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‘A CARICATURE OF HIS OWN VOICE’: FORD AND SELF-EDITING IN *PARADE’S END*

Isabelle Brasme

Besides and beyond the immediate meaning of selecting and preparing texts for publication, editing denotes more largely the activity of reassessing a work and altering it to suit a particular design. While Ford performed as editor for his own, and others', works, I wish to focus here on the way in which his vocation as a literary editor also forms an intrinsic part of his novelistic aesthetics. It seems to me significant that Ford edited the *transatlantic review* at the very moment when he was working on the beginning of *Parade's End*, and even had parts of *Some Do Not . . .* published in the magazine. Ford's interest in editing, altering, and refining a text, may indeed also be considered as a literary agenda for his novelistic work. Reading *Parade's End*, while bearing in mind the contemporaneous activities of Ford as editor, brings a new and fertile perspective to the various processes of alteration and suppression that are everywhere to be found in *Parade's End*.

My purpose here is not to discuss the literal processes of revision at work in the various manuscripts of *Parade's End*: these shall be addressed in the forthcoming annotated critical edition of *Parade's End* by Max Saunders, Joseph Wiesenfarth, Sara Haslam and Paul Skinner. No doubt this publication shall bring a new dimension to the question of self-editing in *Parade's End*. Likewise, I do not address the revisions between the Duckworth edition of *Some Do Not . . .* and the version published in the *transatlantic review*, as these are minor and consequently probably not worth pondering at length (Max Saunders, personal communication). Rather, my focus here is to examine the process of editing as a literary paradigm and as an aesthetic agenda on the part of Ford.

We shall first see in what way the specific use of punctuation alerts us to a text that is shown as undergoing a constant and open process of self-editing. We shall also observe that this stance is shared

to some degree by the characters, through their practice of Englishness. Moreover, through the constant rewriting of their stances and statements, both the characters and the writer adopt a position akin to that of a film editor. Finally, it should prove interesting to observe how the final volume of the tetralogy acts as a major addendum to the work and constitutes a sweeping gesture of a re-editing of the whole.

Self-editing as a major aesthetic stance of the text

Ford's text keeps signalling the potentiality of stating something and simultaneously amending it. There is a constant vibration between the elaboration of an initial text, and the re-editing of this text.

This is first made apparent in the novels' titles. Titles serve as the initial interface between the reader and the literary work; as such, they are the object of much attention in the edition process – and often of controversy between author and editor. 'Some Do Not . . .' is perhaps the most interesting title in this respect, in that it relates the text's constant process of self-correction to that of the characters, which we shall observe later. The phrase forming the title of the first novel, 'Some do not', occurs several times in the novel itself, and is opposed several times to its positive counterpart, 'some do'. The two faces – the temptation of an uncensored, un-amended story – 'some do' –, and its suppressed, decent version – 'some do not' – are thus given to exist simultaneously in the mind of the reader.

Another major element in this and in another title of the tetralogy's, is the specific use of punctuation: the suspension dots in *Some Do Not . . .*, and the dash in *A Man Could Stand Up* –. Such punctuation is not commonly found in titles; before we have even opened the book, we are thus made aware that a highly specific use of punctuation will be at work in the novels. These punctuation marks also bespeak Ford's keen interest in an accurate and significant use of the typographic means at his disposal.

Both the suspension dots and the dashes also function as instruments for editing a first version, a first layer of text. One may open *Parade's End* at any page and be certain to find an impressive number of suspension dots. The text appears literally as holed out, if not hollowed out, by this proliferation of dots. This perforated text may evoke visually the shelled landscapes of Northern France at war. The suspension dots and dashes signal blanks that have been

intentionally carved into the text. Besides the bombed landscape of France, this process is also reminiscent of another consequence of war: that of censorship, in which Ford was directly involved during World War I. Censorship constitutes a specific modality of edition, in that it involves reading a text with a view to erase or rephrase its politically questionable content. War censorship *is* mentioned in *Parade's End* – we learn that Tietjens censors his soldiers' letters.

However, censorship is not limited to the context of war in *Parade's End*, nor is it endowed only with a patriotic and political dimension. Throughout the tetralogy, it seems as though an eraser has left gaps in a text that was initially written, or at least intended, as a complete whole; but this whole is never delivered to us.

The dots that pervade conversations and stream-of-consciousness passages act as traces of the characters' suppressed thoughts, of the pauses they make as they are talking or thinking to censor their own speech before putting it into words. This is where the constant process of self-editing of the text echoes that of the characters. Indeed, just as the narration seems permeated with marks of correction and revisions, so do the characters' conversations and inner speeches.

One particular use of the dash symbol illustrates a discrepancy between the soldiers' and the officers' speeches – or more largely, between lower and upper middle classes. The common soldier and the gentleman at war have different ways of swearing. Where the common soldiers say 'bleeding', or more often, 'bleedin'', the upper ranks say – or rather, do NOT say – 'bloody'; as a matter of fact, the word in the text is almost completely suppressed through the censoring dash: the reader is left with 'b—y', and has to guess the word half obliterated by the dash. The dashes do appear visually as a gesture of crossing-out on the part of both the characters and the author.

Editing out one's behaviour: an inherent mark of the English gentleman

Editing out one's behaviour and one's speech constitutes indeed an inherent mark of the English gentleman such as he is described in *Parade's End*.

The quality of being English – which in the novels is usually made equivalent to that of being a gentleman – is hardly ever defined

directly in *Parade's End*: instead, it is delineated through a series of suppressions.

Tietjens thus identifies Colonel Levin as non-English because of his inability to check his speech. He remarks to him: 'You betray your non-Anglo-Saxon origin by being so vocal'.¹ Further on, he comments: 'You'll excuse my having been emotional so far. You aren't English, so it won't have embarrassed you' (*NMP* 458). The Englishman thus keeps *editing out* his speech and action. This is perhaps best brought to light in *A Man Could Stand Up* – through one of Tietjens's musings: 'Gentlemen don't earn money. Gentlemen, as a matter of fact, don't do anything. They exist. Perfuming the air like Madonna lilies' (*MCSU* 589). The gentleman is thus essentially characterized by what he chooses *not* to do.

It is indeed through what a gentleman edits out of his behaviour that he is revealed as one. Tietjens and his brother are thus first and foremost described through what they suppress: when they are first shown together in the narration, they are each described as 'completely expressionless' (*SDN* 201). Expressionlessness does not mean here a sheer absence of expression, but rather a voluntary suppression of what one may choose to express. This is best exemplified by Mark's attitude in the final volume of *Parade's End*: Mark in *The Last Post* embodies the resistance of Englishness to change and to foreign influence; this resistance is achieved through obstinate silence. Mark considers his muteness as a deliberate elision of speech (notwithstanding his doctors believing his aphasia is the result of a stroke). Paradoxically, though, *The Last Post* is also the volume in which Mark's inner voice is most present. The contrast between the fluency of Mark's thoughts in *The Last Post* and his actual muteness figures all the more the forceful work of suppression that he exerts over himself.

These corrections and suppressions are not mere subtraction; on the contrary, they generate an added meaning. This emphasis on the characters' and the text's perpetual self-corrections contributes substantially to the dynamism of the work: the markers of editing highlight the perpetual shifts both in the characters' thoughts, and in the text's own aesthetic project.

Film editing

The dual nature of editing as cutting out and editing as adding in is perhaps made most present in the analogy between the narration's structure and film editing.

The process of cutting out parts of a story is explicitly mentioned by the characters. Christopher and Valentine, who may in some respect be considered as the two quintessential instances of Englishness and gentleman- (or woman-)liness in the novel, explicitly articulate their wish to edit out their own story. Towards the end of the first volume, Tietjens asks Valentine to be his mistress, and she accepts; later that day, however, they finally decide *not* to become lovers, and wish they could edit out the moment when they considered what would have amounted to a free, uncensored expression of their feelings. Here is their conversation on this occasion:

She said:

'If we *could* wash out this afternoon. . . . It would make it easier to bear.' [. . .]

'Yes, you *can*,' he said. 'You cut out from this afternoon, just before 4.58 it was when I said that to you and you consented . . . [. . .] To now. . . . Cut it out; and join time up. . . . It can be done. (SDN 284-5)

Tietjens's fantasy of cutting out a moment and joining time up resembles very much the process of *film* editing, where the director cuts unwanted bits of filming, and reconnects the reels, leaving out the unwanted parts.

In this respect, Tietjens and Valentine may be considered as wishful doubles of the novelist Ford. Attempting aesthetic experiments, then cutting out what proves to be unsatisfactory, is something Ford is constantly and openly performing in *Parade's End*.

Interestingly, though, in the situation of the characters as in that of the writer, both would-be editors finally decide to leave their story as is: Valentine considers editing her story, but in the end refuses to leave this moment out, unfortunate though it may have been: 'But I wouldn't cut it out . . . It was the first spoken sign' (SDN 285). Similarly, while Ford makes amendments to the writing, he is nonetheless careful to leave traces of the initial text. The markers of editing are left within the text as a way to draw our attention to various coexisting versions of the story. The temptation of cutting

things out is made obvious, but is not carried to its full conclusion, so that we are not left with a clean and smoothly emended final version.

Besides, film editing is obviously not merely a negative gesture of leaving things out: it also involves reorganizing film cuts in a different order. Editing in the cinematic sense is of course akin to the way in which Ford builds the narration in *Parade's End*: Ford cuts up the linear story and rearranges the sections into a different order, sometimes leaving whole parts out of the final result. This process is most obvious in the ellipses between the novels, or between the main parts within each of the novels; it is central to the practice of literary impressionism and has been perhaps best brought to light by the narrator of *The Good Soldier*, in this oft-quoted passage:

When one discusses an affair – a long, sad affair – one goes back, one goes forward. One remembers points that one has forgotten and one explains them all the more minutely since one recognizes that one has forgotten to mention them in proper places and that one may have given, by omitting them, a false impression.²

This process is everywhere at work in *Parade's End*. Ford's narration aims at rendering this process of omission, of flashback, and of belated emendation. Editing thus involves here both cutting out and adding in elements.

Moreover, by rearranging them into different patterns and setting them in varying contexts, Ford imbues the initial occurrences with a renewed richness of meaning.

Variation-within-repetition

Another mode through which the text appears to be re-edited in the course of the writing is the phenomenon of variation-within-repetition. The text is continually quoting itself, albeit with slight and not-so-slight variations. While one may wonder at first whether these are not involuntary misquotations of the text by itself, they are however too numerous – and we owe Ford's intelligence too much respect – not to be considered as programmatic on the part of Ford.

For instance, in *A Man Could Stand Up* –, Campion writes a report and then pauses to reflect on the situation. Going back to his report after a while, he reads again the last sentences that he has previously written; except they are now altered. When his report is first quoted, it ends with 'conclusion of hostilities'; when it is

mentioned again after his digression, the last words have become 'termination of hostilities' (MCSU 468-9). Nothing in the narration indicates that Campion has intentionally altered his text. This is but one of many instances of this phenomenon in *Parade's End*; one may wonder if these discreet shifts are not there as subtle hints to the text's perpetual movement of auto-correction.

Even when the text is repeated exactly, the context in which the repetition takes place invites us to reconsider the first occurrence in the light of the latter. This phenomenon is made explicit at the end of *SDN*, when Tietjens recalls words that he has uttered several years previously, in the first pages of the novel, and before the war broke out.

'I stand for monogamy and chastity. And for no talking about it. Of course if a man who's a man wants to have a woman he has her. And again no talking about it. . . .' His voice – his own voice – came to him as if from the other end of a long-distance telephone. A damn long-distance one! Ten years. . . . (SDN 281)

The rendering of the same sentence in italics in the second instance, paired with the analogy of the telephone, highlights the discrepancy between the two occurrences of the same sentence. Because the context and Tietjens's own positions have shifted, because the war has made him reconsider his moral tenets, he now hears his past discourse as 'a caricature of his own voice': 'His own voice, a caricature of his own voice, seemed to come to him: "Gentlemen don't . . ."' (SDN 138). The iteration of the 'own', which Tietjens seems to use as if to convince himself of the continuity between his previous tenets and his present state of mind, in effect emphasizes the alterity between Tietjens's past and present selves. One may wonder whether, through the many processes of iteration and rewriting, Ford did not consider his own text at times as 'a caricature of his own voice'.

The problem lies of course in knowing which of the various versions should impose itself as the right one. While at the front, Tietjens tries to put his relations with Sylvia and Valentine into writing:

He said to himself that he must put, in exact language, as if he were making a report for the use of garrison headquarters, the exact story of himself in his relation to his wife. . . . And to Miss Wannop, of course. 'Better put it into writing,' he said. (NMP 345)

Tietjens suggests again a double of the novelist. However, he keeps correcting his so-called 'exact report'. This is how he narrates his leave-taking with Valentine:

So I touched the brim of my cap and said: So long! . . . Or perhaps I did not even say *so long*. Or she. . . I don't remember. I remember the thoughts I thought and the thoughts I gave her credit for thinking. But perhaps she did not think them. There is no knowing. (*NMP* 347)

Tietjens thus finally renounces the pretence of knowing and deciding which version is correct. This position is also shared by the narration. Every layer of text is added to the others until they form a palimpsest where no layer is to be given more importance or credit than the others: the text does not settle on a final, definite version whence the previous layers should be expunged. This indecision, however, needs not be perceived as negative: on the contrary, while the wish for a stable meaning needs to be abandoned, this is more than made up for by the added depths and the enriched meaning that results. Ford may appear here as experimenting with an aesthetic of the trace – what endows *Parade's End* with such fascination is precisely what is half there, and half erased, or half altered as the novel unfolds. Ford offers a work whose ideological and aesthetic orientations he is consciously and conspicuously reconsidering in the very course of the writing.

***The Last Post* as a major gesture of self-editing**

The final volume of the tetralogy, *The Last Post*, may appear as the largest and most significant gesture of self-editing on the part of Ford. The process of self-edition is here effected on the scale of the whole tetralogy.

The oft-debated question of the inclusion of the fourth volume within *Parade's End*, a question equivocated by Ford himself, sustains the notion of a text whose overall design is continually re-examined, amended, and eventually left in suspense. The heterogeneous character of *The Last Post* within the tetralogy deepens the impression of Ford's refusal to smooth out the asperities left by his deliberate shifts in writing. This in my view contributes to make *The Last Post* inseparable from the rest of *Parade's End*.

The fourth novel as a whole may indeed appear as a profound gesture of radical editing of the aesthetic, epistemological and philosophical project of the whole tetralogy. I propose to examine a few of the modalities of amendment effected by *The Last Post*.

Mark Tietjens probably offers the most striking re-writing of the main plot in *Parade's End*. Throughout the novels and up to the very finale of *The Last Post*, Mark is convinced that his father has committed suicide on hearing the rumour that his son Christopher is having an affair with Valentine: Mark's opinion is that his father had an affair with Mrs. Wannop and that Valentine is his child, and that the resulting incestuous affair between Christopher and Valentine drove him to despair. In the very last pages of *The Last Post*, however, Mark, experiencing an epiphany of sorts, realizes his father did not commit suicide, and deduces thereof that no incest was perpetrated either. Another major indecision characterizing the plot in *Parade's End* is the question of the paternity of Sylvia's son. Here as well, Mark gains the conviction on seeing Sylvia's son that he is also Christopher's, and therefore not an illegitimate heir to Groby. Through a series of sweeping statements, Mark quite clearly rewrites the previous versions to the main strings of the plot: 'The worst of it rolled up together. No suicide. No incest. No by-blow at Groby' (*LP* 832). Once again, one may observe that the plot is eventually reduced to what it is *not*.

The characters are also all profoundly re-evaluated in the fourth novel. Despite hitherto appearing as the main protagonist in *Parade's End*, Christopher Tietjens is hardly present in the final volume, except overhead on a plane; when he does end up making a brief appearance in the very last pages, he is shown very much diminished. The last sentence referring to him in the novel likens him to a contrite, 'dejected bulldog' (*LP* 835). Conversely, Marie-Léonie, who is hardly mentioned in the first three novels, occupies the forefront in the last volume.

A similar reversal occurs when we consider the novels' two main feminine figures: Valentine, who has been represented throughout the first three novels as a paragon of feminine activity and as the embodiment of a new, positive concept of femininity, shuts herself up in her room and appears to regress towards constant bickering. On the other end of the spectrum, Sylvia, who was often presented as

Valentine's negative double, is made much more sympathetic in the final volume: she finally relents in her animosity against Tietjens and Valentine, and is even heard to sob.

Another major amendment to the tetralogy that is brought about by the last volume concerns the respective values ascribed to the trivial and to the sublime, to the material and to the ideal. Throughout the first three volumes, Tietjens and Valentine have been presented as above the obsession for the material that is evinced by most of the other characters; and this stance was made to appear as the more positive. This detachment from material things was made most evident at the end of *A Man Could Stand Up* – when Tietjens got rid of all his furniture and Valentine happily embraced his decision: '[The rooms] did not look sordid and forlorn. They looked frugal. And glorious!' (MCSU 651). In the final volume, however, Tietjens has become an antique dealer, in consequence of which their house is cluttered with a variety of furniture for sale. Valentine is engrossed in material considerations, from the obsession for the bed in which she insists sleeping and giving birth to her child, down to purchasing new *cache-corsets*. Strikingly, though, this shift is not made to be felt as utterly negative. Marie-Léonie, who has come to occupy the forefront of the narration along with her husband, espouses most fervently the sheer thingness of life; and she is certainly not presented without sympathy.

The Last Post thus highlights and stages most clearly the text's reflexivity and its constant instability between various conflicting versions – of the way to build a narrative, of the characters' values, of the text's possible ideological and aesthetic meaning, and of its consequent positioning within the canons of its time.

Conclusion

The radical *addendum* to *Parade's End* that constitutes *The Last Post* contributes largely in my view to the fascination exerted by the work as a whole. The text's reflexivity and movement of self-questioning and self-correction, while it is at work throughout the four novels, is asserted as the major direction of the final volume; retrospectively, it comes to shed a new perspective on the whole work. It invites us to become in turn editors of our own reading: we are required to consider *Parade's End* anew, in the light of a text that is continually, and creatively, crossing parts of itself out and rewriting an ever-updated

version, while allowing traces of the previous text to show underneath. *The Last Post* sounds to some extent as Ford's deliberate 'caricature of his own voice': it may appear as though Ford was intentionally forcing the discrepancy to deepen our uncertainty about the whole. Through this lighter-hearted volume, Ford points out his will not to take his own aesthetic choices for granted, but to keep them continually in progress.

NOTES

- ¹ *No More Parades* (henceforth *NMP*) in Ford Madox Ford, *Parade's End*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, p. 454. Page numbers are given in parentheses in the body of the text with the abbreviation for the volume title. Abbreviations for the other volumes in the tetralogy shall stand as such: *SDN* for *Some Do Not . . .*, *MCSU* for *A Man Could Stand Up* –, and *LP* for *The Last Post*.
- ² Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*, Martin Stannard (ed.), New York: Norton, 1995, p. 120.