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IS ALL THIS DIGRESSION OR ISN'T IT DIGRESSION:
'Fourplay' and Its Effects in Ford Madox Ford's
The Good Soldier

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

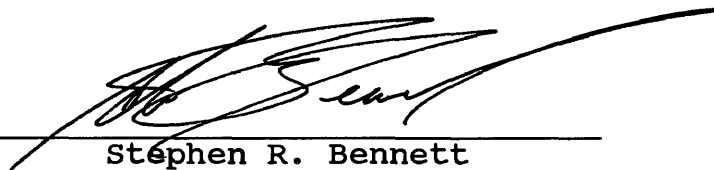
by
Stephen R. Bennett

1995

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts



Stephen R. Bennett

Approved, August 1995



Elsa Nettels



Thomas Heacox



Christopher MacGowan

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father and mother, Robert and Hazel Bennett, and to my sister and brother, Debbie and Mark. Without the steady love, support and well-placed censure offered by each of you, I could not have achieved this level of success.

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I am grateful to Gordon Downie for furnishing me with the appropriate word at the appropriate time. Courage? Indeed.

ABSTRACT

In The Good Soldier, Ford Madox Ford's calculated prose strategy captures and conveys the ostensibly unstructured, potentially unreliable, and altogether baffling utterances and anecdotes of his primary narrator, John Dowell. In tendering Dowell's dubious impressions and opinions about his wife, Florence, and his two spuriously genteel companions, Leonora and Edward Ashburnham, Ford animates--quite self-consciously--some the central tenets of literary Impressionism: tenets which the novelist chronicles, in substantial detail, in several of his critical writings. Ford, thus governing the precise "effects" of Dowell's digressive commentary, trumpets the uncommon level of control he exercises over the composition of the text. At various stages in the novel, then, Ford's scrupulous prose provides us with a variety of references and cross-references to which we must return while forging a coherent version of Dowell's story.

In compelling us to chase certain words and phrases as they recur in Dowell's narrative, Ford enlists the reader--vis-a-vis his narrator's perpetually confounding testimony--as an accomplice, of sorts, in the creation of the text's puzzlement. But once the reader begins mobilizing prominent patterns in the text, Ford's language seemingly escapes his self-conscious grasp and "performs"--to summon the words of acclaimed poststructuralist Roland Barthes in his concise essay, "The Death of the Author"--in ways perhaps unforeseen by the fastidious novelist. By tracking a consequential, recurrent phrase in The Good Soldier, namely "the 4th of August," as it reverberates throughout the text, we thus expose the limitations of Ford's local governance, and, in doing so, we test the speculative insights presented by Barthes in "The Death of the Author"; bold insights which converge occasionally and ironically--within the scope of Dowell's narrative--upon Ford's equally bold, altogether dissimilar, Impressionist convictions.

IS ALL THIS DIGRESSION OR ISN'T IT DIGRESSION:
'Fourplay' and Its Effects in Ford Madox Ford's
The Good Soldier

At any rate, I am a perfectly self-conscious writer; I know exactly how I get my effects, as far as those effects go (Ford Madox Ford, "On Impressionism" 34).¹

... it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is to reach ... that point where not "I" but only language acts, "performs," and not "me" (Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" 143).²

Taken together, the two equally bold sentiments expressed above seem altogether irreconcilable; on the one hand, Ford Madox Ford--an influential British modernist whose most enduring novel, The Good Soldier (1915), continues to inspire vigorous critical commentary--champions the prospect of calculated authorial control; on the other hand, Roland Barthes--a contemporary, multi-faceted French theorist whose poststructuralist convictions are best illustrated in his concise essay, "The Death of the Author" (1968)--dismisses the conventional notion that the author is the sole origin of the text, the exclusive source of its meaning, and the foremost authority for its interpretation. Unlike Barthes's assertion that language "performs" inevitably and inescapably beyond the author's local control or understanding, Ford's contention is that the "perfectly self conscious writer" can, in truth, "know exactly how" to maneuver language and can, as a result, produce profoundly

deliberate literary effects. And, as Ford notes elsewhere in his theoretical writing, the "effects" he labors to produce are "those queer effects of real life ... the recollection ... of a set of circumstances that happened ten years ago--or ten minutes. It might even be the impression of the moment--but it is the impression, not the corrected chronicle" (41).

In The Good Soldier, as many scholars and critics have observed, Ford's meticulous narrative strategy delivers the ostensibly unstructured, potentially unreliable, and altogether baffling recollections and impressions of his primary narrator, John Dowell. Confronting Dowell's cryptic account of his marriage to a pseudo convalescent, covertly adulterous spouse, Florence, and his annual retreats to Nauheim with two spuriously genteel companions, Leonora and "Captain" Edward Ashburnham, the reader of The Good Soldier must struggle to dissect and re-organize Dowell's testimony in the hopes of fashioning a lucid account of his tale or, as Ford himself permits, a "corrected chronicle" of the many events and circumstances registered by Dowell in the novel.

It is, however, at precisely "that point"--to summon Barthes--where the reader begins uprooting and re-arranging Dowell's many bewildered, and equally bewildering, anecdotes and utterances that Ford's language seems to defy his "perfectly self-conscious" command. In conceivably escaping Ford's local governance, several key words and phrases recur throughout the novel and "speak" to the reader in ways

perhaps unforeseen by this fastidious writer. The fundamental purpose of this inquiry, then, is to explore the carefully considered literary effects outlined by Ford in several of his critical writings--and likewise engendered by him in The Good Soldier--as they converge upon the explicitly incongruous speculations on language and authorial control offered by Barthes in his essay, "The Death of the Author."

In the spirit of the disparate views posited by Ford and Barthes, then, the scheme of this conciliatory investigation is unmistakably two-fold. Firstly, by pursuing at length a consequential phrase in The Good Soldier, namely "the 4th of August," as it metamorphoses and reverberates throughout the novel--eventually overstepping Ford's control to frustrate any clear or plain assignment of either its literal or its symbolic meaning--I intend, as a surrogate author of the text, to awaken a crisis in understanding that complements Dowell's sense of bewilderment: a despondent sense of bafflement which illustrates, dramatically, Ford's impressionist convictions. In coaxing my analysis towards "that point" where, according to Barthes, "it is language which speaks, not the author," I will demonstrate how Ford's prose functions both "as far as [his impressionist] effects go" and beyond. Secondly, by probing in detail several particularly illuminating, interconnected passages from The Good Soldier--that is, short segments of the novel within which Ford seemingly

counsels the reader as to how to decode his novel--I expect to identify several ways in which Ford manipulates language and flaunts his remarkable control over Dowell's illusive commentary. Ultimately, by enlisting The Good Soldier to reconcile the distinct theories offered by Barthes and Ford, I should like in this essay to furnish additional evidence in support the novel's enduring quality.

I

In his informal preface to the American edition of The Good Soldier (1928), the often cited "Dedicatory Letter to Stella Ford," Ford concedes: "And I will permit myself to say that I was astounded at the work I must have put into the construction of the book, at the intricate tangle of references and cross-references" (xx). Before probing how the phrase "the 4th of August" likely surpasses the precise "construction" of Ford's novel, then, we must recognize and appreciate the chief principles of impressionism he animates by way of the novel's "intricate tangle of references and cross-references." One particularly provocative and instructive 'knot' in the author's self-confessed literary "tangle" is delivered by his decidedly suspect narrator at the outset of the novel.

"This is the saddest story I have ever heard," Dowell mutters dejectedly at the beginning of the text's opening chapter (3). With this handful of cautiously chosen words,

Dowell thus launches his digressive, apparently rambling report. In the less than a dozen pages that follow, Ford's narrator introduces a myriad of words and phrases that will become, in the course of the novel, the vital points of "reference and cross-reference" to which the reader must return while chasing a full understanding of the text. But even before we can begin to gather and appraise Dowell's initial remarks, Ford establishes the reader's fundamental role in generating the optimum "effects" in the novel.

As Dowell acquaints--or seemingly re-acquaints--himself with his mute "listener" (14), he levels several key phrases at the reader, and, in doing so, he establishes our interpretive obligation to his story. "You will gather from this" and "You will perceive," Dowell coaches us initially about his impending tale (4); "You may well ask" and "you will probably expect," he tutors us later (4); "as you must also expect" and "as you know," he schools us later still (5). Here, Dowell's language is strategically specific. In Dowell's introductory address Ford couches or, to be more precise, he **entangles** several hints for deciphering his novel; that is, through his narrator Ford tacitly advises the reader to strive, at one and the same time, to gather together Dowell's many scattered impressions, to question their accuracy, to anticipate their resolution (or lack thereof) and, finally, to grasp an understanding of their meaning (or lack thereof) and their design.

Dowell's abrupt proddings at the outset of the novel are fashioned by Ford, moreover, to evoke--especially for the first-time reader of the text--a disconcerting sense of confusion. Why, after all, does Dowell assume that we can, without any prior notice or intelligence, "gather," "perceive," "expect," or "know" anything of consequence regarding his as-yet-undisclosed ordeal? Has the reader mistakenly overlooked some earlier, pivotal affiliation or exchange with Ford's strikingly congenial narrator? Since Dowell fails to submit additional justification for the cozy interchange between himself and his mute partner, Ford introduces his narrator's inherently misguided nature while, at the same time, he foreshadows our own swelling sense of puzzlement over Dowell's observations. Moreover, because Dowell's story is, by his own admission, the most dismal story that he--the sole narrative voice of the text--has ever "heard" (3), Ford establishes a distance between speaking and hearing to underscore the ironic gap between the events and circumstances soon to be recounted by Dowell and the narrator's true grasp of their meaning.

But Dowell's introductory remarks establish for the reader much more than simply his ironic and detached position in the novel. Dowell's comments also serve to illustrate a significant, if not obvious, component of Ford's aesthetic pursuits. "For the first business of Impressionism is to produce an impression," Ford states

bluntly in his critical writing,

and the only way in literature to produce an impression is to awaken interest ... you can only keep interest awakened by keeping alive, by whatever means you may have at your disposal, the surprise of your reader. You must state your argument; you must illustrate it, and then you must stick in something that appears to have nothing whatever to do with either subject or illustration, so that the reader will exclaim: "What the devil is the fellow driving at?" ("On Impressionism" 48)

Without a doubt, Dowell's opening statements--those concise summary remarks which forecast, in their conscientious placement by Ford at the beginning of the novel, the absurdity of all that follows--are designed to "surprise" us and "awaken [our] interest" in his monologue. Facing Dowell's brazenly cryptic comments, then, we are almost certainly obliged to echo Ford's very own sentiment: "What the devil is the fellow driving at?" (48). From this early point in the novel onwards, though, we are also obliged to differentiate between the cunning "fellow" who drafts the novel and the misguided "fellow" who tirelessly relates the seriocomic incidents of the story.

Early scholars of The Good Soldier, addressing the necessary distinction to be made between Ford and his narrator, focus their attention on the distinct roles played

by the two "fellows" who permeate the novel. By recognizing the profound gap between novelist and narrator, the earliest critics of the novel spotlight Ford's steady dominance over Dowell's scattered impressions. Richard Cassell, whose revealing analysis of the novel's opening chapter in his book-length study, Ford Madox Ford: A Study Of His Novels (1961) prompts my own inquiry, recognizes that Ford's conception of random "memoirs" composed by a conspicuously digressive narrator is nothing less than a cunning "ruse" (176). "With its dislocations of time and its free movement between reporting, evaluating, and questioning," Cassell contends, "it is a method to conceal art" (176). Similarly, Norman Leer, whose comprehensive examination of Ford's work, The Limited Hero (1966), extends the indispensable critical dialogue launched by pioneer Ford scholars such as Mark Schorer, John Meixner and Samuel Hynes, confirms--and with a precision of his own--Ford's artful manipulation of Dowell's commentary:³

One of Ford's strongest technical achievements in the novel is this presentation of two simultaneous points of view--that of his narrator as well as his own ... It is in fact unlikely that the author, had he been without a coherent attitude, could have exercised upon this work the degree of control so immediately evident. (74-75)

As the initial chapter of Ford's novel unfolds, the prudent "fellow" whose skillful authorial charge generates,

according to Leer's subsequent testimony, an intriguing "double perspective" (77), stocks us with additional scraps of information and half-truths designed to stimulate our newly aroused puzzlement. Dowell declares, for instance, that he and his wife had known their aristocratic companions, the Ashburnhams, "as well as it was possible to know anybody, and yet, in another sense we knew nothing at all about them" (3); he acknowledges that his "poor dear" (7), Florence, had suffered from a "'heart'" and that she had, as a result, passed away (4); he contends that Captain Ashburnham "also had a heart" due to "polo, or too much hard sportsmanship in his youth" (4); he laments that his "long tranquil life, which was just stepping a minuet, vanished in four crashing days" (6); he recasts his minuet, strangely, as "a prison full of screaming hysterics (7); he allows that the "physical rottenness of at least two pillars of our four-square house never presented itself" (7); and he acknowledges, with an overstated sense of despondence, that he knows "nothing--nothing in the world--of the hearts of men. I only know that I am alone--horribly alone" (7; dashes Ford). We advance out of Ford's initial chapter, then, armed with only the sparsest details about the Ashburnhams, the "heart" conditions of Florence and the Captain, the "four crashing days" to which Dowell alludes, and the "two pillars" of "physical rottenness" that had remained cloaked until the collapse of the cherished "four-square house."

To afford ourselves a fruitful passage through the remainder of Dowell's knotted tale, we must consider and reconsider each additional sign, symbol, image or phrase we encounter in the text. We must ask ourselves, above all else, how any (or all, or none) of the subsequent information woven by Ford into Dowell's tale may relate--either directly or indirectly--to the "unthinkable" dissolution of his narrator's self-described "four-square coterie" (5). Certainly, by having Dowell outfit the reader in the opening pages of the novel with several obscure yet instructive points of reference and cross-reference, Ford bolsters his claims regarding the "perfectly self-conscious" quality of his writing. And, in terms of furnishing his reader with supplementary information designed to enlarge upon Dowell's initial remarks, Ford does not disappoint.

Indeed, at various stages in the novel Ford supplies us, vis-a-vis his narrator's perpetually shaky testimony, with details and particulars designed to contribute color and tone to the vague outline or, rather, plotline sketched by Dowell at the beginning of his yarn. We learn, for instance, that "Teddy" Ashburnham--"just exactly the sort of chap," as Dowell rates him, "you could have trusted your wife with" (11)--was, in truth, a lecherous fellow whose pathetic affairs of the "heart" had included, among others, an audacious in-transit embrace of a lovely nursemaid "of about nineteen" who occupied the same train carriage as he did (151); a fleeting and financially disastrous liaison

with the enticing La Dolciquita, the Grand Duke's mistress and a noted "Spanish dancer of passionate appearance" (159); and a prolonged romantic fling with Florence, a woman whose "poor little heart might," according to her misinformed husband, "flutter away to its doom" if consumed by excess passion (88). We learn, furthermore, that Edward's wife, Leonora, was fully cognizant of her husband's infidelities and that she had, for the sake of public opinion, erected a sturdy facade. We also learn, at random intervals throughout the novel, that Edward's debauchery had catalyzed, in one way or another, the accidental death of Maisie Maidan--the trusting "little rat" (74) whose fragile heart had, Dowell maintains, perished under the "ravages" of Edward's licensed promiscuity (74)--and the self-inflicted death of Florence. Moreover, we learn from Dowell that in the wake of Edward's own suicide--a final act performed by the Captain in a truly melodramatic, sentimentalist fashion by way of "a neat little penknife" (256)--he alone remains to nurse the final casualty of the revered "four-square house": the mentally unbalanced Nancy Rufford, whose pitiful condition flared because she "felt," or so we are told, "like a shuttlecock being tossed backwards and forwards between the violent personalities of [her guardians] Edward and his wife" (253).

Like the hapless Nancy Rufford, then, the reader of The Good Soldier is hurled "backwards and forwards" between the "personalities" of the determined novelist and his seemingly

indeterminate novel. Of course, the baffling "shuttlecock" effect devised by Ford is, as stated previously, wholly intentional. After all, as an aspiring Impressionist, Ford seeks--by his own admission--to convey in his writing "the odd vibration that scenes in life really have ... give your reader the impression that he was witnessing something real, that he was passing through an experience" ("On Impressionism" 42). While Dowell relates his conscious memories, recalls and modifies his earlier impressions, and poses his exasperating questions, Ford's highly selective narrative method fuels the formidable sense of bewilderment established by his narrator in the opening pages of the novel. On the whole, then, the confusing "experience" of reading Ford's novel coincides with the "odd vibration" evoked by the many scenes depicted by Dowell in an array of potentially inexplicable fragments.

Perhaps encouraged by the curious "vibration" issuing forth from Dowell's narrative, several scholars and critics suggest that Ford's literary method also betrays, to a considerable extent, the novelist's conception of a literary **progression d'effet**.⁴ Although Cassell concedes that a truly sound definition of this term is, in itself, rather illusive, he describes a **progression d'effet**, generally, as the amassed sum of the reader's "emotional responses" and "moral and intellectual reactions and evaluations ... the result [of which] is a complex of information discovered, attitudes aroused, and implications drawn" (A Study 175).

Likewise, Arthur Mizener, in his extensive biography of Ford, The Saddest Story (1971), augments this notion of a "complex" of data by characterizing the **progression d'effet**, more succinctly than does Cassell, as "the slowly accelerated revelation of motive and meaning in a series of dramatic scenes" (478). Not surprisingly, though, Ford himself provides the most formal and distinct statement of purpose regarding the **progression d'effet**. In his Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance (1924), Ford reflects upon his collaborative work with the elder novelist, and he concludes:⁵

In writing a novel, we agreed that every word set on paper--every word set on paper--must carry the story forward and that, as the story progressed, the story must be carried forward faster and faster and with more intensity. That is called progression d'effet, words for which there is no English equivalent. (225; emphasis Ford)

Given Ford's further statement of purpose, then, we can expect that Dowell's narrative, regardless of its explicit disorganization, is designed by Ford to move forward--by way of each and every word or phrase that Ford allots his narrator--with mounting intensity.

Mark Schorer, extolling Ford's accumulating narrative clutter in perhaps the first significant study of the text's tangled design, "An Interpretation" (1951), provides a stimulating point of departure for subsequent studies of the

text. "As a novel," Schorer asserts,

The Good Soldier is like a hall of mirrors, so constructed that, while one is always looking straight ahead at a perfectly solid surface, one is made to contemplate not the bright surface itself, but the bewildering maze of past circumstances and future consequence that-- somewhat falsely--it contains. (vii; dashes Schorer)

Thus encouraging the reader to pursue the confusing, yet imperative, vacillations and inferences which abound in the text, Schorer emphasizes--as does virtually every critic since--our interpretive contract with Ford's puzzling text. By recognizing, moreover, the novel's lively interplay between "past circumstances and future consequence," Schorer implies that Dowell's impressions are, indeed, structured by Ford so as to propel forward the meandering narrative.

What is more striking to Schorer, though, is the conspicuous demarcation between the calculated structure of Dowell's impressions and the potentially unfettered accretion of their meaning. Of course, Ford, by insisting that we draw implications from Dowell's scattered impressions, enlists his reader as an accomplice, of sorts, in the production of his text's bewilderment; after all, the reader's ardent pursuit of meaning in the text is fundamental to Ford's impressionist aims. In Schorer's opinion, however, the "mechanical structure of The Good

Soldier is controlled to a degree nothing less than taut, while the structure of meaning is almost blandly open, capable of limitless refractions" (vi).⁶ Altogether, then, Schorer's essay highlights the paradoxical design of Ford's self-conscious prose; Schorer confirms that Ford's remarkably "controlled" first-person narrative confuses, rather than clarifies, the meaning of Dowell's scattered impressions.

Samuel Hynes, enlarging upon Schorer's insightful analysis in his essay, "The Epistemology of The Good Soldier" (1961), likewise addresses the implications of Ford's crafty narrative "refractions." While Schorer observes elsewhere in his study that "[w]e are forced, at every point, to look back at this narrator, to scan his beguiling surprise, to measure the angle of refraction at which his veiled glance penetrates experience" (ix), Hynes qualifies, more explicitly than does Schorer, the intricate configuration of Dowell's retrospective narration:

... Dowell tells his story as a puzzled man thinks--not in chronological order, but compulsively, going over the ground in circles, returning to crucial points, like someone looking for a lost object in a dim light. What he is looking for is the meaning of his experience.

(231)

In his appraisal of the novel's design, then, Hynes not only broadcasts Ford's substantial control over his narrator's

impressions, but he also trumpets the correlation between Dowell's puzzlement and our own; that is, Hynes recognizes that we must think of the narrative in terms of ever-widening, overlapping "circles," and we must return, perchance "compulsively," to several "crucial points" in the story in the hopes of gleaning a more complete understanding of the experience.

In addition, Hynes notes, as does Schorer, that the most substantive action in the novel is Dowell's own struggle to understand the troubling experience through which he has passed. According to Hynes, however, the "crucial points" of concern to which Dowell returns psychologically are arranged by Ford "in relation to [Dowell's] developing knowledge, and are given importance in relation to what he learns from them" (54). In tendering this suggestion, Hynes not only harkens back, indirectly, to Ford's notion of an escalating *progression d'effet*, but he also reminds us that Ford's brand of Impressionism is founded, according to the novelist's own deposition, "upon analysis of the human mind" and, more accurately, "on observation of the psychology of the patron" who must unravel Dowell's tangled recollections ("On Impressionism" 48, 41).

As Dowell replays in his mind the experience of his wife's death, for instance, the magnitude of the incident increases for him "in relation" to what he learns gradually from it. At the same time, the significance of Dowell's

distorted view of his marriage swells for us "in relation" to what we learn from his ever-increasing knowledge of Florence's death. Hynes explains:

... we know in the first chapter that Dowell's wife, Florence, is dead, hear in the second chapter of Part II Dowell's account of that death (which he believes to be a heart attack), and only in Part III learn, through Dowell's account of Leonora's version of that event, that it was in fact suicide. (231)

Consequently, and as Hynes suggests implicitly, the psychology of Ford's narrator parallels that of the novelist's "patron." Unlike Schorer, though, who claims in "An Interpretation" that Dowell's version of such incidents is designed by Ford to be "exactly the wrong view" (vii; emphasis mine) of the events in the novel--a strategy employed by Ford to heighten the ironic impact of Dowell's narrow, distanced perspective--Hynes maintains that the novel is "not a study of [Dowell's] particular limitations; it is rather a study of the difficulties which man's nature and the world's put in the way of his will to know" (230).

By connecting the "particular limitations" of Dowell's narrative stance with the "nature" and "will" of human knowledge and understanding, Hynes thus recalls the governing principle of Ford's literary Impressionism. Ford, elsewhere in his Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, reiterates his conviction--presumably with an

eye towards the traditional, omniscient narratives tendered by novelists of the previous generation--that Conrad and he understood clearly that "Life did not narrate ... if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, [we] must not narrate but render impressions" (194-95). Accordingly, one of Ford's primary objectives in rendering Dowell's narrative is the deliberate frustration, as Hynes indicates, of the reader's "will to know."

Not surprisingly, several other critics have probed, in greater depth, the text's calculated impediments to our understanding and knowledge. Paul B. Armstrong, in his essay, "The Epistemology of The Good Soldier: A Phenomenological Reconsideration" (1980), extends Hynes's analysis and recapitulates, more explicitly than does his predecessor, Ford's aesthetic philosophy. "To 'render impressions'," Armstrong contends, "means to recreate the level of original experience before reflection composes life into a clear, orderly narration" (232). Having established this, Armstrong reminds us that a "rigidly chronological format would not be appropriate" for Dowell's tale since "it would ignore the temporal dynamics of self-consciousness" (235). And Armstrong advises us later in his essay that Ford--as documented by the novelist in his critical writings and animated by him in Dowell's disordered narrative--places "the highest epistemological and aesthetic value" on the dynamics of "bewilderment" (250).

Encouraged by Armstrong's provocative commentary, Ann

Barr Snitow launches, in one chapter of her book-length study of Ford's work, Ford Madox Ford and the Voice of Uncertainty (1984), her own noteworthy investigation of the novelist's deft blending of epistemology and aesthetics. In Snitow's opinion, Ford's impressionist maneuverings in The Good Soldier capture and convey the "expression of a fully known, unique narrator" (165). To Snitow, Dowell's penchant for prolonged digression represents, in itself, another of Ford's signposts for understanding his aims and goals in the novel. Espousing Ford's "triumph of technique in The Good Soldier" (164), Snitow writes:

Placing doubt inside Dowell and making him the narrator is a technique that lets doubt and irresolution proliferate into every corner of the narrative while still keeping these mixed emotions as a clear expression of one man's search for meaning" (164).

Thus identifying Ford's fusion of dramatic contradictions--that is, his artful mingling of "doubt and irresolution" and "clear expression"--Snitow, like her predecessors, highlights the intentionally paradoxical nature of Ford's writing.

Snitow reminds us in her study, moreover, that any comprehensive understanding of Dowell's experience derives from "all the layers of associations that Ford has heaped upon the narrative line" (168). In heeding Snitow's counsel, we must struggle to negotiate all "layers of

associations" stemming from Dowell's cogitations on his "four-square coterie." Of course, by recognizing that we must evaluate Dowell's errant ramblings--without a proven, consistent mode of assessment--before we can disentangle Ford's text, Snitow reiterates the comparison between Dowell's interpretive task and that of the reader: "... the problem the style of the novel poses is analagous to the problem the narrator faces within the novel itself" (165-166). On the whole, then, Snitow's applause for Ford's "carefully planned assaults on the body of his material" (167) suggests, to a significant degree, her steady belief that Ford governs, fully and completely, even the most exotic "associations" stemming from Dowell's utterances.

Armstrong, concurring with Snitow in his more recent study of the novel, "Obscurity and Reflection in The Good Soldier" (1987), asserts that Ford's text is "not only a novel about the trials of human understanding; it is itself an example of them, an occasion for interpretive dilemmas in the reader's engagement with it" (195). Consequently, as both Snitow and Armstrong suggest, the final effect of Ford's bewildering narrative strategy depends primarily on the reader's capacity to engage the "interpretive" paradigm offered by Ford vis-a-vis Dowell's convoluted storyline. Armstrong explains: "When we read The Good Soldier, our acts of anticipation and retrospection complement the forward and backward movement of Dowell's reflections on his past

("Obscurity" 200). And according to Armstrong's ensuing testimony, Ford's reader--by toiling alongside Dowell to compose a coherent version of his story--becomes aware of the "implicit process of retrospective reconstitution that all reading entails" ("Obscurity" 200). Armstrong also observes, however, that the experience of reading The Good Soldier "entails" much more than simply uprooting and rearranging the events of Dowell's past:

Following up a new line of thought prompted by his reflections may interfere with the very attempt to fit the pieces of his history into a coherent pattern which is the task of self-conscious retrospection. ("Obscurity" 194).

In concluding his recent study of the novel, then, Armstrong alleges that as readers of The Good Soldier we "are likely to find [ourselves] becoming self-conscious about the very process of understanding precisely because it has been blocked" ("Obscurity" 206-07). Indeed, and as stated previously, Ford activates and re-activates specific points of reference and cross-reference in Dowell's narrative to simultaneously encourage and frustrate our attempts at decoding the novel. Thus, as I have considered up to this point in my own analysis, it is Ford's steady control of Dowell's conspicuously rambling report that generates for us the "illusion of reality" to which Ford alludes in his theoretical writing ("On Impressionism" 43).

Nevertheless, Roger Poole's contemporary analysis of

the novel, "The Real Plot Line of Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier" (1990), challenges the popular, well-chronicled theory of Ford's "perfectly self-conscious" prose. "There are moments in the experience of reading," Poole attests at the outset of his essay, "when some pattern that is obviously 'there' ... suddenly insists upon getting itself recognized as **being 'there'**" (38; emphasis Poole). Although Poole concedes that certain instances of unanticipated recognition in the novel may merely signal another "textual effect" generated by Ford with an eye towards bewilderment, he reminds us that any "militating" points of reference in the text raise "almost at once the perilous question of authorial intention" (391). Such is the case, as I will now argue, with the recurring expression "the 4th of August" in The Good Soldier. By tracking the phrase as it "insists," to cite Poole, "upon getting itself recognized" in various ways throughout the novel, I expect to arrive--as indicated at the beginning of this essay--at "that point," to summon anew Roland Barthes, where Ford's language "performs" in a fashion that he likely could not have foreseen.

Prefiguring and, in fact, prompting my own pursuit of "the 4th of August," is Frank Nigro's recent essay, "Who Framed The Good Soldier?: Dowell's Story in Search of a Form" (1992). In his short study Nigro investigates the thematic pattern to which the phrase belongs originally, and, in doing so, he situates it within a framework of

Dowell's bewilderment. Nigro writes:

Dowell seems to be grasping for something concrete as an anchor in a sea of indeterminacy. One of these foundation stones or anchors is the number four. There are four central characters ... the date August 4 takes on various significances; and, finally, The Good Soldier divides into four chapters. (388)

Suggesting, moreover, that Dowell "persistently calls our attention to four, echoing the four-square coterie which forms the basis of his narrative," Nigro observes rightly that "Dowell's relation to the number four, or to numbering in general, is curious" (Nigro 388).

But how truly "curious," to echo Nigro, are Dowell's most immediate associations with the number four? Consider the following textual evidence: Dowell declares that the universe as he knew it--or, more precisely, as he failed to know it!--"vanished in four crashing days at the end of nine years and six weeks" (7); he determines that "the first year of us four at Nauheim ... would have been the fourth year of Florence and myself" (37; ellipsis and emphasis mine); he alleges that Edward travelled to Nauheim with a "profusion" of suitcases, some of which contained "four bottles of medicine" (26); he claims that Edward would have been faithful to the servant girl in the Kilsyte case, had she acquiesced to his daring in-transit embrace, "for four or five years" (58); and, he claims that Leonora's urgent

telegraph--imploing him to visit the Ashburnhams to console the grief-stricken Edward--had reached him "four hours after Edward's" own correspondence had arrived (200; all emphasis mine). As this modest handful of 'curiosities' confirms, then, Dowell tempts us to pursue his peculiar "relation to the number four."

At the beginning of "Part II" of The Good Soldier, Dowell himself exemplifies--in his typically loquacious manner--his "curious relation to the number four" (Nigro 388) as it is manifest in the phrase "the 4th of August":

The death of Mrs. Maidan occurred on the 4th of August 1904. And then nothing happened until the 4th of August 1913. There is the curious coincidence of dates, but I do not know whether that is one of those sinister, as if half-jocular and altogether merciless proceedings on the part of a cruel Providence that we call a coincidence. Because it may just as well have been the superstitious mind of Florence that forced her to certain acts, as if she had been hypnotized. It is, however, certain that the 4th of August always proved a significant date for her. To begin with, she was born on the 4th of August. Then on that date, in the year 1899, she set out with her uncle for the tour round the world in company with a young man called Jimmy. But that was not merely a coincidence. Her kindly old uncle, with the

supposedly damaged heart, was, in his delicate way, offering her, in this trip, a birthday present to celebrate her coming of age. Then, on the 4th of August 1900, she yielded to an action that certainly coloured her whole life - as well as mine. She had no luck. She was probably offering herself a birthday present that morning ...

On the 4th of August 1901, she married me, and set sail for Europe in a great gale of wind-- the gale that affected her heart. (77-78; ellipsis Ford).

Since the calendar years associated with this all-important date are presented non-chronologically by Dowell--"1904," "1913," "1899," "1900" and, lastly, "1901"--the excerpt cited above illustrates, indirectly and in miniature, the anti-chronological time frame evoked by Ford in the novel. Moreover, by entangling in the aforementioned passage four events of vital importance to the storyline--death (Mrs. Maiden's), life (Florence's), marriage (Florence's and Dowell's) and clandestine sexual affairs (Florence and Jimmy)--Ford's narrator encourages the reader to engage the number four as a possible vehicle for understanding exactly how much of "nothing" has actually "happened" to Dowell.

At the same time, Dowell's repeated mention of "the 4th of August" summons for us a profound historical event and informs further the reader's response to Ford's text: August

4, 1914, marks the watershed of Great Britain's involvement in the First World War.⁷ In considering the historical context of the novel--when it was written (1915), by whom it was written, and the time period evoked in its pages--it is conceivable that our "perfectly self-conscious" novelist evokes the outburst of World War I as an analog, of sorts, to describe (perhaps in a melodramatic fashion that complements Dowell's own propensity for overstatement) the dissolution of Dowell's cozy clique and the many lifestyle changes facing citizens like the Ashburnhams. In fact, by omitting from Dowell's retrospective testimony any mention of the year 1914, Ford paradoxically highlights its absence and, by extension, broadcasts the vital importance of those 'happenings' which are not tendered explicitly by Dowell within the lines of the novel.

Once "the 4th of August" is mobilized by the hopeful reader, though, the expression clearly "insists," to again cite Roger Poole, "upon getting itself recognized" (390) in ways perhaps unanticipated by Ford. For example, the word "four" contains precisely four letters. Moreover, as the eighth month of the calendar year, "August"--or, more accurately, the number (8) which it denotes--is divisible two times by the number four. Of course, in yielding these potentially coincidental "layers of associations" (Snitow 168) between the numbers eight, four and two, Ford's language functions alongside his determined narrative structure to energize the "limitless refractions" that help

typify, according to Schorer's earlier testimony, Dowell's rambling report (vi).

However, according to Barthes's speculations in "The Death of the Author," it seems that if we mistakenly attribute to Ford--even remotely--a too-strict governance over Dowell's language, we may actually undermine, rather than bolster, the novelist's avowed intentions in composing The Good Soldier. "To give a text an Author," Barthes cautions us, "is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (147). And, as evidenced repeatedly in Ford's own theoretical musings, the closure of writing to which Barthes refers would inhibit, ultimately, the far-reaching effects Ford seeks to animate vis-a-vis Dowell's narrative. In the true spirit of Ford's "perfectly self-conscious" literary goals, then, the reader, or, to enlist Barthes's contemporary terminology, the "modern scriptor" (Barthes 145) of The Good Soldier must refuse to "close" the novel by embracing, as Barthes urges, the "multiplicity of writing" (147) located invariably in the text.

Of course, by adopting Barthes's "revolutionary" ("Death" 147) reading strategy as a means to advance Ford's pre-conceived notion of bewilderment we reconcile, to a large degree, the discordant philosophies with which I open this inquiry. Nevertheless, Poole reminds us in his essay that the harmonious discord between Ford's authorial phrasings and the sovereign voice of language still conjures

for us the contentious issue of authorial control. Addressing Ford's "planned subversion" of the novel's linear plotline, Poole believes it is conceivable "that an author's intent should be that a text should 'exceed' and 'pervert' itself" (391). By extension, then, is it conceivable that in constructing The Good Soldier Ford consciously employs language which, in itself, adulterates and "perverts" its meaning? Or, is the play on numbers inherent in the phrase "the 4th of August" merely, to use Dowell's own words, "a curious coincidence?" (77).

Consider the number two as it "exceed[s]" further the numerical associations inherent in the phrase "the 4th of August" to broadcast another prominent pattern in the novel. There are two married couples--that is, two wedded twosomes--in the text; each pair leads a double life marked by a double standard of social propriety and private indulgence (Florence and Edward's adulterous affair); only two of the most visible characters in the novel fail to engage this double standard (Dowell and Nancy Rufford); two of the central characters of the "four-square house" commit suicide (Florence and Edward); two species of religious conviction are in competition in the novel (Protestantism and Catholicism); and, as Roger Poole demonstrates convincingly, "two entirely different sets of events are being claimed to have taken place on a single day, the 4th of August 1904" (401).⁸

To be sure, throughout The Good Soldier Dowell evokes

the number two in a myriad of contexts. We are informed by him, as noted earlier, that "two pillars" of his "house" had suffered "physical rottenness" (7); we are instructed by him, in Ford's second paragraph of chapter "II" (curious? indeed!), that the events and circumstances soon to be recounted had occurred "Two years ago" (13); we are notified by him, many pages later, that "only two of [Edward's] affairs of the heart [had] cost him money" (58); we are told by Dowell, later still, that he had waited "two hours ... at the foot of the ladder" on the evening that Florence and he had eloped (84; ellipsis and emphasis mine); we are told by him that exactly "two hours after [Florence's] death" he had blurted out his intention to marry Nancy Rufford (104); and we are told by him, much later in the novel, that Florence was "in two minds whether to confess" of her adultery "to me or Leonora" (192; all emphasis mine).

In addition to all this, Dowell claims that Edward had "treated Florence with gallant attentiveness ... until two hours before her death" (131; ellipsis mine); he recalls that Edward had spent "two hundred pounds" to exonerate the daughter of one of his tenants (28); and, he explains that Edward had "cried for two days" when Leonora "sold two Vandykes" (oil paintings) to raise money for their overdue mortgage (167): that is, "two kings' ransoms" (163) worth of cash that the reckless Captain had squandered in "about a fortnight"--in other words, two weeks--at the gambling tables in Monte Carlo (162; all emphasis mine). Moreover,

since the preceding utterance "a fortnight" echoes, in part, the number four yet signifies--in terms of weeks--the number two, Dowell's language "heaps," according to Snitow's earlier testimony (168), additional and potentially superfluous "layers of associations" on key elements of the narrative line.

The refusal of Ford's language--in this case, two of the most recognizable numbers in Dowell's narrative--to limit its performance in The Good Soldier is manifest elsewhere in the novel. Take, for instance, Dowell's remark that the adulterous Edward "would have to pay a premium of two years' hire for a month" in the company of the Grand Duke's mistress, La Dolciquita (160). The expression "a month" signals a time period of four weeks while "two years" marks a duration of 24--that is, two and four--four week terms. In addition to this, consider Dowell's claim that the conniving Florence, in fabricating her fragile heart condition, had discussed with her Aunt Emily, "for hours and hours" (85), the details of her Uncle Hurlbird's illness. Here, the preposition "for" parrots the number four while the word "hours" repeats two times to compound the play of associations spawned by this pair of numbers. But "is all this," to borrow from Dowell another of his surprisingly germane remarks, "digression or isn't it digression?" (14).

Although these digressive associations may appear, at first glance, to be ingenuity--on my part--solely for its own sake, they are not; instead, they extend Ford's "odd

vibration" ("On Impressionism" 42) of a mystifying and meaningless (or potentially meaningful) bewilderment and, at the same time, animate Barthes's contemporary view of the "total existence" of writing (148). To Barthes, any text consists of "multiple writings" which enter into "mutual relations of dialogue, parody, [and] contestation" and converge, ultimately, on the reader (148). "The reader," as Barthes speculates in his essay, "is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (148). Again, since the "destination" of Ford's writing is, as I state elsewhere in this study, the reader or, more accurately, the "patron" (Ford, "On Impressionism" 41) of The Good Soldier, these contesting (and equally contestable) divergences--many of which are likely unintended at their place of "origin"--help recast the distinct theories of Ford and Barthes in a much less contradictory manner.

In pursuing Barthes's additional claim in "The Death of the Author" that every text is "eternally written **here** and **now**" (145; emphasis Barthes), we must probe, in still greater depth, the ways in which two, four and--less frequently--eight, resonate throughout Ford's novel to perpetuate the text's bewilderment: the cheery foursome travelled to the Castle of M-- on "the two-forty" train from Nauheim (41); Mrs. Maidan kept a "boy husband out in Chitral [who was] not more than twenty-four" years old (51); Leonora

met Edward when he was "twenty-two" years of age (137); the Grand Duke's mistress had been "twenty-four" at the time of her romance with Edward (160); and, Florence's Uncle Hurlbird had died--and of complications altogether unrelated to his heart--"at the age of eighty-four" (19; all emphasis mine). Moreover, La Dolciquita had "exacted a twenty-thousand pound pearl tiara from [Edward] as the price for her favours" (55); the Captain had frittered away "forty thousand pounds" at the casinos in Monte Carlo (55); Dowell had "first met Florence at the [home of the] Stuyvesants', in Fourteenth Street" (78); he feared having "a dual personality" (103); and he realized that Edward had "sent expensive cables in cipher to Florence about twice a week" (195; all emphasis mine).

Of course, it is altogether contestable whether or not these various manifestations of two and four actually overstep Ford's "perfectly self-conscious" charge. On the one hand, these reverberations may have been designed by the novelist to further lampoon his narrator's impotent sense of order and understanding; in other words, the numbers to which Dowell clings for solace assume a replicative and proliferative life of their own--at the very "place," according to Barthes, of their "destination" (148)--to animate Dowell's self-perpetuating bafflement. On the other hand, such repercussions expose the limitations of Ford's self-conscious prose by providing "layers of associations" likely unforeseen by this meticulous writer. In doing so,

these potentially unforeseen reverberations seemingly mock the process by which Ford's writing negotiates its contract with the reader; the words and phrases which we chase in The Good Soldier fix us in doubt and confusion as to how even they function within Dowell's narrative. By propagating the reader's doubt and confusion, then, Dowell's utterances work alongside Ford's pen--perchance unwittingly--to animate the epistemological and aesthetic principles of Impressionism.

II

In acknowledging some of the ways in which the numbers two and four emerge from the recurring phrase "the 4th of August" to resonate throughout The Good Soldier, we thus foster--indirectly and ironically--the calculated "effects" of Ford's textual confusion. Regardless of our complementary puzzlement, however, it is unlikely that Ford meant for us to deviate in this manner beyond the scope of Dowell's ironic, digressive "tale of passion." On the contrary, Ford advises us in his critical writing that a novelist's "contentions" should appear to us "like a ravelled skein ... then, in the last few lines, [we] will draw towards [us] the master-string of that seeming confusion, and the whole pattern of the carpet, the whole net-work will be apparent" ("On Impressionism" 48). Clearly, then, although the theories posited by Ford and Barthes intersect occasionally, they remain essentially

divergent; Ford, unlike Barthes, confers upon the author the unfailing potency to create "the whole pattern ... the whole net-work" inherent in even the most self-perpetuating text.

Indeed, in several select passages of The Good Soldier Ford artfully maneuvers his narrator's testimony and offers us tentative "master-string[s]," of a sort, that help make apparent some of his "contentions" in the novel. Prompted by Dowell's peculiar affinity for the number four, then, I should like now to examine closely four particularly revealing, interconnected segments of his narrative; four concise--yet densely populated--passages of text within which Ford consistently flaunts his "remarkably self-conscious" control over Dowell's ramblings and, in doing so, counsels us as to how to navigate his text's explicit confusion.

Midway through "Part One" of the novel, for instance, Dowell recalls a serene, apparently insignificant moment spent gazing around the hotel grounds at Nauheim. As Dowell describes the resort's exterior, Ford confirms--albeit obliquely--his conscientious manipulation of Dowell's utterances:

... whilst poor Florence was taking her morning bath, I stood upon the carefully swept steps of the Englischer Hof, looking at the carefully arranged trees in tubs upon the carefully arranged gravel whilst carefully arranged people walked past in carefully calculated gaiety, at the

carefully calculated hour, the tall trees of the public gardens, going up to the right; the reddish stone of the baths--or were they white half-timber chalets? Upon my word I have forgotten, I who was there so often. (21-22; dashes Ford)

With Dowell's admission that he is "looking" rather than seeing, Ford's "carefully calculated" prose accentuates the tension found elsewhere in the text between Dowell's glut of sights and his dearth of insights. Moreover, the image of only partial fertility evoked by the phrase "carefully arranged trees in tubs" alerts us to the mostly impotent quality of Dowell's prolific observations.

At the same time, Dowell's language in this passage reveals much more than simply two of Ford's dominant thematic concerns. Granted, certain repetitions in the excerpt cited above--that is, the phrases "carefully arranged trees," "carefully arranged gravel," "carefully arranged people," and "carefully calculated gaiety"--combine to form a concise and contained *progression d'effet*, of sorts, and highlight Ford's textual concern with facades. But these recurring expressions also forecast Dowell's mechanical attempts to order and explain his experience. By repeating words such as "carefully," "arranged," and "calculated," Ford points toward the contrived nature of Dowell's recollection and underscores the deliberate, genuinely systematic prose style implemented in the novel; in other words, Ford organizes this short passage very

"carefully" to illustrate syntactically the artificiality of his narrator's seemingly spontaneous cogitation.

Furthermore, Ford's "carefully arranged" prose complicates the already hazardous question of authorial control. Although the concise language used by Ford in the aforementioned passage aptly broadcasts the artificiality of Dowell's overtly casual recollection and, in doing so, underscores the artistry of the novel, it also suggests that Dowell himself is satirizing--by way of his ironic, mechanical overstatement--the underlying artificiality of Nauheim, its spuriously refined guests, and its guise of "carefully" respected practices and routines.⁹ Thus, while Dowell is undoubtedly oblivious of the true meaning of his experience at Nauheim at the time it occurs, the diction of his retrospective tale--as evidenced by the short passage provided above--implies a new-found awareness of his earlier failures of insight. Consequently, Dowell's tale becomes, in varying degrees, an extended exercise in self-derision and disenchantment that further obstructs our efforts to order and appraise his experience; Dowell's tone of self-mockery constitutes yet another textual variable manipulated by Ford to fuel the effects of the novel's over-arching bewilderment.

By entangling in Dowell's brief description of the spa's exterior several serviceable "master-string[s]" to the novel's confusion, Ford dramatizes his conviction that a narrative, like a painting or a photograph, "should come out

of its frame and seize the spectator" ("On Impressionism" 48). Of course, and as I suggest earlier in this essay, the phrase "the 4th of August" seems to behave in such a manner; that is, it oversteps the "frame" of Ford's local governance to "seize the spectator" with a sense of doubt and irresolution which parallels--albeit coincidentally--that of Dowell's own bewilderment. Elsewhere in the novel, however, Ford parades his uncanny control over the ways in which his text 'seizes' the reader.

One of Dowell's earliest meditations on the revered Captain is, in fact, propelled by Ford "out of its frame" and into several other 'snapshots' in the narrative. Dowell, while contemplating Edward's physical demeanor and attractiveness, asks himself:

Good God, what did they all see in him?--for I swear that was all there was of him, inside and out; though they said he was a good soldier. Yet Leonora adored him with a passion that was like an agony, and hated him with an agony that was as bitter as the sea. How could he rouse anything like a sentiment, in anybody? (26: dashes Ford)

In this passage, Ford's precise diction forecasts in several ways the absurd quality of Dowell's ensuing narrative. Firstly, by proclaiming "Good God" at the beginning of the paragraph, Dowell himself answers his query regarding Edward's capacity to "rouse anything like a sentiment" in others; a protest which is squashed initially by Dowell's

own use of words denoting extreme sentiment. Secondly, by questioning what the others "all see in [Edward]," Dowell augments the noteworthy tension between sight and insight while, at the same time, he alerts us to his distanced, unique perspective in the novel. Thirdly, as a cliché, the expression "Good God" explains little or nothing about either "good[ness]" or "God" and thus betrays the enigmatic quality of Ford's writing; Dowell's hollow remark conveys meaning that is only related remotely to the utterance itself.

Given this, what does Ford mean for us to infer from Dowell's subsequent claim that Edward "was," as the title of the novel heralds, "a good soldier?" Clearly, the word "good" signifies little or nothing in regards to the purity or benevolence of Edward's character and, as a result, it becomes an empty cliché--like the preceding expression, "Good God"--mobilized by Ford to elucidate both the Captain's vacuousness and also the impotency of Dowell's utterance. At the same time, we cannot ignore the retrospective quality of Dowell's remarks and, by extension, we cannot discount his fresh perception of "Teddy" Ashburnham's deplorable character: an awareness which is highlighted both by Dowell's self-mocking tone and also his ironic use of the term "good."

Ford, having 'seized' the reader in the aforementioned passage with the empty and ironic status of the word "good," strategically displaces the term from its immediate "frame"

of reference and invests it--at various junctures in the novel--with a host of meanings designed to accentuate its ambiguity and hollowness. Dowell considers, for instance, that Leonora was a "good actress ... By jove she was good" (49); he admits that he was "no good at geography of the Indian Empire" (172); he recognizes that Edward was gone from Leonora "for good" (203); he claims that he wanted Florence's estate only to provide the ailing Nancy Rufford with "a good time" for the remainder of her days (199); he alleges that "Mrs. Basil was very good to Edward and Mrs. Maiden very good for him" (179); and he maintains--even in the closing moments of the novel--that the various members of his splintered coterie were still, in his estimation, "good people" (249). Unlike the potentially unchecked conduct of the phrase "the 4th of August," then, the word "good"--in all its indeterminate splendor--seems to remain under the novelist's local supervision to trumpet loudly the calculated limitations of Dowell's testimony.

At several additional points in Dowell's rambling narrative Ford illustrates, perhaps more dramatically, the self-conscious quality of his prose in The Good Soldier. Consider, as a third example of Ford's publicized governance, yet another of Dowell's curious assessments of Captain Ashburnham:

... the fellow talked like a cheap novelist.--Or like a very good novelist for the matter of it, if it's the business of the novelist to make you see

things clearly. And I tell you I see that thing as clearly as if it were a dream that never left me. (109)

Here, by squashing the distinction between "a cheap novelist" and "a very good novelist," Dowell undercuts a precise definition of either term to broadcast further the dubious quality of his ostensibly insightful commentary. More significantly, though, Ford couches in this short passage one of Joseph Conrad's most recognizable statements of purpose regarding the viable potency of a prudent novelist. "My task which I am trying to achieve," Conrad claims in his "Preface" to The Nigger of the Narcissus (1897), "is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see" (x; dashes and emphasis Conrad). Thus enlisting "the power" of the elder novelist's "written word[s]" in favor of authorial dominance, Ford reminds us that it is his "business"--as the chief architect of The Good Soldier--to make us "hear" and "see" both the blindness of Dowell's vision and also the insight (buried, as is often the case with Dowell's discernment, within an unmistakable tone of disillusionment and self-deprecation) of his retrospection.

Ford's most explicit guidance to his reader is tendered, however, at the beginning of "Part Four" of the novel--an additional happenstance which seems, to again cite Dowell, "too [or is it two?] unbearable" (100)--and is

couched within Dowell's own apt appraisal of his ramblings:

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 has forgotten to mention them in their proper places and that one may have given, by omitting them, a false impression. (183; dashes Ford, ellipsis mine)

Here, Ford instructs us directly to shift back and forth between the most conspicuous "points" of Dowell's convoluted narrative. And Dowell, in casting his memoirs as a fallible discussion, signals the dubiousness of his tale and, in doing so, broadcasts Ford's documented belief that an Impressionist "will never render a long speech of one of his characters verbatim, because the mind of the reader would at once lose some of the illusion of the good faith of the narrator" ("On Impressionism" 41).

Not surprisingly, the excerpt cited above does much more than just reinforce the reader's "good faith" in Dowell's narrative stance: a solitary and detached perspective underscored by Ford's repeated use of the word "one." Indeed, on one level--and by way of Dowell's

mentioning a safeway through his maze-like story--Ford spotlights the premeditated status of Dowell's chaotic impressions while, at the same time, he sustains the ambiguous tone of his narrator's commentary; after all, Dowell concedes, in his characteristically equivocal manner, that his ramblings are merely "a sort of" labyrinth. On another level, though, Dowell's evocation of a maze tells us that Ford, like his narrator, is well "aware" of the profound challenge lurking at the "heart"--to evoke another recurrent emblem in the novel--of Dowell's labyrinthine tale: the confrontation of a half meaningful, half meaningless, perhaps ironic, undoubtedly astounding narrative.¹⁰

* * *

In The Good Soldier, Ford Madox Ford's meticulous prose style captures and conveys the ostensibly unstructured observations and cogitations of his "carefully arranged," intentionally fallible narrator, John Dowell. And, as the wealth of critical speculation about the novel and its primary narrator indicates repeatedly, Ford orchestrates--by way of exercising the "perfectly self-conscious" authorial charge to which he alludes often in his critical writings--Dowell's woeful and, at times, melodramatic/ironic account of his stints at Nauheim, his life with Florence, and his alliance with the Ashburnhams. Ford, thus governing

the ever-bewildering "effects" of Dowell's digressive ramblings, dramatizes several prominent features of literary Impressionism and, in doing so, trumpets the exceptional level of control he exerts over the composition of the novel.

At first glance, then, Ford's well-chronicled faith in a determined authorial command seems to counter, fully and completely, Roland Barthes's poststructural convictions in "The Death of the Author." Still, as I suggest at various stages in this essay, these distinct philosophies--each of which is illustrated succinctly by the citations with which I open this inquiry--need not exist solely as antithetic absolutes. On the contrary, by initiating a conciliatory dialogue, of sorts, between the theoretical writings of Ford and Barthes, we afford ourselves an opportunity to engage several as-yet-undiscovered layers of associations in The Good Soldier that are, on the one hand, likely unanticipated by Ford yet are, on the other hand, analogous to his Impressionist aims and goals; that is, our supplementary (and potentially errant) associations in the novel--such as those numerical combinations that I plucked from the recurring utterance "the 4th of August"--serve to defer the closure of Ford's novel and proliferate, at the point of their "destination," the uncertainty and confusion envisioned originally by Ford with an eye towards textual bewilderment.

Notes

¹ Ford's essay, "On Impressionism," was first published in 1913 in two installments of Poetry and Drama (MacShane 33). The essay remains, according to a prominent Ford scholar, Frank MacShane, a detailed "assessment of the techniques which, both by himself and in collaboration with Joseph Conrad, [Ford] had labored so long to master" (33). Ford, by outlining in his essay the vital considerations of literary "Impressionism," provided a blueprint, of sorts, for understanding his aims and goals in The Good Soldier. As MacShane notes, the Impressionists sought, by way of a meticulous selection of "telling detail," to capture the "seemingly casual aspects of human relationships which so often, as in real life, provide true insights into personal relationships and human activities" (33).

² Barthes's short essay, "The Death of the Author," was first published in French in 1968 (Adams 1130). It was reprinted in a collection of his essays, selected and translated by Stephen Heath in 1977, entitled Image-Music-Text (Adams 1130). In "The Death of the Author" Barthes dismisses the commonly held view that the creator of a written work can govern, fully and completely, its literal and/or its symbolic meanings. Ultimately, and as Raman Selden confirms in his concise yet competent review of current literary trends, A Reader's Guide To Contemporary Literary Theory, Barthes view is extreme because it encourages readers "to take their pleasure of the text, to follow what defiles of the signifier as it slips and slides evading the grasp of the signified ... they are free to connect the text with systems of meaning and ignore the author's 'intention'" (79).

³ Although The Good Soldier did attract modest critical attention from its original date of publication, the inclusion in the 1951 Vintage edition of Mark Schorer's essay, "An Interpretation"--published originally in 1948 in The Princeton University Library Chronicle--ignited lively scholarly interest in the novel (Cassell, Critical Essays 3). Meixner's study, "The Saddest Story," was first printed in Kenyon Review 22 (Spring 1960) while Hynes's pivotal essay, "The Epistemology of The Good Soldier" was first published in Sewanee Review 49 (1961) (Cassell, Critical Essays 49). Each of these studies remains, to this day, a rewarding point of departure for any critical inquiry of the

novel.

⁴ Cassell points to Robert F. Haugh's work, Joseph Conrad: Discovery In Design (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), to explain the notion of a **progression d'effet**. In citing Haugh directly, Cassell writes: "The term, employed by Conrad and Hueffer [Ford] in their conversations on the art of fiction, embraces growth, movement, heightening of all elements of the story: conflict and stress if it is a dramatic story; intensity of magnitude of image if it is a poetic story; complexity of patterns; balance and symmetry; evocations used for mood and functional atmosphere" (Haugh, qtd. in Cassell, A Study 175). Although Haugh applies his analysis of **progression d'effet** only to Conrad's works, Cassell's point of reference is valid; Ford, like Conrad, holds a distinct view of the way in which a novel should be arranged for maximum effect.

⁵ Ford met Joseph Conrad, his senior by some eighteen years, in 1898, and they collaborated--during a period that spanned 1898-1903--on three fictional works: The Inheritors (1901), Romance (1903), and The Nature of the Crime (first printed in 1909 in two installments of The English Review; published in book form, apparently at Ford's insistence, in 1924) (Hoffman 19).

⁶ Although Schorer's conception of potentially unhampered "refractions" of meaning--located, nonetheless, within a tightly controlled narrative framework--may reconcile, to some extent, the vital contradiction with which I open this essay, it does not resolve the dilemma altogether: on the contrary, Schorer's suggestion encourages the pursuit of noteworthy "refractions" beyond the effects likely intended by the novelist.

⁷ I am grateful to Professor Elsa Nettels for her advice regarding the historical context of this date.

⁸ Poole argues vigorously, and with formidable success, that the novel contains "two mutually contradictory time schemes" (405). To substantiate his claims, Poole dates the events of the novel internally and concludes that "the story of how Florence saw Leonora box Maisie Maidan's ears on the very evening they met (4 August 1904), and the story of how Maisie Maidan was found dead upon the return of the foursome from the town of M--, are not compossible. The chain of events involving Leonora, Florence and Maisie Maidan's humiliation, occupies the afternoon of 4 August. The story of the trip to M-- also occupies the afternoon of 4 August" (404; emphasis Poole).

⁹ I am thankful to Professor Elsa Nettels for her reminders about the schism between Dowell's immediate observations and his retrospective testimony.

¹⁰ I am reminded, here, of Ovid's tale of Daedalus and the Labyrinth of the Minotaur. Daedalus, an outstanding--and presumably self-conscious!--architect and inventor, created an intricate labyrinth from which there was no opportunity of escape. At the behest of King Minos, Daedalus entrapped within his maze a Minotaur: the monstrous offspring of King Minos's adulterous wife and a strikingly handsome bull whose composition was, not surprisingly, half human and half bull. (See Ovid's Metamorphoses. Trans. Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955: 182-190). By eliciting this myth, Ford perhaps invites us--albeit subtly--to probe the depths of his labyrinthine text in search of the meaning (or meanings) which resides at its center.

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