

# Reading Levinasian Notions of Alterity and the Ethics of Place in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*

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**Abstract** Questions about ethics continue to exert a profound influence upon the direction of contemporary literary criticism. In addition to tracing the evolution of ethical criticism as an interpretive form, this essay explores the ways in which the critical paradigm's twenty-first-century manifestations continue to address literature's ethical motivations and import. As a form of case-study, this essay examines Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* both in terms of the ethical framework in which the novel's characters coexist as well as the moral crises following the Great War and the conflict's substantial influence upon the abidingly complex interrelationship between French and British culture and society. Through this lens, we can understand the manner in which Ford's tetralogy encounters a number of revealing aspects of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophies of the self, alterity, and otherness. Drawing upon Levinas's critical matrix of alterity, a reading of Ford's ethical imperatives in *Parade's End* demonstrates the author's considerable humanistic agenda for "altering" our perspectives of war and atrocity via his well-honed and influential Impressionistic techniques.

**Keywords** Ethical criticism; Ford, Ford Madox; Impressionism; Levinas, Emmanuel; Moral philosophy; Selfhood

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### **A Brief History of Anglo-American Literature and Ethical Criticism**

Questions about ethics continue to exert a profound influence upon the direction of contemporary literary criticism. Yet, as Geoffrey Galt Harpham observes in *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society*, ethical criticism functions in the eyes of many literary scholars as an “alien discourse” that challenges or undermines the theoretical project’s capacity for promoting “literature’s immediacy, concreteness, vitality, and affective richness” (ix). During the last two decades, ethical criticism’s fusion with continental philosophy has produced a more theoretically rigorous form of literary critique that continues to elevate its status as a viable interpretive mechanism. In contrast with North American variations of the paradigm that find their origins in Kantian moral philosophy and troll dangerously close to the shoals of moral relativism, ethical criticism’s European manifestations offer a more forceful analysis by emphasizing continental philosophy’s various and ongoing accounts of alterity, otherness, and phenomenology. While both schools of thought may hale from decidedly different venues of intellectual thought, ethical criticism’s various manifestations demonstrate the theoretical project’s larger interest in assessing the value systems that inform our textual interpretations. As recent evidence has shown, ethical criticism’s Anglo-American emergence during the latter half of the twentieth century is enjoying yet another renaissance, particularly in the Eastern academy—namely, China—as thinkers in the new century ponder the significance of addressing literature’s ethical motivations and import.

To begin, ethical criticism can be most usefully understood through two principal spheres of thought:

1. as an “interpretive paradigm that explores the nature of ethical issues from their considerable roles in the creation and interpretation of literary works” (Womack 167);
2. as a philosophical matrix that “refers to the inclusion of ethical components in the interpretation and evaluation of art” (Peek).

Moreover, ethical criticism may be regarded as a meeting between the two polarities of moralism, which contends that the aesthetic value of art should be determined by or reduced to its “moral” value, and autonomism, which challenges our notions about whether it is appropriate to apply moral categories to art that

should be evaluated by aesthetic standards alone.

Among Anglo-American academic circles, it must be understood that there are signal differences between British and American manifestations of ethical criticism. The revival of ethical criticism as an interpretative paradigm during the last two decades of the twentieth century finds its origins as a response, especially in the mid to late 1980s, to poststructuralist theoretical concerns such as deconstruction and the development of postmodernism as a set of theoretical positions. Many of these theoretical thrusts had their origins in post-Second World War French philosophical thought influenced by earlier German thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and others (see Abrams and Harpham 56). French philosophical thought — as espoused, for instance, by leading players such as Derrida — exerted a powerful impact upon American academe, especially in the form of key professorial appointments during the early 1980s in prestigious East Coast institutions. The ensuing reactions subsequently led to the development of various socially challenging modes of critical thinking — for example, gender studies, historical criticism, anti-theory, and eco-criticism, among others.

As one of the critical zeitgeist's key late-twentieth-century movements, ethical criticism may be regarded as a sociocultural reaction to a host of critical and philosophical antecedents. In literary studies, we can find these roots in much earlier works, such as Tolstoy's classic "What Is Art?" and Oscar Wilde's Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in which he asserts that moral merits and defects should not influence aesthetic considerations. Other examples of earlier exponents of ethical criticism may be found also in the work of the great Russian critics Alexander Voronski and Mikhail Bakhtin, whose literary criticism can be understood as essentially "ethical" in nature.<sup>1</sup> Contextually, ethical criticism and other interpretive forms find their origins in the Anglo-American academy and in the institutionalization of English studies and literary theory, particularly in the United States. In Europe, on the other hand — and namely in France and Germany — there has been a striking tendency to examine ethical aesthetics in terms of their philosophical implications rather than, as in the United Kingdom, from the perspective of cultural studies.

Scholars in British academic circles have explored ethical literary considerations since the early twentieth century, as evinced by F. R. Leavis and Christopher Norris, among others. Indeed, Leavis acted as one of the chief exponents of ethical criticism. As a major critical voice — perhaps *the* major twentieth century British critical voice, as evidenced by his seminal essays published in *Scrutiny* in the 1930s and 1940s — Leavis influenced generations of thinkers

as they pondered literature's moral value systems. In works such as *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1948), Leavis directed literary critics in the United Kingdom and the United States alike to engage the scholarly energies in addressing the ethical properties of the novel as our most revelatory generic long-playing form. Leavis's successors eagerly take up this baton, as demonstrated by the work of British critic Christopher Norris, who argues in *Truth and the Ethics of Criticism* (1994) that by providing readers with the means to establish vital interconnections between texts and the divergent, heterogeneous communities in which we live, ethical criticism attempts to empower the theoretical project with the capacity to produce socially and culturally relevant critiques. This way of reading allows critics to consider "the prospect of a better, more enlightened alternative where the difference *within* each and every subject is envisaged as providing the common ground, the measure of shared humanity, whereby to transcend such differences *between* ethnic and national ties" (94). As Kenneth Womack observes, Norris consequently "posits an ethics of criticism that self-consciously assesses the theoretical presuppositions undergirding the moral position of," for instance, "contemporary hermeneutics" (Womack 168).

Not surprisingly, such grandiose social and critical arguments are conspicuously absent from the work of American critic Martha C. Nussbaum, whose *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (1990) and other work represent the high tide of pragmatic and rhetorical ethics. As with the eminent American rhetorician Wayne C. Booth in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988), Nussbaum focuses largely on the novel as a means for ethical reflection. In particular, Nussbaum applies her Boothian conception of ethical criticism to the work of Henry James, Marcel Proust, and dramatist Samuel Beckett. Nussbaum fervently defends the practice of ethical criticism, arguing that certain literary works may potentially play important supplementary roles in moral education and applying this notion to James's novels, which she sees and key sites of ethical interplay and valuation.

In *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum demonstrates the interpretive power of ethical criticism, the usefulness of its critical goals to scholarship concerning literary character upon the cultural landscape of fiction, and the ethical motivations underpinning satire. She argues, moreover, for the place of love as a subject in the evolving discourse of ethical criticism. In particular, Nussbaum is concerned with "practical love," referring to "an attitude of concern that one can will oneself to have towards another human being, and which is, for that reason, a part of morality" as opposed to "pathological" (336-37) or irrational obsessive love.

The acknowledgment of practical love provides additional insight into human conceptions of living well and the ways in which literary texts depict love's capacity to produce personal fulfillment. In a later work, *Poetic Justice* (1995), Nussbaum takes her theoretical perspective a step further and explores the value of ethical reading as a means of influencing political theory and public discourse.

To understand the late-twentieth-century American academy's grappling with ethical theory, it is vital that we consider the role of stylistics in ethical criticism. In *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum writes that "Form and style are not incidental features. A view of life is *told*. The telling itself — the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary, of the whole manner of addressing the reader's sense of life — all of this expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not, of what learning and communicating are, of life's relationships and connections. Life is never simply *presented* by a text; it is always *represented as something*" (5). In the light of such an observation from a leading exponent of "ethical criticism," it is little wonder that the novel maintains its preeminence as a favored form of exploration.

To understand the philosophical origins of Booth and Nussbaum's scholarship, it is especially useful to consider the work of their key influences — namely, such thinkers as Louise M. Rosenblatt, John Gardner, J. Hillis Miller, and Bernard Williams, among others. In *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978), Rosenblatt provides a matrix of interpretation for ethical critics to explain reader's motives and their "transactions" with literary texts. According to Rosenblatt, there are two principal types of reading strategies:

1. Aesthetic reading in which the reader is concerned with what occurs *whilst* actually reading;
2. Non-aesthetic reading in which the reader is concerned with what occurs *after* reading.

The non-aesthetic is a notably different kind of reading; it is interested with what the reader materially derives from the reading experience — for instance, a concern with verbal symbols, what they represent, and so forth. The reader "seeks the information, the concepts, the guides to action that will be left with the reader when the reading is over" (27). Such a position offers vastly similar aims as those most closely associated with reader-response criticism.<sup>2</sup> During the act of reading, Rosenblatt writes, "each reader brings to the transaction, not only a specific past life and literary history, not only a repertory of internalized 'codes' but also a very

active present, with all its preoccupations, anxieties, questions and aspirations” (144). Indeed, for Rosenblatt reading is a complex transaction that involves a deep interconnection between reader and the human communities in which they live and seek personal fulfillment. The reading transaction lays “bare the assumption about human beings and society and the hierarchy of values that govern the world derived from the text” (149-50).

In 1978, Gardner published *On Moral Fiction*, taking Rosenblatt’s theories a step further and arguing that artistic expression “is not didactic because... it clarifies, like an experiment in a chemistry lab, and confirms” (19). Consequently, Gardner affirms that power of reading and expresses the text’s ability to convey ideas and notions concerning knowledge and universal good for its readers, through for instance allegory, satire, or other fictive devices. Our ethical continuum further evolves with the work of British philosopher Bernard Williams, who argues in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985) that “an ethical theory is a theoretical account of what ethical thought and practice are” (72). Williams’s position “either implies a general test for the correctness of basic ethical beliefs and principles or else implies that there cannot be such a test” (72). In particular, Williams raises the issue of the motives of critics who engage in the interpretation of human values. In concert with his critical forebears, Williams takes great pains to avoid what he sees as the self-propagation of personal values imposed upon a literary work. He writes that “we should not try to seal determinate values into the future society,” warning that “to try to transmit free inquiry and the reflective consciousness is to transmit something more than nothing, and something that demands some forms of life more rather than others” (173).

In its basic manifestations, ethical criticism attempts to communicate the meaning of Williams’s “something” and its greater social relevance through the interpretation of literary works. And, as previously noted, these works are, with the exception of Rosenblatt’s attention to poetry, largely works of fiction. In *The Company We Keep*, Booth observes that “ethical criticism attempts to describe the encounters of a storyteller’s ethos with that of the reader or listener. Ethical critics need not begin with the intent to evaluate, but their descriptions will always entail appraisals of the value of what is being described” (8). Simply put, Booth’s ethical criticism allows for the recognition of the interrelatedness of the reading experience and the life of the reader. Booth recognizes the powerful factors of language and ideology when texts are assessed. By this reasoning, feminist criticism may be regarded as a type of ethical criticism through a form of literary interpretation that seeks to draw attention to perceived social injustice such as misogyny or the

underrepresentation of women.

In *Getting It Right* (1992), Harpham continues Booth and Nussbaum's efforts to elaborate the ethical paradigm as an interdisciplinary means of interpretation. Ethical criticism should "be considered a matrix, a hub from which the various discourses and disciplines fan out and at which they meet, crossing out of themselves to encounter each other" (17). Harpham draws upon the term "ethnicity" to refer to the interpretive moments in ethical criticism: "the most dramatic of narrative turnings, the climactic point just between the knitting and unraveling of the action, the *fort* and the *da*, the moments when the rising line of complication peaks, pauses, and begins its descent into the *dénouement*." For Harpham, this line of thinking refers to a "macro-turn" in which ethical critics, through their obligations to their own sets of values and commitments, reflect upon and interpret the moral choices depicted in narratives (171).

Our tour of Western critical thought vis-à-vis ethical criticism concludes with Miller, a poststructuralist juggernaut in his own right whose important volume, *The Ethics of Reading* (1989) concerns the process that occurs between the text and the reader. For Miller, this is a reflexive process in which the reading experience is shifting, is performative. In his later work *Versions of Pygmalion* (1990), he argues that reading defies stasis, that reading evolves during successive readings of a given text. More recently, Miller's *Reading for Our Time: Adam Bede and Middlemarch Revisited* (2012) revisits the issue of reading as a means for understanding the present. Miller pointedly asks, "Can reading *Adam Bede* and *Middlemarch* be justified in this time of climate change, financial meltdown and ineffective politicians?" (1). By paying attention to each work's linguistic detail, to its figures of speech, and by relating characters and their sociocultural errors in these works to current affairs, Miller conspicuously interprets literary works in the context of the here and the now. Reading — or rereading according to Miller — may assist us in accommodating the current human, social, and political situations of our times and, if we succeed in putting discourse into action, perhaps even ameliorating them.

It is worth noting that much of Anglo-American ethical criticism belongs to the late twentieth century, a period of reaction, largely in American universities, to the specters of deconstruction, poststructuralism, and the emerging influence of continental philosophy, the interpretive power of which we will address in the reading of Ford Madox Ford's novel below. In many ways, ethical criticism has fallen short of realizing the vision inherent in Booth's *The Company We Keep* "of a reading methodology that shuns theoretical dogma in favor of 'critical pluralism' and highlights the ethical interconnections between the lives of readers and their

textual experiences” (Booth 489). If anything, the twenty-first century has seen a clear movement away from Anglo-American ethical criticism to the Eastern academy — namely, China’s burgeoning critical project — where the paradigm’s chief expositors now ply their trade. This notion is most principally demonstrated by the work of Zhenzhao Nie, who draws attention to the most recent developments in ethical criticism in China and provide vital new perspectives about its potential reinvigoration. Indeed, as Shang reveals, there are, with some exceptions, three main thrusts of ethical criticism:

1. pragmatic and rhetorical ethics as expounded by Nussbaum, Booth and others;
2. the ethics of alterity — of difference, of otherness as expounded by French theorists regarding the work of Derrida, Levinas, and Miller;
3. political approaches to ethics, with the main exponents being such luminaries as Homi K. Bhabha and Luce Irigaray.

Yet as Shang indicates, these three principal strands did not develop into a fully independent discipline or an individual critical school devoted, in specific, to ethical study. In China, the refinements of ethical criticism may be found in the sophisticated work Nie and Shang, two critics whose evolving discourse point to a renaissance in the ethical project as a matrix of critical interpretation. Chinese theorists such as Nie and Shang clearly realize, as with their Anglo-American precursors, the significance of understanding our moral interrelationships with imaginative works of literature. As the eminent British dramatist Tom Stoppard recently observed, our shared international literatures possess a unique power to move us towards vital moments of ethical reflection that can prompt us into much-needed, even life-affirming and culture-shifting action. As Stoppard remarked — speaking in particular about theatre’s signal role in contemporary life — our desire for spectacle “fulfills one of the prime functions of art in society, namely to reflect and interpret and offer a critique of the social environment it lives in” (Stoppard). With such a mandate still in the offing for a world beset by challenge and crisis, can the fundamental need for an ethical criticism ever truly lose its sway?

### **Alterity and the Ethics of Place in Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End***

As our historical study of the ethical project reveals, as an interpretive paradigm, ethical criticism offers a valuable lens for examining the manner in which literary characters experience moments of moral clarity and interpersonal change.



Originally published in 1924-1928, Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* illustrates a variety of ethical principles inherent in the evolving critical vocabulary of continental philosophy's postwar ethical turn. In *Parade's End*, Ford deftly explores the nuances of literary realism, while simultaneously experimenting with the technique of Impressionist "rendering" that he had contemplated with great frequency in his nonfiction. Ford imagined writing a novel "on an immense scale, a little cloudy in immediate attack, but with the salient points and the final impression extraordinarily clear. I wanted the Novelist in fact to appear in his really proud position as historian of his own time.... The 'subject,'" Ford added, "was the world as it culminated in the war" (qtd. in Bradbury xvii). Ford's conception of Impressionism affords *Parade's End* with its precise formal structure, as well as with its significant ethical agenda. In addition to its historiographic components, *Parade's End* addresses a range of issues regarding the moral crises following the Great War and the conflict's substantial influence upon the abidingly complex interrelationship between French and British culture and society.

Originally published as four novels — *Some Do Not...*, *No More Parades*, *A Man Could Stand Up* —, and *Last Post* — *Parade's End* traces the war- and peace-time experiences of Christopher Tietjens; in this manner, Ford's tetralogy encounters a number of revealing aspects of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophies of the self, alterity, and otherness. As Jill Robbins observes in *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (1999), Levinasian ethics "denotes the putting into question of the self by the infinitizing mode of the face of the other" (xiii). Ford's ethical imperatives in *Parade's End* are most dramatically underscored by Marie Léonie's powerful interior monologue, which shrewdly establishes the French point-of-view regarding the staggering social and cultural atrocities of the First World War. Her dramatic meditation — perhaps more than any other moment in Ford's tetralogy — genuinely reveals the complex "face" of England's French "other."

In *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (1998), Robert Eaglestone argues that "Levinas's thought cannot be turned into a methodology: it is not a philosophy that can be *applied*.... To ask for a Levinasian critical method is to ask for something that cannot and should not exist" (176; italics added). In fact, Eaglestone offers little evidence demonstrating the thrust of his contention beyond his observation that "there is obviously no one critical process which embodies Levinas's ideas, no one answer" (176). Yet Levinas's ethical philosophy quite obviously posits its own terminology — including such concepts as "adequation," "alterity," "the face," and "negation," among a host of others. Simply put, Levinasian philosophy, despite Eaglestone's misgivings, can easily be *applied* as

an interpretive matrix in much the same interdisciplinary fashion as gender studies, psychology, history, and sociology — to name but a few of literary criticism's multitudinous allied disciplines, each of which possesses its own contingent of thinkers with their own critical vocabularies.

Such philosophically vexed issues as obligation and responsibility, for instance, are perhaps most usefully considered via Levinas's conceptions of alterity, contemporary moral philosophy's *sine qua non* for understanding the nature of our innate responsibilities to our human others. In "Is Ontology Fundamental?" Levinas discusses the ethical significance of other beings in relation to the needs and desires of ourselves. Our ethical obligations to others, Levinas reasons, find their origins in our inability to erase them via negation. Simply put, unless we succeed in negating others through violence, domination, or slavery, we must comprehend others as beings *par excellence* who become signified as "faces," the Levinasian term that refers to the moral consciousness and particularity inherent in others. This "primacy of ontology," in Levinas's words, demonstrates the nature of the collective interrelationships that human beings share with one another (10). In "The Trace of the Other," Levinas argues that "the relationship with the other puts me into question, empties me of myself" (350). More importantly for our purposes here, Levinas describes the concept of the face as "the concrete figure for alterity" (qtd. in Robbins 23). The notion of alterity itself — which Paul-Laurent Assoun characterizes as "the primal scene of ethics" (96) — refers to our inherent responsibilities and obligations to the irreducible face of the other. These aspects of our human condition find their origins in the recognition of sameness that we find in others. This similarity of identity and human empathy establishes the foundation for our alterity — in short, the possibility of being "altered" — and for the responsibilities and obligations that we afford to other beings.

In *Time and the Other* (1979), Levinas identifies the absolute exteriority of alterity, as opposed to the binary, dialectic, or reciprocal structure implied in the idea of the other. Hence, alterity implies a state of being apprehended, a state of infinite and absolute otherness. In "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," Levinas writes that "we can say that the alterity of the infinite is not canceled, is not extinguished in the thought that thinks it. In thinking infinity the I from the first *thinks more than it thinks*. Infinity does not enter into the *idea* of infinity, is not grasped; this idea is not a concept," he continues, "The infinite is radically, absolutely, other" (54). Alterity's boundless possibilities for registering otherness, for allowing us to comprehend the experiences of other beings, demonstrates its ethical imperatives. Its exteriority forces us to recognize an ethics of difference

and of otherness. Such encounters with other beings oblige us, then, to incur the spheres of responsibility inherent in our alterity. When we perceive the face of the other, we can no longer, at least ethically, suspend responsibility for other beings. In such instances, Levinas writes in "Meaning and Sense," "the I loses its sovereign self-confidence, its identification, in which consciousness returns triumphantly to itself to rest on itself. Before the exigency of the Other (*Autrui*), the I is expelled from this rest and is not the already glorious consciousness of this exile. Any complacency," he adds, "would destroy the straightforwardness of the ethical movement" (54).

Drawing upon Levinas's critical matrix of alterity, a reading of Ford's ethical imperatives in *Parade's End* demonstrates the author's considerable humanistic agenda for "altering" our perspectives of war and atrocity via his well-honed Impressionistic techniques. In his landmark essay, "On Impressionism," Ford describes his conception of Impressionism in terms of its capacity for impacting — and, indeed, ultimately altering — readerly perspectives: "Always consider the impressions that you are making upon the mind of the reader," he writes, "and always consider that the first impression with which you present him will be so strong that it will be all that you can ever do to efface it, to alter it or even quite slightly to modify it" (39). In Ford's postulation, the Impressionist technique affords novelists with the ability to capture the nuances of genuine humanity that mark our lives and to ponder the occasional moments in which we reveal the nature of our inner selves: "I suppose that Impressionism exists to render those queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass," Ford observes, "through glass so bright that whilst you perceive through it a landscape or a backyard, you are aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you. For the whole of life is really like that," Ford adds, and "we are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite other" (41). Ford's Impressionistic technique involves the careful construction of a series of layers of meaning that work in concert in order to evoke various images and emotions. As Max Saunders notes, "Ford responds to the complexity of war-torn Europe not by impressing his own designs upon his material, but by rendering the complexity. His fiction does not work to subordinate everything to his voice," Saunders continues, "It re-creates the play of conflicting voices, volitions, attitudes, and viewpoints" (211). Simply put, through his assembly of details and revelations in his novels concerning the lives and proclivities of his characters, Ford attempts "to produce an illusion of reality" in the mind of the reader (44).

This notion of an "illusion of reality" allows Ford to shape the ethical

perspectives inherent in such narratives as *The Good Soldier* (1915) and *Parade's End*. In *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society* (1999), Harpham observes that “ethics does not solve problems, it structures them” (37). In *Parade's End*, Ford structures his novel's ethical dimensions by imagining a vast Impressionistic expanse regarding the Great War and its sociocultural aftermath. Perhaps even more effectively than with his depiction of the bewildered (and bewildering) John Dowell in his masterwork of narratology and concentration, *The Good Soldier*, Ford's tetralogy succeeds in portraying the ways in which conscious minds engage in the act of perception and, in some cases, wallow in sheer ignorance. In *Parade's End*, the novel itself concerns the collapse of Tory-Christian values after the First World War. A central text in the modernist canon of the 1920s, *Parade's End* functions as a kind of “crisis epic” or “anti-epic,” in the words of Malcolm Bradbury, that “deals with peace and war, society as it has formed itself in the *belle époque* era, and society as it is shattered by war” (xvi). The tetralogy's protagonist Christopher Tietjens — the “last Tory” — witnesses the violence and social hypocrisy of postwar Europe, while also pondering the end of a cultural and political epoch in England. Although much of the novel involves Tietjens's perspectives of war and its aftermath, *Parade's End* devotes considerable attention to his protracted bout of sexual warfare with his adulterous wife Sylvia, who confronts him with yet other social paradigm shifts of a sort in the guises of polygamy, divorce, and the New Woman. Perhaps even more interestingly, though, is the manner in which Ford's novel recontextualizes French war- and peace-time experiences for its largely English-speaking audience.

Of particular interest to this essay, then, is Marie Léonie's powerful — and, for some critics at least, controversial — interior monologue that features prominently, and some argue disconcertingly, in the tetralogy's final installment, *Last Post*. Ancillary to much of *Parade's End*'s narrative, Marie Léonie's inclusion as a central character in *Last Post* surely presented Ford with considerable textual difficulties. As Arthur Mizener writes: “Ford exercised all his ingenuity to justify his abrupt introduction of her, but there is no getting around the fact that, in using her, he multiplied entities unnecessarily and shifted attention from the real center of the action; though it is easy to understand why, with his lifelong passion for the French, Ford found her irresistible” (508). The genesis of her name offers an intriguing antecedent in itself. As with Ford's contemporary, Princess Marie-Léonie Bonaparte (1870-1947) — herself the distant inheritor of a vanquished regime — Ford's French heroine in *Last Post* finds herself on the precipice of a new world order that dares to redraw the boundaries of the sociocultural relationship between

England and France. In *Last Post*, Marie Léonie shares a North Country cottage with her dying lover, Christopher's older brother Mark, as well as with Christopher and his mistress Valentine. Marie Léonie's efforts at nursing Mark back to health after his stroke will come to no avail. Thematically, a dying Tory like him simply cannot survive in the new world. Similarly, Christopher and Valentine will not be able to hide in the provinces from Sylvia forever; eventually, the bold and brazen twentieth century — embodied in the figure of Sylvia herself, no less — will descend upon them in the cottage, and their perceptions of, and places within, the post-Armistice world will become altered irrevocably.

For this reason, Ford uses Marie Léonie's interior narrative as the means via which he registers his principal characters' displacement in the postwar world. Her monologues in *Last Post* provide Ford's English readership with the opportunity for distinguishing the Levinasian "face" of their hitherto concealed French other. Ford accomplishes this end by allowing Marie Léonie to reveal her particularity and her continental perspectives throughout her interior narrative. Ford describes her as being of "the large, blond, Norman type; in the middle forties, her extremely fair hair very voluminous and noticeable. She had lived with Mark Tietjens for twenty years now," Ford adds, "but she had always refused to speak a word of English, having an invincible scorn for both language and people of her adopted country" (737). Marie Léonie's existence within the close environs of her adopted English family forces them to recognize her alien presence, to confront a very different perspective of the Great War and its outcome. For Mark, Ford writes, "No doubt twenty years of listening to the almost ceaseless but never disagreeable Marie Léonie had been a liberal education" (785). Perhaps even more importantly, though, her interrelationship with the Tietjens family forces them, and especially Mark, to reconceive the First World War and the resulting balance of power in Europe from a markedly different vantage point. On Armistice Day, English buglers solemnly "played the Last Post on the steps of the church under Marie Léonie's windows" (787). Rather than being consumed with nostalgia for the England of days gone by or relieved by the nation's recent withdrawal from war-time Europe, Marie Léonie can only think of the numerous French dead and the needless waste of a generation. For her, the bugle's dirge — "a funeral call at three in the morning" — is an affront: "It was betraying her country to have given those [German] assassins an armistice when they were far from their borders," Ford writes, "Merely that was treachery on the part of these sham Allies. They should have gone right through those monsters slaying them by the millions, defenseless, and then they should have laid waste their country with fire and sword. Let them too know what it was to suffer as

France had suffered” (838).

As the tetralogy—and, hence, the end of his own life — comes to its conclusion, Mark finally and rather pointedly perceives Marie Léonie’s otherness through his altered relationship with her in specific and with France in general. Mark’s “long association with Marie Léonie, his respect for the way in which she had her head screwed on, the constant intimacy with the life and point of view of French individuals of the *petite bourgeoisie* which her gossip had given him — all these things together with his despair for the future of his own country had given him a very considerable belief in the destinies and indeed in the virtues of the country across the Channel,” Ford writes (806). By demonstrating his English characters, and especially Mark, in the act of reconsidering their interrelationship with France through the auspices of Marie Léonie’s particularity, Ford underscores the value and significance inherent in our ethical obligations to others. Ford’s Impressionism — his “illusion of reality” — merely functions as the engine of *Parade’s End’s* ethics of alterity. The rest is up to us.

## Notes

1. We owe this observation to the distinguished Russian literary critic Igor Olegovich Shaytanov’s prescient remarks during the 4th International Symposium on Ethical Literary Criticism held at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in December 2014.
2. Rosenblatt’s contributions to reader-response criticism receive special attention in Terence R. Wright’s review-essay, “Reader-Response under Review: Art, Game, or Science?” The value of Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading, Wright argues, “lies in its recognition of both sides of the ‘reading transaction,’ reader and text” (542).

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