SUMITRA MUKERJI -- PAPER ON F. M. FORD's *The Good Soldier* -- 1990

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SUMITRA MUKERJI
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Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier begins with the sentence: "This is the saddest story I have ever heard."[1] In my opinion, this single sentence, placed as it is at the very beginning of the text to serve as a kind of key, an entry into the narrative, and resorted to at strategic points in the course of narration whenever the narrator finds himself up against a closed door, as it were – provides a paradigm for what Paul Ricoeur has described as the problem of mediation in the mimetic function of narrative. Ricoeur, having established that narrative as mimesis is not only the sequence of visible action or plot (the narrow Aristotelian perception of mimesis), but is also the intelligibility of plot in the narrative, and also the *reception* of this intelligibility, of understanding by the reader of the narrative, stresses that "mimesis draws its intelligibility from its faculty of mediation, which is to conduct us from the one side of the text to the other,

transfiguring the one side into the other through its power of configuration." Since for Ricoeur mimesis is characterised by its mediating function, "what is at stake … is the concrete process by which the textual configuration mediates between the prefiguration of the practical field and its refiguration through the reception of the work."[2] This concrete process of textual configuration brings into play the problem of the relation between time and narrative, and, according to Ricoeur, the key to this problem is the dynamic of emplotment rather than the plot or even the semiotics of the literary text alone.

The concept of mediation that Ricoeur introduces in *Time and Narrative* (I have presented his discussion in a very condensed and simplified form here), marking as it does the *dialectical* processes of mediation at work when a narrative is read, seems to me particularly seminal to a reading of a text like *The Good Soldier*. For, in this novel, the intra-textual elements are so deviously and intricately constructed to control a reader's response, that the reception of this novel cannot be passive. The text itself forces the reader to bring into operation specific kinds of *interpretative strategies* in order to approach its multiple layers of 'meaning'; and this enforced *interpretation* brought into play in the course of reading (as against the evaluation that ensues after a text has been 'consumed') becomes, in turn, the mediation that ultimately determines the meaning that may be received from this text.

In this paper I want to argue that the mediation effected by the 'dynamic of emplotment' and the 'concrete process of textual configuration' in *The Good Soldier*, far from making the text more accessible (or, in Ricoeur's words, conducting us from one side of the text to the other), in effect makes the text virtually impenetrable and creates a problematic for interpretation itself.

My focus will therefore be not on textual configuration alone but also on the type of interpretation this configuration explicitly calls for. I propose to show that by first of all constructing a narrator for the story, who then makes all too obvious to the reader his deliberate fracturing of the narrative and emphasises his own unreliability, Ford manages to push the actual contents of the story to a relatively background position and draws the reader's attention to the narrator and his textual functions. Given the kind of narrator we are given, *his* voice – with all its peculiarities of tone, emphases, and concerns – assumes paramount importance in the communication of the story he tells. I maintain that no reader can penetrate to the actual discourse of the narrative in *The Good Soldier* without first encountering this filter of the narrator's voice; and this proves to be so overwhelming in its presence that only by deliberately *circumventing* it can one reach the content of the book. But here lies the first problematic for interpretation: If the narrator's voice itself constitutes to an overwhelming extent the 'content' of the book, then can an interpretation of the text without taking into account its controlling voice be possible?

The answer seems to be, no. Given the nature of the narrator's voice, the control it exercises not only over its representation of events but over the reader's response, it is to a degree inevitable that the primary interpretive move would be to analyze this voice. And since analysis in this case gets confronted with delusion, self-pity, illogic, contradictory evasiveness and assertion, the tendency is to brand the voice of the narrator as a "hysterical" voice and, hence, to psychoanalyze the narrator himself.

This brings us to the major problem which I believe interpretive mediation creates in relation to the text. For what does classic psychoanalytic criticism do but construe the story itself as a displaced Oedipal fantasy on the part of the narrator and reify the various events of the story into reproductions of some archetypal "primal scene"?[3] I am not denying that *The Good Soldier* has numerous details within its "story" that are psychoanalysable; it does. And we can go so far as to state that in some respects this story, as a story, provides a perfect "case-study" for psychoanalysis. However, what I am stressing is that, in the first place, the text as a whole is not just a story; the story is only a part of the entire book and also only one aspect of the *narrative*. Second, the text as a whole and its various elements – the narrator, the narrator's voice, the story he tells, the discrepancies within this story – are all constructions. They are in fact constructions within constructions and the only way a classic psychoanalytic reading of *The Good Soldier* can hold together is if it also psychoanalyses the author of these constructions (i.e., Ford) – and the stock objections to the feasibility of such an enterprise are only too obvious. For psychoanalysing the author would involve questions of intentionality, of motivation, of unconscious desire, and so forth, and none of these could be textually verifiable. They could only be assumed and superimposed upon the text and the author.

At the same time, since the text itself raises questions for interpretive mediation, the mediation of psychoanalysis cannot be discounted. My objections in this regard are therefore not directed against psychoanalytic investigation per se, but against the particular approach deriving from traditional applied psychoanalysis which Elizabeth Wright describes as "the classic psychoanalytic reading" the hallmarks of which are as follows:

Firstly, the work of literature is seen as analogous to fantasy and treated as a symptom of a particular writer, leading to the psychoanalysis of the author.

Secondly, the literary character is treated as if he/she were a living being within the fantasy, with a complex of his/her own.

Then, Freud's interpretation of symbols is applied to language wholesale, as if it were a given and rigid code.

As Wright points out, both the second and third presupposition "implicitly relate back to the author's psyche, for they rest on the assumption that the purpose of the work of art is the same as that which psychoanalysis had taken to be the purpose of the dream: the secret gratification of an infantile and forbidden wish, lodged in the unconscious" (Wright 1986, p. 146).[4]

But there is an even more basic assumption in classic psychoanalytic criticism that lies under the one about purposiveness: the work of art is as often *equated* with the desire of the author's unconscious and this unconscious and the manifest work are often treated as homologous.

As mentioned, the internal contradictions within this approach make themselves apparent and undercut the validity of the approach as a whole. But what are the implications of a classic psychoanalytic reading of *The Good Soldier* in terms of mediation? Such a reading, working with the kind of ready-made assumptions that Freudian theory (itself grounded on an apporia of anagogical reasoning)[5] provides, can only interpret the narrative voice as a hysterical voice and the mimetic action of the narrative as a displaced Oedipal fantasy by means of an *extra-textual* and superimposed reading. It therefore does not explain, or it overlooks, the *process* by which

such readings are *deliberately*, a little too easily, brought into play in this text. Further, by applying psychoanalytic concepts as models, arbitrarily and from the outside, to features within the narrative-as-story, this classic approach reads these features as phenomenological 'truths'. What effectively happens in the process is that the constructed text is reified as psychic reality, interpretation is relinquished to the positivistic affirmation of an unilateral meaning in the 'world' of the text, and the problem of *drawing* out meaning in communication with the text, thus satisfactorily resolved. The text remains in effect undisturbed by mediation, since this mediation has had very little to do with the actual contents of the text. It *contains* its discourse, unchallenged.

There is, of course, a different approach in psychoanalytical criticism (what Elizabeth Wright calls its "second phase")[6] which moves away from obsessive preoccupation with the author's relation to the text and takes up the question of what goes on between the reader and the text. This would be the kind of approach followed by Norman Holland who, while sharing the classical view of literary texts as *concealments*, coded systems which disguise unconscious wishes and fears, goes beyond the limitations of this view and sees the text as the scene of a collusion between author and reader, upon which he founds an aesthetics of response. For Holland, what draws us as readers to a text is the secret expression of what we desire to hear, manifest in the *form* of the text itself.

There is an obvious problem with this theory in that it does not sufficiently take into account the *active* role of interpretation and casts the reader as a fairly passive one. Possibly in an attempt to redress this problem, Holland in his later writings comes up with the theory that

reading is itself primarily a recreation of identity and suggests that whatever organizational principles might be at work in a text are projected onto the text by the reader and that the reader's expectations and defensive strategies "transform" meaning in a text. In other words, the text's meaning or significance is dependent on the reader's identity.[7] The trouble with Holland's later approach is similar to the first: once again he fails to take into account the factor of mediation and the control upon the reader's response exercised by the strategies of the text itself. Hence, my point is that even a relatively sophisticated psychoanalytical approach like Holland's cannot really come to grips with the multiple processes at work between author, text, and reader in the case of *The Good Soldier*. In the first place because this novel so blatantly constructs a *lack* of identity for its narrator that it resists an "identity-theme".

Perhaps the only kind of psychoanalysis that can be effectively brought to work upon The Good Soldier would be the structuralist and post-structuralist psychoanalytic approach of Lacan and his followers. Since the Lacanian perspective concerns itself with deconstructing *interpretation* as much as the text being interpreted, and since it is primarily concerned with language and how language constructs "reality", it would in fact be one of the most effective methods by which to penetrate the text of Ford's novel. I use the word "penetrate" deliberately; for while granted that a Lacanian reading might effectively deconstruct the "concrete process of textual configuration" and expose both the readerly and writerly mediations referred to so far, it would also subsume the discourses of the text under the general 'law of the Father', and relegate all meaning once again to Oedipus (to use Deleuze and Guattari's term),[8] suppressing other interpretations with the power of the phallus!

I have described the problematics involved in potential psychoanalytic readings of *The Good Soldier* in order to highlight one aspect of the dialectic of mediation. I now want to turn to the other aspect, that is, the *intra-textual* processes that affect its reception.

Structurally as well as thematically, *The Good Soldier* is a divided text. Divided not because of the seemingly hysterical narrative it offers but because it (a) contains a divided discourse, and (b) divides the reader's response to it. For, interestingly, this novel *simultaneously* denies positivistic claims to Truth and a logocentric, conservative discourse through its narrative structure and method, and asserts such claims through the thematic configuration of value which the *substance* of the narrator's speech ultimately takes up. This division is repeated in the quality of Dowell's voice and utterance and the effect it has upon the reader (listener). He simultaneously draws us into intimacy, confidence, sympathetic listening *and* distances us – from himself, from the other characters in the novel, and from our capacity to glean what is "real" and what is fabricated in his narration. As I said earlier, how can view independently? Dowell is our filter to the story.

Claire Kahanee has pointed out the "seductive" quality in the narrator's voice and the abundance of images and references in *The Good Soldier* which signify the power of speech.[9] The very opening sentence signifies that it is this power that provides the impulse of the entire narrative. In the first few pages of the novel the narrator takes great pains to establish that he has been so moved by the story he has "heard," and heard moreover from different sources (the strength of numbers attesting to the validity of his 'data collection' and documentary evidence, as it were), that he must "repeat" it. The 'value' of retelling is thus being stressed, highlighting in

the process the 'significance' of the story itself and the cathartic value the act of retelling will have. Ford himself foregrounds this element in his dedicatory preface: he heard it from Edward Ashburnham himself.[10] The narrator, Dowell, reinforces this 'value' periodically throughout the narrative (lest the reader forget its significance). But this is not all. The reader is constantly being asked to participate as confidante; he/she must engage in the narrator's intimacy, listen to him, even identify with him and his responses. This is all too clearly conveyed by this early passage:

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> I don't know how it is best to put this thing down – whether it would be better to try and tell the story from the beginning, as if it were a story; or whether to tell it from this distance of time, as it reached me from the lips of Leonora or from those of Edward himself.[11] (*The Good Soldier*, p. 14)

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The rhetoric is transparent here. The narrator doesn't "know," so the reader must know. And in the event Dowell tells the story both ways, confusing the distinction between its fictive and its authentic nature, and either way the reader "knows" it is best. Then,

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> So I shall just imagine myself for a fortnight or so at one side of the fireplace of a country cottage, with a sympathetic soul opposite me. And I shall go on talking, in a low voice while the sea sounds in the distance.… From time to time we shall get up and go to the door and look out at the great moon…. And then we shall come back to the fireside, with just the touch of a sigh because we are not gay.… [12] (*The Good Soldier*, p. 15)

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The reader's function has been assigned: he/she is to play the "sympathetic soul."

It is indeed tempting to read this scene and in fact the whole construction of the narrative as the setting of the 'talking cure'. A troublesome question would then arise, however: Who is the analyst and who the analysand in this situation? The narrator is definitely mediating the reader's response to him, here and elsewhere when he frequently talks about his own "silent" suffering, his being duped by all the people around him, his breakdown when Florence commits suicide. After he narrates this event he says, "I was in a state just simply cataleptic."[13] He doesn't know what is going on around him. Especially unaware and lost at this point ("I was the walking dead", p. 121), he is in general singularly unseeing and unknowing, a frail bark being tossed in the stormy currents of other people's passionate lives. Or so he would have us believe. And if he is so helpless, so defenceless because so gullible and easily deceived, if he lacks both worldly knowledge and self-knowledge, then the *reader* must help him see, must reassure him, must work therapy on him by analysing him.

Indeed, this narrator claims to be so out of touch with the reality around him, he doesn't even have control over his own consciousness or his own utterance! Even while he is describing his wife lying dead on her bed with an empty phial in her hand (this is at the end of Part II of the novel), he claims that he doesn't know that his wife committed suicide. Someone else has to tell him that. The "fact" of Florence's suicide is apparent to everyone else but not to her husband. Likewise, the narrator begins Part III by suddenly, out of the blue, introducing the notion of his marrying "the girl" (interestingly, Nancy is never named at this point, as if to reinforce the lack of personal connection the narrator has with his own desire), and then apparently accounts for

this causal discrepancy by claiming to be as surprised by the strange, mystical, appearance of this new element in his narrative as the reader may be.

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> Now that is to me a very amazing thing – amazing for the light of possibilities that it casts into the human heart. For I had never had the slightest conscious idea of marrying the girl; I never had the slightest idea even of caring for her. I must have talked in an odd way, as people do who are recovering from an anaesthetic. It is as if one had a dual personality, the one I being entirely unconscious of the other. I had thought nothing; I had said such an extraordinary thing.
>
> I don't know that analysis of my own psychology matters at all to this story…. But that odd remark of mine had a strong influence upon what came after. (*The Good Soldier*, p. 115)

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So there we have it. Within the text itself, in the narrator's own words, comes the call for psychoanalytic interpretation. By deliberately fracturing his narrative, by drawing attention to aporia in the causal relations between the events of the narrative and the narration itself, Dowell has effectively projected himself as neurotic, unbalanced, hysterical, infantile, what you will. And psychoanalysis wills; how can such an obvious 'case' of repression, verging on the brink of a split personality be resisted? For isn't Dowell making evident here that he is *repressing* his unconscious desire for Nancy, just as earlier in the episode of Florence's suicide he has probably repressed his desire to see her dead, just as later when he attributes admirable "courage and

virility and … physique" (p. 275) to Edward Ashburnham he is *projecting* his unconscious, repressed desire to be like Edward? (Classic psychoanalysis might stop here or it might go on to make the famous leap of 'free association' and see in all this the artistic sublimation of *Ford*'s repressed desires. The 'second phase' reading might go further and include the reader.) And isn't the fact that all these hidden desires are now becoming conscious in Dowell's mind an indication that the 'talking cure' has worked for him, that in the process of speaking to the reader he has become aware of his identity problems? (Lacanians, following the master's injunction to "return to Freud" and be pristine in methodology, might revert to the castration complex and transference.) But since all desire is constituted in and by lack, doesn't Dowell constantly exhibit this lack? Look at his impotent marriage, his inability to assert himself, his desire to identify with Edward. All this signifies the desire for the power of the phallus, a power Dowell lacks. But through transference Dowell is able to displace his desire and lack and project it on to other characters. (The logic of transference would clearly flounder if applied too rigorously to Dowell and the reader.) And ultimately, doesn't Dowell's ambivalent attitude toward the women in *The Good Soldier* represent, on the one hand, a primal male Oedipal fantasy, and, on the other hand, a repressed yearning for the maternal voice? (As current feminist psychoanalysis might argue.)

I want to concede all these points because these constructions are explicitly there in the text – *but as constructions, textural configurations*. At risk of being perverse, we need to break up any cozy one-is-to-one equation between psychoanalytic theory and "the evidence of human psychosexuality" that may be developed as a result of the above correspondences. These correspondences are first of all fictive, and, second, correspondences by virtue or anagogical associations. The narrator has projected himself not so much onto the other characters as onto the

text. And he has highly self-consciously established himself as a victim – not only of Florence, Edward, and Leonora, but also of paranoic delusion and infantile regression. Once we recognise the carefully plotted, fictive nature of his self-projection, many other suppressed yet nonetheless suggestive discourses in the text come to light.

I am trying to show that by setting up a narrator like Dowell in *The Good Soldier*, Ford has created what Robert Jauss terms an "aesthetic of reception" for the reader.[14] This aesthetic is directed both at interpretive response (as I have shown above) and at general reading response during the *immediate* course of reading. As the narrative unfolds and develops, in spite of all the surface stops and starts, the going back and forth in time, and so on, there is one constant factor: We are throughout being asked to respond *emotionally* to the characters and situations within the story. Note, for instance, the over-abundance of references to "the saddest story" (p.1), "the sad affair" (p. 56), "terrible," et cetera (pp. 75, 179, 201, 202). Florence, Leonora, Nancy, Mrs. Maidan, the narrator himself (of course!) are all at some stage or other "poor," "wretched," "in agony," "suffering," and so on. What is involved in our reception of the "saddest story" therefore is our communication with the teller of the story. My reference to the passage in which the narrator creates for himself an 'ideal reader/listener', a "sympathetic soul," shows one way whereby communication is established (to the narrator's convenience, of course).

The other way by which the text communicates with the reader is, paradoxically enough, through the narrator's unreliability. The voice of the unbelievably naïve ingenue that I have described earlier is also the Marlovian voice of "one of us." It is no coincidence that (without psychoanalysis) Dowell's voice often sounds like a replica of Marlow's voice in *Lord Jim* and

Heart of Darkness, with its allusions to the male camaraderie of the smoking room, its postures of disingenuous lack of knowledge, its parading of mental confusion.[15] All of which, as in the case of Conrad's Marlow, successfully establishes (a) a sympathetic response from a non-critical reader, and (b) a response of recognition from the critical reader (who runs the risk of losing critical distance on account of feeling too condescending toward the narrator-character!) Further, this element of unreliability does not really undermine the credibility of the narrator in The Good Soldier because it is made dependant upon his function as 'persona' and constituted by his function as participant – both in terms of his being a 'character' in the "actual events of the story" and in terms of his being a "participating consciousness" in the Jamesian sense.

What the narrator says is therefore subsumed under *how* he says it. And since how he narrates is self-consciously depicted by Dowell as being in turn mediated by his (apparently involuntary) participation in the events he is narrating, this brings into foreground the question of *why* Dowell narrates the way he does. Interestingly, once again the text situates and answers this question for itself:

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> I have, I am aware, told this story in a very rambling way so that it may be difficult for anyone to find his path through what may be a sort of maze. I cannot help it. … 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 may have given, by omitting them, a false impression. I console myself with thinking that this is a real story and that, after all, real stories are probably told best in

the way a person telling a story would tell them. They will then seem most real.[16] (*The Good Soldier*, p. 201)

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Thus speaks a fictive narrator. *The Good Soldier* is really a wonder of a text in the way in which it successfully *resists by containing* any interrogation that might seek to crack its beautiful but opaque surface!

However, as Ricouer points out, "an aesthetic of reception cannot take up the problem of communication without also taking up that of reference."[17] And an analysis of the question "why" cannot be solely based upon Dowell's textual role as narrator because this question inextricably relies upon the *content* of Dowell's narration. When this content and its reference are examined together, we find an extremely suggestive and variegated discourse on the bulwarks of Western liberal bourgeois society of the early twentieth century. And in my opinion, this discourse too, like the rest of the text, is divided. At one level it is highly orthodox and conservative, at another it contains a radical subversive potential. Which way does the text tilt? Neither. I suspect Ford couldn't make up his mind so he ended up suppressing one aspect of his critique of modern Western culture while sustaining the relatively less explosive aspect.

The "saddest story" Dowell retells is supposed to be the story of the "good soldier" but it turns out to be the story of the bad soldier, the bad husband, the bad landlord, the bad [surrogate] father, the bad friend, and the bad Englishman. Leaving the narrator's psychological motivations aside, the heavy-handed Manichean inversion that is made to resound throughout the text (the more Dowell refers to the Ashburnhams as "good people" and to Edward as "decent,"

"respectable," "perfectly likeable," and so on, the more we are shown of the opposite in them) seems to drive at ruthlessly exposing the "pillars of the community" and tearing down the hypocritical facades of the English upper class. Early criticism of this novel records this concern when it talks about Ford's "social and moral satire."[18] The series of adulterous, extramarital relationships (Edward's, Florence's; even Dowell's own extramarital desires) and the murky lies and subterfuges within the two sets of marital relations (Leonora and Edward's and Florence and Dowell's) are designed moreover to reveal the decadence of a particular social class. For both sets of couples are shown to be, superficially at least, fin de siecle, landed, coming from "good old families" – in short, the American and European bourgeois elite. And correspondingly, the lifestyles of "the beautiful and the damned" (to use Scott Fitzgerald's apt phrase) are shown to be frivolous, hypochondriachal, dilletantish, and even corrupt. (Ford's ironical leit-motif of bad hearts and divided hearts evokes a similar preoccupation with the "undivided heart" in E. M. Forster,[19] with a similar moral emphasis.)

The main force of Ford's moral criticism seems to be directed particularly against *Edward*. Leonora, Florence, and Dowell himself, are all represented as being guilty of duplicity and hypocrisy, but their failings are in some way or other accounted for and attributed to their being (each in distinctive ways) products of a certain kind of upbringing and social or familial system. In Leonora's case, especially, her rigid Catholic indoctrination is made responsible for the charades she enacts in her private life, thereby mitigating the 'lie' she insists on maintaining in her marriage. Dowell consistently reminds us that Leonora had "reasons" and also that she "suffered." Her condition is one of plight, of prolonged ceaseless agony, and we are throughout asked to temper our judgement of her by recognising that her complicitous role in Edward's

sexual imbroglios with other women is determined by circumstances beyond her personal control. Leonora is the suffering, patient Grizelda, the 'wronged wife' trapped in a sado-masochistic syndrome. To a lesser extent, a similar pre-determined network of external circumstances envelopes Nancy Rufford's fallibility – she is the tragic, dark-eyed victim of her Catholic convent school regimentation and her 'heredity'. (Ford's affinities with the "naturalistic" novelists – Zola, Crane, Dreiser – become most evident here.) But Edward is presented as intrinsically, fundamentally culpable because he is a "sentimentalist." It is Edward's sentimentality, his inherent *falseness*, that make him indulge his romantic weaknesses, that him such a sham in every aspect of his life, public as well as private. And it is this quality of false romanticization, of hypocritical sentimentality, that seems to constitute for Ford the most inexcusable human failing. The ironic inversion of the "good soldier" gets its force from precisely this "utterly reprehensible" characteristic.

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> Good God, what did they all see in him? [cries the narrator on page 29, after describing Edward's impeccable appearance] – for I swear that was all there was of him, inside and out; though they said he was a good soldier. (p. 29)

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Just as Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* drives through his 'exposure' of Kurtz on the basis that Kurtz was "no more than a voice," implying throughout that narrative that the main problem with corrupt humanity is that appearances belie reality, so here Dowell drives home his criticism by showing the falsity of human appearances. And, as in Conrad, in Ford this is followed by a critique of the "civilizing mission" itself.

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> … All good soldiers are sentimentalists – all good soldiers of that type. Their profession, for one thing, is full of the big words – "courage," "loyalty," "honor," "constancy." (*The Good Soldier*, p. 29)

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Then, systematically, Ford proceeds to show, through his narrator's clause by clause 'unveiling of the truth', how all these high virtues are nothing but a sham. And since Edward, in his designated social functions, is also a country magistrate, a "father to his people" (in his capacity as landlord over tenant farmers), a civil servant of the Raj serving the British Empire (in his capacity as an army officer posted in India), Edward's sentimental posturings in one function spill over and encompass his charade in other functions. That is why I say that it is not only the falsity of good soldiering but the entire liberal civilizing imperialistic mission that seems to be under attack. Further, Edward also has a familiar function, as husband, householder, and guardian (his relation to Nancy), and so when we see him reneging on his 'duties' in this regard we may also locate a subtle indictment of the hypocrisy of Victorian and Edwardian (pun intended!) patriarchy.

And so, the actual *substance* of the narrator's discourse in *The Good Soldier* reveals not only the events of a sordid domestic drama of "deceit, hatred, infidelity, and betrayal,"21 but also a discourse on the institutions of marriage, religion, and government. This discourse is mediated by the critical comments of the narrator, at least in the first half of the narrative, in such a way that the central assumptions and ideologies of each of these institutions seem to be questioned. This is what suggests that the very presence of a narrator like Dowell in the text

could constitute a major *subversive* potential in the text's discourse, because Dowell is so obviously set up as an antithesis to Edward in many ways. Dowell's American-ness (much foregrounded in the text) itself could constitute a subversion of all the hallmarks of 'typical' English snobbery and decadence we are show in the "good people," Leonora and Edward, especially since the connotations of "being an American" are projected to signify a sort of innocence and naivete, and freedom from the rigidities of the British class system. Dowell's impotency could also be read as an antithesis to the 'typical' masculinity of Edward – Dowell is many ways an androgynous figure in the text, lacking a strongly gendered *male* voice, lacking in the investitures of authority and power traditionally associated with patriarchal male supremacy. (These 'lacks' are highlighted in his relationship to Florence, and later to Nancy, and can, I maintain, be interpreted both positively and negatively, the meaning of positive and negative of course depending on the reader's own gendered position.)

However, as mentioned earlier, The Good Soldier is divided even in its actual discourse and what happens ultimately by the end of the narrative is that the potential for subversion suggested above is subtly weakened and, on the contrary, the very ideologies which seemed to have been critiqued earlier, effectively reinforced. It is difficult to locate the exact point within the narrative structure where this twist occurs, but indications of such a turn in Ford's critical viewpoint are there from the beginning. The first indication may be seen in the way in which the force of ideological and political concerns in the novel are glossed over and the dangers of imperialism, the horrors of militant territorial aggression, relegated to secondary importance in view of ostensibly more terrible domestic discord and failure. For instance, in pages 7-12 of the novel, the narrator equates the crack in the façade of the perfect foursome with the catastrophe of

a "sack of a city" and then goes on to say that "the mob may sack Versailles; the Trianon may fall, but surely the minuet – the minuet itself is dancing itself away into the furthest stars…"[22] With this image the "minuet" of the two couples is privileged with illusions of immortality. Of course, the narrator then acknowledges that this is an illusion: "It wasn't a minuet we stepped; it was a prison"[23] – but the lament carries its weight. The narrator goes on to invoke the companionship of the smoking room, and the "warm hearthside,"[24] the "security" of the "four-square house"[25] the two couples represent, and, increasingly in the course of his narration, the "tragedy" of this security having vanished, the solid virtues of "humanity" having been compromised, is highlighted. Hence, even while Dowell may be sardonically commenting on the *absence* of 'real' values and virtues in the marriages, the religion, the family relations and civic governance he describes, the *necessity* and *validity* of these virtues for the sustenance of a 'healthy commonwealth' is nonetheless enforced, precisely on account of absence and the lament which accompanies it.

Thus, in effect the novel's discourse amounts to the following: Leonora and Edward's marriage is a charade not because a marriage of convenience is itself a mockery but because in their case each partner breaks the terms of the contract – Edward by his "sentimental" affairs, Leonora by exploiting Edward's weakness and assuming unwifely dominance in the family setup. Florence's pretensions to "Culture" are ridiculous not because the acquisition of culture with a capital C is itself a middle-class pretension but because *Florence* is a ridiculous, over-talkative American upstart who lacks a 'real' cultured background and only superficially absorbs it through second-hand sources. And ultimately, Edward's sentimentality is reprehensible because Edward violates the norms of masculine strength and discipline, not because these

'masculine' virtues are themselves a mystification. For Edward reneges on masculinity itself: he spends too much time dilly-dallying with women when he should be soldiering, he breaks down like a woman, his preoccupations are 'feminine', and so on. And when, at the end of the novel, the narrator shows that Edward has finally reverted to the masculine prototype, Edward is "tragic" but redeemed. He can now be identified with "courage, virility, …[and] physique"[26] without irony and the narrator can clearly be made to admire him as his 'alter-ego'.

Thus, by a series of projected lacks, absences, and failures, the text of *The Good Soldier* succeeds in reinforcing an entire value-system of conservative virtues and duties. "Permanence? Stability!" cries the narrator in the very first pages. "I can't believe it's gone."[27] Thus asserting the positivistic claims of permanence and stability, those good old 'classical' values which Ford and his contemporaries (e.g., Conrad, Eliot, and Pound) all felt to be so desirable for the maintenance of "civilization."

I have tried to show then the means by which emplotment and textual configurations in *The Good Soldier* work together to create a story in which the *breakdown* and absence of traditional social and cultural values is the main concern. I have also shown how the *threat* constituted by the possibility of such breakdowns is successfully *contained* by the text by means of fairly conventional techniques of narrative displacement. The disjunction between the temporality of the novel and its spatial discourse is therefore not a problem (for the author) in this text but rather its successful achievement. Because it is by means of this disjunction that Ford can manipulate the reader's response to the fictive nature of the text. By simultaneously positing his discourse as fictive, textual, and reconstructed, and as real, objective, and historical,

Ford is able to let his text mediate our reception of it according to the terms he wants without being intrusive as a more palpably authoritative writer might have been. Nonetheless, he seeks to establish the authority of his discourse which is hovering on the brinks of a quite orthodox liberal humanist discourse. Along with the text's 'internal' mediation, however, Ford has also effected a remarkable control over interpretive mediation by providing numerous aporia within the text's discourse which he leaves unexplained, unfilled. This draws the expected response, as for instance Mark Schorer's in his introduction to the novel in 1951:

<Ext>

> The book's controlling irony lies in the fact that passionate situations are related by a narrator who is himself incapable of passion, sexual and moral alike. … at every point we are forced to ask: "How can we believe *him*? His must be exactly the *wrong* view." The fracture between the character of the event as we feel it to be and the character of the narrator as he reports the event to us is the essential irony, yet it is not in any way a simple one; … No simple inversion of statement can yield up the truth, for the truth is the maze …. [28]

<Ext ends>

I have also shown how psychoanalytic interpretation plays neatly into the demands for a *specific* kind of reading mediated by the text, and fills the 'empty space' provided.

A word finally, therefore, on how and why I am able to mark my intervention. In her recently published book, The Appropriated Voice (1990), Bette London talks about the "postmortem performed on the canon of modernist literature and art" and declares that "from our postmodern perspective" and "in an age of mechanical reproduction that has both canonized the

'modern classics' and distributed them in multimedia packagings," we cannot "recover their originality"; we "cannot read them innocently." London suggests that to approach "a modernism that has already been institutionalized" we have to read "interestedly" and that such an undertaking inevitably directs our attention to the assumptions that govern our practices of reading.[29]

The quotation from Schorer places above expresses the assumptions about the aesthetic self-sufficiency of a literary work and about an "authentic" voice. In fact the whole of Schorer's introduction expresses such assumptions with its emphasis on "major themes," "truth," and the lesson of learning "how to live more wisely" which he believes the book teaches us. In my opinion traditional applied psychoanalysis expresses similar assumptions about the speaking subject when it deals with literary texts. The intention of this paper has been to challenge what Fredric Jameson has called the "modernist aesthetic" which becomes "organically linked to the conception of a unique self and a private identity."[30] Hence, I have deliberately introduced Ford's responsibility for manipulating our reading. It matters very much "who is the author of the text," in spite of Foucault and Stanley Fish, if we don't want to partake in a general mystification of crucial political and ideological concerns.

NOTES

1. All references to the text are from the Vintage edition of *The Good Soldier*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

2. Paul Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 53.

3. See, e.g., Deleuze and Guattari on this subject of reification, in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. from the French by Hurley, Seem, and Lane (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1977), pp. 51-83.

4. Elizabeth Wright, "Modern Psychoanalytic Criticism" in *Modern Literary Theory*, eds. Ann Jefferson and David Robey (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1986), p. 146.

5. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*. Op. cit.

6. Elizabeth Wright, "Modern Psychoanalytic Criticism" in *Modern Literary Theory*, p. 148.

7. Norman Holland, "A transactive account of transactive criticism", Poetics 7, pp. 177-89.

8. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*. Op. cit.

9. Claire Kahane, *Seduction and the Voice of the Text*.

10. Ford Madox Ford, "Dedicatory Letter to Stella Ford" in *The Good Soldier*, p. xxii.

11. *The Good Soldier*, p. 14.

12. Ibid., p. 15.

13. Ibid., p. 121.

14. Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

15. See for instance Conrad's and Ford's collaborations as novelists. Their self-conscious attempt to jointly create a new "convention" with the introduction of a narrator "who is limited

by probability as to what he knows" and "who is just a living being like anybody else" (cf. Ford in "Techniques"), testifies that the parallels between Dowell and Marlow are not accidental.

16. The *Good Soldier*, p. 201.

17. Paul Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, p. 77.

18. See Robie Macauley, "The Good Ford" in *Kenyon Review*, XI (Spring 1949); John A. Meixner, *Ford Madox Ford's Novels* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962); Charles G. Hoffmann, *Ford Madox Ford* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1967).

19. Forster's precise phrase is "undeveloped heart"; eee especially *Howard's End* and *A Passage to India* in this regard.

20. *The Good Soldier*, p. 29.

21. This is how the blurb on the back cover of the Vintage edition of *The Good Soldier* describes the novel.

22. *The Good Soldier*, p. 8.

23. Ibid., p. 9.

24. Ibid., p. 10.

25. Ibid., p. 9.

26. Ibid., p. 275.

27. Ibid., p. 8.

28. Mark Schorer, "An Interpretation" as Introduction to *The Good Soldier* (New York: Knopf, 1951), reproduced in Vintage edition, 1989, p. ix.

29. Bette London, *The Appropriated Voice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), pp. 1-2.

30. Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), p. 6.
