this going to go on for ever?" Her hands were ice-cold. She touched the back of her left hand with the fingers of her right. It was ice-cold. She looked at her hands. They were bloodless.... she said to herself: 'It's pure sexual passion... it's pure sexual passion ... God! Can't I get over this? Father!... You used to be fond of Christopher.... Get our Lady to get me over this.... It's the ruin of him and the ruin of me. But, oh damn, don't!... For it's all I have to live for.... When he came mooning back from the telephone I thought it was all right.... I thought what a heavy wooden-horse he looked.... For two minutes.... Then it's all over me again.... I want to swallow my saliva and I can't. My throat won't work...'

(p. 400).

Sylvia Tietjens is out of touch with her own sexuality. She diagnoses it as if it were a disease, and what she takes to be indications of its presence - the "ice-cold"

and "bloodless" hands - are more accurately read as symptomatic of a circulatory disorder or as testimony to the need to wear rather more clothing than a sleeveless dress of gold tissue. Despite her invocations to Father Consett, Sylvia enjoys being at the mercy of this "sexual" side of her nature: she does say that it is all she has to live for. This makes manifest one of her most important characteristics, namely her need to live through others. What few objectives she does have involve her in unhealthy, destructive relations with others. The most notable of these objectives is her major life goal of torturing Tietjens, of affecting him in some - in any - way. She is lacking in self-sufficiency. The boredom she experiences and cites as evidence of the intellectual inadequacy of those around her is little more than a projection of her own emptiness.

When in No More Parades Sylvia calls on the Virgin Mary to make Tietjens have sexual intercourse with her, her decidedly simplistic approach to her Catholicism becomes apparent. Apart from her tendency to invoke spiritual help to further her unspiritual motivations, Sylvia appears to be on rather intimate terms with saints and saviours alike. She is childlike in her faith. Her simple and direct relationship with Father Consett is shown in Some Do Not... when he confronts her after her affair with Perowne. And

although in No More Parades Consett is dead - and with his death achieves martyrdom in Sylvia's estimation - her relationship to him does not change substantially. He is very much present in her mind as is the prophecy he made of her in Some Do Not...: "...her hell on earth will come when he [Tietjens] goes running, blind, head down, mad after another woman" (p. 42).

It seems that priests and saints are the only "beings" with whom Sylvia can relate on a comfortable basis. The naturalness and lack of pretension which characterize this aspect of her life are especially evident in one episode in No More Parades in which Sylvia interprets a temporarily obscured or partial memory as a sign from the Virgin: as Sylvia examines her white face - at this point she is still in the grip of that "pure sexual passion"- in the mirror of her powder box given to her by her first lover, she tries to arrive at a suitable simile with which to describe her visage and an image of an alabaster tomb at Birkenhead comes into her mind. The significance of this image does not come to her immediately but when it does there is evident in Sylvia's response her capacity for a dark brand of humour which makes her very engaging, if not quite likeable:

Suddenly Sylvia began to laugh.... As she began to laugh she had remembered... The

alabaster image in the nun's chapel at Birkenhead the vision of which had just presented itself to her, had been the recumbent tomb of an honourable Mrs. Tremayne-Warlock... She was said to have sinned in her youth and her husband had never forgiven her. That was what the nuns said.... She said aloud:

"A sign..." Then to herself: "Blessed Mary! You've given it me in the neck.... Yet you could not name a father for your child, and I can name two..."

(p. 404).

The question of exactly what it is that Sylvia finds attractive about Christopher Tietjens merits at least a cursory attempt at an answer. A consideration of the grounds on which Sylvia tends to contrast her husband with other members of his sex is revealing:

It was the most damnable of his qualities that to hear any other man talk of any subject - any, any subject - from stable form to the balance of power, or from the voice of a given opera singer to the recurrence of a comet - to have to pass a week-end with any other man and hear his talk after having spent the inside of a week with Christopher, hate his ideas how you might, was the difference between listening to a grown man and, with an intense boredom, trying to entertain an inarticulate schoolboy. As beside him, other men simply did not seem ever to have grown up...

(p. 389).

According to Sylvia then, Tietjens is the intellectual superior of all the other men of her acquaintance. He is the man. And he is thus the only man worth making the effort to hurt. To see Tietjens cringe just once gives her more satisfaction than breaking the hearts of a dozen men like Perowne, whom she feels quite justified in calling a

"girl" and referring to as "my little man" (p. 383). If Sylvia is irritated by the fact that Mark Tietjens is and always has been impervious to her charms, she is outraged by the fact that Christopher, who has in the past shown himself aware and appreciative of her physical beauty to the extent that he was guilty of what he retrospectively judges to be a terrible mistake, is now able to resist her as a matter of principle. It is interesting that when she first sees him in the hotel in Rouen she does experience a momentary scruple before wholeheartedly dedicating herself to the project at hand of making him come to heel:

His face was intolerable. Heavy; fixed. Not insolent, but simply gazing over the heads of all things and created beings, into a world too distant for them to enter. And yet, it seemed to her, since he was so clumsy and worn out, almost not sporting to persecute him. It was like whipping a dying bulldog...

(p. 381).

This simile is later developed into a full-blown reminiscence in which the destructive mixture of attraction and repulsion Sylvia feels for Christopher becomes strikingly and horrifyingly clear. Sylvia remembers whipping a white bulldog at Groby, a bulldog which she explicitly identifies with her husband:

.... And the poor beast had left its kennel to try and be let into the fire.... And I found it at the door when I came in from a dance without Christopher.... And got the rhinoceros

whip and lashed into it. There's a pleasure in lashing into a naked white beast.... Obese and silent, like Christopher.... I thought Christopher might... That night... It went through my head... It hung down its head.... A great head, room for a whole British encyclopedia of misinformation, as Christopher used to put it. It said: 'What a hope!' ... As I hope to be saved, though I never shall be, the dog said: 'What a hope!' ... Snow-white in quite black bushes.... And it went under a bush. They found it there in the morning. You can't imagine what it looked like, with its head over its shoulder, as it looked back and said: 'What a hope!' to me...

(p. 417).

Sylvia's capacity for cruelty is real and it is ugly. That she is mentally unbalanced is obvious; beating an unthreatening and unresisting animal is inexcusable even if that animal reminds you of a hated husband whom you are desperate to gain control over. But what is interesting here is Sylvia's anger and the reason for it: Christopher is an omnipresent reminder of the impossibility of her spiritual salvation. He is the silent, unresisting witness to her sins and, as such, he is both her victim and her accuser. In his silent bulk he embodies her failure as a human being; she refuses to come to terms with her responsibility for the miserable position she is in. It is a point of pride with her that she keep up the game, the pretence of not giving a damn about anything at all. She will be above the concerns which characterize the mass of humanity, if only for the sheer pleasure of proving that what is generally held to be of value does not fit into her scheme of things at all. Sylvia is superior - that is what

she is all about.

Sylvia's superiority extends even to the most sacrosanct and demanding of all relationships: the parent-child bond. Admittedly Sylvia's involvement with motherhood had an unpropitious beginning: her ignorance as to the inner workings of her body - which is rather amusing considering just how much time she devotes to observing and preserving her admirable physique - precludes her knowing just who had fathered her son. Yet this in no way excuses her gross neglect of her child. She does not hesitate to run off for months on end, making no provisions for her child's care or enquiries as to his welfare. Even given the mixed feelings she has for both of Michael's possible fathers, she is not a mother in anything but the biological sense. Perhaps the least forgivable aspect of her relation with her son is her tendency to use him as an infallible means of inflicting pain on Christopher Tietjens who does love the child. Sylvia's maternal ambivalence is apparent in her remembrance of Tietjen's response to a crisis in their son's health:

... their boy had had a temperature of 105° with the measles... He [Tietjens] had taken the responsibility, which the village doctor would not face, of himself placing the child in a bath full of split ice.... Christopher had been down to hell to bring the child back.... Fancy facing its pain in that dreadful bath!.... The thermometer had dropped, running down under their

eyes. ...Christopher had said: 'A good heart, he's got! A good plucked one!' and then held his breath, watching the thin filament of bright mercury drop to normal.... She said now, between her teeth: 'The child is his property as much as the damned estate.... Well, I've got them both....'

(pp. 436-437).

There is something repugnant about a woman who can feel only a grudging admiration for such an act of love and who can respond to such a positive remembrance with vindictive intentions. She resents Christopher's having any claim on the child but note her tacit admission of that claim in her use of the phrase "when their boy" (my emphasis). The question also arises as to the nature of Sylvia's courage, which quality even Tietjens attributes to her. She is clearly intimidated by the mere prospect of doing what Tietjens does to help their son. She is unwilling to initiate the steps necessary to help. She is a mere observer. Sylvia fails to accept the responsibility to try and help her child in any way, even at the expense of temporarily increasing his suffering. She is ineffectual as a parent and this episode, like the bulldog episode, points to her greatest flaw: her utter irresponsibility. Sylvia is not incapable of behaving responsibly, she simply chooses not to do so. At those few points in the tetralogy where she may be said to be behaving in a thoughtful manner, with concern for people other than herself, she is behaving on a whim. Sylvia's behavior is arbitrary to the extreme. When she behaves "well" or "admirably" she is

acting as much on impulse as at her worst moments. Sylvia is the antithesis of self-regulation just as she is the antithesis of anything constructive. She is no Bitch of mythic proportions but a disturbed and deeply disturbing, albeit engaging, woman.

A Man Could Stand Up- : Valentine's Book.

From a woman and a world given over to the impulses of destruction in No More Parades it is a relief to arrive at the reserved hopefulness of A Man Could Stand Up-, Ford's brilliant study of the difficulties inherent in trying to construct something worthwhile - in this case a necessarily unconventional relationship between a man and a woman - out of virtual chaos. This third novel in the tetralogy begins and ends in the imaginatively constructive mind of Ford's most appealing heroine, Valentine Wannop. Just as Sylvia was temperamentally at one with the terrible destructive energy of war, so Valentine with her healthy optimism seems the only personality in Parade's End up to the challenge of actually directing her considerable physical and mental

energy and doing something positive with the materials at hand after the Great War.

In Part One of A Man Could Stand Up-, Ford presents a Valentine Wannop who is two years older and a good deal changed from the young woman last seen in Some Do Not..... The signal feature of Valentine Wannop is her immense likeability: she is as far removed from Sylvia as one could wish and yet Ford does not make the mistake of reducing her to a colorless Pollyanna figure. Valentine is intelligent and self-assured but she is also troubled by some well-founded concerns as to the limitations and flaws of the society in which she lives:

But at the Mistress's Conference that morning Valentine had realized that what was really frightening them was the other note. A quite definite fear. If, at this parting of the ways, at this crack across the table of History, the School - the World, the future mothers of Europe - got out of hand, would they ever come back? The Authorities - Authority all over the world - was afraid of that; more afraid of that than of any other thing. Wasn't it a possibility that there was to be no more Respect? None for constituted Authority and consecrated Experience?  
(p. 510-511)

Valentine has come to question the foundations on which her society is based. Prior to the war she had already expressed her active dissent from some of the tenets of this same society by participating in the Woman's Suffrage Movement. Now, aided by the disintegrating and

exposing effect the war has had on all levels of society, she makes a more comprehensive "case" against those institutions and conventions and their proponents who would, without a sound moral/ethical basis, seek to limit the choices open to her as a young, unmarried, and far from well-off woman. Her resolve to no longer be intimidated is expressed in her characteristic spirited idiom:

She was not going to show respect for any Lady anything ever again. She had had to hitherto, independent young woman of means though she were, so as not to damage the school and Miss Wanostrocht with the Governoresses. Now... She was never going to show respect for anyone ever again. She had been through the mill: the whole world had been through the mill! No more respect.

(p. 506)

Valentine is irreverent but her irreverence is selective. Her social critique may be light-hearted in tone but it is deeply felt and it is born of hard experience. It becomes increasingly obvious that there is little naivete in this young woman: she is aware, painfully so, of the consequences of her decision to effectively live outside Society, yet her spirit and the optimism which informs it enable her to expect gratification and fulfillment in a liaison which she knows Society will refuse to countenance.

Ford makes this optimism, together with her ability not to take herself too seriously, a focal feature of Valentine's presentation. But Valentine also recognizes as

valid her own wants and needs. Her self-knowledge is as capacious as Sylvia's is limited and it is this awareness coupled with her marvellous sense of humour which makes her such a balanced and undeniably appealing character:

... There she was in a sort of nonconformist cloister. Nunlike! Positively nunlike! At the parting of the ways of the universe!

She whistled slightly to herself.

'By Jove," she exclaimed coolly, 'I hope it does not mean an omen that I'm to be - oh, nunlike- for the rest of my career in the reconstructed world!'

She began for a moment seriously to take stock of her position - of her whole position in life. It had certainly been hitherto rather nunlike. She was twenty-threeish, rising twenty-four. As fit as a fiddle; as clean as a whistle. Five foot in her gym shoes. And no one had ever wanted to marry her. No doubt that was because she was so clean and fit. No one even had ever tried to seduce her. That was certainly because she was so clean run. She didn't obviously offer - what was it the fellow called it?- promise of pneumatic bliss to the gentlemen with sergeant-majors' horse-shoe moustaches and gurglish voices! She never would. Then perhaps she would never marry. And never be seduced!

Nunlike! She would have to stand at attention besides [sic] a telephone all her life; in an empty schoolroom with the world shouting from the playground. Or not even shouting from the playground any more. Gone to Picadilly!

But, hang it all, she wanted some fun! Now!

(p. 513)

Valentine is comfortable enough with herself to make a few jokes at her own expense. This aspect of her presentation further distinguishes her from Sylvia who, while possessed of a keenly ironic wit, exercises her humour as a weapon rather than a tool. In contrast, Valentine uses her sense of humour as a means of keeping things, particularly her

self-image, in a state of healthy balance.

Another feature which Ford emphasizes in Valentine - and which is pointedly absent in Sylvia Tietjens - is the desire and the capacity to nurture others. Valentine is the quintessential caregiver. And Ford takes pains to present his heroine as an intelligent nurturer: the care Valentine selectively bestows on people is prudent - there is nothing random about it. In the role of caregiver Valentine's behavior ranges from calculating the nutritive value of a stew she prepares for her over-worked mother in Some Do Not... through to her brusque yet eminently sensible handling of Pettigul One's melodramatic appeal for sympathy in Part One of A Man Could Stand Up-. It is interesting to note that when Edith Ethel, now Lady Macmaster, informs her that Tietjens has returned home from the war incapable of caring for himself, the language of romance we might expect is supplanted by the language of nurture in Valentine's explication of her motives for renewing contact with Tietjens: "She was to become the cold nurse of a shell-shock case" (p. 645). As long as she and Tietjens stand in a nurse-patient relation, Valentine can temporarily avoid dealing with the sexual and social realities of the relationship she desires and intends to have with this man. She is temporarily in need of an excuse to be with him. As long as she is apart from

Tietjens she is capable of describing her ostensible relation to him in terms which are striking in their purposive objectivity. She even goes so far as to invent new terms i.e: "cold nurse", an invention which rather backfires for Valentine, bringing to mind as it does the term "wet nurse" with its connotations of physical intimacy. But as soon as she encounters Tietjens she is physically drawn to him, and her excuse for tending him becomes more and more obviously just that - an excuse:

He [Tietjens] was beside her. Beside her. Beside her. It was infinitely sad to be beside this madman. It was infinitely glad. Because if he had been sane she would not have been beside him. She could be beside him for long spaces of time if he were mad. Perhaps he did not recognize her! She might be beside him for long spaces of time with him not recognizing her. Like tending your baby!

(p. 646)

Valentine's need to restrict herself to the role of nurturer in her relation with this supposed madman is soon obviated by her "discovery" that the rumours of his madness had been greatly exaggerated.

Crucial to Valentine's presentation in A Man Could Stand Up- is the use of other female characters as foils for the illumination of aspects of her personality. In Part One she is engaged in a telephone conversation with her former friend Edith Ethel. This call, which takes

place at a singularly inappropriate time, causing Valentine to miss the official announcement of the Armistice,- "For the rest of her life she was never able to remember the greatest stab of joy that had ever been known by waiting millions" (p. 505) - is important not only for the information it conveys about Christopher Tietjens but also for what it reveals of its unwilling participant for during the extensive gaps/interruptions in the "conversation", Valentine's mind is working with its characteristic liveliness. As she talks to an unknown voice on the telephone, she becomes alive to the possibilities open to her now that the war is at an end, and she flirts with the idea of a trip to the Mediterranean:

She was going to leave that old school and eat pomegranates in the shadow of the rock where Penelope, wife of Ulysses, did her washing. With lashings of blue in the water! Was all your underlinen bluish in those parts owing to the color of the sea? She could! She could! She could! Go with her mother and brother and all to where you could eat... Oh, new potatoes! In December, the sea being blue. ...What songs the sirens sang and whether...

(p. 506).

Her vacation plans are interesting both in terms of what they include and exclude. Her list of named participants does not extend beyond her immediate family, although that nebulous "all" does leave some room for addition, which indicates her determination to exist - and to enjoy herself - independently of Tietjens. Yet the very manner in which

she views her proposed vacation spot shows the ambiguity which colors her striving for independence. The reference to "The Odyssey", referring as it does to Penelope and Ulysses (Odysseus) points to a plausible case of subliminal identification: Valentine sees herself as the faithful Penelope - sans, of course, that woman's plaguing "herd" of ardent suitors- waiting for years on end for the return of her husband Ulysses-Tietjens.

As an accomplished classicist, it is only natural that Valentine should find a parallel for her situation in such sources. This stands in marked contrast to Sylvia's literary sources and the snippets she tends to remember as exemplified in No More Parades:

There occurred to her [Sylvia's] irreverent mind a sentence of one of the Duchess of Marlborough's letters to Queen Anne. The Duchess had visited the general during one of his campaigns in Flanders. 'My Lord,' she wrote, 'did me the honour three times in his boots!'. . . The sort of thing she would remember. . . .

(p. 439)

The telephone conversation between Edith Ethel and Valentine also makes unavoidably clear the contrast between its two participants. Edith Ethel had roughly two years earlier been responsible for causing Valentine to "suffer a great sexual shock" (p. 231), when she presumptuously and insultingly demanded Valentine's help in terminating an

unwanted pregnancy. Now, immediately after hissing her address and thereby making her identity known to Valentine, Edith Ethel reproaches Valentine for not remaining "above" the celebratory mood of Armistice. In the exchange between the two women, Edith Ethel's assumed superiority and actual baseness is neatly contrasted with Valentine's lack of pretention and her palpable moral superiority. In her reaction to Edith Ethel it is clear that Valentine knows her former friend for exactly the sort of woman she is and, what is more, she is now quite capable of handling her:

Edith Ethel, too, was trying to show how superior she was. She wanted to prove that until she, Valentine Wannop, had reminded her, Lady Macmaster, that that day had about it something of the popularly festival she, Lady Mac, had been quite unaware of the fact. Really quite unaware, you know. She lived in her rapt seclusion along with Sir Vincent - the critic, you know; their eyes fixed on higher things, they disregarded maroons and had really a quite remarkable collection, by now, of first editions, official-titled friends and At Homes to their credit.

Yet Valentine remembered that once she had sat at the feet of the darkly mysterious Edith Ethel Duchemin - where had that all gone? -.... So she said good-humouredly to the instrument:  
'Aren't you just the the same, Edith Ethel? And what can I do for you?'

The good-natured patronage in her tone astonished her, and she was astonished, too, at the ease with which she spoke.

(p. 508)

Another female character who serves as a foil for certain of Valentine's qualities is Miss Wanostrocht, the ineffectual head-mistress of the school at which Valentine

is employed as Physical Instructress. Miss Wanostrocht is most remarkable for her inability to say anything in a straightforward manner. The direct, unequivocal nature of Valentine's speech is all the more apparent when contrasted with the circuitous, evasive style of expression employed by this older woman, a caricature of a spinsterish academic. Miss Wanostrocht exemplifies Ford's regrettable tendency to create stereotypical minor characters, both male and female; the only reason for her presence is to provide a contrast in her dry ineffectuality with Valentine's purposefulness and to provide Valentine with the opportunity to correct the generally held misconceptions regarding her eminent father, Professor Wannop as they are epitomized in Miss Wanostrocht's idealized vision of the same:

'Yes, yes... Your schwaerm for my father's memory and all. But my father couldn't bring it about that I should lead a sheltered life....I'm about as experienced as any girl of the lower classes.... No doubt it was his doing, but don't make any mistakes.'

(p. 539)

and,

'One knows all about the conflict between a man's private duties and his public achievements. But with a very little less of the flamboyant in his life my father might have left us very much better off. It isn't what I want - to be a cross between a sergeant in the army and an upper housemaid. Any more than I wanted to be an under one.'

(p. 540)

The first words Tietjens addresses to Valentine after two years complete separation are "I'm going to sell this thing.... Stay here" (p. 646). No terms of endearment are exchanged between these two beleaguered would-be lovers. The situation is ludicrous. Here are two people, each quite deliberately planning to spend the rest of his/her life with the other, and yet all their actions are calculated by the self-imposed casualness and understatement which characterizes their dealings to belie the genuine emotional undercurrent which connects them. The net result of the barricades they erect, combined with the obstacles which keep turning up in the form of various members of the 'Old Pals', is high comedy, necessarily linked with high tension, which might conceivably be transposed into high tragedy were it not for the agency of Valentine's well-meaning mama. The telephone conversation between Valentine and her mother and later between Tietjens and Mrs. Wannop is credited by Valentine - and quite rightly so - with making the union between herself and Tietjens possible. Certainly it forces them to behave decisively a good deal earlier than they might have done if left entirely to their own devices! Not only does the passing of the receiver provide the opportunity for their "first caress!" (p. 656), it also gives each the chance to adjust to the changes in the other and to renew the reality of their very real attachment to one another:

Her mother had made their union. For they looked at each other for a long time. What had happened to their eyes? It was as if they had been bathed in soothing fluid: they could look the one at the other. It was no longer the one looking and the other averting the eyes, in alternation. Her mother had spoken between them. They might never have spoken of themselves! In one heart-beat a-piece whilst she had been speaking they had been made certain that their union had already lasted many years.... It was warm; their hearts beat quietly. They had already lived side by side for many years. ... They would be alone together now. For ever!

(p. 669)

#### The Last Post: A Satisfactory Conclusion?

The Last Post was published in 1928, two years after the publication of A Man Could Stand Up. Ford had doubts about this "postscript" to Parade's End from its inception. In accordance with his expressed wishes, when Bodley Head undertook the publication of a four volume edition of Ford's selected works, Parade's End appeared as a trilogy rather than a tetralogy. Both versions of Ford's masterwork have their advocates. Graham Greene argued in favour of the trilogy, maintaining that it is an artistically complete unit and that The Last Post only detracts from this completeness. Other critics, notably Melvin Seiden and Ambrose Gordon Jr., have, contrary to Ford's wishes, treated The Last Post as a valid extension of Parade's End and as a work worthy of critical

engagement.

Whatever one's opinion as to its artistic validity, The Last Post enables us to see just how far Valentine has come on her "dear, meal-sack elephant" (p. 674), and how Sylvia is dealing with what for her must be a truly disagreeable situation. My main objective in this section then is to establish whether The Last Post is consistent with what has preceded it, particularly in terms of whether the presentation and development of Valentine and Sylvia, the two main female characters of the tetralogy, is consistent and artistically satisfactory.

Marie Leonie's and Mark Tietjens' interior monologues form the bulk of the material in this final novel of the tetralogy and there are pages on end when that material is extraneous, irritatingly so. Marie Leonie is entertaining at times but this does not obscure the fact that Ford's creation is a stereotypical bourgeois French woman and she exemplifies her creator's conceptual limitations and prejudices, as does the pitifully flat characterization of Mrs. De Bray Pape, a rather deranged American suffering from delusions of grandeur which Ford with an uncharacteristic lack of restraint belabours to a point painfully beyond humour, tolerance and artistic merit. Mrs. De Bray Pape is poorly conceived and she is proof

positive that The Last Post is not without some very serious flaws.

Why are two peripheral characters brought front stage and center in The Last Post? Functionally, Marie Leonie and Mark serve the purpose of providing important background information and of bringing the reader up to date on what has happened since Valentine and Christopher finally began their dance together on Armistice Night. In their relationship, which has spanned two decades, Mark and Marie Leonie may also be said to provide a contrast with the relationship between the younger couple; however, such a contrast as they do provide is hardly fruitful or interesting enough to justify the space allotted to it. In the final analysis it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the emphasis on Marie Leonie and Mark Tietjens in this novel represents an artistic about-face by Ford. This reluctance to concentrate entirely on the relationship at hand, namely Valentine and Tietjens' is tangible and it is a source of disappointment to the reader who must wade through one hundred pages of explication and diversions, not all of them amusing, before re-encountering any of the main characters. If it is true as Christopher put it in A Man Could Stand Up- that "You seduced a young woman in order to be able to finish your talks with her" (p. 629), then why are we not afforded the opportunity of listening

in on the fruits of this "seduction"? What good there is in The Last Post comes from a renewed attention to the characters we have every reason to be interested in: Christopher, Valentine and Sylvia. The expository details of what has happened since last we saw them could surely have been presented in a more effective manner than through the medium of Christopher's brother and his mistress/wife.

Sylvia Tietjens is the first major character to enter on the scene in The Last Post and she does so on a suitably bad-tempered horse. It becomes increasingly evident that she is getting ready to admit to herself that any idea of reconciliation with Christopher or even of further impact on his life is unrealistic and so she begins to shift her energy elsewhere:

... the time, she was aware, was at hand when she would have to ask herself whether she would not be better off if she were what the French call rangée as the wife of the Commander in Chief in India than as a free-lance woman owing her popularity entirely to her own exertions. It would be slightly ignominious to owe part of her prestige to a pantaloon like General Lord Edward Campion K.C.B., but how restful it might not be! To keep your place in a society of Marjies and Beatties - and even of Cammies, like the Countess of Fittleworth - meant constant exertion and watchfulness, even if you were comfortably wealthy and well-born - and it meant still more exertion when your staple capital for entertainment was the domestic misfortune of a husband that did not like you.  
(p. 789).

This is a tired but essentially unrepentant Sylvia. The strain of keeping up appearances in her current circumstances is beginning to tell; she has made a good go of it but now, before she incurs any greater loss of dignity or experiences a decline in popularity, she is willing to withdraw in as dignified a manner as possible and try her luck elsewhere: "Sylvia felt like a general who is losing the fruits of victory. She did not much care" (p. 802). But it is obvious that Sylvia does care. She has invested a good deal of energy - destructive energy, but energy nonetheless - into her relationship with Christopher and her ego is caught up in her objective of regaining some semblance of control over her husband. Extricating her ego from all of this and investing it elsewhere is a difficult task but Sylvia is a resourceful woman. Rather than accept responsibility for her own decisions and actions, she once again chooses to believe that she is bending her will before a Divine Will. And so as she sits on the bad-tempered chestnut with her path to Tietjens' picturesque cottage blocked by the seemingly intractable Gunning, she has a convenient "religious vision":

But it was the finger of God - or of Father Consett, who as saint and martyr, was the agent of God.... Or, perhaps, God, Himself, was here really taking a hand for the protection of His Christopher, who was undoubtedly an Anglican

saint.... At any rate, up over the landscape, the hills, the sky, she felt the shadow of Father Consett, the arms extended as if in a gigantic cruciform - and then above and behind that an... an August Will!

(p. 806)

Sylvia uses religion as a justification/pretext for her withdrawal from the conflict with Christopher and his pregnant mistress Valentine and decides to divorce Christopher just because it is what God, and not what she, desires.

More difficult to make sense of than this "religious transformation" is the fact that Ford makes considerable effort to connect Sylvia's concern that she not harm the child Valentine is carrying with her own unfulfilled desire to bear another child! This is most inconsistent with Sylvia's tremendous maternal ambivalence in the preceding three novels. The presence of Sylvia's son in The Last Post also tends to reinforce the impression that she has not been a particularly successful mother: Michael (a.k.a. Mark Jr.) is ill at ease with Sylvia; he regards his mother as a beautiful woman who is over-sexed and thus given over to vicious impulses (ref. p. 713). And yet, in spite of all the evidence that motherhood does not figure prominently on Sylvia's list of priorities, Ford presents us with the conundrum of a sobbing Sylvia confronting Valentine with an apology of sorts:

'I say again, as God hears me, I never thought to harm your child. His child.... But any woman's.... Not harm a child... I have a fine one, but I wanted another... with its littleness.... It's the riding has done it....'  
(p. 827)

While it is not surprising that Sylvia subscribes to the amusing eighteenth-century notion that vigorous and habitual exercise is in some way detrimental to a woman's reproductive capacity, it is surprising to learn that Sylvia has been thwarted in one of her nearest and dearest desires. It simply does not ring true. It is highly unsatisfactory to interpret Sylvia's unfulfilled longing for another child as the main reason for her precipitous decision to come to the aid of a woman who is carrying a child. What really motivates Sylvia in her final moments is not a deeply felt empathy with a pregnant woman but rather yet another superstitious fear by which she governs her life and, at the same time, excuses herself from responsibility and culpability: to be responsible for the miscarriage of Valentine's unborn child would be tantamount to murder and that is one sin that Sylvia is not willing to risk committing. Once again her reasons are evidence of the elaborate workings of her defense mechanisms rather than of any redeeming moral principles.

If there are a few difficulties with Ford's presentation of Sylvia Tietjens in The Last Post, no such

problems exist in his presentation of Valentine. The overwhelming fact of Valentine's presentation is her pregnancy. Valentine is absorbed by her condition or, rather, with the fruits of that condition. Pregnancy is more than a physical fact; it is a mental and emotional condition and Ford's sensitive presentation of his pregnant heroine shows an appreciation of this: the workings of Valentine's mind, the courage she exhibits, and the worries she feels are all strongly influenced by her relationship with her unborn child. Valentine's pregnancy is desired - whether it is planned or not does not, therefore, even enter the picture - and her relationship with the life she is carrying is positive, tender and loving. But this does not mean she is in a state of euphoria. Some very real concerns enter into the plans she makes for her unborn child. Valentine and Tietjens' financial situation is far from stable and this looms large in her mind, larger even than their admittedly awkward social position about which she is no longer very troubled:

... they had paid penalty enough for having broken the rules of the Club. She could carry her head high: not obtrusively high, but sufficiently! For, in effect they had surrendered Groby in order to live together and she had endured sprays of obloquy that seemed never to cease to splash over the garden hedges... in order to keep Christopher alive and sane!

(p. 818)

It is Valentine's concern over the financial state she

and Tietjens are in which precipitates the only conflict/argument between the two:

...When once, four months or so ago, the existence of little Chrissie being manifest, she had expressed to Christopher the idea that they ought no longer to go stodging along in penury, the case being so grave; they ought to take some of the Groby money - for the sake of future generations....

Well, she had been run down.... At that stage of parturition, call it, a woman is run down and hysterical....It had seemed to her overwhelmingly the fact that a breeding woman ought to have pink fluffy things next her quivering skin and sprayings of, say, Houbigant all over her shoulders and hair. For the sake of the child's health.

So she had let out violently at poor wretched old Chris who was faced with the necessity for denying his gods and she had slammed to and furiously locked that door. Her castle had been her bedroom with a vengeance then - for Christopher had been unable to get in or she to get out. He had had to whisper through the keyhole that he gave in; he was dreadfully concerned for her. He had said that he hoped she would try to stick it a little longer, but, if she would not, he would take Mark's money.

Naturally she had not let him...

(p. 817)

This conflict surfaces once again in the final scene of The Last Post and is a conflict which Mark apparently regards as sufficiently important for him to break his vow of silence to try and resolve. Whether or not Mark's gentle admonition to Valentine will effect more than a temporary resolution is a moot point but, for the moment at least, Valentine does seem to take it to heart and to welcome it.

The conflict over money aside, the relationship

between Valentine and Tietjens is characterized by an intellectual accord and a sense of mutuality / interdependence. The basis of their intellectual concord is delineated by Valentine as consisting in an agreement on several rather broad principles:

... she had followed the convolutions of her man's mind. And ardently approved. She disapproved with him of riches, of the rich, of the frame of mind that riches confer. If the war had done nothing else for them - for those two of them - it had induced them at least to instal [sic] Frugality as a deity. They desired to live hard even if it deprived them of the leisure in which to think high! She agreed with him that if a ruling class loses the capacity to rule - or the desire! - it should abdicate from its privileges and get underground.

And having accepted that as a principle, she could follow the rest of his cloudy obsessions and obstinacies.

(pp. 817-818)

It is important to notice that for Valentine the fact of understanding Christopher does not preclude the continued exercise on him of her critical intelligence. Her choice of the word "convoluted" to describe Christopher's reasoning could very well imply more than an appreciation of the complexity of that reasoning and her use of the more pejorative terms of "obsessions" and "obstinacies" to characterize other aspects of his thought and behavior is implicitly critical. Unlike Marie Leonie she does not elevate her man to the status of a god: she recognizes his limitations and accepts them - although at times she wishes she might change them - as an integral part of the man she

loves.

The interdependence which is an important aspect of Valentine and Christopher's relationship is epitomized in a very crucial and practical component of their lives, namely, their business partnership. Valentine is absolutely certain of Tietjens' need for and dependence on her as a business associate. She is much more capable than he of handling the personal side of their business: he may have a keen eye for spotting old furniture converted into rabbit hutches but it is she who strikes the bargains and makes the business deals. There is more than a little confidence evident in Valentine's ruminations on how best to handle their troublesome American business associate:

... Christopher had cabled Schatzweiler. But what was the use of that?... Schatzweiler would be finely dished if she lost the affections of Christopher - because poor old Chris could not run any old junk shop without her!... She imagined cabling Schatzweiler - about the four stains on the skirt and the necessity for elegant lying-in gowns. Or else he would lose Christopher's assistance....

(p. 815, my emphasis)

Of course Valentine never seriously doubts the constancy of Christopher's affections for her. She may well fuss about the stains on her skirt and the unattractiveness of her woolen underwear but she does so without ever losing either her sense of perspective or her

sense of humour. She is aware that Christopher's love for her is in no way related to such inconsequential things and, what is more, she is confident of the supremacy of her claim on this man over any claim her rival might put forward and she is able to draw on this confidence in her confrontation with Sylvia:

It was queer! That woman's [Sylvia's] face was all blurred.... Blubberingly! The features swollen, the eyes red!... Ah, she had been thinking, looking at the garden and the stillness: "If I had given Christopher that I should have kept him!" But she would never have kept him. Had she been the one woman in all the world he would never have looked at her. Not after he had seen her. Valentine Wannop.  
(p. 821)

This confrontation is the very heart of The Last Post but it is a mistake to over-simplify and say that it effects more than a very tenuous resolution. Melvin Seiden, in his synopsis of The Last Post is one critic who makes just this mistake:

In the final moments of The Last Post Ford allows nonchalance and constraint to give way at last to the overt expression of powerful emotion. Sylvia, through a kind of religious conversion, fights free of her compulsion to torment Christopher and Valentine, the woman who has displaced her. ... Valentine is able to get beyond awed admiration and unacknowledged hatred of Sylvia to a genuine and womanly sympathy. ... For Sylvia, Mark, and Valentine the tyranny of rancor is ended; and even if they have achieved something less than the serenity which genuine catharsis can confer, they have been urged and perfected by the release of honest feeling.<sup>25</sup>

Putting aside minor quibbles such as the matter of what constitutes a 'dishonest' as opposed to an 'honest' feeling, there are some very real problems with choosing to regard the end of The Last Post in this manner. First, to describe the Sylvia Ford presents in The Last Post as "abjectly defanged" is to do his creation a grave injustice. Sylvia is at no point, and most especially not during her interview with Valentine, an "abject" figure. Except for the brief moment when Valentine views her from her bedroom window, Sylvia remains a commanding physical presence. And to say that she is no longer capable of inflicting considerable pain is effectively to disregard the malicious comments she manages to work in to her exchange with Valentine. She pointedly uses a characteristically Tietjensian remark to remind Valentine of her intimate connection with that family; in one of her less lucid moments she accuses Valentine of the murder of Father Consett; and, in her last remark - "Damn it, I'm playing pimp to Tietjens of Groby - leaving my husband to you!..." - she casts Valentine in a very unpalatable role, that of the procured party.

Valentine's relationship with Sylvia is extremely complex. She has indeed felt an "awed admiration" for this woman in the past and a hatred which she displaces into a perception of Sylvia as a threat to her unborn child, but

to claim that these emotions are suddenly transmogrified into something Seiden refers to as "a genuine and womanly sympathy" is to make an unsubstantiated assertion.

Valentine's feelings for Sylvia are understandably too complex to be so easily dealt with: she remains ambivalent in her feelings towards this woman - there is no clearcut resolution to their confrontation - Ford was quite simply too good a writer to provide us with one. What is remarkable during this interview is not what is said, but rather the contrast between what is said and what is thought. Valentine does not tell Sylvia that she regards her as a pollutant. She does not verbally express her animosity towards this intruder. What is most apparent is Valentine's self-possession - it even occurs to her in the midst of all this chaos that "this position had its comicalities" - so that while Sylvia struggles to maintain some semblance of composure, mainly by trying to appear as if she were well and truly in charge of what is going on, Valentine is able to maintain a saving sort of objectivity, so much so that when Sylvia drops the bombshell that she intends to divorce Tietjens, Valentine's first thought is to remember where the missing antique prints - wanted by their first important English client - are to be found. It is only after Sylvia has left that she allows herself any overt expression of feeling and sinks to the floor in a state of emotional collapse.

Consistency and subtlety characterize Ford's presentation of Valentine in The Last Post and his presentation of Sylvia is also a remarkable achievement, although it has one or two troubling points. The Last Post is not without attendant difficulties - its manifest nature as a postscript means that it has inherent limitations - but it does add to the rich tapestry of Parade's End through a further exploration of the two main female characters of that work.

## CONCLUSION

### I

Ford Madox Ford's greatest strength lay in depicting the often awkward and frustrating relation people have to the society in which they live. Katharine Howard in The Fifth Queen trilogy is an anachronism in the Machiavellian world of Henry VIII. She is both unwilling and unable to "adjust" her priorities and principles so that they are in keeping with the spirit of the times, and she pays a heavy price for her unyielding temperament. In The Good Soldier the relation of the three main female characters to Edwardian society is one of the central issues of that novel. Two of these characters, Leonora Ashburnham and Florence Dowell, are fairly accepting of the limitations imposed on them by their need to conform outwardly to the social conventions prescribed for them by contemporary

standards. Nancy Rufford, the one female character who cannot accept or endure these limitations, chooses one of the few forms of protest open to her and adopts a strange sort of madness, a madness which is a parody of the society in which she lives. And in Parade's End there is both explicit and implicit social criticism, albeit of a very limited nature, as Valentine Wannop and Sylvia Tietjens are clearly at odds with their society. While Sylvia plays the role of a Society Woman, she is also capable of recognizing the terrible constraints of such a role but is lacking the conviction and energy necessary to make a break from society. In contrast, Valentine's relation to society is more actively critical and, ultimately, more constructive. She has observed Society from numerous perspectives - including that of a servant - and she has never made the mistake of unquestioningly accepting social mores. She disowns Society - and is disowned by it - but she does so with an admirable clearness of vision and a good deal of courage.

Ford is an attractive novelist for many reasons: men and women are given equal time in his novels, and if one sex may be said to exercise a greater claim on him, it is the female sex.<sup>26</sup> His understanding of the social context in which his female creations exist is obvious; and his refusal to countenance the use of sexual stereotypes (refer

to "The Woman of the Novelists", 1911), together with his appreciation of the complexity of human nature, is manifested in his creation of some of the most fully realized female characters in the fiction of his era.

## II .

"Personally, I am an ardent, I am an enraged, suffragette."

- Ford Madox Ford Ancient Lights

According to the first criterion stated in my introduction, Ford does achieve an acceptable presentation of female character: he is aware of the influence of environment on character formation, and he is sensitive to the constraints his female characters live under in their respective societies. Ford makes a considerable effort to relate the important life events which have had such a telling effect on his main female characters. For example, in The Good Soldier, Nancy Rufford's traumatic and unsettling childhood is depicted as being the basis for her strong emotional needs, and for her very real vulnerability. Such background information plays a crucial role in her presentation, and in the presentation of other female characters. The evidence of Ford's sensitivity to the constraints imposed on women in patriarchal society - and all three societies depicted in the novels are

patriarchal - is considerable. Katherine Howard, Nancy Rufford, Sylvia Tietjens, and Valentine Wannop all express their frustration with the limitations imposed on them as a result of their being female "members" of their respective societies.

In respect of my second criterion - that of the recognition of the common potential of every human being, regardless of sex, with its attendant sensitivity to human needs - Ford's presentation of female character is limited in two fundamental ways. He fails either to engage in much explicit criticism of society, or to address himself to the admittedly complex and demanding task of suggesting the social changes necessary to ensure the fostering of human potential. Thus no one in The Good Soldier, with the exception of Dowell, voices any explicit social criticism, and Dowell's criticism amounts to little more than a declaration of his dislike for the society in which he lives, and is certainly less than compelling, coming as it does from someone who is, by virtue of both his sex and his wealth, among the people least liable to exploitation in Edwardian society. In Parade's End Valentine Wannop voices her opposition to various social constraints, but, apart from her decidedly less than total involvement in the Women's Suffrage Movement, she is vague about her commitment to social change: if she has a program for

social change, or a coherent philosophy regarding it, Ford certainly does not let us in on it.

Ford's conservative temperament, his need for social acceptance, recognition, and prestige muted to the point of effectively silencing any trace of radical polemicism in his novels. What might be termed by some his 'feminism' is superficial. Inherent in it is a love for individually appealing traits, such as beauty and intelligence, which exist in spite of a woman's social circumstances, and largely absent is any strongly voiced anger at the social systems which have, as an integral feature of their design, the purpose of keeping female function and fulfillment within "reasonable" and "rational" - i.e.: controllable - boundaries.

The fact is that what tendentiousness there is in Ford is restrained, filtered or submerged by other elements in his art. One can hypothesize that his desire to polemicize was overridden by his concern that his novels not become "mere" tracts, but even such an attempt to account for Ford's reticences contains within it the unavoidable conclusion that Ford's feminism either was superficial, or his skill as an artist was too limited for him to convey it [his feminism] in a tangible and convincing manner. It is one thing to depict the tensions between the individual -

male or female - and society, it is quite another thing to move beyond such depiction into an exploration of what things in society need to be changed to accommodate the individual needs and desires of human beings. Ford chose not to make that move. Rather than believe that he was too limited a writer to adequately express his convictions - for study of his best works belies any such theory of inarticulateness or limitations - I conclude that Ford was not strongly motivated by feminist concerns. He was certainly sympathetic to the suffragette cause, but his was the sympathy of a benevolent, generous-minded man and not that of a passionately involved participant. Ford could imaginatively enter into many compelling human dramas, but the drama of the suffragette was only one of many, and its claim on him, although felt and real, was subordinated to other claims. It is a vitalizing but not a vital component of his artistry. To say that one is sympathetic to suffragette concerns is certainly not one and the same with saying that feminist concerns are informing values in one's life, and, as such, are integral to one's decision-making and work.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sondra Stang, ed., The Ford Madox Ford Reader (Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1986), p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 160-161.

<sup>3</sup> Ezra Pound, ABC of Reading (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Huntley, The Alien Protagonist of Ford Madox Ford (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.101.

<sup>7</sup> In historian Jasper Ridley's recent work Henry VIII, it is apparent just how limited our knowledge of this fifth queen is. Most of the evidence Ridley presents is based on reports made by court contemporary Charles de Marillac, the French ambassador, whose reports are generally deemed to be unreliable. And only one letter presumably written by Katharine is extant. See Jasper Ridley, Henry VIII (London: Constable, 1984), p. 357.

<sup>8</sup> Lacey Baldwin Smith, A Tudor Tragedy: The Life and Times of Catherine Howard (London: Cape, [1961]), pp. 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>10</sup> Ridley, Henry VIII, p. 339.

<sup>11</sup> Huntley, Alien Protagonist..., pp.71-72.

<sup>12</sup> Ford Madox Ford, The Fifth Queen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 78. All subsequent references will be cited in the text.

<sup>13</sup> Those critics, notably Carol Ohmann, who charge Ford with creating a female character the static formality of whose language and gestures interferes with her realism should carefully rethink their position. Surely Katherine's behavior is believable when her education and her nature are taken into account.

<sup>14</sup> Katharine's questionable past is too tightly bound in with what makes her appealing to Ford for him to "come clean" on the issue of her implied sexual exploits with Culpepper and others. Part of the appeal she holds for him is her aura of mystery, and he is not about to diminish that aura/appeal by stating matter-of-factly that she did or did not bed with her cousin.

<sup>15</sup> Samuel Hynes, The Edwardian Turn of Mind (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Ford Madox Ford, The Good Soldier (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982), p. 11. All subsequent references will be cited in the text.

<sup>17</sup> Actually, there is some ambiguity as to whether it is Dowell or Leonora who first suggests that Dowell might marry Nancy. On p. 103, Dowell says that "it appears that I addressed to her that singular remark: 'Now I can marry the girl.'" But his use of the word "appears" lends a definite note of uncertainty to this statement. On pp. 114-115, while reflecting on the origin of his love for Nancy, Dowell says "I had never thought about it until I heard Leonora state that I might now marry her [Nancy]." It remains unclear whether Dowell himself comes up with this idea or whether Leonora is its source, and this has obvious significance for if it is indeed the case that Leonora is responsible for germinating this little seed in the receptive soil of Dowell's mind then she is guilty of a rather despicable act of pandering (despicable because she must be aware that a marriage between the two would be unpleasant and unfulfilling for Nancy), and we can no longer attribute to Dowell the saving grace of at least being able to vaguely recognize and dimly appreciate the

beauty and potential inherent in Nancy.

<sup>18</sup> But then the male characters, although fewer in number, are no less neurotic: Edward Ashburnham figures as a pink-complexioned, fair-haired Don Juan, riddled with guilts and fears only partly assuaged by his romantic-chivalric amalgam of a code of ethics, and John Dowell has, quite understandably, been likened to J. Alfred Prufrock.

<sup>19</sup> By "social pressure" I mean quite simply the felt need to behave, or not to behave, in a particular way. And such a need may be either conscious or unconscious, and such "pressures", of course, differ from society to society, as well as varying enormously according to one's position within a particular society.

<sup>20</sup> One cannot help thinking how unfortunate it is that the final resting positions of Maisie Maida and Florence could not have been transposed. How delightfully just it would have been to have Florence end up in a ludicrous position with her upper half submerged in a trunk and her lower half dangling indignantly, and to have the gentle little Maisie die in a manner which would leave her quite without the need of Leonora's ministrations - but then justice is not the keynote of The Good Soldier.

<sup>21</sup> Ford Madox Ford, It Was the Nightingale (New York: The Ecco Press, 1984), pp. 210-211.

<sup>22</sup> Ford Madox Ford, Parade's End (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 128. All subsequent references will be cited in text.

<sup>23</sup> Ambrose Gordon Jr., The Invisible Tent: The War Novels of Ford Madox Ford (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1964), pp. 111-112.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>25</sup> Melvin Seiden, "Persucution and Paranoia in Parade's End," in Ford Madox Ford: Modern Judgements, ed. Richard A. Cassell (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 167.

26 In her excellent introduction to The Ford Madox Ford Reader, Sondra Stang expatiates on this point saying "Women and Men is the title of one of Ford's books... it could have been the subtitle of any of Ford's novels. It is one of his great subjects. 'Do you think one can make a thing interesting without a woman?' Conrad asked. The question would not have occurred to Ford" (p. xvii).

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- PRIMARY SOURCES -

Ford, Ford Madox. The Fifth Queen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Ford, Ford Madox. The Good Soldier. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982.

Ford, Ford Madox. Parade's End. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

- SECONDARY SOURCES -

Bailin, Miriam. " 'An Extraordinarily Safe Castle': Aesthetics as Refuge in The Good Soldier," Modern Fiction Studies. XXX, iv (Winter, 1984), 621-636.

Cassell, Richard A., ed. Ford Madox Ford: Modern Judgements. London: Macmillan Press, 1972.

Fleishman, Avrom. "The Genre of The Good Soldier: Ford's Comic Mastery," Studies in the Literary Imagination. XIII, i (Spring, 1980), 31-42.

Ford, Ford Madox. It Was the Nightingale. New York: The Ecco Press, 1984.

Gordon Jr., Ambrose. The Invisible Tent: The War Novels of Ford Madox Ford. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1964.

Green, Robert. Ford Madox Ford: Prose and Politics.

Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Huntley, Robert H. The Alien Protagonist of Ford Madox Ford. Chapel Hill, North Carolina : University of North Carolina Press, 1970.

Hynes, Samuel. The Edwardian Turn of Mind. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Leer, Norman. The Limited Hero in the Novels of Ford Madox Ford. Michigan: Michigan State University, 1966.

Ludwig, Richard M. The Letters of Ford Madox Ford. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Lynn, David H. "Watching the Orchards Robbed: Dowell and The Good Soldier," Studies in the Novel. XVI, iv (Winter, 1984), 410-423.

MacShane, Frank. The Life and Work of Ford Madox Ford. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1965.

MacShane, Frank, ed. Ford Madox Ford: The Critical Heritage. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972.

Mizener, Arthur. The Saddest Story. New York: World Publishing Co., 1971.

Moser, Thomas C. The Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Newman, Judie. "Ford Madox Ford's Fifth Queen Trilogy: Mythical Fiction and Political Letters," Etudes Anglaises. XXXVIII, iv (1985), 397-410.

Ohmann, Carol. Ford Madox Ford: From Apprentice to Craftsman. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1964.

Page, Norman. "Living as Ritual in Parade's End,"  
Studies in the Literary Imagination. XIII, 1 (Spring,  
1980), 43-50.

Pound, Ezra. ABC of Reading. New Haven: Yale University  
Press, 1934.

Ridley, Jasper. Henry VIII. London: Constable, 1984.

Secor, Marie and Secor, Robert. The Return of the Good  
Soldier: Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt's 1917 Diary.  
No. 30 of English Literary Studies Monograph Series.  
Victoria: University of Victoria, 1983.

Smith, Lacey Baldwin. A Tudor Tragedy: The Life and Times  
of Catherine Howard. London: Cape, [1961].

Snitow, Ann Barr. Ford Madox Ford and The Voice of  
Uncertainty. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University  
Press, 1984.

Stang, Sondra J., ed. The Ford Madox Ford Reader.  
Manchester: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1966.

Thornton, Lawrence. "'A Queer and Fantastic World':  
Romance and Society in The Good Soldier," in  
Unbodied Hope: Narcissism and the Modern Novel.  
Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1984.

Wiley, Paul L. Novelist of Three Worlds: Ford Madox Ford.  
New York: Syracuse University Press.

VITA

Surname: Trimmer Given Names: Karen-Marie

Place of Birth: Bistroff, France

Date of Birth: June 13 1962

Educational Institutions Attended, with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, B.C. 1980-1987

Degrees, Diplomas, Etc., Awarded, with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. (with distinction) 1984 University of Victoria, B.C.

Honors and Awards:

Provincial University Entrance Scholarship 1980

President's Scholarships, 1981/82 and 1983/84

University of Victoria Teaching Assistantship 1984/85

B.C. Law Foundation Scholarship 1987

Publications:

---

---

---

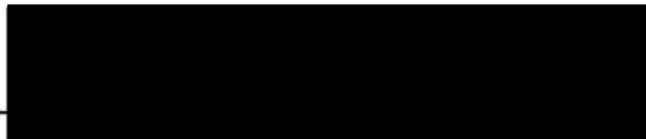
PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis (the title of which is shown below) to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the Library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis

The Presentation of Women in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford

Author



K.-M. TRIMMER

---

August 27<sup>th</sup> 1987

---