

# Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* and the Ethics of Perspective

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**A**LTHOUGH LESS widely read than his contemporaries, and only recently turned into the target of sustained academic attention,<sup>1</sup> Ford Madox Ford represents a foundational figure at the very dawn of British modernism, one whose huge literary output is paralleled only by his influence on fictional modes of experimentation. As Max Saunders remarks in the Preface to a celebratory collection, *The Good Soldier* may well have become a globally read novel,<sup>2</sup> no doubt also due to the recent reconsideration of modernism as a phenomenon and set of conceptual and ethical orientations, which distanced it from the postmodern agenda and allowed critics to read it not in terms of an aestheticized retreat into the religion of art, but simultaneously as a historical event and as a comment on historical developments and ideological commitments. This paper contends that Ford's innovative choice of the restricted first-person perspective did not only set the tone for subsequent modernist experiments with unreliability as the embodiment of radical skepticism, but also holds the potential of probing the ethical implications of the act of narration through its parallel staging of the (historicized) events and the act of storytelling itself. The narrator's utter misconception of others and their actions is compensated only by his sincerity regarding the inadequacy of storytelling; however, this can be taken as yet another symptom of his being unable to form ethical relations.

Completed during 1914, as Ford and his country were preparing to go to war, *The Good Soldier* was published in 1915, after its author had already volunteered to enlist at the age of 41, and was taking part in the European conflagration from which he would emerge shell-shocked and with a heightened sense of generalized calamity. The novel's themes and convoluted structure reflect the turmoil of the historical age it is set in (roughly, the Edwardian decade preceding its publication) and of the ensuing catastrophe, prophetically concentrated in its obsession with the date of the 4<sup>th</sup> of August (when most of the important events are said to occur), which, coincidentally, was also the day of Britain's declaring war on Germany. The novel has become famous for the use of John Dowell, a shockingly unreliable narrator even by modernist standards, of a disjointed temporal structure and erratic recounting of events, characterized both by repetition and marked redundancy, and avoidance or prolonged ellipses. The reconstituted plot stages the sentimental history ("the saddest story" of the first line, and the original title of the novel) of two couples who claim to be inseparable friends, but enter-

tain subterraneous relations of illicit love and repressed hate. The narrator's predicament consists of his impossible effort to persuade the reader of his reliability, while telling the story of an unconsummated marriage, spent protecting Florence, his wife, from an imaginary heart condition she has invented to keep him from knowing she has been conducting multiple affairs. Even after Florence commits suicide once Edward Ashburnham's interest in her recedes, on the same night she realizes she might have been exposed, Dowell declares himself to have remained in the dark about the actual reasons behind her death. The novel's primary plot is thus doubled by the more interesting progression of Dowell's gradual revelation of his mental processes (including his belated grasp on reality), coupled with his incessant questioning of his own storytelling abilities. Dowell's improbable credulity, explained by critics either through his intellectual paucity (he appears as too obtuse to understand the state of the matters) or by questioning his integrity (he may purposefully have set out to deceive us), poses fascinating queries about the representational capacities of fiction, as well as an entire host of questions regarding the ethical responsibilities of author, reader and narrator alike. One might well remember at this juncture that Ford himself viewed the novel as a defamiliarizing instrument endowed with the capacity to renew the understanding of the world by forcing the reader to inhabit the position of the other: in his sketch of the history of English fiction, he declared that

*the function of the Arts in the State—apart from the consideration of aesthetics—is so to aerate the mind of the taxpayer as to make him less dull a boy. Or if you like, it is by removing him from his own immediate affairs and immersing him in those of his fellows to give him a better view of the complicated predicaments that surround him.*<sup>3</sup>

The reevaluation of modernism as a cultural model I have already mentioned includes an interest in the relationship between modernist writing and ethics, a rich field of investigation long ignored, as a consequence of the suspicion towards normativity and the rejection of moralizing literature enacted by the modernists themselves, coupled with the breakdown of axiological certainties that characterized the twentieth century. Despite the necessary and legitimate caveats, however, writers like Conrad, Ford, Lawrence, Joyce or Woolf cannot be said to have abandoned the foray into the meaning and implications of the “good life;” on the contrary, an ethics of relation, both on the representational level of the interaction among characters, and on the discursive level of the interaction between writer and readers, was always central to their approach to fiction. Derek Attridge has convincingly argued that ethical concerns lie at the very heart of what seems to be an aesthetic project of radical estrangement from the historical world:

*My argument, briefly, is that what often gets called (and condemned as) the self-reflexiveness of modernist writing, its foregrounding of its own linguistic, figurative, and generic operations, its willed interference with the transparency of the discourse, is, in its effects if not always in its intentions, allied to a new apprehension of the claims of otherness, of that which cannot be expressed in the discourse available to us—not because*

*of an essential ineffability but because of the constraints imposed by that discourse, often in its very productivity and deliberation.*<sup>4</sup>

During the past decades, literary ethics has also become a legitimate and exciting line of inquiry, expanding in several directions. On the one hand, there is the liberal humanist orientation practiced by critics Wayne Booth and Martha Nussbaum, whose *Love's Knowledge* forcefully argues that ethical values are best transmitted narratively, that the complex stylistic, linguistic and generic choices involved in narrative writing set up models for self-knowledge and knowledge of the others capable of enhancing sensitivity and causing readers to behave ethically.<sup>5</sup> Nussbaum's view on fiction is necessarily representational (in the mimetic sense), and has drawn disapproval from other quarters, those of critics inspired by the legacy of Levinasian philosophy, founded on the concept of the face-to-face relation with the unknowable other. Important progress in this respect has been made through work by Adam Newton, J. Hillis Miller, Andrew Gibson, Robert Eaglestone, or Derek Attridge, who redefine narrative ethics in terms of hospitality, accountability and responsibility to the other. Broadly speaking, within this theoretical trend, authentic reading depends on the willingness to accept the temporary retreat of the individual self during the encounter with the text, and to welcome the irruption of the alien within the boundaries of the already familiar; reading thus becomes a deeply ethical gesture occurring within the "the site of surplus, of the unforeseen, of self-exposure."<sup>6</sup> Newton, for instance, considers ethics "a defining property of prose fiction, of particular import in nineteenth- and later twentieth-century texts."<sup>7</sup> To him, rather than discussing the ethics of narrative, it makes more sense to speak of "narrative *as* ethics: [of] the ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalizing person, and the reciprocal claims binding teller, listener, witness, and reader in that process."<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty faced by attempts at founding an ethical kind of criticism resides, as one might expect, in the apprehensions triggered by traditional assumptions that works of art reflect, or are oriented towards, (pre-existing) values—civic, emotional or rational—they are meant to illustrate. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham has noticed, within such a paradigm of thought it behooves to the critics to reveal the veiled ethical potential of the work of art, for the benefit of the general reader.<sup>9</sup> It is easy to see why such prescriptive views of literary texts (diversely illustrated by the humanist approach of F.R. Leavis, Marxist theorists such as Raymond Williams or Terry Eagleton, or classically trained thinkers like Martha Nussbaum) are regarded as questionable by readers educated in the poststructuralist tradition. James Phelan usefully counteracts these assumptions with the reminder that the kind of narratives our cultural age has come to privilege—one could argue, narratives in general—create worldviews with their own internal set of values, often in contradiction to prevailing norms: "individual narratives explicitly or more often implicitly establish their own ethical standards in order to guide their audiences to particular ethical judgments."<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Phelan has spent most of his career as a narratologist laying the foundations for a "rhetorical ethics," which draws on the complex imbrications of aesthetic and ethical judgments performed by readers to explore how the trajectories selected by narratives out of the range available possi-

bilities guide the act of interpretation. Following the suggestions of both the Levinasian line of inquiry into the ethics of fiction, and Phelan's model of rhetorical narratology, the main focus of my investigation will be on what Phelan names "the ethics of the telling"—as distinct from "the ethics of the told." As Phelan shows in a recently published study, the ethics of the telling encompasses two dimensions: the rapport of the narrator to the act of telling, the recounted events and the audience (involving readerly judgments on the authority and responsibility of the designated speaker in the text), and the rapport of the implied author "to the telling, the told and the audience."<sup>11</sup>

Phelan's early inquiry into the ethics of fiction, *Living to Tell about It*, analyzes first-person "character narration" as the "art of indirection, one in which the same text simultaneously communicates two different purposes to two different audiences" (the narrator addresses the narratee, and the author addresses the "authorial audience," with a message that might contradict the intentions of the narrator.) In a number of texts of which *The Good Soldier*—with its singularly untrustworthy voice, its numerous redundancies and just as numerous discursive truncations—is a very good example, narratorial unreliability and the differences between the implied author and narrator count for more than the actual events depicted.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, one of the convenient distinctions introduced by Phelan while discussing character narration refers to "narrator functions" vs "disclosure functions." Narrator functions have to do with the reporting of events by speaker, while disclosure functions, although they need to be achieved through the same discourse as, or even simultaneously with the former, are aimed at making the reader realize the author's views may differ widely from the values of the narrator.<sup>13</sup> In the case of *The Good Soldier*, disclosure functions most likely carry the heaviest weight, as the novel could be said to concern itself less with the reader's estimation of Edward, Florence or Leonora's moral worth, than with establishing the truth value of Dowell's assertions, since he is the one placed in the original epistemological position with the question "what does one know and why is one here?"<sup>14</sup> Among the strategies Ford employs to achieve "disclosure," redundancy and ellipsis ("[i]t occurs to me that I have never told you anything about my marriage")<sup>15</sup> emerge as the poles of the tension between what is too often told and what is eluded, unveiling Dowell's essential deficiencies as a responsible storyteller, just as his approach to marriage had revealed his propensities to violence and control, rather than dedicated care of the others. Alternatively, in *The Good Soldier*, the question of unreliability hinges not only on the narrator's incapacity of adequately representing the world, but also on the failure of the world to live up to the set of norms we attribute to the authorial framework. If we reconstruct the implied author's values based on the suggestion of the title (that would also seem to be supported by Ford's anxiety towards the political effects of modernization), it can be argued that it was not only Dowell who proved deficient in this take on the world; it was the disenchanted version of the world available to him that made cognition and ethical behavior impossible.

In her contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel*, Dorothy J. Hale describes the art of fiction practiced by an important number of British authors as an "aesthetics of alterity," identified in "the genre's inherent capacity for otherness." For Hale, this ethical potential is located primarily in the encounter

between the private subjectivities of writer and reader, against the background of publicly shared cultural and historical conventions, providing “a view of that is outside and beyond self (other to the self) through the lens of subjective perspective.”<sup>16</sup> It is not coincidental that the first example she provides to illustrate this tenet is Ford Madox Ford and his interpretation of literary impressionism in terms of modernist “objectivity”—for Ford, the task the modernist writer undertakes is the restraint of personality in favor of the representational act, which remains nevertheless the expression of the said personality. From this standpoint, novel writing emerges from the effort to draw attention to both the relativity of worldviews, and the interrelatedness that forms the texture of the existence. As Hale remarks after an extended discussion of Henry James’s poetics of point of view,

*The view from the house of fiction positions the novelist at “the window” of his character’s consciousness, which in turn is realized through its operation as a point of view, the establishment of living relation with something outside and beyond the self. That this point of view then becomes available to a reader is part of the novel’s power to establish relativized relations.*<sup>17</sup>

*The Good Soldier* is widely cited as the best illustration of its author’s impressionist aesthetic doctrine, which was meant to enhance the naturalism of the representation, but inevitably led to drastic cognitive relativization. In the utopian pursuit of rendering the immediacy of impressions (whether of the present or of the past), Ford endeavored to capture “the evanescence of the self.”<sup>18</sup>

*The point is that any piece of Impressionism, whether it be prose, or verse, or painting, or sculpture, is the record of the impression of a moment; it is not a sort of rounded, annotated record of a set of circumstances—it is the record of the recollection in your mind 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.*<sup>19</sup>

One crucial assertion is that Impressionism, contrary to established opinion, is to be seen as a relational,<sup>20</sup> rather than a solipsistic concept: as Ford put it

*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.*<sup>21</sup>

It is not only the multiplicity of experience (in Jamesian fashion) that is emphasized here, but also its intersubjective condition—experience is revealed to be always a matter of negotiation, to always have a double origin, within and outside the self. This may well be the foundation for an exploration of literary impressionism, via modernist narrative perspective, from the standpoint of ethical criticism. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric

Jameson famously criticized the development of modernist novelistic techniques of perspective from Flaubert to Henry James as the climax of “the transformation of the reader’s subjective attitudes which is at one and the same time the production of a new kind of objectivity.”<sup>22</sup> The novel, as the instrument of the bourgeois redefinition of the world, is assigned the task of fabricating the referential reality of the new capitalist order defined by measurable time and commodity exchange, and part of this process is the production of subject positions that institutionalize “the lived experience of individual consciousness as a monadic and autonomous center of activity”<sup>23</sup> constituted through the aestheticized notion of perspective or Flaubert’s free indirect discourse. According to Jameson, rather than reflecting the freedom of the individual,

*Jamesian point of view, which comes into being as a protest and a defense against reification, ends up furnishing a powerful ideological instrument in the perpetuation of an increasingly subjectivized and psychologized world, a world whose social vision is one of a thoroughlygoing relativity of monads in coexistence and whose ethos is irony and neo-Freudian projection theory and adaptation-to-reality therapy.*<sup>24</sup>

In other words, James’s window-like apertures in the walls of the “house of fiction” are to be read not as competing and relativizing worldviews, as the “Preface” to *The Portrait of a Lady* would suggest, but as the final endorsement of the illusory freedom of the centered self, meant to camouflage the degree to which the latter was secretly regulated and policed by the forces of the commodity system. While I believe that Jameson’s formulations are in need of revision, and do not exhaust the moral effects Jamesian point of view has on the reading of the novels (given that the very freedom allotted by James to his reflecting fictional consciousness is painfully limited in crucial epistemological and experiential regards, and that his frequent overlapping of mutually excluding stances is an ethical act in itself), I am more interested in attempts that patently contradict them by testing freedom’s impossibility when the narrating subject is faced with the confines of his/her own ethical site. With its thoroughly undependable focalizing consciousness, which also represents the mediating voice of the novel, Ford Madox Ford’s writing illustrates such attempts. In a more recent study of the relation between novelistic form and “the new ethics,” Dorothy Hale brings further arguments in support of the idea that “the novel’s distinctive generic purpose” is “the achievement of alterity,”<sup>25</sup> which she proceeds to discuss in the terms proposed by Judith Butler as the encounter with the utter incomprehensibility of the *other’s* perspective. Faced with the necessity of accepting and protecting a dissimilar, irreconcilable understanding of the world, we come to the repeated realization of our own epistemological lack and submission to established norms. The disruptive potential of such realization relies on our admission of vulnerability and constitutes the promise of change:

*The new ethics helps us recognize novelistic aesthetics as inherently politicized by showing how the novel form positions the reader to experience the self as ‘free’ through the experience of being socially bound. The reader experiences the free play of his or her imagination as produced through a power struggle with a social other. The struggle to bind*

*turns back on the reader; enabling the reader to experience the self as unfree, as in a constitutive relation with the other; who, in turn, binds him or her.*<sup>26</sup>

Early on in the novel, Dowell, the self-conscious verbalizer in the text—the only voice the reader is given direct access to—summarizes the complexity of his situation as a storyteller with a succinctness he will rarely resort to: “I don’t know how it is best to put this thing down—whether it would be better to try and tell the story from the beginning, as if it were a story; or whether to tell it from this distance of time, as it reached me from the lips of Leonora or from those of Edward himself.”<sup>27</sup> This remark encapsulates much of the modernist perplexity at the intricacies of re-presenting the absent by its ambiguous substitution of “story” and referent (recount the events as they happened means is the same as telling them “as if it were a story,” while retrospective or indirect narration becomes is seen as the “realistic” discourse). History is here haunted by story: though it appears to focus exclusively on the trials and passions of two upper-class couples, the plot embeds individual lives within the apocalyptic layers of the long duration, brought to a crisis by recent historical events. As the narrator observes,

*You may well ask why I write. And yet my reasons are quite many. For it is not unusual in human beings who have witnessed the sack of a city or the falling to pieces of a people to desire to set down what they have witnessed for the benefit of unknown heirs or of generations infinitely remote; or, if you please, just to get the sight out of their heads.*<sup>28</sup>

Apart from inscribing the tragic fates of the characters into the outflow of disastrous history, this passage, with its explicit thematization of writing which will become one of the staple strategies of Ford’s early modernist kind of metafiction, also represents an early signal of the multifarious ethical ramifications staged by the narrator’s discourse. Not only does it problematize the narrator’s position in history, thus adumbrating the challenges to discursive authorship and responsibility that will be taken up later, but it also places him in relation with an absent audience he would repeatedly invoke and imagine while never being able to bring it into existence. The need to invent “a sympathetic soul” as the addressee, always accompanied by a recognition of its futility, recurs so often that it turns into an intimation of Dowell’s secretive culpability: “You, the listener, sit opposite me. But you are so silent. You don’t tell me anything. 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.”<sup>29</sup> Writing thus is revealed as a disguised confession of guilt, bringing about technical complications stemming from Dowell’s obtuse inability to openly admit his own deficiencies, despite his efforts to convince the hypothetical listener that he had behaved responsibly.

On a first sight, the narrator’s apparent innocence seems to be his best defense: having dedicated his life to protecting and caring for Florence whom he believes to be suffering from a heart condition, Dowell espouses the dictates of Victorian morality by sacrificing his own comfort for that of another. In fact, however, Dowell’s misperception as to the real state of things (even allowing for the possibility that this misperception is merely simulated) springs from an ethical deficiency: his incapacity to welcome

or accommodate the absolute difference invoked by his encounter with other people. Not only is he all too eager to accept Florence's improbable story—and for nine years, at that—but he actually seems to encourage her to trick him by suggesting the terms of Florence's deceit himself. Reminiscing about the circumstances of their first meeting, he informs the readers: "I determined with all the obstinacy of a possibly weak nature, if not to make her mine, at least to marry her"<sup>30</sup>—a slip of the tongue that is bound to cause moral reservations as to his conception of marriage. The phrase "to make her mine" implies that for Dowell, love is experienced as possession, an idea endorsed by the subsequent ironical substitution of love with material goods: "But, if I never so much as kissed Florence, she let me discover very easily, in the course of a fortnight, her simple wants. And I could supply those wants."<sup>31</sup> Florence's "simple wants" are, of course, a life of ease, a British-sounding husband and being installed as the mistress of an English manor (this last a wish that Dowell probably knows he will not be able to fulfil, in spite of his assurances).

Discussing Ford's ambivalent poetics, which partakes of both late-Victorian realism and the incipient radicalism of modernist skepticism and which seems to uphold the necessity for validating characters by resorting to logic and accepted models of reality, Michael Levenson describes a "method of characterization [which] tends to the 'justified self' which emanates from context and embodies the social will."<sup>32</sup> According to Levenson, Dowell's narrative follows Ford's rule of justification, which dictates that behavior must appear as motivated (Leonora's actions, for example, are derived from her upbringing as a Catholic, or Edward's from his idealizing of the role of the country squire). Justification, therefore, becomes one of the main concerns of the characters in the novel, who keep on explaining what they do through reference to norms and expectations—until it backfires by revealing its own lack of ground and reverting to "incongruities" exploited by the plot. The contradictions between the characters' explanations and their actual actions turn justification into a concealing mechanism, rather than one of clarification, which challenges the "stability of the character itself, and our capacity to understand each other at all" as individual passion becomes its own reason for being.<sup>33</sup> The novel illustrates the collapse of the "justified self" and the distance between normativity and experience, but, instead of placing Dowell in the position of the newly born self, empowering him to fashion himself, as Levenson claims, it probes his incapacity to responsibly welcome the other by dramatizing the absence of an addressee for the story.

Such a relational approach to narrative perspective has not always received due attention in modernist studies, having often been cast aside in favor of the interest in the working of consciousness as the center of experience. Nevertheless, *The Good Soldier* might offer a fascinating insight into perspective as relation, precisely through its exploration of Dowell's utter misunderstanding of the events and through his insistence on summoning into being an absent audience he claims he need for the narration to unfold.





## Notes

1. Largely, but not exclusively, through the efforts of the international Ford Madox Ford Society, whose series of studies dedicated to the life and work of the writer is far-ranging.
2. Max Saunders, "Introduction," in *Ford Madox Ford's The Good Soldier: Centenary Essays*, edited by Max Saunders and Sara Haslam (Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 13-30, 14.
3. Ford Madox Ford, *The English Novel: from the Earliest Days to the Death of Joseph Conrad* (Folcroft, Penn.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1929), 28.
4. Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.
5. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
6. Adam Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, Ma & London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.
7. Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, 8.
8. Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, 11.
9. Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Ethics and Literary Criticism," in Christa Knellwolf and Christopher Norris, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 9: Twentieth-Century Historical, Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 371-385, 376.
10. James Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative* (Columbia: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 10.
11. James Phelan, *Reading the American Novel: 1920-2010*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 34.
12. James Phelan, *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 7.
13. Phelan, *Living to Tell About It*, 14.
14. Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion*; edited by Kenneth Womack and William Baker (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), 40.
15. Ford, *The Good Soldier*, 95.
16. Dorothy J. Hale, "The Art of English Fiction in the Twentieth-Century," in Robert L. Caserio, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10-22, 13.
17. Hale, "Art of English Fiction," 20.
18. Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 28.
19. Ford Madox Ford, "On Impressionism," in Lawrence Rainey, editor, *Modernism: An Anthology* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 566-577, 570.
20. On the role of impression as a "mediator" both between several dimensions of cognition and affect, and between literary trends (conventional realism and high modernism) see Matz's excellent *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*.
21. Ford, "On Impressionism," 570.
22. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 138. For the bearing of Jameson's critique of represented centered subjects on an ethically-inspired theory of narrative, see Dorothy Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics. Theorizing the Novel in the Twentieth Century," *PMLA*, Vol. 124, No. 3 (May, 2009), p. 896-905.

23. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 140.
24. Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 210.
25. Dorothy Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics," 900. It should be noted that it is precisely in Henry James's conflictual staging between the liberating role of the aesthetic and art's instrumentalization by external forces that Hale identifies the roots of the novel's ethical potential.
26. Hale, "Aesthetics and the New Ethics," 902.
27. Ford, *The Good Soldier*, 41.
28. Ford, *The Good Soldier*, 36.
29. Ford, *The Good Soldier*, 44.
30. Ford, *The Good Soldier*, 95.
31. Ford, *The Good Soldier*, 96.
32. Michael Levenson, "Character in *The Good Soldier*," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter, 1984), p. 373-387, 376-377.
33. Levenson, "Character in *The Good Soldier*," 374-5.

### **Abstract**

#### Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* and the Ethics of Perspective

This study attempts a reading of Ford Madox Ford's 1915 novel, *The Good Soldier*, as sample of the much-neglected modernist interest in the ethics of narration. Starting from a definition of the ethics of narration as an investigation by means of fictional representation of the essentially intersubjective and relational character of the act of telling, it examines the effects that Ford's choice of narrative voice (which constructs point of view exclusively through the discourse of a radically unreliable narrator, whose moral and intellectual authority are highly questionable) has on the emergence of an "impressionistic" worldview that exploits what Dorothy Hale has termed fiction's "inherent capacity for otherness."

### **Keywords**

narrative perspective, unreliable narration, ethics of fiction, modernism, impressionism