

## Rumour, Propaganda, and *Parade's End*

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'I SIMPLY DO NOT believe in atrocities', says Gringoire, the central character of Ford Madox Ford's war memoir, *No Enemy* (1929). 'No, I don't believe in atrocities. Or at the most I half believe in one. It is asserted – the Huns asserted it themselves but I found it difficult to believe – that they filmed the *Lusitania* whilst she was sinking. That I find atrocious.' Why? Because it seems to take pleasure in the spectacle: 'that you should take a cinema machine to represent, for the gloating of others, the ruin and disappearance of a tall ship – that seems to me the most horrible of crimes'. Then again, 'perhaps they never did it. Perhaps they only said that they did'.<sup>1</sup>

Gringoire's story is one of thousands of false rumours which circulated during and after the Great War. Rumour takes on a new meaning in this period, as a result of propaganda. Lying for the sake of war has a long history, but the Great War was the first to organize propaganda in a 'scientific manner'.<sup>2</sup> In Britain, especially, a vast amount of propaganda was aimed not at the enemy but at its own citizens, through bogus statistics, inaccurate news reports, and, most contentiously, false atrocity stories. These were much criticized after the war. Whether Britain was the most successful, and the most duplicitous, manufacturer of propaganda remained a powerfully argued question throughout the 1920s.

*Parade's End* is fascinated by the circulation of rumours and lies; indeed, gossip – some of it true, most of it false – is one of the organizing principles of the novel. Ford's own life was plagued by gossip and he was frequently accused of lying, as many critics have noted.<sup>3</sup> He also quite enjoyed being lied to,<sup>4</sup> though he disliked being the subject of scandal, writing to Stella Bowen in 1919: 'It is fatal to have controversy about oneself; it is much better to have the worst lies told, unrefuted. No one believes the lies, tho' they may repeat them for the fun of the thing'.<sup>5</sup> But this biographical interest should not

obscure its larger historical context: *Parade's End* is part of a complicated and often fraught debate which took place after the war. Not only does its notorious ambivalence point towards contemporary concerns about propaganda but, as the quotation from *No Enemy* suggests, it also reflects Ford's interest in the relationship between representation and pleasure in stories which circulated during the war.

The most successful propaganda campaigns were probably those based on fictions about German atrocities. As Harold Lasswell commented in 1927, 'A handy rule for arousing hate is, if at first they do not enrage, use an atrocity'.<sup>6</sup> The effects of this deception continued well into the Second World War; the success of British propaganda in the First World War made people very sceptical about news of real nazi atrocities during the 1930s and 40s.<sup>7</sup> In Britain, almost no one who was touched by the Great War had any reliable information about it. Casualty figures were misrepresented; defeats were presented as victories; atrocity stories were invented; accounts of real suffering were censored; opposition to the war was suppressed.

One of the most famous atrocity lies appeared in *The Times* on 10 May 1915, in which it was claimed that a Canadian officer had been crucified by the Germans:

He had been pinned to a wall by bayonets thrust through his hands and feet; another bayonet had then been driven through his throat, and, finally, he was riddled with bullets.

The wounded Canadians said that the Dublin Fusiliers had seen this done with their own eyes, and that they had heard the officers of the Dublin Fusiliers talking about it.<sup>8</sup>

A few days later, *The Times* repeated the story, citing different sources.

There is, unhappily, good reason to believe that the story related [. . . on 10 May] of the crucifixion of a Canadian officer during the fighting at Ypres on April 22-23 is in substance true. The story was current here at the time, but, in the absence of direct evidence and absolute proof,

men were unwilling to believe that a civilized foe could be guilty of an act so cruel and savage.

Much of the second report is devoted to the question of plausibility, citing 'written depositions' supposedly in possession of British Headquarters. 'I have not heard that any of our men actually saw the crime committed', comments the reporter, going on to speculate that the Canadian officer may have been dead before 'the enemy in his insensate rage and hatred of the English wreaked his vengeance on the lifeless body of his foe'. Despite the lack of first-hand evidence, 'There is not a man in the ranks of the Canadians who fought at Ypres who is not firmly convinced that this vile thing has been done'.<sup>9</sup> The officer is said to have been pinned to a wooden fence by four bayonets, his body 'repeatedly stabbed with bayonets'. The previous report had five bayonets and the body also 'rid-dled with bullets' – a strange excess of weaponry which makes the Germans look inefficient as well as barbaric.

Like much of *The Times'* reporting of the war, the sources are obscure and the details don't quite add up, but the story is persuasive precisely because of its rough edges; readers are offered a many-layered rumour, supported by evidence which is at once vague (an anonymous written deposition) and highly specific (the exact number of bayonets). Rumour was presented as fact and seems to have been widely believed at the time; civilians, particularly, had no way of verifying what they read in the newspapers.<sup>10</sup> Crucifixion stories – whether of babies, children, or Americans – reappeared throughout the war, but no verifiable cases of crucifixion were ever found.<sup>11</sup>

What made this a good propaganda story? Crucifixion was a highly charged image, especially as both sides made strong claims of righteousness in the name of Christianity. British MPs often used the story in public speeches. As George Parfitt notes, soldiers were often seen as Christ-like figures whose suffering was blamed variously on the enemy, on women, and on the General Staff.<sup>12</sup> But the story has an anthropological significance, too. Crucifixion was the wrong kind of death in this war; an inappropriate use of its technology. The possibility that the officer may have already been dead offers both

comfort and renewed distress. The act becomes monstrous, since mutilation of a dead body serves no practical military aim, but also for that reason slightly ridiculous, as a number of writers after the war suggested.

Other famous lies included stories of babies without arms, mutilated nurses, raped nuns, soldiers with their faces tattooed with enemy insignia, and a Germany factory for converting battlefield corpses into usable products. The many terrible and revolting acts that really did take place were hardly ever used as propaganda; indeed, true stories were rigorously censored in Britain throughout the war. The most compelling and memorable stories to be taken up and circulated were almost always fictions, and they were fictions of a particular kind. Some were recycled atrocity stories from earlier wars;<sup>13</sup> others were drawn partly from popular horror stories and partly from the conventions of pornography. Atrocity pamphlets appeared with titles such as *The Horrors of Wittenburg* (1916) and *Microbe-Culture at Bukarest* (1917).<sup>14</sup> Irene Cooper Willis noted that propaganda stories about rape and sexual mutilation were reported in lurid detail in the newspapers, especially in the *Daily News*.<sup>15</sup> There was even a scatological sub-genre. J. H. Morgan's German *Atrocities: An Official Investigation* (1916) included a section entitled 'Bestiality of German Officers and Men' which claims that 'chateaux or private houses used as the head-quarters of German officers were frequently found to have been left in a state of bestial pollution'. Even though 'to use the beds and the upholstery of private houses as a latrine is not an atrocity, it indicates a state of mind sufficiently depraved to commit one'. Morgan also wrote that many incidents witnessed by British officers 'are so disgusting that they are unfit for publication', adding that 'Some of the worst things have never been published'.<sup>16</sup>

Studies of propaganda appeared throughout the 1920s and 30s.<sup>17</sup> Mariel Grant notes that the term changed its meaning during this period, taking on new, negative connotations 'in response to the success of British propaganda in the First World War'.<sup>18</sup> Writing in 1927, Irene Cooper Willis argued that 'war plays the devil not only with bodies but with minds,

and the ensuing intellectual deterioration of the warring nations, being less obvious than the physical deterioration, is by so much the more dangerous'.<sup>19</sup> Many people shared this concern, including Arthur Ponsonby, whose study of propaganda appeared in 1928:

In calm retrospect we can appreciate better the disastrous effects of the poison of falsehood, whether officially, semi-officially, or privately manufactured. It has rightly been said that the injection of the poison of hatred into men's minds by means of falsehood is a greater evil in war-time than the actual loss of life.<sup>20</sup>

For Ponsonby, 'The deception of whole peoples is not a matter which can be lightly regarded', and his book focuses on a particular kind of lying: the false information which circulated in newspaper articles, pamphlets, verbal rumours, official reports. Every country used propaganda 'to deceive its own people, to attract neutrals, and to mislead the enemy'.<sup>21</sup> It was also used to delay or prevent peace settlements, as Buitenhuis has recently argued:

In the latter part of 1916 and throughout 1917, there were several calls for peace by negotiation among the Allies. These attempts all failed, largely because of three factors: the alleged military victories manufactured by the generals and propagandists, the lack of information about the real conditions on the Western Front, and the climate created by the hate and atrocity propaganda against Germany.<sup>22</sup>

The effects of propaganda are impossible to measure, but, whatever it achieved during the war, anxiety about propaganda had become a serious matter by 1928, when universal franchise was established in Britain for the first time. A basic premise of democracy – that people make rational choices based on reliable information – was thrown into question. As Grant points out, there was also concern that the new electors would be easily swayed by propaganda, so that – paradoxically – the extended franchise came to seem a threat to democracy.<sup>23</sup>

Propaganda can seem like an act of betrayal when the state deliberately misleads its subjects, the newspaper its readers. As Freud remarked in 1915, citizens of the supposedly civilized European states were expected to live by high moral standards; above all, people were 'forbidden to make use of the immense advantages to be gained by the practice of lying and deception'.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, citizens assumed that the state would obey its own rules. People become disillusioned, says Freud, when they realize that 'the state has forbidden to the individual the practice of wrong-doing [in this case, lying], not because it desires to abolish it, but because it desires to monopolize it, like salt and tobacco'. Freud's turn to an economic metaphor is particularly striking. Lies, rumours, and propaganda become commodities – valuable assets taken under state control – while citizens become passive consumers, treated 'like children by an excess of secrecy and a censorship of news and expressions of opinion'. This leaves them extremely vulnerable to propaganda and rumour – almost the only information in circulation in a society at war.

How does this help us to read *Parade's End*? It is a highly unsettling novel, teetering, as Max Saunders argues, on the brink between tragedy and absurdity.<sup>25</sup> It also locates itself on another brink – between anxiety and pleasure – an ambivalent position which gives the novel much of its power, and which is highly resonant when read against the debates around propaganda after the war. One source of its ambivalence, perhaps, is Ford's unease about his own propaganda work in the early stages of the war. He contributed a series of articles to *Outlook* in 1914-15, and was commissioned by Masterman to write two propaganda books: *When Blood is their Argument* (1915) and *Between St. Dennis and St. George* (1915). Many respected writers produced serious books which argued, directly or indirectly, in support of the war, often on secret commission from government propaganda committees: Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, Kipling, Conan Doyle, Mrs Humphry Ward, and many others.<sup>26</sup> This was quite a different kind of writing from the atrocity stories discussed earlier, but it was an important element in the great propaganda machine, and its disguised origins were another

kind of lie. In *Between St. Dennis and St. George*, Ford pillories some leading pacifists, accusing H. N. Brailsford of lies and 'forgery' and Shaw of repeating unfounded gossip; this surely raised some ethical questions when Ford began to recognize the consequences of the war.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the pacifists deserved support rather than ridicule and attack. Peter Buitenhuis argues that Ford, like Wells, Kipling, and Bennett, looked back on the war and felt 'some dismay at [his] own complicity'.<sup>28</sup> Ford's own propaganda work was very slight, but it raised questions about collusion and official lies which are addressed, often in a highly displaced form, in *Parade's End*.

'You can't get ahead of rumour', says Christopher Tietjens, the central character of *Parade's End*, and the novel's four volumes are filled with gossip about his sexual life, his politics, his marriage, his money. Most of the stories are untrue – 'foul and baseless rumours', as his estranged wife Sylvia puts it – but they have a material effect on the course of Tietjens's life.<sup>29</sup> Gossip drives the various plots and organizes the relationships among the central characters. Rumours about Tietjens diminish his reputation, isolate him from his social class, damage his finances. Yet, at the same time, the gossip enlarges him, giving him a central role in the stories his society tells itself. Gossip is fundamental to social organization; it is an important source of pleasure as well as a mechanism for policing people. Throughout the novel, Tietjens's friends and family tell lies about him, then behave as if the stories were true. The processes of gossip are like 'the smooth working of a mechanical model' (p. 202).

Generically, *Parade's End* moves between soldier's memoir and modernist fiction. Published as four separate novels – *Some Do Not* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up* (1926), and *The Last Post* (1928) – it did not appear as a single volume until 1950. Although much of its war material is based on Ford's own experiences at the front, its central character is only partly autobiographical, and it is quite unlike the most famous soldiers' narratives of the Great War. Even in the sections set in battle in *No More Parades* and *A Man Could Stand Up*, in method *Parade's End* more

closely resembles Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1915-38), a book Ford admired, than Blunden's *Undertones of War* (1928), Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), Barbusse's *Under Fire* (1916), or Graves's *Goodbye to All That* (1929).

When *Parade's End* begins the young Tietjens is working in the Civil Service in a job which requires him to fake statistics (pp. 47, 57, 60), and is married to Sylvia, who has run off with another man. As a husband Tietjens considers it ungentlemanly to divorce his wife, and insists on protecting her reputation. The novel repeatedly draws attention to Tietjens's adherence to an anachronistic moral code. Although he is one of the few members of his circle who is monogamous, he develops a reputation for indiscreet affairs. People want to drop him from their visiting lists – not so much for the fictional affairs as for being the subject of malicious gossip. This pattern is repeated throughout the novel, and accords with Tietjens's own statement at the beginning that society distrusts the 'cuckold' and blames him for his own misfortunes (pp. 10, 11). As a wealthy member of the ruling class who refuses to defend himself against libel, Tietjens is an unusual victim. His unyielding belief in the correct codes of behaviour can make him unsympathetic; he defends his wife's honour as a point of principle, for example, but fails to do the same for Valentine, the woman he loves.

Much of the gossip in the novel focuses on illicit sexual practices. Tietjens is said to be 'a bloody pimp living on women' (p. 217); to have taken Mrs Duchemin (later Mrs Macmaster) as his mistress (pp. 161, 207, 209, 215, 220, 270, 271) and to have made her pregnant before her marriage to Macmaster (pp. 222, 261). Many people think that Valentine has had a war baby to Tietjens (pp. 158, 209-10, 212). 'Seven people in the last five weeks have told me you have had a child by that brute beast', says Mrs Duchemin to Valentine, calling her a 'shameless thing' and a harlot (pp. 260-1); Valentine in turn considers Mrs Duchemin a 'foul whore' (p. 265). Before he has even met Valentine, Tietjens is alleged to be her lover (pp. 107, 117): 'He was said to have ruined himself, broken up his home and spent his wife's money on

her' (p. 87). 'Those were lies', reflects Tietjens, patiently. 'On the other hand they were not inherent impossibilities' (p. 87). To some extent, it is the gossip – 'the pressure of suggestion' – which makes the affair between Tietjens and Valentine possible (p. 88). 'The whole world conspired to force them together!' (p. 214). Later, in the war, Tietjens is sent up the line, despite being medically unfit, because the scandals attached to his private life are thought to be demoralizing the army (pp. 476-8). One of the Welsh soldiers, O Nine Morgan, discovers that his wife has taken up with a prize fighter. He applies for leave, but Tietjens refuses, on the grounds that 'the prize-fighter would have smashed him to bits' (p. 310). O Nine Morgan is killed shortly afterwards, his face smashed by a shell (p. 308). Tietjens will be haunted by this death, caused, indirectly, by the workings of gossip.

The worst rumours have a physical effect on Tietjens's family: his brother Mark feels 'sickish' when he thinks of Tietjens and the stories which surround him (p. 738), and the gossip is said to have killed their father (p. 490). Even in the war, Tietjens himself suffers less from the violence of battle than from malicious stories, most of which originate from his wife. Sylvia's attacks on Tietjens are key elements in the movement of the plot, yet their causes remain enigmatic. Her main purpose in life is to torment him for reasons which change in the course of the novel: because he bores her; because she hates him; because she loves him; because he is the only real man she knows; because she wants him to notice her; because she enjoys the spectacle of suffering. Most of the characters in *Parade's End* attempt to injure Tietjens in some way; their motives, too, are often obscure. Early in *Some Do Not*, General Campion questions Tietjens about his alleged affair with Valentine. Tietjens has been seen 'lolloping' in central London with an unknown woman; is this the same one? The woman is actually one of Macmaster's unsuitable mistresses, and Tietjens tries to protect his friend without lying to the General:

'I was trying to get that young woman . . . I was taking her out to lunch from her office at the bottom of the

Haymarket . . . To get her off a friend's back. That is, of course, between ourselves.' (p. 72)

The General is astonished by such an implausible excuse:

'Upon my soul,' he said, 'what do you take me for?' He repeated the words as if he were amazed. 'If,' he said, 'my G.S.O.II – who's the stupidest ass I know – told me such a damn-fool lie as that I'd have him broke tomorrow. [. . .] Damn it all, it's the first duty of a soldier – it's the first duty of all Englishmen – to be able to tell a good lie in answer to a charge. But a lie like that [. . .] Hang it all, I told that lie to my grandmother and my grandfather told it to *his* grandfather.' (p. 72)

But of course the story is true. One reason Tietjens is persecuted is because he refuses to tell the right sort of lies. Such scruples are beyond the General, who says 'I only want a plausible story to tell Claudine. Or not even plausible. An obvious lie as long as it shows you're not flying in the face of society' (p. 74).

Sylvia's lies about Tietjens are designed to discredit him. Early in the novel, they leave him literally so, and his bank refuses to honour his cheques (pp. 161, 182-3, 194, 202). Much is made of the relationship between credit and discredit. Without social and financial credit, the individual cannot function within society. Society itself is being transformed through the processes of lying; members of the old ruling class (land-owners such as Tietjens) are being displaced by lower-middle-class people such as Macmaster who gain power by fraud. Macmaster, for example, is awarded a knighthood for his war work: a set of bogus statistics designed to prove that the French have barely suffered during the war. He has not even faked the figures himself, but has stolen the calculations from Tietjens.

Tietjens formulates the statistics as an intellectual exercise, but they will have a profound effect on many people's lives. The aim of the statistics is to prevent reinforcements being sent, and to delay the introduction of a single command. Tietjens explains the reasoning to Valentine, the woman everyone (at this stage, wrongly) believes to be his mistress:

They had wanted to rub into our allies that their losses by devastation had been nothing to write home about [. . .] Well, if you took just the bricks and mortar of the devastated districts, you could prove that the loss in bricks, tiles, woodwork and the rest didn't – and the figures with a little manipulation would prove it! – amount to more than a normal year's dilapidations spread over the whole country in peace time . . . House repairs in a normal year had cost several million sterling. The enemy had only destroyed just about so many million sterling in bricks and mortar. And what was a mere year's dilapidations in house property! You just neglected to do them and did them next year.

So, if you ignored the lost harvests of three years, the lost industrial output of the richest industrial region of the country, the smashed machinery, the barked fruit trees [etc. . . .] – and the loss of life! – we could go to our allies and say:

'All your yappings about losses are the merest bulls. You can perfectly well afford to reinforce the weak places of your own lines. We intend to send our new troops to the Near East, where lies our true interest!' And, though they might sooner or later point out the fallacy, you would by so much have put off the abhorrent expedient of a single command. (p. 253)

When Valentine wonders if it isn't dangerous to tell Macmaster these ideas, Tietjens emphatically defends his friend: 'Oh, no, no. No! You don't know what a good soul little Vinnie is. [. . .] He'd as soon think of picking my pocket as of picking my brains. The soul of honour!' (p. 253) As it turns out, Macmaster picks his pocket as well as his brains, and is rewarded for his corruption while Tietjens is further discredited. Yet Tietjens is not simply a helpless victim; here, as elsewhere, the distinction between innocence and guilt, honour and dishonour becomes blurred. After all, it was Tietjens who calculated the bogus statistics; does he bear no responsibility for their consequences? The novel is aware of precisely this question, and deliberately makes it impossible to

untangle the lines of responsibility; at the same time, it demonstrates repeatedly that the texts and stories people produce – rumours, lies, statistics – are integral to the war, and can affect the lives and deaths of large numbers of people.

*Parade's End* appeared in a period in which several key propaganda stories were exposed as inventions, and it expresses some of the anxieties they aroused. What does 'democracy' mean if you do not have reliable information upon which to base your judgements, if the state in which you are now a democratic citizen has been systematically telling you lies? Ford wrote in his preface to *A Man Could Stand Up* that he hoped that war could be prevented in the future;<sup>30</sup> but how can this be achieved if propaganda and censorship make one's knowledge of the war so imperfect? The novel suggests that even the most privileged of individuals can be seriously damaged by lies and rumours.

When Tietjens returns from the war his affair with Valentine can begin, but their first opportunity to sleep together is thwarted by Sylvia, who turns up to announce she is to have an operation for cancer. Sylvia is '*a maitresse femme*' who knows how to choose a 'good lie' – like a successful propagandist (p. 776). But lying can harm the liar, too, and towards the end of *The Last Post*, Mark Tietjens reflects that inventing 'that sort of sex-cruelty stuff' leaves your mind 'a little affected'. People 'who invent gossip frequently' end up going 'dotty'. Christopher is a saint, thinks Mark, and providence 'invents retributions of an ingenious kind against those who libel saints' (pp. 727-8). Elsewhere he is likened to Christ (p. 379) – an image which was particularly freighted as a result of the circulation (and later exposure) of stories about crucified soldiers. Tietjens is often compared to a saint or a martyr, much to Sylvia's irritation. He is even likened to the most famous military martyr of the previous generation, General Campion remarks:

'A regular . . . what's is name? A regular Dreyfus!'

'Did you think Dreyfus was guilty?', Tietjens asked.

'Hang it,' the General said, 'he was worse than guilty – the sort of fellow you couldn't believe in and yet couldn't

prove anything against. The curse of the world [. . .] fellows like that *unsettle* society. You don't know where you are. You can't judge. They make you uncomfortable'. (p. 75)

Here, as elsewhere, the General is satirized for his ignorant prejudice. Yet Dreyfus really was a martyr – an innocent man vilified and imprisoned for five years on Devil's Island for crimes he never committed. The Dreyfus case, it is often argued, created profound divisions in French society and created a new wave of anti-Semitism in the late nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> *Parade's End* takes up this cultural memory and shifts the idea of the victim away from the figure of the persecuted Jew towards an English tory gentleman struggling for Anglican sainthood. Here, too, the novel is hard to pin down. Tietjens has a number of relationships with Jewish men; like Scots, the Jews are cast as duplicitous aliens within English society – social inferiors who will use an honourable Englishman to help them rise, only to betray and discredit their patron. These 'inferior' men (Macmaster, Ruggles, Levin, Schatzweiler) are frequently represented as feminized, hysterical, and deceitful. On the one hand the book claims the moral ground occupied by the traduced Jew Dreyfus; on the other it casts the Jew – like the femme fatale – as a source of damage and betrayal.<sup>32</sup>

*Parade's End* is often read as a nostalgic study of the disappearance of the old, pre-war England Tietjens supposedly represents. But it might be more useful to think about this as a cultural fantasy, and to ask how the book takes up other cultural anxieties of the 1920s, including the re-emergence of anti-Semitism. Its relationship to anti-Semitism is, characteristically, highly ambivalent, both mobilizing and mocking its ideas, and perhaps alludes to Ford's own experience as the (non-Jewish) butt of some bizarre anti-Semitic attacks. In 1916, for example, *The New Witness* published a hostile review of *Zeppelin Nights*, a book co-written by Ford and Violet Hunt. 'It is generally supposed that Mr. Hueffer [Ford] is not exactly of pure European extraction', wrote the reviewer, 'and this book tends to confirm such impression'.

She went on to accuse Ford of 'abjection', referring enigmatically to 'the foreign quarters of Whitechapel – and by "foreign" I mean those parts which are inhabited by non-Europeans'. This set off an anti-Semitic debate in the letters page, starting with J. M. Barrie's claim that, while *Zeppelin Nights* was a bad book, 'That is no reason why you should go out of your way to insult Mr. Hueffer by calling him a Jew and a coward'.<sup>33</sup> Later, in 1926, a review of *No More Parades* called it 'not a thoroughly English book', likening it to the work of 'one of those aliens in the British Empire, Celt or Semite, who in their souls resent what England stands for'.<sup>34</sup> The attacks are absurd, hysterical, weirdly entertaining as well as potentially harmful; all these possibilities are present in *Parade's End*, too. It is not Tietjens, however, but the 'womanish' men (the Scots and Jews) and Sylvia, the gossiping woman, who are finally removed from the world of the text. Perhaps that is why some readers consider the fourth novel unsatisfying: the rumours, lies, and sexual cruelty have disappeared.<sup>35</sup>

Towards the end of *Some Do Not*, Valentine's mother, Mrs Wannop, is approached by 'one of the more excitable Sunday papers to write a series of articles on extravagant matters connected with the hostilities' (p. 269) – in other words, to write propaganda. It is easy work, and well paid. The subjects proposed are 'war babies' and 'the fact that the Germans were reduced to eating their own corpses'. Valentine Wannop is a pacifist, yet oddly seems to have no ethical objection to her mother writing propaganda. The morality of the issue is raised by Tietjens, for whom the topics are 'below the treatment of any decent pen'. Furthermore, the stories are not true: 'The illegitimacy rate, he had said, had shown very little increase; the French-derived German word "*cadaver*" meant bodies of horses or cattle; *leichnam* being the German for the word "corpse". He had practically refused to have anything to do with the affair' (p. 269).

His objection to the 'war babies' story seems clear enough – they don't exist, therefore it would be dishonest to write about them. The second matter is less straightforward. The question of the German word for 'corpse' had been a matter

of debate in 1917, when it was falsely reported in the newspapers (and later presented in a government pamphlet) that the Germans were converting battlefield corpses into oil, fertilizer, and animal food (the use varied from one report to the next). Ponsonby called this 'one of the most revolting lies invented during the war' (p. 102), and it generated intense interest. There were several reports and letters about the 'corpse factory' in *The Times* during April 1917; the matter was also raised in parliament, and an article was published in *The Lancet* as to the technical aspects of utilizing human corpses.<sup>36</sup> Much of the debate focused on whether the word *Kadaver* referred to human or animal bodies.<sup>37</sup> In *Disenchantment* (1922), C. E. Montague cites the story as evidence that you 'can't believe a word you read' in the newspapers.<sup>38</sup> It was not until 1925 (the year after *Some Do Not* was published) that the story was officially exposed as a lie; even then, a number of different stories circulated about the exact nature of the fraud.<sup>39</sup> In *Some Do Not*, the 'excitable paper' attempts to exaggerate the story even further, into cannibalism. (A variation on this story appears in Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* in which the German soldiers are accused of eating Belgian babies. The narrator calls the authors of such propaganda 'the real culprits' of the war.<sup>40</sup>)

In the event, Mrs Wannop can drop the atrocity story when she is asked to write propaganda for a respectable journal instead (p. 269). The ethics of writing propaganda are not confronted here, nor anywhere else in the novel. Even its most moral figures (Valentine, Mrs Wannop) find themselves contributing to the propaganda machine without, it seems, compromising their integrity. Yet, structurally, *Parade's End* is troubled by precisely this issue. It worries at the idea that stories – both true and false – can have a material effect in the world, and can cause serious damage. On the other hand, lies can be comforting. In the final paragraphs of the novel, Tietjens's brother Mark breaks his long silence to speak kindly to Valentine as he dies. Valentine tells the doctor Mark has spoken, but asks him not to tell Mark's wife, Marie-Léonie. 'She would have liked to have his last words', says Valentine, 'But she did not need them as much as I' (p. 836).

*Parade's End's* concern with propaganda is not simply a critique of its practices. Ford goes beyond Ponsonby or Cooper Willis in being more conscious of the pleasures involved in the circulation of outrageous stories. In some ways the manufacture of propaganda – especially atrocity stories – was simply an extension of the sensational journalism of the nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Some stories were deemed too obscene to publish and were circulated as rumour or folk myth. As Trevor Wilson points out, many of these stories involved 'sexual-sadistic fantasies' which entered public discourse, especially among middle-class people, 'under the guise of patriotic warnings'. Wilson speculates that this kind of rumour provided a strong *frisson* of enjoyment as well as horror or disgust.<sup>42</sup> Harold Lasswell's influential study, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (1927), makes the point more strongly:

Stress can always be laid [in propaganda] upon the wounding of women, children, old people, priests and nuns, and upon sexual enormities [. . .]. These stories yield a crop of indignation against the fiendish perpetrators of these dark deeds, and satisfy certain powerful, hidden impulses. A young woman, ravished by the enemy, yields secret satisfaction to a host of vicarious ravishers on the other side of the border. Hence, perhaps, the popularity and ubiquity of such stories. (p. 82)

Lasswell's characterization of entire nations as would-be rapists is both startling and facile, and owes something to popular misunderstandings of psychoanalysis. Yet it identifies, however clumsily, the element of sexual fantasy at work in much atrocity propaganda – what H. D. Chalmers described in 1914 as 'sensational outrages which please the public'.<sup>43</sup>

After the war, many writers were concerned that citizens had been treated like children by the state, the newspapers, and other institutions. As people struggled to recover from the mental and physical suffering of the war, this realization produced a good deal of bitterness. There were serious political reasons for objecting to institutional lying, but the language of outrage and indignation which appears in a number of

studies of propaganda suggests that something else is going on in these writings. Terms such as *defilement*, *degradation*, *contamination*, *desecrated*, *polluted*, *germs of hate*, *poison*, *evil*, and *hysteria* appear in many such analyses, uncannily repeating some of the outraged language of the propaganda itself, drawing on metaphors of disease, dirt, and sexual depravity. Sometimes it imitates the methods of propagation – repeating hearsay, retelling unverified rumours, citing incomplete sources – and can even exhibit a kind of relish in the horrible material.

In *The Propaganda Menace* (1933), for example, Frederick Lumley quotes material drawn third-hand from other sources about a French firm which supposedly manufactured atrocity photographs:

Its principal work consisted in making photographs and cuts of wooden figures with cut-off hands, torn-out tongues, gouged-out eyes, crushed skulls and brains laid bare. The pictures thus made were sent as unassailable evidence of German atrocities to all parts of the globe, where they did not fail to produce the desired effect. In the same rooms fictitious photographs were made of bombarded French and Belgian churches, violated graves and monuments and scenes of ruins and desolation. The staging and painting of those scenes were done by the best scene-painters of the Paris Grand Opera.<sup>44</sup>

It seems remarkable that anyone should need to forge such scenes of devastation, but propaganda frequently preferred fakes. Real mutilated bodies were not hard to come by, either, though these were often unsuitable for propaganda. Lumley does not comment on this incongruity, nor on the astonishing name of the institution involved: the House of Propaganda and Prostitution. He is as unsuspecting of the story and its sources as earlier readers had been of the propaganda itself. James Morgan Read later argued that the original anonymous source, *Behind the Scenes of French Journalism*, was unconfirmed by any other evidence.<sup>45</sup> Even a study as careful as Ponsonby's, according to Read, contains errors of fact; inaccurate stories continued to circulate long after the war had ended.<sup>46</sup>

If the atrocity propaganda and its critiques are ambivalent, unsettling, and sometimes duplicitous forms of writing, what might this also tell us about *Parade's End*? An incident from the life of another young man who went to the Great War is useful here. In 1907, the Rat Man went into analysis with Freud. Shortly before this, he had been on military manoeuvres, where he heard a terrible story. A captain who was fond of cruelty said that 'he had read of a specially horrible punishment used in the East'. The Rat Man finds it very difficult to retell the story to Freud. After many hesitations, he manages to indicate that 'a criminal was tied up [. . .] a pot was turned upside down on his buttocks . . . some rats were put into it . . . and they [. . .] bored their way in . . .'. As he speaks, the Rat Man shows 'every sign of horror and resistance', says Freud; at the most important moments of his story, his face 'took on a very strange, composite expression. I could only interpret it as one of *horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware*'.<sup>47</sup> The rat story is a characteristic piece of atrocity propaganda. Its source is vague and it is located somewhere loosely designated 'the East' at an unspecified time. Like the Rat Man's story, as analysed by Freud, both the propaganda of the Great War and some of the criticism which followed seem to articulate a *horror at pleasure of its own* of which the writing itself is unaware. This may be a further reason why atrocity stories were so fascinating, and so disturbing, and why they received so much attention.

Bogus atrocity stories displaced the suffering of millions of real bodies. Even more troubling, however, is the realization, however partial, that to criticize propaganda requires the repudiation of a fantasmatic pleasure which dare not speak its name (fantasies about mutilation, sexual sadism, and so forth). Criticism of the war reveals but also mobilizes some of the obscene enjoyment which drives the war's psychic economy. *Parade's End* enacts this contradiction not only by exposing the damage done by rumours, lies, and sensational stories, but also because it is covertly interested in the pleasures they generate. It both enjoys and repudiates the idea of pleasurable representations of war – what Gringoire calls the 'most horrible of crimes' and Sylvia likens to pornography,

repeated 'with the lust of men telling dirty stories in smoking rooms' (pp. 439). Often praised as one of the great critiques of the war, *Parade's End* not simply or self-evidently an anti-war novel. It is powerful for the same reason that it is disturbing, expressing anxiety at a pleasure of its own of which it is only partially aware.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *No Enemy*, (1929; New York, 1984), pp. 108-10.

<sup>2</sup> James Read, *Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919*, (1941; New York, 1972), p. 1; Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker from the Crimea to Vietnam*, (1975), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Mizener, *The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford*, (1971); Alan Judd, *Ford Madox Ford*, (1991); Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, 2 vols., (Oxford, 1996); Thomas Moser, *The Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford*, (Princeton, 1980). Ford wrote to Bowen that Rebecca West had called him 'the biggest liar in New York', 4 Dec. 1926, *The Correspondence of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen*, ed. Sondra Stang and Karen Cochran, (Bloomington, Indiana, 1993), p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> Ford, *It Was the Nightingale*, (1933; New York, 1984), p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> 2 May 1919, *The Correspondence of Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen*, p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, (1927), p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> M. L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War*, (1982), p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> 'Torture of a Canadian Officer', *The Times*, 10 May 1915, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> 'The Crucifixion of a Canadian: Insensate Act of Hate', *The Times*, 15 May 1915, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Read argues that although soldiers were less likely than civilians to believe propaganda stories, there were said to be cases of real atrocities committed in reprisals for invented ones. *Atrocity Propaganda*, pp. 6-7, 52. However, Robert Graves claims that the soldiers he knew believed neither the original story, nor the accounts of reprisals. *Goodbye to All That*, (1929; rev. edn 1957; Harmondsworth, 1988), p. 154.

<sup>11</sup> The Bryce Report cites a number of these stories, all of them hearsay. No evidence could be found for any of them. See Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, pp. 40-1; Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda 1914-18 and After*, (1989), pp. 27-8; Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time*, (1928), pp. 91-3.

<sup>12</sup> Parfitt, *Fiction of the First World War*, (1988), pp. 25-30.

<sup>13</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*, pp. 82-3. Lasswell comments that 'all atrocity stories show a family resemblance', though they will also change according to the technology of the time.

<sup>14</sup> Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, p. 146.

<sup>15</sup> Irene Cooper Willis, *England's Holy War: A Study of English Liberal Idealism During the Great War*, (New York, 1928), p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> J. H. Morgan, *German Atrocities: An Official Investigation*, (1916), pp. 61-2. This book was reprinted six times in 1916. See also Joseph Bédier, *German Atrocities from German Evidence*, trans. Bernhard Harrison, (Paris, 1915).

<sup>17</sup> Well-known studies include Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique*; Cooper Willis, *England's Holy War*; Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time*; George Sylvester Viereck, *Spreading Germs of Hate*, (1931); Frederick Lumley, *The Propaganda Menace*, (New York, 1933); J. D. Squires, *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States*, (Cambridge MA, 1935). Some propaganda works themselves included a discussion of lies in propaganda, such as Edwyn Bevan, 'The Truth about Lies', *Nineteenth Century*, 80 (September 1916), pp. 612-22; Augustin Hamon, 'Terrorism and Untruth', in *Lessons of the World-War*, trans. Bernard Miall, (1918).

<sup>18</sup> Mariel Grant, *Propaganda and the Role of the State in Inter-War Britain*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 11-13.

<sup>19</sup> Cooper Willis, preface (1927), *England's Holy War*, pp. xix-xx. The book examines responses (including propaganda) to the war in the Liberal press and comprises material first published in pamphlet form, 1919-21.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time*, pp. 13, 18. According to Philip Taylor, Ponsonby's book was a best-seller. *Munitions of the Mind*, rev. edn., (Manchester, 1995), p. 311.

<sup>21</sup> Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time*, p. 13. This argument is developed in Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*. Ponsonby's own work has been appropriated by a more recent form of propaganda. In the early 1980s, *Falsehood in War-Time* was republished by the 'Institute for Historical Review', with an anonymous preface denying the truth of the nazi holocaust.

<sup>22</sup> Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 141.

<sup>23</sup> Grant, *Propaganda*, pp. 12, 15. This led to debates about education. Education was seen as necessary to arm people against propaganda, yet 'the growth of literacy had made it much easier to spread misinformation'.

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Thoughts for the Time on War and Death' (1915), *Civilization, Society and Religion*, (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 62-3.

<sup>25</sup> Saunders, *Ford*, vol. 2, p. 219.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed discussion of writers' propaganda activities, see Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, ch. 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Between St. Dennis and St. George*, (1915), pp. 227, 282.

<sup>28</sup> Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, p. 151.

<sup>29</sup> Ford, *Parade's End*, (1924-28; Harmondsworth, 1982), pp. 196, 166.

<sup>30</sup> Ford, preface to *A Man Could Stand Up*, (1926).

<sup>31</sup> See for example Eric Cahm, *The Dreyfus Affair in French Society and Politics*, (1996); Guy Chapman, *The Dreyfus Trials*, (1972).

<sup>32</sup> On representations of Jews in this period, see Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875-1945*, (Cambridge, 1993); Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb, eds., *The Jew in the Text: Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, (1995).

<sup>33</sup> 'J. K. Prothero' [Ada Elizabeth Jones], 'Mr. Hueffer and his Cellar Garnis', *New Witness*, 6 January 1916, p. 293; 'J. M.'

[J. M. Barrie], letter, *The New Witness*, 13 January 1916, p. 321; rpt. in F. MacShane (ed.), *Ford Madox Ford: The Critical Heritage*, (1972), pp. 122-5. The original reviewer had not mentioned Jews, but her response to Barrie confirms that this is what she meant. 'J. K. Prothero', letter, *The New Witness*, 20 January 1916, p. 352.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Colum, 'New Worlds and Old', *Saturday Review of Literature*, 30 January 1926, p. 523; rpt. in MacShane (ed.), *Critical Heritage*, p. 94.

<sup>35</sup> Whether *The Last Post* belongs in *Parade's End* has been a matter of some debate; see Saunders, *Ford*, vol. 2, pp. 249, 253-4.

<sup>36</sup> *The Lancet*, 21 April 1917, p. 635. Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time*, pp. 103-13; see also *The Times*, 4 November 1925, p. 16; 'Kadaver', *The Nation*, 38, (1925), pp. 171-2; Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, pp. 38-41; Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 2nd edn, (Basingstoke, 1991), pp. 252-3.

<sup>37</sup> 'The "Kadaver" Controversy', *The Nation*, (19 May 1917), p. 168; 'Kadaver', *The Nation*, (26 May 1917), p. 198.

<sup>38</sup> Montague, *Disenchantment*, (1922), p. 94.

<sup>39</sup> This story, too, had long-term consequences; British newspapers would not print early reports of nazi gas chambers because they believed them to be another version of the 'corpse-conversion factory'. Marwick, *The Deluge*, p. 253.

<sup>40</sup> *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. A. W. Wheen, (1929; 1990), p. 136.

<sup>41</sup> Cooper Willis, *England's Holy War*, p. xvi.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, *Myriad Faces of War*, pp. 739-40, 185-90.

<sup>43</sup> Chalmers, letter to Lord Bryce, December 1914, quoted in Wilson, *Myriad Faces*, 185. Chalmers was a barrister who worked with the Bryce Committee.

<sup>44</sup> Lumley, *Propaganda Menace*, p. 230; Lumley's notes refer to *Behind the Scenes of French Journalism*, (details not cited), as quoted in *The Progressive*, 1 January 1926.

<sup>45</sup> Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Read, *Atrocity Propaganda*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>47</sup> Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis', (1909), *Case Histories II*, trans. Angela Richards, (1991), pp. 47-8.