



Ford Madox Ford
The Good Soldier

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THE GOOD SOLDIER

FORD MADOX FORD was born Ford Hermann Hueffer in Merton, Surrey, in 1873, the eldest son of Francis Hueffer, a German emigré, musicologist and music critic for *The Times*, and Catherine, the daughter of Ford Madox Brown, the Pre-Raphaelite painter. Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti were his aunt and uncle by marriage. Ford was a prolific writer, producing some eighty books in a variety of genres: novels, poems, criticism, memoirs, and impressionist accounts of English, European, and American culture.

Ford published his first book—a fairy-tale—when he was seventeen. He collaborated with Joseph Conrad from 1898 to 1909 on two novels and a novella. He became a central figure in the Modernist movement, founding *The English Review* in 1908, publishing established writers such as his friends Henry James and H. G. Wells alongside his new discoveries D. H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound, who became another close friend. Ford is best known for his novels, especially *The Fifth Queen* trilogy (1906–8), *The Good Soldier* (1915), and the four ‘Tietjens’ novels making up *Parade’s End* (1924–8).

Ford served as an officer in the Welch Regiment during the First World War, getting concussed by a nearby shell-explosion during the Battle of the Somme. After the war he changed his name to Ford Madox Ford and moved to France. In Paris he founded the *transatlantic review*, taking on Ernest Hemingway as a sub-editor, discovering Jean Rhys and Basil Bunting, and publishing Gertrude Stein and James Joyce. In the 1920s and 1930s he moved between Paris, New York, and Provence. He died in Deauville in June 1939.

MAX SAUNDERS is Director of the Arts and Humanities Research Institute, Professor of English, and Co-Director of the Centre for Life-Writing Research at King’s College London, where he teaches modern literature. He is the author of *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1996) and *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2010), and editor of four other volumes of Ford’s writing, including an annotated critical edition of the first novel of the *Parade’s End* sequence about the First World War, *Some Do Not . . .* (Carcant, 2010).

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FORD MADDOX FORD

The Good Soldier

A Tale of Passion



Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

MAX SAUNDERS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

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It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
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Editorial material © Max Saunders 2012

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First published as a World's Classics paperback 1990

Reissued as an Oxford World's Classics paperback 1999, 2008

New edition 2012

Impression: 1

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Data available

ISBN 978-0-19-958594-6

Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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INTRODUCTION

[*Readers who are unfamiliar with the plot may prefer to treat the Introduction as an Afterword.*]

FORD MADOX FORD referred to *The Good Soldier* (1915) as his ‘one novel’—though he had written eighteen before it, and twenty-four of his eventual thirty or more when he made that comment in 1931.¹ ‘I have always regarded this as my best book’, he says in the Dedication Letter (written for a second edition in 1927 and included here); and many critics have echoed that judgement. It is an extraordinary achievement. The intricate first-person narration manages the rare feat of pulling off a virtuoso technical performance while remaining powerfully engaging. It is an exemplary modernist text in its use of unreliable narration, the ‘time-shift’, and its play with interpretative enigma. From its arresting first sentence to its bitterly ironic last, it sustains its intensity, its compelling intimacy, and its disconcerting but irresistible mix of pathos and humour. It can divide opinions, but rarely leaves readers cold. *The Good Soldier* is amongst the handful of Ford’s eighty or so books to have remained in print constantly since the 1940s; it has gone through more editions and translations than any of his other works; and it is one of only two of his works to have been filmed for television.²

Rebecca West wrote that *The Good Soldier* had ‘set the pattern for perhaps half the novels which have been written since’.³ But Ford’s transatlantic theme and presentation of the sexual intrigues and duplicities of a civilized elite show his own debt to the work of his friend Henry James; as *The Good Soldier*’s technical virtuosity owes much to a decade of collaboration with a closer friend, Joseph Conrad. Its influence on later modernist and post-modernist fiction has indeed

¹ Ford, *Return to Yesterday* (London: Gollancz, 1931), 417, 429.

² *The Good Soldier* was adapted for British television by Julian Mitchell and broadcast by Granada in 1981, directed by Kevin Billington and starring Jeremy Brett and Susan Fleetwood as the Ashburnhams, and Robin Ellis and Vickery Turner as the Dowells. *Parade’s End* has been adapted twice for the BBC; once in 1964, and again in 2012 with a screenplay by Tom Stoppard.

³ West, ‘Unlucky Eccentric’s Private World’, *Sunday Telegraph* (17 June 1962), 6. An exaggeration, certainly: she was perhaps thinking of its influence on her own *The Return of the Soldier* (1916).

been profound. Works like F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Jean Rhys's *Quartet* (published as *Postures* in 1928), Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair* (1951), Anthony Burgess's *Earthly Powers* (1980), Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), or Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) are unlikely to have taken the form they did without Ford's example. Indeed, Ford has found champions among the best modern writers, including Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden, Robert Lowell, William Carlos Williams, Gore Vidal, Malcolm Bradbury, A. S. Byatt, Edmund White, and Tom Stoppard.

There was little in his previous work to prepare *The Good Soldier's* first readers for its formal brilliance and psychological resonance. The books for which Ford was known throughout the Edwardian years were very different—criticism and reminiscences of the Pre-Raphaelites; a trilogy of poignant books about *England and the English* (1905–7); a trilogy of historical novels about Henry VIII and his *Fifth Queen* (1906–8); and a spirited historical romance with a modern twist, *Ladies Whose Bright Eyes* (1911). He had some cachet as a literary critic and editor, founding the *English Review* in 1908, and publishing prestigious established writers such as James, Conrad, H. G. Wells, and Arnold Bennett alongside his new discoveries—Pound, D. H. Lawrence, and Wyndham Lewis. But he felt he had not really shown what he could do himself. *The Good Soldier* was subtitled 'A Tale of Passion', and passion had always been the predominant theme of his fiction. But only *A Call: The Tale of Two Passions* (1910) had dealt with it with comparable intensity, setting the story in the contemporary world and dealing frankly with desire, adultery, psychoanalysis, and modern technologies of communication such as the telegraph and telephone. Otherwise, his most powerful evocations of desire and obsession were to be found in his historical fantasies such as *Ladies Whose Bright Eyes* or the novel he published just before starting *The Good Soldier*, *The Young Lovell* (1913). He could turn an elegant comic novel too, whether historical, as with *The Portrait* (1910), or contemporary, as with *The Panel* (1912). And he could equally turn a deft satire: of the media and celebrity in *Mr. Apollo* (1908), or of political manipulation in *Mr. Flight* (1913). In *The Good Soldier* all these strengths came together for the first time in his work: the pitiless satirical analysis of the codes of behaviour of the upper-class English 'good people', and of the naivety of the American

narrator; the vivid historical sense, reaching back through Victorian sentimentality, to the Reformation, and, earlier still, to the invention of romance in medieval Provence; the registering of modern anxieties about problems such as sexuality, class, 'the condition of England', degeneration, imperial decline, the rise of America, and the fate of Europe on the verge of war.

Modernism, Impressionism, and the Unreliable Narrator

The Good Soldier is most often placed now in the context of modernism. Ford was closely involved with three major modernist networks: the circle of James, Conrad, Stephen Crane, and Wells, in Kent and Sussex around 1900; then the avant-garde in London before the war, including Lawrence, May Sinclair, Dorothy Richardson, West, Pound, and Lewis; and third, the expatriates in postwar Paris, especially Joyce, Hemingway, Jean Rhys, and Gertrude Stein. While *Parade's End*—the coruscating sequence of novels he wrote in the 1920s about British Society through the First World War—responds to the experiments of these last, it is the first two groups which provide crucial contexts for *The Good Soldier*. Where *Parade's End* has been juxtaposed with works by Proust, Musil, and the Joyce of *Ulysses*, *The Good Soldier* needs to be situated alongside both the early modernism of James and Conrad and also contemporary high-modernist works reinventing the representation of consciousness, time, memory, and narration, such as the early volumes of *À la recherche*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'.

Ford was very much at the heart of the modernist rethinking of the poetics of verse and prose. *The Good Soldier* is the culmination of an astonishing burst of critical activity over the previous five years: founding the *English Review*, and furiously writing literary journalism refining the critical theories elaborated with Conrad. His championing of younger modernist talents, and his *English Review* editorials, later collected as *The Critical Attitude* (1911), arguing for a technical self-consciousness and critical rigour in the writing of fiction, had already marked him as a key contributor to the avant-garde. Wyndham Lewis included the opening of *The Good Soldier*, under its original title of 'The Saddest Story', in the first number of his aggressively modern 'Vorticist' magazine *Blast* in June 1914. In pre-war

London Ford moved in the world of aesthetic coteries—Imagists, Futurists, Vorticists. Though they saw themselves as ‘modern’, and occasionally wrote of ‘modernism’ in the arts, they were not seen as a coherent single movement. Nor did Ford call himself modernist. He saw his method as ‘impressionism’; and it was as he began *The Good Soldier* that he started to define it in two major essays. One—‘Impressionism—Some Speculations’—became the preface to his 1913 *Collected Poems*: a document that, channelled by Pound, had a profound influence on English poetics.⁴ The other—‘On Impressionism’—has more to say about prose, and is reprinted here in full, in an annotated version that brings out its profound interplay with *The Good Soldier*.

Impressionism was of course first taken as the name for a movement by the French group of artists—including Monet, Renoir, and Pissarro—who began exhibiting in Paris from 1874. Ford certainly knew of these painters. But his allegiance to the Pre-Raphaelites of his beloved grandfather Ford Madox Brown’s circle perhaps made him reluctant at first to identify himself with their successors. He only started to do that as he was poised to write *The Good Soldier*, though he had written much about ‘impressions’ through the Edwardian years; and his verse and prose of that period could well be described as ‘impressionist’. The application of the term to literature has always been controversial; but literary impressionism has recently been undergoing a rehabilitation as a crucial, if ambiguous, category.⁵ It describes both a historical phase of writing, coming between realism and modernism; and also a style or method with a rather longer span, identifiable within realist and modernist works as well. Earlier writers in English—John Ruskin, Walter Pater, Henry James—had made the ‘impression’ central to their aesthetics. But Ford is arguably the foremost critic who argued for impressionism as both a technical approach and a literary tradition. He is certainly one of the most prolific writers on impressionism in literature.

When Ford writes of impressionism he is not thinking primarily of the French painters. Nor is he thinking of the British aesthetes of the turn of the century—such as Pater, George Moore, or Arthur

⁴ See Brita Lindberg-Seyersted (ed.), *Pound/Ford: The Story of a Literary Friendship* (London: Faber & Faber, 1982).

⁵ See the works cited in the Select Bibliography by Paul Armstrong, Jesse Matz, John Peters, Tamar Katz, and others.

Symons—who had sought to translate impressionism into literature. Instead, he identifies a line of what he calls ‘conscious art’,⁶ coming to maturity with the French writers Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant, and the Russian Ivan Turgenev; and then passing into English through the Americans James and Crane, and the Polish émigré Conrad. That Ford knew these last three, and could remember as a young child offering Turgenev a chair on a visit to Madox Brown’s studio, gave him a strong personal connection with these figures. James and Conrad themselves probably would not have seen themselves as part of an impressionist movement. But Ford’s view of impressionism was more capacious still: he saw it as continuing into, and helping to shape, the contemporary work he admired most, by writers such as Pound, Lawrence, Joyce, Hemingway, and Jean Rhys. Like impressionism in painting, then, literary impressionism starts in the late nineteenth century, and moves away from realism’s claims to objectivity and omniscience. But what is distinctive about Ford’s account is that impressionism does not end with modernism (as art-historians see pictorial impressionism ending with post-impressionism and cubism). Instead, rather than trying to theorize a literary impressionism that never caught on, Ford was using that term to describe the main currents of experimental writing that did catch on, from the nineteenth century into the twentieth: the writing that develops into what we now term modernism.

What, then, did Ford understand the method to be that could unite such diverse writers? Impressionism is sometimes described in ways that make it sound like a mere refinement of realism: moving realism from its fascination with the detail of the material world closer to the interior world of individual consciousness, perception, thought, and feeling; and thus a step on the road to the modernist stream-of-consciousness novel. But *The Good Soldier*’s narration, modelled on speaking rather than thinking, can all too often be made to seem essentially realist: ultimately a study of character and situation. Such an approach is a necessary part of a full response to the text; but it is only a part. Certainly all the four main characters are interesting *as* characters. But part of their interest is that they do not stay true to their character in the way that realist characters are supposed to do. And the fact that they are all presented to us by

⁶ See for example Ford, *The March of Literature* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1939), 639, 800–1.

Dowell means that we never know whether that indeterminacy is due to the other three characters being unstable, or whether it is Dowell who keeps changing. Fordian impressionism, that is, proceeds by a duality which is at once a form and a doubt. As he puts it in the essay 'On Impressionism':

I suppose that Impressionism exists to render those queer effects of real life that are like so many views seen through bright glass—through glass so bright that whilst you perceive through it a landscape or a backyard, you are aware that, on its surface, it reflects a face of a person behind you. For the whole of life is really like that; we are almost always in one place with our minds somewhere quite other.⁷

Impressionist 'views' are thus both of a world and a person. The formal doubleness means that we can read each episode as about a situation or about a psychology. The doubt is that we can never be sure how much the situation is shaped by that psychology. Doubt is a leitmotiv of *The Good Soldier*. Dowell is continually abstaining from judgement; lamenting that 'It is all a darkness'; asking 'For who in this world can give anyone a character? Who in this world knows anything of any other heart—or of his own?' (p. 122); and telling us: 'I don't know.' The doubt is important to Ford, though, because it is the sign of our perplexity when faced with the enigmas of character and perception. Our perceptions are always incomplete and never infallible, whether of landscapes or of persons. And Ford's impressionism accords doubt its prominent place in our dealings with the world.

One of the striking things about the essay 'On Impressionism' is how similar its cadences are to Dowell's—as when the second paragraph begins 'I do not know', and then echoes the disclaimer twice within a few lines. That might be taken as a sign that *The Good Soldier* is an especially personal book, written in Ford's own manner. In one sense this is true. He does impressionism in whatever genre he takes up: not just the novel, but poems, memoirs, conversations, even criticism. And his criticism is a novelist's; novelistic, even. Nowhere is this truer than in his memoir, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, which Ford provocatively described as a novel rather than a biography, and in one section of which—effectively a manual of impressionism—he sets out the techniques he and Conrad developed

⁷ 'On Impressionism', *Poetry and Drama*, 2 (June and December 1914), 167–75, 323–34 (p. 74). See Appendix B, p. 197.

in their quest for a new form for the novel. But to say that is to suggest not so much that the criticism is written in his own voice, against which we can gauge the novels, as rather that his novelistic imagination comes into play even in the criticism, and is as liable to start fictionalizing his positions and tones. Hugh Kenner wrote memorably about Joyce's use of 'shadow-selves'; roles he would act out 'that he might better write them. To make Bloom an authentic parody of himself, Joyce turned himself for long periods into a parody of Bloom.' So, with Ford, to make Dowell an authentic impression of himself, he turned himself into an impression of Dowell. As with Bloom and Joyce though, Dowell is an impression of only part of Ford's self. If Ford could sound as despondently baffled as Dowell at times, more often what struck people was the opposite: his Olympian pose of omniscience. Conrad referred to the 'characteristically casual and omniscient manner' of the friend who told him the anarchist story that was the germ for *The Secret Agent*.⁸ Wyndham Lewis described him at a country house party in Scotland at the end of July 1914, at which Ford read from 'The Saddest Story' in *Blast*. Lewis and Mary Borden Turner, their host, argued that Britain's Liberal government could not possibly declare war; but 'omniscient, bored, sleepy Ford', as Lewis called him, insisted that 'it has always been the Liberals who have gone to war. It is *because* it is a Liberal Government that it *will* declare war.'⁹ If that note of ennui is echoed by Dowell, Ford's knowledge of the ways of the world, his political *nous*, is certainly not. For that you need to listen to Ford's characters based on his friend Arthur Marwood: Mr Blood in the political satire *Mr. Fleight*; or the hyper-intelligent Christopher Tietjens in *Parade's End*.

If we work it the other way, one of the striking things about Dowell's narration is how much he sounds like an impressionist critic or novelist. He is extremely self-conscious, that is, about how a story should be narrated; about the precise effects he is trying to produce. (Compare 'On Impressionism': 'I am a perfectly self-conscious writer; I know exactly how I get my effects, as far as those effects go.') When Dowell says: 'I am, at any rate, trying to get you to see what sort of life it was I led with Florence and what Florence was like', we

⁸ Conrad, 'Author's Note' to *The Secret Agent*, ed. John Lyon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 230.

⁹ Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, revised edition (London: John Calder; and New York: Riverrun Press, 1982), 58–9.

can hear Ford echoing Conrad's profoundly impressionist credo: 'My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*.'¹⁰ But Dowell is continually anxious he is failing in the attempt: 'I have given you a wrong impression if I have not made you see.' 'It is very difficult to give an all-round impression of any man,' he says: 'I wonder how far I have succeeded with Edward Ashburnham. I dare say I haven't succeeded at all'; and adds: 'It is even very difficult to see how such things matter' (p. 119). But they keep mattering to him. He worries that the detailed history he has given us of Ashburnham's philandering has blown it out of proportion: 'Because, until the very last, the amount of time taken up by his various passions was relatively small [. . .] But I guess I have made it hard for you, O silent listener, to get that impression' (p. 119). Or, worse still: 'looking over what I have written, I see that I have unintentionally misled you when I said that Florence was never out of my sight. Yet that was the impression that I really had until just now. When I come to think of it she was out of my sight most of the time' (p. 72).

The question of how to give an impression of someone matters to Ford too, but differently. Where Dowell is puzzling out how to tell his own story, Ford is writing a novel about someone puzzling out how to tell his own story. What may be unintentional for an obtuse narrator-character is intentional for the conscious impressionist. The critical tradition of discussing *The Good Soldier* in terms of knowledge, epistemology, and doubt sometimes attempts to recuperate uncertainty back to psychological realism: the characters keep appearing different because that is what our experience of others is like; we think we know where we are, then some revelation disorients us. But Ford's turning of these anxieties into a theme in the novel shows him to be doing something different, and which instead looks forward, to postmodernism. Dowell's fussing about story is an element of what might be seen as Ford's metafiction. If literary impressionism shares realism's aim of seeking a more accurate, candid account of life, it does so by stripping away false certainties so as to reach the real questions; and in the process strips away the very certainties on which realism relies: the knowability of character; the intelligibility of a character's destiny. Ford's book on Conrad gives a vivid example

¹⁰ Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*; first printed as an 'Author's Note' after the serialization in the *New Review*, 17 (December 1897), 628–31.

of how this difficulty in the subject matter—knowing what to make of people—required a corresponding difficulty in the presentation:

You meet an English gentleman at your golf club. He is beefy, full of health, the moral of the boy from an English Public School of the finest type. You discover, gradually, that he is hopelessly neurasthenic, dishonest in matters of small change, but unexpectedly self-sacrificing, a dreadful liar but a most painfully careful student of lepidoptera and, finally, from the public prints, a bigamist who was once, under another name, hammered on the Stock Exchange. . . . Still, there he is, the beefy, full-fed fellow, moral of an English Public School product. To get such a man in fiction you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past. . . . That theory at least we gradually evolved.¹¹

This was written soon after Conrad's death, and a decade after *The Good Soldier*. But Ford had then been working on a French translation of the novel (which he said he had begun during the Battle of the Somme).¹² He was presumably thinking, in part, of the novel, since this describes its structure precisely: the narrator, John Dowell, gives a detailed strong first impression of Edward Ashburnham when the two couples meet in Germany in August 1904, and then completes their story with vertiginous 'time-shifts'.¹³ Dowell says, 'That question of first impressions has always bothered me a good deal [. . .]' (p. 120). But it is also a question of the impossibility of ever arriving at a last impression, because the earlier ones keep coming back in a disturbed, and disturbing, order. To make the point unmistakably, in *The Good Soldier* Dowell's most devastating revelations of the extent to which his wife Florence had betrayed him with his best friend Edward Ashburnham are still coming even after they have both committed suicide. The novel is Ford's greatest attainment of what Ann Snitow has called 'the voice of uncertainty'.¹⁴ Fordian uncertainty, though, is not the static impasse the critics can make it sound. As here, it is a dynamic process; the experience of multiply-shifting perspectives, jumps in time and space and understanding. This process

¹¹ Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (London: Duckworth, 1924), 129–30.

¹² See explanatory note to p. 4 of the novel.

¹³ On the 'time-shift' see for example *It Was the Nightingale*, 143.

¹⁴ See Ann Barr Snitow, *Ford Madox Ford and the Voice of Uncertainty* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1984).

does not just unsettle the narrative, or our grasp of that narrative; does not just make us feel, as soon as we have finished reading the book, that if only we were to reread it we might at last know what we thought about its characters. As Frank Kermode said of its interpretative conundrum: '*the illusion of the single right reading is possible no longer*'.¹⁵ It makes us wonder whether the reason why the characters do not stand still is not because character itself is a fiction. Since the novel is regularly explicit about character, personality, stories, novels, we need to consider its metafictional aspects—the ways in which it plays with, and undermines, rather than just resting upon, conventional assumptions about character, psychology, and narrative.

Chief among these is the use of an unreliable narrator, who makes us as uncertain about him as he is about others. But such metafictional moves have other consequences. One is to risk collapsing the distance between narrator and author. The more Dowell talks about telling a story, the more he sounds like a novelist; like his author. Too close, and our trust in Dowell as a fully-realized character (rather than a mouthpiece) would be jeopardized, as would our trust in Ford as an author. Ford's revisions to the manuscript show him adjusting this fine balance, excising some of Dowell's comments about novels, so as to make him sound less literary. When Dowell worries that he has 'unintentionally misled' us we might feel reassured: Ford is making it clear that Dowell is inept but honest. But if Dowell sounds too close to a novelist for such moments to maintain the distance between narrator and author, then instead of Ford intending to have Dowell mislead us, we might have Dowell (and by extension, Ford too) intending to mislead. A novelist might purposely mislead us for some of the time, so as to make the revelation of truth more effective. And to some extent that is Dowell's purpose too. He was deceived by Florence, Edward, and Leonora for over nine years. So he may feel his narrative needs to mislead us at first, to re-create his experience of deceit. But in that case, his misleading is not always unintentional. And once he admits to misleading us, we are likely to suspect that his assurance that it was unintentional might itself be misleading.

That might sound merely like a way of re-describing narratorial unreliability. But narrators can be unreliable in different ways. Many novelists before Ford had used narrators whose reliability is called

¹⁵ Kermode, *Essays on Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 102.

into question. Most often what may be unreliable is their understanding of the events they narrate. Whether they are eccentric or mad, like Sterne's Tristram Shandy, or self-interested or amoral like Defoe's Robinson Crusoe or Moll Flanders, we do not suspect them of intentionally misleading us. It is not that they give a dubious account of events; what is unreliable is not what they narrate but how they interpret it. They generally display a limitation—whether of character or understanding—which hinders them from grasping the full implications of their story or attaining full self-knowledge. We can always know or suspect things about them of which they would be unconscious. Henry James, in works such as *The Aspern Papers*, 'The Turn of the Screw', *The Sacred Fount*, or 'The Figure in the Carpet', experimented with cleverer narrators who reveal themselves as (at least, possibly) possessed by their own ideas to the point of insanity. But even with these knowing figures, the question is whether they are deceiving *themselves*, not us. Ford takes this to the next level. In certain key scenes—when Dowell describes being embraced by Florence as they are eloping; or when Florence touches Ashburnham's wrist while showing him the 'Protest' documents—Dowell's responses seem so obtuse as to suggest (and not just to us, but to the other characters) that he is incapable of grasping what is happening around him. He seems surprised that his bride-to-be expects him to be more passionate; he seems not to realize that she is later flirting with Ashburnham. Yet such blindness is hard to square with his perceptive descriptions and sensitivity to impressions. We can put down the disparity to the gap between his ignorance while Florence and Edward were deceiving him, and his subsequent knowledge as the affair comes to light after their deaths. But some of his statements arouse a greater degree of doubt, such as his claim:

Of the question of the sex-instinct I know very little and I do not think that it counts for very much in a really great passion. It can be aroused by such nothings—by an untied shoelace, by a glance of the eye in passing—that I think it might be left out of the calculation. (p. 92)

We may wish to grant him his ignorance of 'the sex-instinct'; and may find moving the implication that he has felt 'a really great passion' without it, as he may for Nancy—or even arguably for Edward. Yet he seems knowing enough about how it can be aroused, which appears to contradict his claim for ignorance. He may know such

things from books. But even if they may be left out of the calculation for him, his own experience should have taught him (if the books did not) that they cannot be for most others—given that it was because he left it out of the calculation that he has so miscalculated his life. In short, statements like this, or his claim that ‘nothing happened’ between 1904 and 1913, raise more serious doubts about his truthfulness. (We later learn that what was happening during those nine years was his wife and best friend cuckolding him.) When he says: ‘from time to time I have wondered whether it were or were not best to trust to one’s first impressions in dealing with people’ (p. 120), the novel makes us wonder how far to trust our first—and indeed our subsequent—impressions of him. One way of describing this is to say Ford uses our relation to Dowell as an analogue to his relation to the other characters. Our uncertainties about whether to trust his stories correlate to his experience of trusting too much in the stories they were telling him. But where that analogy leads is to implying that he should not be trusted either.¹⁶ What is innovative about Ford’s use of the unreliable narrator, then, is the way he keeps making us wonder whether Dowell is not actually lying to us, or trying to conceal things. People often used to wonder that about Ford himself (especially during the time he was with Violet Hunt, whom Florence often resembles in her flirtatious talkativeness). It was a tightrope he seemed to enjoy walking in his own life, often exaggerating his stories to see how far he could go and still be believed. In *The Good Soldier* he found a form which makes the technique mesmerizingly effective. Any doubt we have about Dowell might seem to undermine what he tells us about the others; but simultaneously, it makes him a more complex and intriguing character, and thus draws us further into his world, and his entanglements with those same other characters. And Dowell’s voice is so distinctive—Ford’s grip on his way of thinking and talking is so sure—that despite the doubt, and even *through* it, the reality of his story becomes utterly convincing. If Ford’s creation of his narrator’s uncertainties is a tribute to his own technical certainty, that certainty involves disturbing our sense of the boundaries between life and fictionality.

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of this question of trust see Max Saunders, ‘Ford Madox Ford, Impressionism, and Trust in *The Good Soldier*’, in John Attridge and Rod Rosenquist (eds.), *Incredible Modernism—Literature, Trust and Deception* (Farnham: Ashgate, forthcoming).

The Stories Behind 'The Saddest Story'

Graham Greene wrote of *The Good Soldier* that 'the impression which will be left most strongly on the reader is the sense of Ford's involvement', adding: 'one cannot help wondering what agonies of frustration and error lay behind *The Saddest Story*'.¹⁷ Ford's biographers have found much in his life to relate to his 'Tale of Passion'. Like Ashburnham, Ford had married young, to Elsie Martindale. They left London, and settled in the Romney Marsh, on the borders of Kent and Sussex. Again like Edward, he had betrayed her; first in what appears to have been a disastrous brief affair with her sister, undermining not only their marriage but also his mental stability. The novel draws on this fraught period a decade earlier, when Ford underwent a severe agoraphobic nervous breakdown in the summer of 1904—the date on which the Ashburnhams and Dowells meet; and, like them, he visited German spa resorts for a 'cure'.

Then, in 1908, estranged from Elsie, and now living in London and setting up the *English Review*, he got to know the racy novelist Violet Hunt. By the following year he had embarked on an equally disastrous affair with her. Friends like James and Conrad, who had known him with Elsie and were still her neighbours, became markedly colder. Though Ford was a—nominal—Catholic, he sought a divorce, but Elsie—who was not Catholic, unlike Leonora Ashburnham—refused (Leonora's hardness is thought to be modelled on hers). Then Ford was told that another of his closest friends, Arthur Marwood, had 'made advances' towards Elsie. Marwood was ill with tuberculosis, and the story was perhaps implausible. He may have been trying to console her rather than seduce her—as Dowell wonders about Ashburnham's embracing the girl on a train in the 'Kilsyte case'. But there were letters which Ford's solicitor saw, and which seemed to confirm that something untoward had happened. Marwood was also Ford's business partner in publishing the *English Review*, and a rift between them during the magazine's first few months proved catastrophic. As the *Review*'s finances worsened, Ford fell out with friends like Wells whom he had persuaded to join his altruistic profit-sharing scheme instead of receiving payment for contributions. A rescue package was worked out, but the result

¹⁷ Greene, 'Introduction', *The Bodley Head Ford Madox Ford*, Vol. 1 (London: The Bodley Head, 1962), 7–12 (p. 12).

was to oust Ford from the editor's chair after little more than a year. The novel's sense of a world collapsing; intimacies turning out to have been betrayed; one's closest friends proving to be unreliable; and of a man destroying himself in the effort to stop himself doing further damage to those around him, all seem to draw on this second period of personal crisis too, four or five years before Ford wrote the novel.

By the end of 1913, when he said he began *The Good Soldier*, the strain was also beginning to tell on his relationship with Hunt. They had hoped to be able to marry if Ford could acquire German nationality (his father, Francis Hueffer, having been a German émigré), and then get a divorce under German law. He went to live in Giessen, near Marburg (the town of 'M——' the Ashburnhams and Dowells visit to see the castle where Protestantism was argued out), and when Violet came over they spent time at Nauheim, the spa the novel's 'good people' frequent. The divorce plan failed when Ford was refused German nationality. When he returned to London he and Hunt nonetheless claimed they had got married abroad. But when she was referred to in print as 'Mrs Ford Madox Hueffer', Elsie sued, and the resulting court case scandalized Violet's society friends and humiliated both her and Ford. His vignette of the English gentleman you meet at a golf club, but then hear scandalous rumours about, also registers his anxiety about how he had himself appeared at this time. Ashburnham-like, his response to these pressures was to fall in love with someone else: the young Irish beauty Brigit Patmore, who had become a regular at Violet's Kensington home, South Lodge. Patmore wrote—much later—that 'People have said that Ford was slightly in love with me, but he never attracted me. I admired his intellect, but that was all.' Violet may have felt, like Leonora Ashburnham arranging for Maisie Maidan to accompany them to Nauheim, that if Ford was prone to infatuations, they would do less damage if she could manage them herself. She invited Patmore to stay in her seaside cottage at Selsey. It was during her visit that Ford wrote his best-known poem, 'On Heaven', ostensibly addressed to Hunt, but clearly inspired by his feelings for Patmore. And, despite Patmore's denial, Hunt noted in 1917 that she had 'succumbed from the flattery of his suit—his plausibility . . .'.¹⁸

¹⁸ Patmore, *My Friends When Young* (London: Heinemann, 1968), 52–3. Hunt, entry for 20 April 1917: *The Return of the Good Soldier: Ford Madox Ford and Violet Hunt's 1917 Diary*, ed. Robert and Marie Secor (University of Victoria, BC, 1983), 57.

Hunt's diary for 1914, which only emerged into the public domain in 1995, gives a poignant account of the affair over the following months.¹⁹ Brigit was married, and when her husband came to collect her on 12 April Hunt assumed he knew 'what she had been up to'. If the parallel here seems to be with the married women Ashburnham takes up with—Maisie Maidan or Mrs Basil—it is hard not to see what happened next as suggesting Ashburnham's last passion, for his wife's ward Nancy Rufford; devastating not just for its force, but because of his determination to try to resist it. On the 16th Hunt wrote that Ford went to stay near the Conrads: 'his idea of a rest cure & get over Bridgit [*sic*]'. 'I think he really was trying to give her up', she added. Then, on 8 May she noted (presumably, as she often did, annotating the diary in retrospect): 'Brigit came & went? Is this the day they sat & cried all day silently & I left them alone.' The sadness of 'The Saddest Story' surely owes much to such scenes (though the heartbreaking parting at the end of *The Good Soldier* gets its poignancy from the terrible suppression of any such demonstrativeness). It makes a difference to how we read the novel to know that the beginning was actually dictated to Patmore, who was acting as what Hunt called Ford's 'play secretary' at Selsey;²⁰ that when Dowell imagines a 'sympathetic soul' listening silently to him telling the story across 'the fireplace of a country cottage', this was also how the novel was coming into existence.²¹

And yet. The beginning of the novel, which already knows its end, was dictated well before the sad visit in May. This might mean that Ashburnham's passion for Nancy draws upon other sources. The quasi-incestuous relationship might recall Ford's affair with his sister-in-law. Ford later said Conrad had wanted to write a story about incest showing not 'the consummation of forbidden desires', but 'the emotions of a shared passion that by its nature must be most hopeless of all'.²² Much of the novel's sadness comes from the hopelessness of Edward trying not to succumb to his passion for the young woman living in the position of his ward or daughter. Alternatively, in *The Spirit of the People* (1907), the third volume of

¹⁹ The diary is now in the Ford collection of the Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University, and quoted here with the Library's kind permission.

²⁰ Hunt, *The Flurried Years* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1926), 215.

²¹ p. 17.

²² Ford, 'Tiger, Tiger: Being a Commentary on Conrad's *The Sisters*', *Bookman*, 66:5 (January 1928), 495–8 (p. 497).

his trilogy about Englishness, Ford relates a story which many have seen as the 'germ' of 'The Saddest Story'. Though here Ford casts himself in Dowell's role of witnessing other people acting out an unbearably sad station farewell very like that between Edward and Nancy:

I stayed, too, at the house of a married couple one summer. Husband and wife were both extremely nice people—'good people', as the English phrase is. There was also living in the house a young girl, the ward of the husband, and between him and her—in another of those singularly expressive phrases—an attachment had grown up. P—— had not only never 'spoken to' his ward; his ward, I fancy, had spoken to Mrs. P——. At any rate the situation had grown impossible, and it was arranged that Miss W—— would take a trip round the world [. . .] The only suspicion that things were not of their ordinary train was that the night before the parting P—— had said to me: 'I wish you'd drive to the station with us to-morrow morning.' He was, in short, afraid of a 'scene.' [. . .] the parting at the station was too surprising, too really superhuman not to give one, as the saying is, the jumps. For P—— never even shook her by the hand; touching the flap of his cloth cap sufficed for leave-taking. Probably he was choking too badly to say even 'Good-bye' [. . .] as the train drew out of the station P—— turned suddenly on his heels, went through the booking-office to pick up a parcel of fish that was needed for lunch, got into his trap and drove off. He had forgotten me—but he had kept his end up [. . .] Miss W—— died at Brindisi on the voyage out, and P—— spent the next three years at various places on the Continent where nerve cures are attempted.²³

Ford varied some of the details for Nancy's leave-taking in *The Good Soldier*: she is being sent to her father in India rather than taking a trip round the world. Whereas Miss W—— died at Brindisi, it is from Brindisi that Nancy sends the telegram which causes Edward to kill himself. Rather than the man having a breakdown, it is she who goes mad, when she reads of Edward's suicide. That suicide is the most significant alteration, since 'P——' survives for at least the three years he spends taking Continental nerve-cures. Ford says in the Dedicatory Letter that he had the story 'hatching' within himself for a decade, and that 'the story is a true story', adding: 'I had it from Edward Ashburnham himself and I could not write it till all the others were dead.' According to that chronology, Ashburnham's inconsumable passion for Nancy may have been based on someone quite

²³ Ford, *The Spirit of the People* (London: Alston Rivers, 1907), 148–50.

other whom Ford met during his own nerve cure in Germany in 1904. If so, his feelings for Brigit Patmore may have made him feel that his life was beginning to take the shape of that story; and that now he was in a position to write it out. According to this view, rather than the novel drawing on his affair with Patmore, that affair was drawing upon the story for the novel. Hunt wrote in her 1917 diary that Patmore had told her Ford 'must always pose'; that he was 'never real—histrionic to his fingertips . . . Dreaming—not dreaming true—false to himself.'²⁴ She may have been trying to reassure Violet that whatever had happened had not signified. But she may also have picked up how Ford was living himself into the Ashburnham role as he was preparing to write it. Or perhaps the way such things develop is a more complex, reciprocal process: his feelings for Patmore reminding him of the earlier story, and stirring him to begin the novel; but then, in the heat of composition, the novel's situation getting reflected onto his affair with Brigit.

But even that version would be too reductive, assuming a novel is made only from biographical sources. The Dedicatory Letter also says that Ford had an ambition 'to do for the English novel what in *Fort Comme la Mort*, Maupassant had done for the French'. The context makes it sound like a matter of importing French style and technique, as when Ford quotes his friend John Rodker calling *The Good Soldier* 'the finest French novel in the English language'. But the plot and the effect of Maupassant's novel, published in 1889, contribute much to Ford's text.²⁵ Maupassant's is also a 'Tale of Passion'. Olivier Bertin, a fashionable middle-aged artist, has been carrying on an adulterous affair with the Countess de Guilleroy for many years. When the Countess brings her daughter, Annette, back from the provinces where she has been living with her grandmother, Bertin, who has not seen the girl for years, is struck by her resemblance to her mother when younger. He finds himself entranced by her and invigorated by her presence. It dawns on the Countess that Bertin has fallen in love with her daughter. At first Bertin denies it, thinking that what he was feeling was a rejuvenation of his feelings for the mother. But, overcome by his jealousy of Annette's fiancé, he is

²⁴ Hunt, entry for 20 April 1917: *The Return of the Good Soldier*, 57.

²⁵ See W. B. Hutchings, 'Ford and Maupassant', in Robert Hampson and Max Saunders (eds.), *Ford Madox Ford's Modernity* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 257–70.

forced to recognize that the Countess is right. The passion here too is quasi-incestuous—Bertin is so often at the Guilleroy's house as to be treated almost as a member of the family. Realizing the hopelessness of his passion on this score; and because it has not even occurred to Annette; and also because he still loves the Countess, he attempts to fight it, walking off into the night and becoming so exhausted that he gets run over and fatally injured.

Unusually for the cynical Maupassant, *Fort Comme la Mort* does not ironize its melodrama as *The Good Soldier* does. But the effect it works for, continually tightening the screw with the gradual intensification of effect that Ford advocated, using Flaubert's term '*progression d'effet*', is one of overwhelming sadness, as first the Countess, then Bertin, grasp the hopelessness of their situation, and even manage to find a form of solidarity in it as they both feel their lives being devastated by age, passion, and suffering. If the portrayal of the social elites is comparable, Ford's plot is different. Neither Ashburnham nor Dowell is an artist. Nancy is not Leonora Ashburnham's daughter (though the novel has made some wonder whether she is not Edward's).²⁶ So the device on which Maupassant's story turns—the echo of the Countess's youthful appearance in the daughter—has no counterpart in *The Good Soldier*. But the theme and feeling of sadness resounding through the ending of Maupassant's novel is what Ford sought to emulate.

Sex, Polygamous Desire, and the Unconscious

As we have glimpsed already, it is sexuality that most disturbs Dowell's narrative. Ford was to write later:

The trouble is that, at any rate in Anglo-Saxondom, the moment a man of distinction gets hold of an unorthodox idea—be it connected with politics or religion or sex—straight-way he loses most of his sense of proportion and nearly all his power of putting things.²⁷

'Things' are what Ford remembered being told not to discuss with a young lady, by the young lady's mother. He was 'bewildered' because he 'did not know just what "things" were': 'Nowadays', he continued:

²⁶ See below, pp. xxix–xxx.

²⁷ Ford, 'Declined with Thanks', *New York Herald Tribune Books* (24 June 1928), 1, 6.

I know very well what 'things' are; they include, in fact, religious topics, questions of the relations of the sexes, the conditions of poverty-stricken districts—every subject from which one can digress into anything moving.²⁸

Dowell certainly worries obsessively about 'proportion' and about his 'power of putting things'; especially where questions of religion or sex are concerned.

The Good Soldier's explicitness about sex is one of the main things that marked it out as modern. If Dowell's hesitant talk about 'the sex-instinct' sounds slightly staid now, the story it tells of Edward's and Florence's affairs was shocking to many contemporary reviewers. Ford's progressive friends like Rebecca West were enthusiastic, but the notices in the more conservative press were not.²⁹ One complained of the book's 'distorted, sex-morbid atmosphere'. Another mused: 'we can well imagine that the work will prove of some value to the specialist in pathology'. The plot was deemed 'most unsavoury', 'sordid', 'a chronicle of sordid treachery and vice', and 'simply detestable'; Ford's imagination was called 'unpleasant'.³⁰ Some reviewers were still incandescing the following year, when a storm erupted in the paper *The New Witness* (edited by G. K. Chesterton's brother Cecil) over a book Ford published with Violet Hunt called *Zeppelin Nights*. The editor's wife reviewed the book pseudonymously, accusing Ford of cowardice, unpatriotism, and being 'not exactly of pure European extraction' (by which she meant to insinuate that Mr Hueffer—he did not change his surname to Ford till 1919—was not only German but Jewish, which he was not).³¹ In the correspondence that ensued she dragged in *The Good Soldier*—'a novel centering round a particularly brutal type of sensualist'—and a later anonymous letter echoed her outrage that Ford's title seemed a slur on the military:

'The Perfect Stallion' would have been an appropriate title for a book which none of Mr. Hueffer's admirers can have read without wondering what necessity he saw, in this hour when men have so gloriously fought

²⁸ Ford, *The Spirit of the People*, 146.

²⁹ West reviewed the novel in the *Daily News* (2 April 1915), 6, commenting on its 'magnificence' and 'extreme beauty'.

³⁰ Quotations from, respectively, the *Boston Evening Transcript* (17 March 1915), 24; *Bookman* (London), 48 (July 1915), 117; *Outlook*, 35 (17 April 1915), 507–8; *Athenaeum*, no. 4563 (10 April 1915), 334; *Saturday Review*, 119 (19 June 1915), iv; *Morning Post* (5 April 1915), 2; *Independent*, 81 (22 March 1915), 432.

³¹ 'J. K. Prothero', *New Witness*, 7 (6 January 1916), 293.

for and entered into their Kingdom, to portray them in such a despicable light.³²

Ford, of course, had not seen any necessity in the title. His publisher, John Lane, told him his salesmen thought 'The Saddest Story' a difficult title to sell. Ford replied:

My Dear Lane/ I should have thought that you publishers had had eye-openers enough about monkeying with authors' titles, at the request of travellers. 'The Saddest Story'—I say it in all humility—is about the best book you ever published and the title is about the best title. Still, I make it a principle never to interfere with my publisher, but to take it out in calling him names. Why not call the book 'The Roaring Joke'? Or call it anything you like, or perhaps it would be better to call it 'A Good Soldier'—that might do. At any rate it is all I can think of.³³

The 'Dedicatory Letter' makes it clear Lane thought 'the darkest days of the war' meant people wouldn't want to read a story of sadness; and perhaps Ford tried to address this by suggesting a military title. He moved the phrase 'the saddest story' into a new, provocative first sentence, making it more effective as it becomes part of the presentation of Dowell. 'The Good Soldier' makes a more evidently ironic title; though the irony may have been lost on the reviewers who had attacked the subject-matter—perhaps because they too thought the title a slur on the wartime Army. But their responses also show how even as measured (and un-pornographic) an account of sex as Ford's could scandalize an Edwardian readership. Perhaps they protested too much because they knew he was right. Ford had to write another letter to Lane when a circulating library in Liverpool objected to the book's 'lewdness'.

You see, that work is as serious an analysis of the polygamous desires that underlie all men—except perhaps the members of the Publishers' Association—as 'When Blood is Their Argument' is an analysis of Prussian Culture.³⁴

When Blood is Their Argument was the first of two wartime propaganda

³² Ibid. (20 January 1916), 352. 'M. F.', *New Witness*, 7 (10 February 1916), 449.

³³ Ford to John Lane, 17 December 1914: *The Ford Madox Ford Reader*, ed. Sondra J. Stang (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986), 477. Though the 'Dedicatory Letter to Stella Ford', p. 4, describes this exchange as taking place via letters and telegrams, this letter bears out the substance of the story.

³⁴ 28 March 1915: *Reader*, 477–8.

books Ford wrote for the British government (at the request of his friend, the Liberal Cabinet Minister C. F. G. Masterman): an extensively documented diagnosis of German militarism. Ford offers *The Good Soldier* as a psychological study of comparable depth. The claim that 'polygamous desires [. . .] underlie all men' might sound odd in relation to the novel, as it puts the sex-instinct decidedly back into the calculation, even for the apparently sex-blind Dowell—though even he appears to have had unconscious desires for Nancy before the death of his wife. But the novel certainly explores polygamous desires, not only in all the main characters, but even in its version of history—as when 'Florence started to tell us how Ludwig the Courageous wanted to have three wives at once—in which he differed from Henry VIII, who wanted them one after the other, and this caused a good deal of trouble [. . .]' (p. 36). This tangles up sexuality with that other troubling 'thing', religion.

That concept of desire as multiple, ('three [. . .] at once'), omnipotent and omnipresent, is also our later, post-Freudian view. Dowell writes of 'that mysterious and unconscious self that underlies most people' (p. 85). Like many writers of the period, Ford was deeply ambivalent about psychoanalytic ideas. He had been subjected to them, or their sexological forerunners, during his German 'nerve cure' of 1904. 'Those were the early days of that mania that has since beset the entire habitable globe', he wrote, saying of one of the specialists he was assigned to:

In the effort to prove that my troubles had an obscure sexual origin he would suddenly produce from his desk and flash before my eyes indecent photographs of a singular banality. He expected me to throw fits or faint. I didn't.³⁵

When Ford saw the German spa of Nauheim in 1910–11 it had recently been rebuilt into the imposing *Jugendstil* complex that can still be seen today. It provided the perfect setting for so much of the novel's tangle of affairs: a resort offering to cure sufferers from possibly sexual maladies, while providing them with opportunities for new liaisons. In 1912 the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society focused its attention on the habitués of spas. During a discussion of the psychoanalysis of travel, one speaker related 'travel' (in German *reisen*) to 'tearing (free)' (*reissen*):

³⁵ *Return to Yesterday*, 269, 267–8.

Freud thought this plausible: he spoke of his own travelling as tearing himself away from a repressive background. Freud then spoke of taking the waters. Some neurotics, he stated, transfer their inner conflicts onto a place such as a spa: 'There are types—obsessional neurotics, in particular, are such people—who have a much more solid relation with space than with time. In other persons, one sees clearly how they transfer their complexes onto other fields; they copy over their affects, for instance, onto localities—as do those who visit watering places.'³⁶

Had Dowell been Freud's patient, obsessional neurosis would perhaps have been the diagnosis. Dowell certainly has a disturbed relation to time; and his obsessive counting of the paces between the different spaces at Nauheim does indeed suggest a displacement of affect. *The Good Soldier* has most often been read in terms of character—whether either Dowell or Ashburnham warrant our sympathy; or in terms of Ford's biography. But such readings can obscure Ford's up-to-the-minute sense of sexuality as newly problematic in an era of campaigns for female emancipation (and what that meant for contemporary masculinity), for birth control and sex education, and for divorce law reform.

The most fraught psycho-sexual issue in the novel is the love between Edward and Nancy. What is it about it that makes Dowell describe it as 'monstrously wicked' (p. 91), Leonora as 'the most atrocious thing you have done' (p. 162), and determines Edward uncharacteristically to resist at all costs? When Dowell tells us that Nancy's mother writes to her something like: 'How do you know that you are even Colonel Rufford's daughter?' (p. 172) we understand her to be hinting at her life of prostitution. Nancy, says Dowell,

was Leonora's only friend's only child, and Leonora was her guardian, if that is the correct term. She had lived with the Ashburnhams ever since she had been of the age of thirteen, when her mother was said to have committed suicide owing to the brutalities of her father.

But the mother's letter proves the suicide story a lie. It may not be a lie that Leonora was her friend, though it seems unlikely; and the note of doubt about what is the 'correct term' for Nancy's relation to

³⁶ These proceedings are cited in a caption at the Freud Museum, London. See Herman Nunberg and Ernst Federn (eds.), *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, Vol. 4: 1912–18 (New York: International Universities Press, 1975), 67; minuting the scientific meeting of 6 March 1912. I'm grateful to the Museum's former Director, Michael Molnar for this reference.

the Ashburnhams seems designed to make us wonder exactly what she is doing living with them. As a magistrate Edward was 'always trying to put prostitutes into respectable places—and he was a perfect maniac about children' (p. 50). His motives for looking after Nancy appear equally altruistic. But 'perfect maniac' sounds another worrying note, and these comments have made some readers wonder whether there is any possibility Nancy might actually be Edward's illegitimate daughter.³⁷ Ford cut several passages from the manuscript which showed Ashburnham more as a dangerous libertine; in one of them he had fathered bastards: 'every one of his illegitimate offspring must be sent to Eton or to the convent at Roehampton'.³⁸ Perhaps he felt such details would lose Ashburnham all sympathy; or worried that the book might have been censored. (D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* was prosecuted for obscenity later in 1915, and all copies were ordered to be seized and burnt. It could not be bought in Britain for another eleven years.) Or perhaps Ford specifically wanted to exclude any suggestion that Nancy might have been one of Edward's children. Yet the text subtly insinuates that possibility: 'there was the further complication that both Edward and Leonora really regarded the girl as their daughter' (p. 99). How should we read Dowell's comment that 'it had not even come into [Edward's] head that the tabu which extended around her was not inviolable'? Is the taboo not inviolable because Nancy is not his daughter? (Or because, having just come of age, she is no longer a ward?)³⁹ Or has the possibility of violating it not come into Edward's head because she is? The anthropological use of 'taboo' (dating from Captain Cook's visit to Tonga in 1777) pre-dates the psychoanalytic. But

³⁷ Dewey Ganzel asserts this reading categorically in 'What the Letter Said: Fact and Inference in *The Good Soldier*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 11 (July 1984), 277–90; but his argument ignores the ambiguity of much of his evidence.

³⁸ 'The Saddest Story', 88, 88A, 88B: Cornell. This passage was revised into the one on pp. 68–70 of the published text (from 'Yes, they quarrelled bitterly' to 'You see, she was childless herself'). Dowell's comment in the revision—'I trust that I have not, in talking of his liabilities, given the impression that poor Edward was a promiscuous libertine'—could thus stand for Ford's feeling that he *had* given that impression. See *The Good Soldier*, ed. Martin Stannard (New York: Norton, 1995), 184. Other cuts included a mention of 'the girls he ruined', and the suggestion that if he were to be allowed to become destitute he would be 'committing rapes'.

³⁹ In 1913 Leonora says: 'I think the girl ought to have the appearance of being chaproned with Edward in these places. I think the time has come.' Nancy came to live with them when she was 13 and has remained for eight years; Dowell says she was 'rising twenty-two' in August 1913.

Freud's *Totem und Tabu*, with its first chapter on 'The Horror of Incest', was published in German in 1913. Shock, catatonia, horror, amnesia—extreme reactions we would now describe as traumatic—abound in *The Good Soldier*, and imply a profoundly disturbing cause. Could it have been the suggestion of incest rather than—or as well as—the explicit polygamous desire which so disturbed the reviewers?

We cannot be certain whether Edward is actually Nancy's father or not. But the thought of a relationship between them *feels* incestuous even if biologically it is not. Again, 'he had regarded her exactly as he would have regarded a daughter' (p. 90). That is why Edward assures Dowell that if he had been conscious of his passion for her, 'he would have fled from it as from a thing accursed' (p. 90); but also why he says Edward felt 'the immense temptation to do the unthinkable thing' (p. 184). Perhaps the most hauntingly poignant suggestion comes when Leonora tells Nancy Edward is dying because of her, and Nancy 'looked past her at the panels of the half-closed door' (the perfect image for a repression of the almost unthinkable) and says, twice, 'My poor father' (pp. 247–8). Horror of the even quasi-incestuous (such as a passion of guardian—or guardian's husband—and ward) could account for both the terror and devastation in the novel. In a review written soon after he had begun it, Ford wrote: 'I am not sure that there is not something after all in the English-German idea that if one saw the whole truth of things—being English-German oneself—one would go mad.'⁴⁰ Once Edward becomes conscious of his passion for Nancy he destroys himself; and she goes mad. *The Good Soldier* has been read as anticipating Freud's later great essays *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930); especially the latter in its exploration of the destructive cost of repression.⁴¹ The civilized life the two couples live seems like an elegant 'minuet', but underneath they are 'a prison full of screaming hysterics' (p. 13).

The style Ford developed to express both polygamous desire and

⁴⁰ Ford, 'Literary Portraits—XIX.: Gerhart Hauptmann and "Atlantis"', *Outlook*, 33 (17 January 1914), 77–9. Compare *The New Humpty-Dumpty* (published under the pseudonym 'Daniel Chaucer': London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1912), 83: 'He had never really learnt that the truth is a dangerous thing.'

⁴¹ As Sondra Stang noted, 'The novel and the essays most startlingly illuminate each other': 'A Reading of *The Good Soldier*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30:4 (1969), 545–63 (p. 545).

its repression is one of sustained innuendo. Florence's maiden aunts—the Misses Hurlbird—hint darkly that there is some reason why Dowell should not marry Florence: 'We ought to tell you more. But she's our dear sister's child' (p. 68). On a first reading this sounds like it refers to her affair with her uncle's minder, Jimmy; possibly to other affairs. But then that evening Florence disappears. Dowell tracks her down at her uncle's:

The old man received me with a stony, husky face. I was not to see Florence; she was ill; she was keeping her room. And, from something that he let drop—an odd Biblical phrase that I have forgotten—I gathered that all that family simply did not intend her to marry ever in her life. (p. 68)

This may just be a fanatical Puritanism; or an anxiety that Florence is sexually too voracious to be a faithful wife. But the lying about her health, the determination she should never marry, the mysterious biblical phrase, are all troubling, suggesting a more sinister reason. Dowell wonders whether they were worried lest the heart defect they (wrongly) thought Uncle John suffered from might be hereditary. But we might wonder why Florence, the niece of the Misses Hurlbird, is also named Hurlbird. If her mother had married, would she not have had a different married name? Is Florence illegitimate, and the family don't want it known? Has she taken the Hurlbird name because they brought her up (perhaps because she had no other legitimate name)? Or is it that her mother married another Hurlbird—perhaps a cousin? Might that be grounds for an anxiety about degeneracy of some kind (even of a sexual kind) due to inbreeding? Or is there another explanation for Uncle John's protectiveness? Is there a possibility he might actually be Florence's father, and Florence the product of an incestuous union with his sister? (Is some suggestion of incest what was 'odd' about the Biblical phrase?) Or even that he might himself desire his niece—whether or not she is also his daughter?

Such speculations may seem prurient; but the text's insinuations and suppressions incite prurience. Take the Ashburnham marriage. It is fairly clear that Dowell's marriage to Florence is not consummated: she elaborates her fictional 'heart' excuse as they elope to Europe. But what about Edward and Leonora? Dowell says Edward denied his philandering to her because 'He wanted to preserve the virginity of his wife's thoughts' (p. 49). Does that imply the

virginity of her body? 'His marriage with Leonora had been arranged by his parents and, though he always admired her immensely, he had hardly ever pretended to be much more than tender to her' (p. 50). That 'hardly ever' does not mean he never appeared more than tender. But 'pretended'? Even if we knew what being 'more than tender' actually entailed, we could not be sure Edward meant it, or had any desire to consummate the marriage. Nothing they actually did produced any children, but that does not mean they did not do it. Dowell keeps us guessing. After the two couples meet (in 1904), he says Edward seemed 'about that time to have conceived the naïve idea that he might become a polygamist', and that 'it certainly appears that at about that date Edward cared more for Leonora than he had ever done before—or, at any rate, for a long time' (p. 149). In other words, it was only after he began his adulteries with Florence (perhaps because he had learned from her about his own desire) that he began to desire Leonora; though the last characteristic hesitation leaves us unclear whether he had ever thus desired her before.

Here too, Ford's picture of desire is close to the psychoanalytic one: a desire which drives our infatuations, obsessions, and identifications but never coincides with them. A desire which incites a curiosity about the sexuality of others; a curiosity which is itself insatiable because we can never know what we would need to know for it to be satisfied: what it feels like to be the other person. Dowell's trouble with knowledge is inescapably carnal. Once we grant that unconscious desire underlies our thoughts, our ability to know anything is troubled. The opening of *The Good Soldier* turns on the distinction noted by Henry James's brother, the philosopher William James, between '*knowledge of acquaintance*' (as in the French *connaissance*) and '*knowledge-about*' (as in the French *savoir*): 'We had known the Ashburnhams for nine seasons of the town of Nauheim with an extreme intimacy—or, rather, with an acquaintanceship as loose and easy and yet as close as a good glove's with your hand.'⁴² Dowell has learnt that however well acquainted you are with people you still cannot say you know about them. But his terms all bristle with insinuations: *extreme* intimacy? Loose? Easy? Close? Hand in glove? The thing that he cannot know about is their sexuality. That is the knowledge *The Good Soldier* has which William James's account lacks: that

⁴² William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), 221.