

Critical analysis of the good soldier essay



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The Good Soldier A Critical Analysis by Amber Quickenden Ford Madox Ford's masterpiece, *The Good Soldier*, utilizes a variety of literary techniques to construct meaning and propel imaginative power. Ford uses figurative language to initiate the polarity of "Convention and Passion"(1) and a divergent narrative style and structure to present cultural issues such as the quest for human knowledge and the imprisonment of society. "The long afternoon wore on" commences in the context of Nancy's revelations. She has read the account of the Brand divorce case in the newspapers and is apprehending the manifestations of recently discovered phenomena.

Ford employs a vocabulary that is mournful and dull to conjure up images of shadow and anguish. He uses words like "frightened," "wretched," "agony," "pain" and "gloomy" to connote feelings of "affaissement." These are juxtaposed with the vocabulary of the second half of the passage: "lover's," "flame," and "cheerful" which signifies the corruption of Nancy's chastised mind. Knowledge of convention takes "all sweetness...out of life." The lexicogrammar interplays the theme of "Convention and Passion" as being unable to exist congruently in "the law of the land" and cognition of human nature as futile, leading only to darkness.

Ford expresses the degenerative nature of human passion in the metaphor: a tune in which major notes with their cheerful insistence wavered and melted into minor sounds as, beneath a bridge the highlights on dark waters melt and waver and disappear into black depths.

The anagoge alludes to images of passion fading into darkness. An antithesis of light and dark, black and white, the certitude of Passion succumbing to

Convention: Society must go on, I suppose, and society can only exist if the normal, if the virtuous, and the slightly-deceitful flourish, and if the passionate, the headstrong, and the too truthful are condemned⁽¹⁾ Samuel Hynes, 'The Epistemology of The Good Soldier', *The Good Soldier*, Norton Critical Edition (1995. W. W. Norton & Company), p. 315 to suicide and to madness.

Nancy's love must regress, as the etiquette of society must prosper. Fatally for those who were unable to conform to "the technicalities of English life" due to burgeoning eroticisms, "the end was plainly manifest." Ford creates imagery of umbra and shadow elsewhere in the novel: "inevitably they pass away as the shadows across sundials." Ford's adumbrations of unillumination may also reflect the restrictions of human knowledge. Darkness reflects the tenuousness of human cognition. Dowell proposes earlier: what is there to guide us in the more subtle morality of all other personal contacts, associations, and activities? It is all darkness.

Samuel Hynes agrees by stating: "we recognize an irresolvable pluralism of truths, in a world that remains essentially dark." ⁽¹⁾ Further images of nebulosity are resonant when Nancy had "three weeks for introspection" beneath gloomy skies, in that old house, rendered darker by the fact that it lay in a hollow crowned by fir trees with their black shadows.

The allusion purports to the restrictions of society encapsulating Nancy, and others, bounding them from their intimate desires. Convention is "a prison full of screaming hysterics." Thus, shadow and darkness totemize convention and flame and fire express passion and desire. Immediately Ford alliterates "

the flames still fluttered." Nancy's passion prevails while " introspection" about desire and love pervades her. Nancy considered marriage as a " sacrament" and the burning logs once represented an " indestructible mode of life." Now the world Nancy is absorbed in becomes embroiled in doubt and uncertainty. Ford exploits repetition in: " love was a flame," and " a man who was burning with inward flame" to reiterate fire signifying Passion. The tone shifts after the passage, passion is extinguished by " the whole collections of rules:" " the fire had sunk to nothing...a mere glow amongst white ashes." Eros has imminently subserved to convention.(1)'The Epistemology of The Good Soldier', p. 315The tone of the passage is melancholic, morose and formidable. Ford formulates a mood of passion in retrogression like the " fading day." Time seems unyielding, passing tentatively and laboriously, reminiscent in " The long afternoon wore on" and " lolloped." The ambience of fatalism is encircling all in Bramshaw Teleragh. They are without control over their predestined existence as Ford reiterates in the latter: " Not one of us has got what we really wanted." Everything passionate and picturesque is proscribed to contraction as society imprisons them. Nancy has gained comprehension which amounts to her vexation and Leonora is realising she will never procure Edward's love, thus a lachrymose and deranged mood blankets the household.

" The little cottage piano that was in the corner of the hall" resonates concupiscent desires. Ford constructs this elsewhere in the novel using an analogy of their " little four-square coterie" and " stepping a minuet." Dowell questions the consistency of human nature and agonises over why honest and pure beings are prevented from flourishing. " Isn't there any Nirvana

pervaded by the faint thrilling of instruments...?" The "silly old tune" is Eros, candour and Nancy's purity endeavouring to survive while preordained by society to degeneration.

The dialogue represents a juxtaposition of protagonists. Themes of antipathy and contraposition are conveyed through characterization. Nancy is unadulterated, chastised, innocent and naive: "If I married anyone I should want him to be like Edward." Leonora agonises over this: "Leonora writhed on her couch and called out: 'Oh God'" The two characters are collated as "Passion and Convention". Leonora is decorous and sustains the ideology of "good people" and "the law of the Church" but she is also described as being "cold." Nancy's uncontrollable desire is to fulfil her passions for a man whom she is forbidden. Ford resonates irony in the positioning of both figures, the chastised is doomed to failure and the "cold" is destined to prosper. The two characters present contrasted worldly views of the bourgeois ethic encompassing them. Both characters seek cognisance of society and other human souls.

We are reminded of Dowell's narration when he postulates his narrative may be inadequate: "It is so difficult to keep all these people going." He then continues to set out the events in "diary form." Dowell "knows nothing until it is written down." (1)(1)Martin Stannard, *The Good Soldier*, Norton Critical Edition (1995 W. W. Norton ; Company), preface, p. xilt is knowledge, "knowledge of the human heart"(1) that Dowell seeks. Dowell perpetually disorders his chronology and here he attempts to dictate order upon his diverging thoughts and emotions. McCarthy concurs Ford employs this technique to "construct an apparent bulwark of order against the chaotic

conditions of life as he has come to know it.”(2) Frank G. Nigro proposes Ford’s “ time-shift”(3) technique is “ Dowell’s apparent need for structure.”(4) The attempt to impose order on the events by summarising them denotes directly here what the critics suggest, that Dowell is searching for a way to compose and embody the twisted affairs of the world enshrining him. Dowell strives to comprehend and find meaning in “ the queer, shifty thing that is human nature.” Ford uses a focalised point of view told retrospectively which alludes to the narrator being unreliable and untrustworthy, his knowledge of events is limited. This recurs throughout the novel with Dowell asking rhetorical questions: “ what does one know and why is one here?” “ Madness? Predestination? “ Who the devil knows?” Evincing Dowell’s finite understanding induces the theme of the constraints of human perception. Samuel Hynes describes the rhetorical as “ symbols of the difficulty of knowing.”(5)Samuel Hynes also procures: In a novel which postulates such severe limits to human knowledge – a novel of doubt, that is, in which the narrator’s fallibility is the norm –the problem of authority cannot be settled directly, because the question which authority answers ‘ How can we know what is true?’ is itself what the novel is about. (6)Dowell’s fallibility is delineated in “ I have been casting back again.” It asserts Dowell as undependable to relay information to the reader. As does Dowell’s incessant asking of the reader for their opinion of the versions of events he has given us: “ I’ll leave it up to you.”(1)‘The Epistemology of The Good Soldier’, p. 317(2) Patrick A. McCarthy, ‘ In search of lost time: Chronology and Narration in The Good Soldier’, English Literature in Transition (1997 Greensboro NC), p. 144(3)John A. Meixner, ‘ Ford’s Literary Technique’, The Good Soldier, Norton Critical Edition, p. 257(4)Frank G. Nigro, ‘ Who Framed The Good <https://assignbuster.com/critical-analysis-of-the-good-soldier-essay/>

Soldier? Dowell's Story in Search of Form', *Studies in the Novel*, Winter 1992, (Winter Dexton TX), p. 382(5)'The Epistemology of The Good Soldier', p. 317(6)'The Epistemology of The Good Soldier', p. 313The "time-shift" technique and the three-point "varying perspectives"(1) that Dowell has tangled, mentioned in the passage, allude to Frank G. Nigro's ideology of "Dowell's seeming incompetence, which Ford sought to show mistrust"(2) whereas I agree with Samuel Hynes that the "restricted and subjective narrative mode implies a more limited and tentative conception of the way man knows."(3) I believe Dowell is untrustworthy as narrator but as a character he is the only unselfish one of the four, travelling to India to comfort Nancy thus ending up "very much where I started thirteen years ago." I disagree with Nigro's suggestion that "Dowell is hiding something."(4) I agree with McCarthy that Dowell's structured setting of events in the passage allude to "the action of the narrator's mind as it gropes for meaning, the reality of what has occurred"(5) and to represent the shadows of conception rather than Dowell trying to superimpose his follies upon the reader.

What does one really know of another? Is a pivotal issue of the novel, the answer Dowell gives us is: After forty-five years of mixing with one's kind, one ought to have acquired the habit of being able to know something of one's fellow beings. But one doesn't.

Dowell, after all his junctures has still achieved no greater mastery of what has occurred, and Ford illustrates this through Dowell's recurrent undertaking to harmonize and illuminate events and their semiology.

Ford adapts “ novelistic tropes” (6) like language to disseminate a mood of nostalgia and inescapable serendipity. His kaleidoscopic narration and structure successfully denotes the darkness of human knowledge and the confinement of society.(1) Frank G. Nigro, p. 382(2) Frank G. Nigro, p. 383(3) Samuel Hynes, p. 311(4) Frank G. Nigro, p. 385(5) Patrick A. McCarthy, p. 312(6) Frank G. Nigro, p. 383BibliographyBIBLIOGRAPHYHynes, Samuel, ‘ The Epistemology of The Good Soldier,’ The Good Soldier Norton Critical Edition, (1995 W. W. Norton & Company), p. 311-317.

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