In sight of war

'Just imagine it,' murmured Bazarov, 'what a word can mean! You've found it, said it, the word “crisis” – and you're happy! It's astonishing how a man can still believe in words.'

I don't know that the large words Courage, Loyalty, God and the rest had, before the war, been of frequent occurrence in London conversations. But one had had the conviction they were somewhere in the city's subconsciousness... Now they were gone.

Ford admired Turgenev, so it is not surprising that one comes across ideas borrowed, perhaps, from him in the later writer's work. In this case, though, there is a development at work; a development precipitated by the First World War. Turgenev's self-confessed nihilist Bazarov expresses amazement at the tenacity of human belief in words – words that, in his example, can diminish and deaden a feeling of catastrophe. Were he to find himself instead in the volumes of Parade's End (or one of a number of other war novels), Bazarov's amazement would be tempered. Ford, post-war, has lost belief in words. He has lost belief in the power of words to induce comfort and happiness, to describe large concepts. It is the big words that have 'gone'.

The 'big words'

This expression of a wartime linguistic fragmentation is one for which I can find no etymological evidence (I have checked the Oxford English Dictionary and etymological dictionaries). And yet, it is one that is ubiquitous in certain kinds of writing of the First World War. Ezra Pound wrote in 1915, in structuralist vein, that 'when words cease to cling close to things, kingdoms fall, empires wane and diminish'
Symbolising his character as a soldier of a previous order, Edward Ashburnham still holds to his profession as ‘full of the big words’ courage, loyalty, honour, constancy’ (though God is missing). Ernest Hemingway’s protagonist can no longer do so in *A Farewell to Arms* because ‘abstract words such as glory, honor, courage were obscene beside the concrete names of villages’. French novelist Henri Barbusse knew that marshalling against French nationalism from a soldier/writer’s perspective would mean attacking its tendency to ‘gather to itself all prejudice and all the “Big Words”’ – he cannot speak that language any more. In both Paul Fussell’s and Samuel Hynes’s work on the war, the notion of the death of the ‘big words’ figures prominently; Jay Winter relates the ‘big words’ to the ‘lies’ of an older generation (p. 2).7

Allyson Booth evokes Hemingway’s expression of this notion when she calls it a ‘tension between capitalized abstractions like Heroism and the concrete details of trench warfare’. Her explanation of the abstract coming into semantic conflict with the concrete makes far more sense of it than Peter Conrad when he suggests simply that ‘the war gave language a dressing down’. This linguistic crisis is not about language, but about how words are understood and why, about how they can be used to communicate. In this chapter, I discuss why and how the abstract was fragmented by the concrete in the First World War, as expressed in the fiction that it produced. Attention to presenting the detailed, the concrete, is one aspect of the modernist tradition to which Ford was allied. Despite the way in which he often spoke about the war, his writing about it displayed an increasing and continuing allegiance to his impressionist poetics.10

Ford is sensitive to the texture of words. Previous discussions of his narrative technique have concentrated on his tendency to explore among, and represent, the plural levels of human consciousness. He chooses how best to do this not just by way of narrative technique, but by way of the building blocks, the raw material that he uses (think of the basic linguistic sensuousness of *The Fifth Queen*). Graham Greene draws attention to his craftsman’s ability when he writes that ‘he was not only a designer; he was a carpenter: you feel in his work the love of the tools and the love of the material’. When it comes to Ford’s writing of the war, this aspect of his strength is notable – because of the perceived absence of the ‘big words’ and what he does with the resulting gap.

Ford’s apprehension of a pre-1914/post-1918 linguistic dualism is
signified, visibly, in the quotation from his post-war autobiography at the head of this chapter. The homogenising, codifying words are capitalised, privileged, and were accorded cognitive supremacy (pre-1914). In characters such as Macmaster, due to his ignorance of the new realities (post-1918), they still are: “‘What is loathsome’”, Tietjens spits, “‘is all your fumbling in placket holes and polysyllabic Justification by Love […]’. That’s all right if you can get your club to change its rules’”. The process by which the ‘big words’ lose status is also made visible to the readers of his fiction – because it can be attributed in part to what has been seen, at war, ‘beneath Ordered Life’ (*It Was the Nightingale*, p. 64). Following the concentration of previous chapters, then, my discussion of war focuses (though not exclusively so) on the role of sight in the writing of this event that fragmented language.

Before leaving the discussion of language behind, however, it is important to note that as Ford expresses his anxiety he relates it to the (quasi) Freudian map of the mind: ‘One had the conviction that [large words] were somewhere in the city’s subconsciousness…. Now they were gone’. Unconscious understanding of linguistically signified codes, by which one lived, has been made conscious by the newly discovered lack of it. Thus language that connected one to a definable code of conduct is to be replaced by something else, a more diverse and disjointed system of communication, connected in its turn to more diverse behaviour. So there is a similarity here between Grimshaw’s conception of ‘Society’, restraining his instinct, as discussed in Chapter 3, and Ford’s conception of the ‘big words’ (Courage, Loyalty, God) – perhaps also restraining his instinct (refer back to the discussion of the liberation of war in Chapter 1). Both are fragmented. Ford’s dedication to multiplicity continues; he discovers that in other ways, too, language can point towards, or visually allude to, the existence of the unconscious.

Ford is often unsatisfied with the capacity of language to express the totality of thought or experience; speech constantly ‘gives out’, to be replaced by his most characteristic grammatical tool: ellipsis. Tietjens’s consistent inability to find the exact words for a feeling or a thought creates visible proofs of, amongst other things, the difference of Macmaster’s conceptual position, in which the latter is protected from the doubting, fearful multiplicities of human existence by a repressed hold on capitalised comfort. Conversely, Ford pushes Tietjens into battle after battle with his own language, in ways that test
its limitations and extend its boundaries, whilst simultaneously indicating the continuing existence of things he cannot say:

Because what the devil did he want of Valentine Wannop? Why could he not stall off the thought of her? He could stall off the thought of his wife... or his not-wife. But Valentine Wannop came wriggling in. At all hours of the day and night. It was an obsession. A madness... what those fools called 'a complex'?... Due, no doubt, to something your nurse had done, or your parents said to you. At birth... A strong passion... or no doubt not strong enough. Otherwise he, too, would have gone absent. At any rate, from Sylvia... Which he hadn't done. Or had he? There was no saying... (p. 338)

Tietjens is right, there is no 'saying' but there are many sayings; there are many contradictory and exploratory ways of attempting to express the complexities of his feelings at this time. His prolonged need for codes is being disturbed by his desire for Valentine. But desire he now almost knows it is. His conscious control of himself is being challenged by his presence at the front and the fragmenting effects of that existence. It is also being challenged by a defensive and grudging acknowledgement of the psychological developments of the time (it is undoubtedly significant here that his wife, Sylvia, pinned her 'faith' to Freud (p. 37)); he is indirectly rethinking his history, and his psychological history at that.16 Learning, visibly, he is being pushed to give tentative, linguistic life to concepts that make him uncomfortable. The still dark areas are represented by ellipses; these are the points where his brain proves it is ill-equipped for the broadening of knowledge.17 To use Freudian terminology, as does Tietjens, these are indicative of his repression. This repression is mostly sexual. Yet Tietjens has made a tortured progression in the allusion to, if not direct expression of, desire in his speech.

Tietjens's speech fragments as it attempts to incorporate his desire; he approaches and reapproaches the feeling he has, but cannot do other than affirm the fragmentation of himself as subject as he linguistically wrestles with his sexual existence. Tietjens is at war with himself, signified by his speech, and he is also in France, at war. Whilst there, as I have suggested, his sense of fragmentation is keenly known and expressed through the medium of sight.
In sight of war: the kaleidoscope

When Ford’s Englishman ‘looked at the World’ in 1915, in the first book of war propaganda he was commissioned to write by his friend C. F. G. Masterman, he saw ‘kaleidoscopic days’. Ford was outlining ‘British psychology’ of the time, and he chose an intensely visual image – one discussed in the Introduction – with which to do so. As Allyson Booth points out, ‘men and women enter into war with the same perceptual equipment that they rely on to understand and articulate any other experience’: Ford’s choice of imagery is not surprising. The kaleidoscope is an optical device, invented c. 1815, consisting of mirrors that reflect bits of coloured glass in a design that may be changed endlessly (by rotating the section that contains the fragments of glass). In Ford’s imagistic use of it, the kaleidoscope signifies the complex multiplicity of British wartime psychology, one that depended partly on how the light (of experience, of understanding, or of narrative) was thrown. It can be related to Ford’s impressionist ethos, where he uses the reflective properties of light and glass to illustrate how the past co-exists with the present in ever-changing combinations (see his 1914 essay, ‘On Impressionism’). It is important to bear it in mind as I proceed.

Two quotations provide a framework for this exploration into how and why sight functions in the fragmentation of war. They have been chosen because of the way in which they illustrate, and provoke discussion of, the notion of the abstract versus the concrete. I discuss both of them, and the quintessential ideas that they raise, in detail.

The face of battle

The first is from John Keegan’s book, *The Face of Battle*, and it concerns officer training (Ford himself was an officer, enlisting at the end of July 1915, despite being 41). At this point in his analysis, Keegan is describing the ‘rote-learning and repetitive form and the categorical, reductive quality’ of the capabilities necessary to the activity of war. During war, forming and shaping and categorising are essential aspects of soldierly behaviour. They are designed to promote the ability of the fighting man (including officers), ‘to avert the onset of fear or, worse, of panic and to perceive a face of battle which, if not familiar, and certainly not friendly, need not, in the event, prove wholly petrifying [my italics]’. It is the ability to repress fear by
swathing it in a particular linguistic shape, by giving it a ‘repetitive form’ to which Keegan refers. (Bazarov’s amazement could be inferred.) It will mean that, in Keegan’s vivid image, the face of battle turned towards the combatant will be interpreted professionally, in the abstract, not personally.

As he writes of the First World War, Trevor Wilson suggests that it was not simply fear that had to be repressed in order to avoid the personal face of battle; training was (and presumably still is) about conditioning the individual soldier to avoid many instinctive responses. The army, as he points out, required human material that ‘had been rendered proof’ against such urgings as flight. Instincts must be bypassed, then, repressed, if the face of battle is not to prove petrifying. Sassoon knew this, writing that, at war, ‘the instinct of self-preservation automatically sank below all arguments put forward by one’s “higher self”’, meaning, perhaps, by ‘higher self’, the moral and professional self, the super ego to one’s instinctive id. W. H. R. Rivers, Sassoon’s wartime doctor after his breakdown, would agree, and suggests in his clinical writings that training was intended ‘to free the soldier’ from the collapse that terror would induce and from the ‘flight of panic’; he would be freed in order to do his work. So: freedom from the personal face of battle comes with training that categorises and reduces, that shapes and orders instincts and behaviours. From such training emerges a man who has been ‘rendered proof’ against instinctive urgings (one wonders what this human would be like); such a man would be united with his comrades in a singular abstract vision of a professional war.

However, in a text that has been called ‘the finest and noblest book of men in war’, and ‘one of the greatest books about soldiers in the whole of western literature’, Frederic Manning has something very different to say about that face of battle (and this is the second framework quotation). His novel, The Middle Parts of Fortune, which is about the experience of being a fighting man, contains the absolute assurance that ‘a man might rave against war’ but ‘war, from among its myriad faces, could always turn towards him one, which was his own’. War possesses not one but a myriad faces, then, including one for every man who fights, one for every man who trains in order to avoid just that experience of a concrete and identifiable face.

Keegan’s ‘fighting man’ does not look closely enough at war to pick up the elements of his own face; he does not trace its impact upon him as he goes about his soldierly work. Manning’s fighting man does not
have a choice, for eventually he will be forced to pick himself out, made by war ‘to face a fact as naked and inexorable as himself’ (p. 40). This chapter concentrates on the disintegration of the former, idealised, behavioural and psychological position, one that is not just tied to the discussion of war but can be related to many contemporary concerns. Grimshaw was forced to abandon abstract, coded ‘Society’ and to know his individual soul, and Manning’s multi-faceted image also evokes the discussion of modernism from the Introduction and Chapter 1.

Ford was of a social class that would automatically have entitled him to officership. For his major novelistic character who lives and fights through the First World War, Christopher Tietjens, he chose a background of a family of ‘landed proprietors’. Tietjens comes from old money, then, old influence. Ford calls his kind ‘Good People’, using capitals again (It Was the Nightingale, p. 219); he is one of ‘God’s elect’.28 Ford also makes him ‘an officer of sufficient authority to make reports that would get through at times to the higher commands’ (It Was the Nightingale, p. 218). He wanted him, then, to be of two worlds instead of one (see Chapter 2 and its discussion of Parade’s End). Tietjens can communicate with higher commands, perhaps about logistical decisions, but must also attempt to turn towards his men a face of war that does not prove to be ‘wholly petrifying’: initially, he manifests the abstract, visually and linguistically, in his approach to the war.

Most importantly, he must enable his men to fight, and to continue to fight. He himself recognises this when as close to the front as he is ever stationed, ‘It had occurred to him that it was a military duty to bother himself about the mental equilibrium of this member of the lower classes. So he talked … any old talk’ (p. 305). The apparent nonchalance, and arrogance, of his thought is designed to signify his class and concomitant authority, which bestow upon him this quasi-feudal responsibility for the men in his care. At the same time, it must be noted, he believes the army to be cursed by an ‘imbecile national belief that the game is more than the player’. (He details some of the rules of this game: if the quartermaster refuses to give him tin hats for his men, ‘That’s the Game!’ – capitalised; if any of his men are killed, he is expected to grin and invoke the national belief (pp. 305–6).)

Tietjens adopts a code signified by those capital letters that later become obsolete: Military Duty. He provides the aura of distance between his men and the war that will prevent them from being petrified; he protects their minds, if it is possible, from the truth of that
which they must face. This perspective continues into the fashion in which Tietjens translates to himself that which goes on around him. In the following extract he avoids his own face, though idiosyncratically, and the experience does not petrify:

In the bright light it was as if a whole pail of scarlet paint had been dashed against the man’s face on the left and his chest. It glistened in the firelight – just like fresh paint, moving! The runner from the Rhondda, pinned down by the body across his knees, sat down with his jaw fallen, resembling one girl that should be combing the hair of another recumbent before her. The red viscousness welled across the floor; you sometimes so see fresh water bubbling up in the sand. (p. 307)

Here, the overwriting of that which is happening by that which is not happening is uncanny. It points, I think, towards two conclusions in particular. The first concerns the tendency of Tietjens’s brain to work in the abstract manner in which he is supposed to be instructive regarding his men; the second relates to the peculiar priority which the passage grants to that which is not happening whilst it also relates that which is. His speech to himself is divided between two conceptual levels (Allyson Booth writes that ‘dead bodies at the Front were simultaneously understood as both animate subjects and inanimate objects’29) in the attempt at avoiding petrification. He sees O Nine Morgan’s dying face, but transposed on it is another very different reality. Tietjens is really seeing that which he experientially knows, a sight from his past, not that which is in front of his eyes, and in this case it looks like the impressionist painting by Degas: ‘A Maid Combing a Woman’s Hair’. (Susan Greenfield provides a fascinating physiological account of why this should be: a significant part of the brain’s interpretation of what the eye sees has its roots in the subject’s memory.30)

The Degas painting is dominated by a swathe of red paint, which draws the gaze from the bottom left corner across the canvas, but the scene it depicts is one of ideal, domestic, harmony and trust (note too the ordered socio-political construction of the title). One woman reclines toward the other as her hair is brushed – the fact that women are the subjects heightens the sense of abstraction in relation to the war. There is an atmosphere of seductive peace created by this action that can be nothing like the scene, with its dead male body, that confronts Tietjens. It is what he needs to know, however, as an abstract rescue from the concrete; thus it is what he sees. At this point this is how he can translate it to himself. The exclamation mark placed at the
close of the phrase ‘just like fresh paint, moving’, would be callous were the tone of the paragraph different, and more in tune with the actual reality. And yet it is not, because Tietjens is seeing, not a man dying in front of him, but a man covered in recently thrown paint.

The process of mental assimilation of the face continues: ‘It was extraordinary how defined the peaked nose and the serrated teeth were in that mess. . . . The eye looked jauntily at the peak of the canvas hut- roof. . . . Gone with a grin. Singular the fellow should have spoken! After he was dead’ (p. 309). Tietjens now seems fully acclimatized to the factual nature of the horror that he has seen. He knows now that the man is dead, and the lack of humanitarian interest is stunning if the reader considers the stark reality of the mangled body. Within the writing itself, however, his journey into art has managed to deaden and soften the response of the reader as well as his own. Tietjens then divests the man of his humanity, rendering him as though he were a cubist painting, splitting him up into his component but dislocated parts: the nose, the teeth, the eye, the mouth, his speech. The peak of the nose mirrors the inanimate peak of the canvas roof above them – merely as a point of scenic interest. There is no grief. Why not? Partly because of the internal acrobatics that Tietjens has performed, and partly because it is essential that he should not show any. It would not be possible for him to attempt the continual reflection of a face of battle that was not that of each one of his men whilst beset by emotional loss. It would render the attempt invalid, and Tietjens incapable of doing his job. Tietjens is thus shown to exist, for the time, in a state of supremacy for the coded, abstract, behaviour pattern.

O Nine Morgan’s death has occurred as though it were something else, and Nietzsche’s maxim that ‘forgetfulness is a property of all action’ is perceptive in this context (as is much of the opening of Jay Winter’s Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning). Keegan draws attention to a related cognitive problem, caused by the necessity of persuading the men to fight, again, and to risk their lives, again. He says of the nature of battle that there is ‘an anterior and yet more important psychological trick to be played before a breakthrough can occur – one which, as we have seen, has to be pulled off in both armies, the attacking and defending: that of getting their soldiers to stand’ (The Face of Battle, p. 296). The third of Ford’s novels in his tetralogy – A Man Could Stand Up – is partially dedicated to the critical, and conditional, moment of leaving the trenches. The extent of the officer’s responsibility in this role is revealed when Tietjens becomes almost inadvertently
caught in the action. His general exclaims that, "‘A fellow like you has no right to be where he can be wounded’" (p. 643). He has the right, rather, to be where he can make his men into effective fighting machines; he must give names to things and to actions, names like ‘Loyalty’ and ‘Courage’, and he must help them to forget, painting pictures of another reality. Duly, then, volume 2, *No More Parades*, begins with a description of the hut that will soon be the site of O Nine Morgan’s demise (I choose the word carefully). It is ‘shaped like the house a child draws’, not the scene of a murder: language and picture indicate here the men *must* be safe (p. 291).\(^3\)

Abstract versus concrete

As well as possessing a function within the action and the development of the novel, theories of picture-making and capitalising figure in Ford’s non-fictional writing on the subject of the war. In 1916 he was wrestling with what he then deemed to be an insurmountable problem: how to write about what surrounded him. He states that ‘as for explanation I hadn’t any; as for significant or valuable pronouncement of a psychological kind I could not make any – nor any generalisation. There we were: those million men, forlorn, upon a raft in space. But as to what had assembled us upon that landscape: I had just to fall back upon the formula: it is the Will of God’.\(^3\)\(^4\) He uses capitals still at this point – ‘The Will of God’ – in the formula he finds to arrest a conceptual fall (structuralism again). It represents solidity amidst chaos, just as the superimposed likeness of the house a child would draw over the army bunker is the way to a small psychological refuge. His fictional, autobiographical alter ego, Gringoire in *No Enemy*, articulates another version of the same task: ‘But coming back [from the war] or not, Gringoire was certainly going back to it and, in its desperate and fleeting atmosphere, the idea of Lord Kitchener was the one solid thing onto which our poor poet could catch’.\(^3\)\(^5\) Those minds that constructed the advertising posters for Kitchener’s army gave their potential recruits a face that was not their own to encourage them to war. Kitchener’s face would encourage a man to ‘stand up’. Whether or not ‘the idea of Lord Kitchener’ as expressed in the poster campaign by his face was the reason, it was a successful campaign.\(^3\)\(^6\)

Ford, of course, being a modernist and an impressionist (think of the kaleidoscope), never believed in the singular perspective of ‘one solid thing’, expressed by Gringoire, and aimed at by the writers of training
manuscripts, though he recognised the need for it. In *Parade’s End*, it is ultimately the shock of humanity with which Tietjens must deal; it is the flash of recognition that his troops are individual men as well as soldiers – and deserve to be treated differently in each role – that triggers his cognitive move away from the surface comfort of abstract codes. And when the shelling burst that ultimately kills Morgan begins this is signalled: ‘An enormous crashing sound said things of an intolerable intimacy to each of those men, and to all of them as a body. After its mortal vomiting all the other sounds appeared a rushing silence, painful to ears in which the blood audibly coursed’ (p. 293). The beautifully counterpoised ‘intolerable intimacy’ evokes the mutual exclusivity of the states of soldier and man in its uneasy alliance. Intimacy is not the word of a soldier who cannot see his own face in the death that is around him. Such concrete, bodily intimacy is intolerable because to maintain awareness of the shared tenuousness of the hold on life might be enough to send one mad. Tietjens does know this, and this he can speak about (one is reminded of Ford’s writing to Conrad of the unbearable effects of the sounds of battle) as can be seen in a conversation with Mackenzie when he becomes impatient: ‘“Look here, pull yourself together. Are you mad? Stark, staring? . . . Or only just play-acting [. . .] If you let yourself go, you may let yourself go a tidy sight further than you want to”’ (p. 302). To ‘let yourself go’, as figured in the ellipses, means to relax one’s hold upon one’s emotions, to lose language, to forgo self-control. It means acknowledging the individual face of battle.

When such an acknowledgement comes it represents a creative, as well as a cognitive, leap: Keowan, asleep under the bloody overcoat of a dead French dragoon, was disturbed by ‘the shrieks of the dying and the agitation of our minds, for the waves will roll high, after the storm has ceased, and as much of the fight recurred to me as I had time to dream of’. Keegan encourages his reader through Keowan to begin to imagine the ‘living’ of the battle of Waterloo in its sensational extremes. Likewise, Ford demands kindred recognition via intimacy: the ‘body’ of men has been birthed into a new reality, in which they hear their own and others’ blood (as does the reader in the prose) and know everything has changed. Keowan and Ford are each exposing in their words the painful dynamic of mental existence and experience in war. The revelation of a new and extended reality comes out of the silence and space these soldiers sense after the high tides of battle, after which one can never be the same. In this extended reality, intolerable sights are seen for what they are.
The house that the child draws then mutates into art of a quite different order:

You may say that everyone who took part in the war was then mad. No one could have come through that shattering experience and still view life and mankind with any normal vision. In those days you saw objects that the earlier mind labelled as houses. They had been used to seem cubic and solid permanences. But we had seen Ploegsteert where it had been revealed that men’s dwellings were thin shells that could be crushed as walnuts are crushed. (*It Was the Nightingale*, pp. 63–4)

Sight splinters, followed by language: a House (or house, he uses italics here) is now just a house that can be crushed like a walnut. The abstract has become concrete, and the concrete cannot last. What one sees, in instances like this, can indeed make one mad. I don’t believe Ford’s contention to be that every former soldier was certifiable. What he is saying is that they were shattered human beings, shattered by the assault on the conceptual mechanism that deprived them of a vision of the world (defined by Ford as fundamental) where houses were seen and known as *houses*. They have ‘seen’ (past tense) Ploegsteert: they are mad. This isn’t just to do with the sight of inanimate objects; it is to do with the sight of the human body, bodies like O Nine Morgan’s. ‘Like Cubism’, writes Peter Conrad, ‘the war redesigned the human body.’ 

‘Remarque’s novels’, he continues

are specific about the metamorphoses. Soldiers whose feet have been shot off hop towards shell-holes on splintered stumps. One man turns up to have his wounds dressed, clasping his spilled intestines with his hands. One casualty is ‘light to carry, because almost half of him is missing’. A stretcher bearer has been minced. Another veteran has one eye interred beneath scar tissue, while its partner is made of dull glass. A patch conceals the cavity where his nose was. His mouth, sliced in half, has grown back together askew.

Here are other ‘fictional’ versions of cubist canvasses, more brutal and more concrete than Ford’s example.

**Sight and madness**

The fragmentary relationship between sight and madness in *The Good Soldier* is of critical interest to Max Saunders (see my discussion in Chapter 2): ‘Leonora is fighting to suppress that maddening vision of the truth […]. When inexperienced Nancy sees what is happening, she does go mad’. Nancy ‘sees’ figuratively due to what she ‘sees’
literally, the story of the Brand divorce and adultery in the newspaper (_The Good Soldier_, p. 140). For Florence, sight means a different kind of death (she ‘got it in the face’ (p. 77), Ford writes aggressively, of her night-time vision of Edward and Nancy together). Having seen Edward and Nancy, she then sees her husband with Bagshawe: her part in the ‘game’ is up and she kills herself. ‘Prose’, quintessentially and shockingly, for Ford and for his characters, is ‘a matter of looking things in the face’.45

War creates similarly mortal, fragmenting patterns of sight; Ford develops this technique from the earlier text, and others use it too. Indeed in (the writing of) war, such sights seem almost omnipresent, either metaphorically or literally. Though Tietjens looks at the ‘trench face’ at the front, made from flint and soil and pebbles, and finds it friendly, it costs to extend this kind of sympathy to the animate (p. 553): ‘one sees such things’, thinks Bourne, ‘and one suffers vicariously. The mind is averted as well as the eyes. It reassures itself after that first despairing cry: “It is I!” “No, it is not I. I shall not be like that”’ (_The Middle Parts of Fortune_, p. 11). The metaphor of the face is often stretched by war into an overt relationship with life-threatening behaviour: if one looks and sees oneself, one may not be able to fight, one may go mad, or die. (Siegfried Sassoon associates his mental breakdown with an ability to see with the near-focused eyes of his troops, but not with the abstract vision of his employers.46) Many soldiers seem to have maintained a splintered perception of reality, the fragmenting pendulum of which swung between the carapace suggested by Keegan and the real terror of the apprehension of one’s own face in war. Each new sight increased its parabola. When Bourne steps over the dead version of himself, from which he manages to dissociate (“It is I! No, it is not I”), he knows too that the sight, that ‘I’, will return, if only in sleep.

Pat Barker’s novel _The Eye in the Door_ uses the metaphorical and the actual functions of sight to precipitate the breakdown of her working-class officer protagonist, Billy Prior (much of Barker’s research for her famous trilogy was based on W. H. R. Rivers’s wartime work47). The eye of the title refers to that which was often painted on the inside of the prison cell door of conscientious objectors, designed to promote continual unease and the permanent effect of being watched; it also precipitated mental problems, or compounded them, of a much more serious nature. For Billy, the eye, seen in prison, serves to bring back to him unbidden the worst experience of his war career: the realisation,
after an explosion, that he holds in his hand the eyeball of Towers, one of his men. He is sent to consult a fictional/factual Rivers. The real Rivers was one of the pioneers in the reappraisal of madness made necessary by the ‘shell-shock’ of the First World War (although he was not exactly radical, as Elaine Showalter points out, he ‘also saw male hysteria as an inferior kind of psychic response to conflict’).

In the course of Prior’s therapy, Barker’s fictional Rivers fathoms the link between the eye and the conscience of the officer. Prior has dreamt that he was stabbing the eye in the door after visiting a conscientious objector in prison. His guilt after the visit is allied in his unconscious to his responsibility for Towers’s eye. The image of the eye in the door and of himself, standing, holding an eye, merge and culminate in a dreamtime attack on his externalised conscience in an attempt to destroy it: ‘eye was stabbing myself in the “I”’. Using similar language to Bourne (‘It is I. No it is not I’), Prior tries to avoid recognition of a painful and fragmenting part of the self. But in the analytical encounter this link between sight and guilt becomes plain, and Prior is typically scathing as he achieves clarity. Ford’s war fiction also displays a consciousness of this link (though the repeated phrase, ‘under four eyes’, from The Good Soldier, is relevant too).

In Ford’s exploration of this topic, the class considerations driving Prior’s breakdown are replaced by the complexities of gender at war: it is Tietjens’s struggle with his role of officer that renders the abstract concrete. The case of a boy losing his eye is what Tietjens isolates, in conversation with Valentine’s mother, from the whole of his war experience. It has made him mad:

‘It’s that that’s desperate. I’ll tell you. I’ll give you an instance. I was carrying a boy. Under rifle-fire. His eye got knocked out. If I had left him where he was his eye would not have been knocked out. I thought at the time that he might have been drowned, but I ascertained afterwards that the water never rose high enough. So I am responsible for the loss of his eye. It’s a sort of monomania. You see, I am talking of it now. It recurs. Continuously.’ (p. 659)

Just previously, ‘the boy’, Aranjuez, has admitted to Tietjens that ‘it would be awful to have anything happen to your eyes’ because ‘your girl would naturally not look at you’ (p. 599). Although this remembered conversation, in its portentousness, helps to reinforce Tietjens’s feeling of madness, it does not instigate it. The instigation is provided by his concomitant emasculation. Aranjuez, pre-battle, ‘had clung
to Tietjens as a child clings to an omnipotent father; this is because Tietjens, ‘all-wise, could direct the awful courses of war and decree safety for the frightened!’ (pp. 598–9). Aranjuez worshipped him – which was what was supposed to happen in successful army units, in which the ‘rank and file’ would come ‘to identify with the units in which their whole lives were now immersed’. Then the battle begins. In the midst of prose that evokes brilliantly the stuttering time and shock, the confusion and brief moments of vision, caused by shelling, the reader is offered glimpses of Tietjens looking down on Aranjuez. He has the advantage, being an officer (like Prior), being omnipotent; he has ‘a considerable view’. Aranjuez is then buried by flying mud. Only his face, ‘brown, with immense black eyes in bluish whites’ can be seen (p. 637). He looks at Tietjens; all words are lost in the noise. In these chaotic seconds what is transmitted between the two faces is the knowledge that Tietjens is not omnipotent. He has failed his charge, one who looked to him as a father (just as he may have failed his real son, who he has recently learned may have been fathered by Sylvia’s lover instead of by him). Thus he is impotent; the all-powerful, all-seeing officer cannot even protect his own.

In the later conversation with Valentine’s mother, sight has come to represent Tietjens’s conscience. Sight is knowledge is responsibility. War has proved this relationship without guaranteeing the ability for an officer to act accordingly (seeing a Degas doesn’t work in battle). The fragmenting impact on his sense of self can be seen by the number of differently functioning ‘I’s in the quotation. Tietjens’s primary need, later, is to try to talk; he seeks to fill an acquiescent, caring, female vessel with the torments that until now have remained internal. The shortness of the first five sentences reveals his relief at speaking to her, inclusive of disbelief that he now actually has someone to tell. His mind’s eye provides the links between the sentences, the details, the reality, because there he can still see the horror – there it ‘recurs’ (also Keowan’s word for what happens in the lull after battle). Afterwards, it is Tietjens’s vision of his responsibility that causes the monomania, which works like a repetitive self-punishment. Each short sentence is a blow against himself, a slow, unstoppable lambasting. As he talks, he also remembers; when he can no longer bear it, his words cease. His words struggle with showing what it is his mind has been doing to him; this experience feels like madness. It is crucial, of course, that Tietjens speaks not to Valentine herself at this point, but to her mother, on the telephone. Valentine overhears their conversation. Emphasising the
fragmentation of his sense of self, Ford has Tietjens talk not directly to his beloved, but to her via the telephone (that instrument of displacement and disguise – see Chapter 3) and her mother.

**Masculinity at war**

Issues of physical (enforced) passivity, of impotence, issues that become very complex, are raised by this incident in Ford’s tetralogy. Such passivity or impotence, linked in this case with Tietjens’s sight, stands as another explanation of why Keegan’s projected ideal of the fighting man disintegrated in the face of war. It helped to prevent men from holding on to a vision of Kitchener’s face, of themselves as masculine ‘Soldier’. Pat Barker here elaborates upon it:

The Great Adventure. They’d been mobilized into holes in the ground so constricted they could hardly move. And the Great Adventure – the real life equivalent of all the adventure stories they’d devoured as boys – consisted of crouching in a dugout, waiting to be killed. The war that had promised so much in the way of ‘manly’ activity had actually delivered ‘feminine’ passivity, and on a scale their mothers and sisters had hardly known. No wonder they broke down.54

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that soldiers are trained to suppress some instincts (flight, and disordered retaliation, for example). Whilst this is true, they have also been trained to release, and to reclaim, others. Trevor Wilson writes simply of the number of men who signed up for military service that ‘war stirred feelings deeper than many men were able to articulate’, his language implying that such feelings had a long way to travel before they could be expressed.55 Training could capitalise on such stirrings. Tietjens himself considers it to be a condemnation of civilisation that he should never have had to use his significant physical strength (p. 638).

Niall Ferguson analyses the question of instinct in detail, finding a variety of literary evidence – in Wyndham Lewis, Robert Graves, Ernst Jünger and W. S. Littlejohn, amongst others – to support Freud’s theory in ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’ that the war signified the reassertion of primitive instincts.56 In his assessment of a wartime letter by Wilfred Owen, Alvarez finds no simple ‘reassertion’ has taken place, but identifies ‘two forces’, ‘each pulling in the opposite direction: nurture and nature, training and instinct’.57 ‘Manly’ instincts may be released, then, if incompletely, but in the waiting of the trenches, or in the failure to safeguard one’s men, they
cannot be used. Barker’s resulting picture is bleak: the tension, the marked absence of glorious activity, led to the men breaking down; men could be ‘feminised’ by war. Though Edwin Ash doesn’t talk of men in this position as feminised, he suggests that periods of time at the front, where men ‘are frequently kept in a state of nervous tension for days at a time’, deplete men of energy. Consequently their grip on sanity is compromised: ‘hunger, exposure, fatigue, and want of sleep all tend to sap the nervous energy whilst strong emotional waves disturb mental calm’. Lyn Macdonald’s history of the war presents an image of such men, waiting, at the battle of le Cateau (26 August 1914): ‘In the path of the shockwaves, hunched close to the trembling earth, ears ringing, teeth rattling, nerves screaming with every explosion, they could do nothing to retaliate and nothing to avert disaster.’ Their training has given them the controlled ability to liberate and activate their most violent and destructive instincts. Having been taught to kill and maim, behaviours that tore through all previous civilised codes of conduct (Rivers attributes war neurosis in part to the new call made on instinctive tendencies), they must now rein in those ideas and wait. It is no wonder that Macdonald imagines that their nerves were screaming. The reader is placed high above them, looking down upon those who are like animals – ‘hunched close to the trembling earth’ – trapped. They are split, as Tietjens has split a dead soldier, into parts: ears, teeth and nerves. But these men are living, and it is the word ‘nothing’ that Macdonald chooses to repeat, they can do nothing. Of this impotence Barker states ‘No wonder they broke down’.

The breakdown is a hysterical one, as Juliet Mitchell argues. As such, it forced a redefinition of one of the major tenets of contemporary psychological thought:

The First World War leads Freud to a complete reformulation of the main thesis of psychoanalysis [...] During the First World War what happened was that, instead of the typical ‘Victorian’ woman hysterical, shell-shocked soldiers displayed hysterical symptoms [...]. The literature of the war period and the descriptions of hysteria are fascinating because exactly the same symptoms were being produced by the men as had been produced by the women in an illness that was still associated with femininity.

The rules of psychology must be extended to incorporate a new phenomenon, as the writing of the time must expand to give witness to its truth. And Ford rises to the occasion, proving in his fiction an
intense absorption in the task. Ford states that Tietjens remained closer
to the lines than he was instructed to do; he took his position desper-
ately seriously: ‘If I had left him where he was his eye would have not
have been knocked out…. So I am responsible for the loss of his eye.’
Tietjens also becomes intensely affected by the ‘femininity’ historically
associated with ‘passivity’ and with the hysterical. In an extraordinary
way, though, Tietjens’s madness is caused by femininity that becomes
more than passive; it is actively portrayed by Ford. Aranjuez has been
buried, as we have seen. But Tietjens, and then two colleagues, pull him
out of the viscous mud to safety: ‘Cockshott and the corporal pulled
Aranjuez out of the slime. He came out reluctantly, like a lugworm out
of sand. He could not stand. His legs gave way’ (pp. 638–9). Aranjuez
is reborn, with Tietjens presiding as midwife. How much more
concrete can the abstract become? Having let him down as omnipotent
father, Tietjens becomes a mother, ‘he felt tender, like a mother, and
enormous’, as he carries the boy (p. 639). Seconds later, snipers’ bullets
destroy Aranjuez’s eye.

Tietjens has divested himself of the protections of officer-language
and officer-distance. Ceasing in the attempt to blind both himself and
his men to reality, he has fully become that most difficult of things
(harder even than an officer who acts like a father, see note 52): an
officer who cares for his men like a mother. As Trudi Tate has
suggested, the differences between types of masculinity in this period
are in many ways more interesting than those between women and
men. Tietjens abandons the carapace and allows his feelings to show;
he fragments the organised mechanism of the ‘big words’. This
response is ‘realistic’ in the strongest sense of the word, and it is deeply,
psychologically astute of Ford to reconstruct it.
The carefully constructed image of the fighting man is shattered by
Ford; the image of the officer swiftly follows suit. Tietjens picks up
Aranjuez, and carries him like the baby he is shown he has become.
When he cannot protect him in this role as his mother, when his impo-
tence is proved twofold, he loses his mind.

Madness comes too to Manning’s fighting man, due to the return of
the repressed to the visual imagination:

One had lived instantaneously during that timeless interval, for in the
shock and violence of the attack, the perilous instant, on which he
perched so precariously, was all that the half-stunned consciousness of
man could grasp; and if he lost his grip on it he fell back among the
grotesque terrors and nightmare creatures of his own mind. Afterwards,
when the strain had been finally released, in the physical exhaustion which followed, there was a collapse, in which one’s emotional nature was no longer under control. (p. 3)

In the attack, there is simply no possibility of thought. Manning cites two reasons for this. The first is that man’s consciousness is ‘half-stunned’; it is not working to its full interrogative capacity (one wonders about the role of the obligatory rum ration in this; Ferguson states that ‘without alcohol the First World War could not have been fought’ (p. 351)); it cannot think about what is being done. The second reason comes out of the realisation that the mind cannot afford to question or to analyse. If it did, a man would ‘fall back among the grotesque terrors of his own mind’; he needs to be protected from himself. Once a man is committed, once he will ‘stand up’, time appears to work to support him in this protection from himself. It moves instantaneously, a self-perpetuating cycle of movement that simply repeats itself, complicit with the survival instinct and with the need not to think. The truncated consciousness of man is accommodated perfectly by time in this sense. The instinct of self-preservation can be buried in this flickering cine film where the black split-seconds are the ignored possibilities of knowing exactly what is being risked. Film ‘language’ can be allied with Ford’s modernist quest in other important ways.

But Manning refers to a ‘collapse’. The consequences of the sublimation make themselves stunningly felt in the time ‘afterwards’ when the sights and feelings return; in Keowan’s ‘low tide’; in Ford’s time of ‘intolerable intimacy’; in Barker’s ‘feminine passivity’. According to Edwin Ash (still writing in a dated way of shell-shock in 1919) there is a time lag between the shell-explosion and the collapse of the neurotic soldier. In this time lag, the sufferer is got to safety by the intensity of self-preservation. Then, ‘left to his own conscious control’, he collapses (p. 275). To Manning, once physical exhaustion has intruded upon the possibility for continuing action, one’s ‘emotional nature’ takes over and gains absolute control. One pays for the continual neglect of how one feels in repeated small breakdowns. Ash observes that ‘dreadful sights of mutilation and slaughter’ play their part in the collapse (p. 270).
'Shell-shock'

The army eventually reconciled itself to the inescapable fact of the breakdown of so many of its soldiers', writes John Keegan, 'by inventing the notion of “shell-shock” which suggested for it a single physical cause' (p. 328). Ferguson, disagreeing, states that this term was used to describe ‘a variety of mental disorders resulting from combat stress’ (p. 341). Numbers of cases cited vary from 50,000 to 200,000 or more men suffering from ‘mental wounding’.

Ford suffered from ‘shell-shock’ after an incident during the battle of the Somme on 28/29 July 1916. It was during this battle in particular, according to Martin Gilbert, that ‘because of the intensification of nervous breakdowns and shell-shock, special centres were opened in each army area for diagnosis and treatment’ (p. 276). Ford was taken to the casualty clearing station at Corbie, where he lay having lost his memory (to Rivers, loss of memory was one of the most common features of war-neurosis), with some physical injury too (see Saunders II, pp. 1–4). His experiences become part of Tietjens’s war-torn portrayal: Tietjens tells Sylvia that a ‘great portion’ of his brain, ‘in the shape of memory, has gone’ (p. 168).

Ford initially attributes his experience of the illness to the physicality of the injuries caused by shells in the attack. He says in a letter to C. F. G. Masterman, ‘I was twice knocked down by the percussion from these shells, on the second occasion damaging my mouth & loosening my teeth wh. became very bad, affecting my whole condition’. For the next months – he did not quite recover from this – he spent time trying to avoid his old regiment, the 9th Welch. In December 1916, having heard that he probably would be assigned there, he found himself back in hospital due to his lungs. On this occasion he wrote to Masterman saying ‘I lie awake & perceive the ward full of Huns of forbidding aspect . . . I am in short rather ill and sometimes doubt my own sanity – indeed, quite frequently I do’, revealing that the state of his physical health is causing him less real problem than that of his mental health. His nightmares, and daymares, have become more to the point.

When Ford was originally diagnosed with shell-shock (described in a letter to Masterman on 13 September 1916), he wouldn’t go into hospital to be treated for it. Three months later, forced to the Red Cross hospital at Rouen by his ‘charred up’ lungs, the truth of the Somme begins to emerge. ‘I suppose that, really, the Somme was a pretty severe ordeal, though I wasn’t conscious of it at the time’, he writes to
Masterman, in the subsequent sentence in which he doubts his sanity. In *Parade’s End* we only learn the shape of Tietjens’s experiences months later, when he is home, talking to Sylvia (blaming a man in hospital for starting his ‘tortures’), showing his damaged memory and the sights he does remember. Tietjens’s delayed reaction can be equated with those others that have been detailed in fiction, an extended version of the time lag between ‘standing up’ and mental collapse, between the ‘violence of the attack’ and the terrors of one’s ‘own mind’. As Sassoon recovers from shell-shock, in hospital in England, he is aware that all around him men are revisiting the line, at night, in their mind’s eye: ‘By night, each man was back in his doomed sector of a horror-stricken front line where the panic and the stampede of some ghastly experience was re-enacted among the livid faces of the dead’. In Manning’s text, the delay is not so long; he depicts Bourne, surrounded by his sleeping, dreaming companions, hours after the battle, using him to articulate a darkness ‘filled with the shudderings of tormented flesh’ (p. 6).

Ford sees German soldiers, ready for battle, in his hospital ward. It proves difficult to step back out of the reality he has come to know, that of battle, and appreciate once more the comparatively civilian aspect of a hospital. This difficulty was compounded, and heightened (and very generally felt – see Chapter 1), by the re-entry into civilian life. The sense of difference, between combatant experience and civilian perception, between the ‘big words’ and the reality, between the abstract and the concrete, is part of what drives Ford into fiction in *Parade’s End*. The four volumes that make it up don’t begin to appear until 1924, though; there is a time lag here too.

Ford’s waking nightmares and the anxiety from which they proceed can be related to the psychological problems that Rivers ascribed to officership. The ‘pathological conditions’ described, of noise and extreme sensation, and the strain of re-entering civilian life, more than satisfy Rivers’s criteria for ‘disorders of the nervous system’ becoming manifest. But whatever the rank of the men, they were ultimately linked by the problem of the expression of such disorders. Showalter, echoing the discussion of communication in Chapter 1, attributes the final breakdown most of all to this issue of inexpressibility: ‘When all signs of physical fear were judged as weakness and where alternatives to combat – pacifism, conscientious objection, desertion, even suicide – were viewed as unmanly, men were silenced and immobilized and forced, like women, to express their conflicts through the body’ (p. 171).
They could not say how they felt or what they had seen, because language did not provide them with the words, and because language had changed anyway. Combatant alienation was reinforced when civilians didn’t respect this change: a house was no longer a House.74

Ford eventually wrote a great deal on the subject of the war, and on its psychological, emotional and linguistic effects; he was committed to his self-perceived responsibility of being historian of his time. He used narrative to explore the many, sometimes conflicting, levels of existence—levels that proliferate in war. He also fought, and experienced mental problems as a direct result. The war provides, then, a crystallised example of systems fragmenting, for all the reasons that have been discussed up to this point in this chapter. And yet Tietjens survives (unlike Bourne, who suffocates on his own blood whilst being carried ‘tenderly, like a child’, by his pal, p. 246); he not only survives, but is a more complete, aware human being. He is allowed by his author to retire from the front, back to the country. Why? It is to this question that I now wish to turn, as I approach the end of this chapter.

Tietjens

This discussion necessitates at first a further analysis of Ford’s narrative technique. Although Ford chose in Tietjens a character through whom he could show the extremes to which war can push a man, much must be inferred by the reader. The ‘big words’ have gone, and Ford experiments with how to replace them in the text. The language he finds is not explosive or desperately dramatic or even particularly gory or violent. Tietjens’s experience of a shell barrage is ‘slow, slow, slow... like a slowed down movie. The earth manoeuvred for an infinite time’ (p. 637);75 it is not frantic or panic-struck. Brains can work like this under stress, revealing the cost of such calm at a later time, as we have seen, but such narrative also represents, perhaps, the stress involved in being unable to say what one thinks or sees because one does not have the words.

Ford thinks he doesn’t have the right words, concrete words. He wrote in 1916 that ‘when I look at a mere coarse map of the Line, simply to read “Ploegsteert” or “Armentieres” seems to bring up extraordinarily coloured and exact pictures behind my eyeballs... – But, as for putting them – into words! No: the mind stops dead’ (‘A Day of Battle’, pp. 497–8). And so, whilst Samuel Hynes’s prosaic account of the war is as ‘the most literary and the most poetical war in
English history’, there is, nonetheless, a faltering beginning. Ford does find some words, but the reader must work hard with them, for they are representative of something which the reader must articulate; they are impressionistic. Although the need to symbolise repression is perhaps one cause for the profusion of ellipses (and they are a ‘tool’, as I said at the outset of this chapter) in Ford’s work, another is linked to impressionism. These active spaces allow for confusion, for contradiction, and for the uplift of the words that are there:

... But, anyhow, these things are official. One can’t, if one’s scrupulous, even talk about them... And then... You see it means such infinite deaths of men, such an infinite prolongation... all this interference for side-ends!... I seem to see these fellows with clouds of blood over their heads... And then... I’m to carry out their orders because they’re my superiors.... But helping them means unnumbered deaths... (p. 237)

Because of Tietjens’s position, secrecy concerning his orders should be absolute. So he acknowledges that he cannot talk about them whilst the necessity that he feels to do so is implied in the following space. Because he must do his duty and follow his orders he does so; yet, in the second space, his mind allows him to consider the consequences. These consequences are deaths, for men in ‘infinite’ numbers over an ‘infinite time’; that which his mind cannot comprehend because of the infinitude is left to the following space to construct. Sharp though he is, Prior states in Barker’s The Eye in the Door that he ‘can’t grasp’ war though he has ‘been there’. ‘I can’t get my mind round it’, he admits, feeling similarly bereft of articulacy (p. 169). But whilst he acknowledges the impossibility and stops, Tietjens carries on through it. He continues, though faltering, embodying the impossibility, besought by the pictures that his brain shows him of the consequences of his actions.

When words fail in Ford, he can resort to pictures. It is his impressionist’s eye that overall solves the problem. A fragmented quasi-conversational exchange takes place between Tietjens and General Campion in No More Parades. It is the backbone of this volume (2) of the tetralogy. Tortuous, deeply painful, heavy with Tietjens’s beleaguered humanity and Campion’s bullying, this exchange, which takes many slow and awkward pages, manages to bring to Tietjens’s traumatised attention all the aspects of his life that he would rather forget: his unhappy army career, his wife’s infidelities, his domestic loneliness, his social inadequacies, his potential status as
illegitimate, and his father’s suicide. At its climax, Tietjens is quietly desperate. ‘I’m sorry, sir’, he interjects, ‘it’s difficult to make myself plain’. The general replies, ‘neither of us do. What is language for? What the hell is language for? We go round and round’ (pp. 468–93). Campion decides their inability to communicate is because he is an ‘old fool’ who cannot understand Tietjens’s ‘modern ways’. But of course that’s not true, as he then realises, because Tietjens is not modern himself. Tietjens is the product (or at least was the product), in his schooling, in his landed inheritance, in his conception of life, of the ‘eighteenth century’. This existence, in its existential clash with the twentieth century (as represented by war, by Sylvia’s affairs, and by the circumstances of his father’s death), renders him inarticulate, or, in his own understated language, it makes it difficult for him to make himself ‘plain’. ‘Principles [like the “big words”] are like the skeleton map of a country’, Tietjens has said many pages previously. They can show one where to go, behaviourally and morally. Without them, as he is in this twentieth-century world, he must use another map. Ford presents him with one, and simultaneously proves his way of using words impressionistically, to make pictures of fragments when the abstract words have gone and the concrete ones are inadequate:

Panic came over Tietjens. He knew it would be the last panic of that interview. No brain could stand more. Fragments of scenes of fighting, voices, names, went before his eyes and ears. Elaborate problems... The whole map of the embattled world ran out in front of him – as large as a field. An embossed map in greenish papier mâché – a ten-acre field of embossed papier mâché, with the blood of O Nine Morgan blurring luminously over it.

This map shows the shape and texture of Tietjens’s fragmented struggle. It is a linguistic map. It is a temporal map too, as well as a geographical record of the front, domestic and military. All the sights and sounds of war are there, held in equilibrium by the sea of colour that is before his eyes. Campion recedes, and Ford finds the words to show how it is for this man. The words depict a multi-faceted, kaleidoscopic image, made of past and present sights and sounds, fed too by his enforced trawl through his life and its decline from the ideal. ‘I ask you to believe’, Tietjens says to Campion, ‘that I have absolutely no relations with that young lady [Valentine Wannop, accused of being his lover]. None! I have no intention of having any. None!’ (p. 488). It is not true. He admits the truth, post-war, finding new words on
Armistice Day, and turns this decline from the eighteenth-century abstract ideal into a modern, fragmented, triumph.

Tietjens is opened out, existentially speaking; he is made to be self-aware in his journey through warfare. The man whom Ford was able to describe as having ‘an emotional existence’ of ‘complete taciturnity’ at the beginning of the text (p. 6), is made to relinquish, or at least to question, his past. In the most violent and painful fashion imaginable (‘Sylvia Tietjens had been excruciatingly unfaithful, in the most painful manner’, p. 299), everything has been changed. Groby, his land, his inheritance, is, he believes, to pass into Sylvia’s hands. David Cannadine gives an impression of what that loss would have meant: ‘Until the 1870s [as usual, Tietjens is slow to catch up] . . . land was wealth: the most secure, reliable and permanent asset. Land was status. And land was power: over the locality, the county, and the nation.’77 Post-war, the ‘big words’, his preconceptions and safe customs, may have been destroyed. He may have been tortured by this destruction. But he does learn to admit what he wants.

In sexual terms this means that he will have ‘relations’ with Valentine: public codes are sublimated to private desires. War has forced him to this point. When Valentine travels to him, her mother attempts to prevent their inevitable union by appealing to the Tietjens who existed before the war:

Standing at the telephone, Tietjens had recognised at once that this was a mother, pleading with infinite statesmanship for her daughter. There was no doubt about that. How could he continue to . . . to entertain designs on the daughter of this voice? . . . But he did. He couldn’t. He did. He couldn’t. He did . . . You may expel Nature by pleading . . . tamen usque recur . . . She must recline in his arms before midnight . . . [ . . . ] There was nothing to answer to the mother on sentimental lines. He wanted Valentine Wannop enough to take her away. (p. 665)78

In comparison with the tortured battle with his desire exposed at the beginning of this chapter, these lines reveal a man who has had to face, and incorporate, his full human existence. His language is still full of difficulty, and is self-contradictory, but there is a new confidence in the unconcealed aspect of his unjustified desire. It becomes a statement of fact. Implicit in this is the relevance of Armistice Day; his sexual union will echo the end of atrocities, proving that some little joy can be salvaged from the suffering undergone. Tietjens’s existence has been stretched; he must now show his new, reclaimed, aspects. The repeated
'couldn’t’ above represents the vestige of pre-war codes of behaviour; his gentlemanly attendance to ‘a mother’ reminds us of what he would have done. But now he wants Valentine, and there is nothing to prevent him from having her.

As well as discovering the female side of his nature, as has been discussed in his bearing of Aranjuez away from the scene of battle, Tietjens has thus been introduced to the more instinctive and essentially male side of himself. From this base he can experience the desire for sexual pleasure and union with one he loves and wants. 'The war had made a man of him!' he exults. 'What he had been before, God alone knew. A Younger Son? A Perpetual Second-in-Command? Who knew. But to-day the world changed. Feudalism was finished; its last vestiges were gone. It held no place for him' (p. 668). Capitalised words return for what would seem to be the last time, as they are banished from his vocabulary. He can no longer hide in the protection of feudalism, behind the banner of inherited systematised thought. He must adopt the life now demanded of him, which is less defined. I said, as I began this last section of the chapter, that Tietjens is allowed by his narrator to retire from the front back into the country. I now wish to qualify this statement, for although he does indeed move to the country, the last and most significant personal battle takes place here when Sylvia comes to hunt him down. Instead of Christopher, she finds Valentine:

[Sylvia] bit into a small handkerchief that she had in her hand, concealed.

She said:

'Damn it, I’m playing pimp to Tietjens of Groby – leaving my husband to you!…’

Someone again sobbed… […]

Marie Leonie said:

‘C’est lamentable qu’un seul homme puisse inspirer deux passions pareilles dans deux femmes…’ (p. 827)

Tietjens may not be there to witness this exchange, but two of the worlds that have at different times claimed him are realigned and brought once more to face each other. The repressive power, of which Sylvia was the prime representative, returns, reminiscent of that diminished ‘he couldn’t’ of the telephone conversation. Perhaps Ford has banished Tietjens from this part of the action because he is aware of a still animate allegiance, somewhere within him, to the time before. Ford will not allow him to retract, and so prevents him from being tested again. It can be intuited from his banishment that the need for
Keegan’s carapace, made so obvious by the suffering of war, and equally challenged by the courage of the fighters and writers in their discovery of different truths, is never thoroughly exorcised.

Ford apprehends the destructiveness of war mostly personally, observantly, perhaps encouraged to do so by his life as a writer. He was able to state, of his habitual mental existence just after the war, ‘I live in my moment’ (*It Was the Nightingale*, p. 112), a moment which is yet multi-faceted and well informed. His experiences of war have solidified and validated this self-awareness. Some things have been gained, at the expense of others. He says of himself at the same time that ‘I had no illusions myself’ (*It Was the Nightingale*, p. 17) and his ‘new’ subjects come partly out of this strong sense of disillusionment. Disillusionment out of what he has seen – the mental and physical vulnerability he has suffered and witnessed; disillusionment too comes from the returning home to another world, where communication represents a whole new battle. The ‘big words’ are no longer in use.

Robert Graves provides a salient post-war observation, one that forms the conceptual partner to Ford’s statement that ‘everyone who had taken part in the war was then mad’. Graves relates a conversation between himself and Siegfried Sassoon in 1917, when they both had come to adopt an anti-war stance, and Sassoon in particular was suffering severe mental problems: ‘I took the line that everyone was mad except ourselves and one or two others, and that no good would come of offering sense to the insane’.* Consciousness heightened to the extent of that of fighting men was, in Graves’s opinion, the correct, and most sane, system of response to what had occurred. Those who were mad were sane in their vision; Tietjens in his agonised and fragmented self was real. Graves had to appear at the medical board to assess Sassoon, on his behalf. His role was to persuade those examining Sassoon that he was psychologically unfit and therefore not liable for imprisonment for the publication of his ‘Soldier’s Declaration’ which announced his resignation from the British army. Of this meeting Graves states that: ‘I had to appear in the role of a patriot distressed by the mental collapse of a brother-in-arms – a collapse directly due to his magnificent exploits in the trenches. I mentioned Siegfried’s “hallucinations” of corpses strewn along Piccadilly. The irony of having to argue to these mad old men that Siegfried was not sane!’ (p. 216). Graves thus signifies the presence of a whole generation of men who, to a greater or lesser extent, see reality differently now. A new battle will have to begin, a battle on the grounds of consciousness.
This battle is what has, in part, created Tietjens. His story is one of microcosmic destabilisation. Through the continual battles (personal and international), Tietjens is stripped of one protective convention after another, until he is ‘naked’, like Bourne (p. 40), and left to face himself: then the face of battle has become his own face. This stripping occurs until Tietjens is aware of himself physically and sexually, until he sleeps with Valentine, until he comes to reject everything he thought was necessary and risks himself.

In Chapter 3 the potential of the Fordian woman as a symbol of containment was tentatively posed in the form of Ellida. Grimshaw, though tested, and reduced completely by Ford, was ultimately prevented from recognising this by the projection of his fear that was Katya. The ‘sexual horror’ that both Etta and Katya described was triumphant in A Call. It meant that Grimshaw, having rejected the protection of society in the form of marriage, also rejected the alternative that was presented by Ford as essentially feminine. In Parade’s End, despite the horror of Sylvia, Valentine both symbolises and stabilises a new system for existence, one that has emerged from the chaos and fragmentation of war – and yet Tietjens is absent from the scene of its institution. In the chapters that follow, Fordian men will be seen to make the leap of recognition into these alternative worlds more completely. Rather than the nightmare visions of war, it is the sights of fantasy that precipitate them. Multi-faceted though it still is, the fragmenting face of modernism becomes one instead that can be celebrated. The splintering nature of desire and of war is countered by fictional worlds that free and articulate the unconscious entirely, and Ford’s protagonists are allowed to be present at their investiture.

Notes
5 Perhaps because, as Peter Conrad suggests, to Hemingway ‘the language which offered to give an account of [the war] had given up, or died of shame’ (Modern Times, Modern Places: Life and Art in the Twentieth Century, London, Thames & Hudson, 1998, p. 213).

7 Peter Childs provides a pertinent reminder, however, that for modernists in general language ‘was breaking down as it struggled and bent to encompass the world’ (Modernism, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 62). Kurtz can only say ‘The horror!’ at the climax to *Heart of Darkness*.


10 See Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 140–4, for an interesting discussion of ‘the war among the moderns’. Ford’s statements about war include that made to his mother: ‘I have never felt such an entire peace of mind as I have felt since I wore the King’s uniform’ (Levenson, p. 144).


14 Confusion as to the term ‘unconscious’ was common. Ford makes a mistake here in using ‘subconscious’ (refer to Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life For Our Time*, London, J. M. Dent & Sons, 1988, p. 453 for an assessment of this ‘common and telling mistake’). Any Freudian would also take Ford on at his suggestion that such concepts as Loyalty, God, etc. would be part of the unconscious framework. Anna Freud puts it well when she writes that ‘while our conscious thinking and planning are subject to the rules of reason and logic ... the mode inherent in the unconscious follows its own paths that are directed solely to the pursuit of pleasure’ (in her edition of *Sigmund Freud: The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p. 77). It is, nonetheless, clear what Ford means here: an underpinning belief in certain concepts has vanished.
15 Where he can, he manipulates that incapacity: in the rules for writing fiction that he designed with Conrad it is decreed that ‘no speech of one character should ever answer the speech that goes before it’ (Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, New York, Ecco, 1989, p. 200). This is because speech isn’t fluent or coherent, but truncated and fragmented.

16 Refer to Chapter 1 for accounts of Ford’s experience of mental illness, and of his opinions of the professionals associated with this field.

17 See Allyson Booth’s discussion of Wallace Stevens’s use of ellipsis in his war writing to suggest ‘the radical potential of words to register war’s dislocations’ (Postcards from the Trenches, pp. 15–16); see also Cornelia Cook’s discussion of Last Post, which includes some assessment of the modernist degeneration of linguistic codes (Agenda, 27/8, 1989/90, pp. 23–30).


19 Booth, Postcards from the Trenches, p. 5.

20 This essay is published in full in the Norton edition of The Good Soldier. Impressionism is discussed in Chapter 7.

21 After training with the 3rd Battalion of the Welch Regiment at Tenby, he left for France on 17 July 1916, as a second lieutenant.


24 [Siegfried Sassoon,] Sherston’s Progress (London, Faber & Faber, 1936), p. 86.


26 These opinions are those of Ernest Hemingway, then Michael Howard. They are quoted in Wilson, Myriad Faces of War, p. 678.

27 Frederic Manning, The Middle Parts of Fortune (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1990), p. 182. This quotation also gave Trevor Wilson the title for his history of the First World War.


29 Booth, Postcards from the Trenches, p. 53.


32 Winter writes that, ‘to remember the anxiety of 1500 days of war necessarily
entailed how to forget; in the interwar years those who couldn’t obliterate the nightmares were locked in asylums throughout Europe’ (Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, p. 2).

33 See Ford’s poem ‘A House’ (in New Poems, New York, William Edwin Rudge, 1927), in which the ‘permanent’ fixtures of the house support a fabric of the changing of fate in its endless cycles. It is a child’s construction, under the simplicity of which other truths come alive – and yet that simplicity is not destroyed. The poem can also be found in Max Saunders (ed.), Ford Madox Ford: Selected Poems (Manchester, Carcanet, 1997), pp. 126–39.


36 Keegan states that Kitchener is still ‘accorded respect for his triumphs of army building in 1914–15’; he ‘had originally called for a single increment of a hundred thousand men to the strength of the current army. He was, by the spring of 1915, to find himself with six of these “hundred thousands”’ (Face of Battle, pp. 174, 217). But despite the fact that Wilson discusses Kitchener as a ‘symbol of the Government’s determination to prosecute the war to victory’, he thinks the famous poster did little in the way of persuading men to enlist (Myriad Faces of War, pp. 243, 409–10).

37 Hence Ford’s sense, as well as his language, is evocative of George Eliot’s ‘roar which lies on the other side of silence’ that she claims one could die of (Middlemarch, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985, p. 226).

38 He writes typically, in a way that further illustrates the terrible dualities of experiencing war, and being an officer, and attempting to write about it: the real fear comes after the shell-fire. Ford is ‘frightened out of his life’ by thunder, but does his job as the shells burst; the fear is forced into the ‘subconscious’ realm, because ‘if one of the cooks suddenly opens, with a hammer, a chest close at hand, one jumps in a way one doesn’t when the “dirt” is coming over fairly heavily’. Ford Madox Ford, letter to Joseph Conrad, headed Attd. 9/Welch, 19th Div., B. E. F., [September 1916] in Richard Ludwig (ed.), The Letters of Ford Madox Ford (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 71–2.

39 Keegan, Face of Battle, p. 196.

40 Like Keegan, Ford pursues the analogy of turbulent water in its relevance to the workings of the mind, ‘there it was then: the natural catastrophe! As when, under thunder, a dam breaks. His mind was battling with the waters’ (Parade’s End, p. 477). A force equivalent to a dam-burst of water threatens Tietjens’s psychological balance. Using relevant imagery, Jung writes that ‘[rite and dogma] were dams and walls to keep back the dangers of the unconscious […]’. It is these barriers that collapse when the symbols

41 H. G. Wells wrote that ‘in the 1914–18 war [Ford] was a bad case of shell-shock from which he never recovered. The pre-war F. M. H. was tortuous but understandable, the post-war F. M. H. was incurably crazy. [His emphasis.]’ Wells was not a dispassionate observer, for he and Ford were not on good terms at this time, but the sense of acute change is notable (quoted in Arthur Mizener, The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford, New York, Carroll & Graf, 1985, pp. 292–3).

42 Ford’s prosaic quest is thus linked to Remarque’s. As Peter Conrad points out, Remarque argued in his novel Im Westen nichts Neues (1929), that ‘all those who took part in the war were destroyed by it, even if they saved their lives’ (Modern Times, Modern Places, p. 203).


45 Outlook 33, 17 January 1914.

46 Sherston’s Progress, p. 21.

47 The extent of this research, as well as the fact that imagination can’t conjure more horrifically than reality can show, is shown when Burns’s case, in Regeneration, is taken intact (and almost word for word) from one of Rivers’s case-studies. (Compare Regeneration (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1992, pp. 18–19) with Appendix III of Instinct and the Unconscious (p. 192).)


50 See Pat Barker, The Eye in the Door (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1993), pp. 68–9, 75.

51 The Good Soldier, pp. 25, 42. I think the sense of judgement or conscience is implied here (conspicuous by its absence in a way), although what Ford is actually referring to is the unwatched interaction of two characters.

52 Wilson, Myriad Faces of War, p. 249. Wilson goes on to quote from Ian Hay’s The First Hundred Thousand (published as a book in 1915) in a passage that gives an officer the role of strict parent whilst the soldier is depicted as the recalcitrant child. In a (feudal) socio-political echo of this family structure, David Cannadine writes of the aristocracy, ‘the warrior class’, as men ‘who knew how to lead, how to command, and how to look
after the men’ (Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 74). Tietjens is a member of the land-owning class.

53 Tietjens’s need to talk revivifies the discussion of analysis as a ‘talking cure’ (refer to Chapter 1).

54 Barker, Regeneration, pp. 107–8.

55 Wilson, Myriad Faces of War, p. 244.

56 See Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War (London, Penguin, 1998), pp. 357–61. See too the discussion regarding the liberation of war in relation to The Middle Parts of Fortune in Chapter 1 of this book.


58 This use of language is, in itself, suspect: such behaviour is, of course, neither ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, contrary to what the psychoanalytic pioneers suspected.


61 Rivers, Instinct and the Unconscious, p. 120.


63 Trudi Tate, Modernism, History and the First World War (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 109. Also, both chapters of the second part of this study of the war and modernism debate ideas of masculinity (in terms of sexuality and the feminisation of men).

64 In his study of Ford’s war writing, particularly the Parade’s End tetralogy, Ambrose Gordon states that ‘Ford’s affinities are more with the movies; his way of building up a scene – out of fragmented details, sudden “cuttings”, shifts in “camera angle” closely resembles film montage’. The scene he studies in detail is that of the explosion at the beginning of No More Parades which kills O Nine Morgan (The Invisible Tent: The War Novels of Ford Madox Ford, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1964, p. 8). See also note 75 here.


66 Tate, Modernism, History and the First World War, p. 96.


68 The first letter is quoted by Mizener in The Saddest Story, p. 289; the second is in Ludwig (ed.), Letters of Ford Madox Ford, pp. 81–3.


71 Sherston’s Progress, p. 88.
72 Samuel Hynes points out that one of Rivers’s principal contributions to the subject of war neurosis lies in the fact that he distinguished between the neuroses of enlisted men and those of their officers. Enlisted men tended to suffer from paralysis, mutism and anaesthesia, and their officers from nightmares, obsessions and hysteria (A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture, London, Pimlico, 1992, p. 177).
74 See Booth, Postcards from the Trenches, pp. 22–9. She refers the reader to Sassoon’s poem ‘Blighters’ for an example of what civilians don’t know about the meaning of words.
75 Childs writes that ‘by the 1920s film was having an enormous cultural impact on art and literature’ (Modernism, p. 123). See also Lyn Macdonald’s comment on the ‘filmic’ nature of war, 1914, p. 294; refer also to note 64 in this chapter.
76 Hynes, A War Imagined, p. 28.
77 Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, p. 16.
78 Tietjens himself allies the sexual act with a succumbing to ‘Nature’ and to the woman, in a way reminiscent of the discussion of Freud and Paglia in relation to A Call.
80 Sondra Stang uses this phrase in analysing the relationship between Ford’s and James’s fiction: ‘For Ford as well as for James, concealment and revelation are exercises in seeing how [writing] can best be done, and for both what is revealed is sexual horror’ (The Presence of Ford Madox Ford, Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p. xxii).