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Narrative Unreliability in *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion*

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Abstract

The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion (TGS) by Ford Maddox Ford is one of the earliest examples of the Modernist Period in English Literature. Written in 1915 and set just before the Great War, the novel is about two couples, an aristocratic English couple (Edward and Leonora Ashburnham) and a wealthy American couple (John and Florence Dowell), who meet at a spa in Nauheim, Germany in 1904. John Dowell, as the involved first-person narrator, tells the story that revolves around Edward's and Florence's inability to remain faithful to their partners, Edward's love affair with several women, Edward's refusal to give up his idealized dream of living as a Victorian gentleman, and John Dowell's struggle with how to interpret and narrate all these events. Although the themes of the novel are like typical Victorian issues, unlike its Victorian predecessors, the novel lacks omniscient narration and depends on frequent shifting of emotional impressions and views of its narrator. Thus, what makes the novel interesting and its interpretation difficult is the unconventional narrator who brings impressionistic storytelling into play as a narrative technique, and who, for the readers, offers this method as an alternative to changing social order, personal integrity and conventional novel form. The aim of this paper is to discuss how Dowell's unreliable narrative technique creates a mimetic illusion which makes the reader an active participant in Dowell's writing of the story.

Keywords: Ford Maddox Ford, *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion*, unreliable narrator, John Dowell, impressionistic narrative.

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*İyi Asker: Bir Tutku Hikayesi'*nde Anlatı Güvenilmezliği

Öz

Ford Maddox Ford'un *İyi Asker: Bir Tutku Hikayesi* adlı eseri İngiliz Edebiyatında Modernist Dönemin en erken örneklerinden biridir. 1915'te kaleme alınan ve Birinci Dünya Savaşı'nın hemen öncesinde geçen roman, 1904 senesinde Almanya'nın Nauheim kentindeki bir kaplıcada yolları kesişen biri aristokrat İngiliz (Edward ve Leonora Ashburham), diğeri ise varlıklı Amerikan (Florence ve John Dowell) olmak üzere iki farklı çifti konu edinmektedir. Katılımcı birinci şahıs anlatıcı konumundaki John Dowell, Edward ve Florence'ın partnerlerine sadık kalmadaki başarısızlıklarını, Edward'ın farklı kadınlarla yaşadığı ilişkileri ve bir yandan da Viktoryen beyefendisi olma idealinden vazgeçmemekte diretmesini merkezine alan hikayeyi aktarmaktadır; ancak John Dowell aynı zamanda tüm bu olan biteni nasıl yorumlayacağına ve okurlara nasıl anlatacağına karar vermek için mücadele vermektedir. Romanda benimsenen temalar Viktorya dönemi romanındaki tipik meselelere benzese de, Viktorya dönemindeki öncülerinin aksine, romanda tanrısal bakış açısı bulunmamakta ve roman anlatıcısının duygusal izlenimleri ve bakış açılarında sıkça meydana gelen değişimlere göre şekillenmektedir. Böylece romanı ilginç kılan ve yorumlanmasını güçleştiren husus, izlenimci hikaye anlatımını bir anlatım tekniği olarak ortaya koyan ve bu yöntemi okurlara sosyal düzeni, kişisel bütünlüğü ve geleneksel roman formunu dönüştürecek bir alternatif olarak sunan alışılmadık anlatıcısıdır. Bu çalışmanın amacı; Dowell'in güvenilmez anlatıcı tekniği ile, öyküyü kaleme alma aşamasında okuru aktif bir katılımcıya dönüştüren mimetik yanılsamayı nasıl yarattığını ele almaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ford Maddox Ford, *İyi Asker: Bir Tutku Hikayesi*, güvenilmez anlatıcı, John Dowell, izlenimci anlatı.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Modernist Period in English Literature marks a break with the conventions of the Victorian era, especially with the bourgeois morality. The early modernist examples are about moving from the Victorian ideals to the modernist questioning of truth, exploring how people are becoming modern throughout the Edwardian years and through the First World War (Saunders 2004: 422). According to some critics, *The Good Soldier* is one of the early examples of Modernist literature since Ford uses John Dowell as an involved character-narrator whose uncovering of his mind during the events is like modernist fragmentation controlled by his stream of consciousness. The reality in the novel is shaped by the flow of Dowell's mind which is in search of the meaning. Thus, the novel is definitely "*transitional*: *Janus-faced, looking back to its predecessors as much as sideways and forwards to its Modernist contemporaries and heirs*" (Saunders 2004: 422). Frustrated by World War I, early modernist writers challenge the common notion that they should be a reliable representative of mainstream social, moral, and cultural values and ideas. However, Nick Hubble makes a distinction between the Modernist writers' opposition to the forces of social mimesis and Ford's constant awareness "*that a modernist identity could not be constructed in opposition to modern mass society, but only in conjunction with it*" (2006: 154).

Written in 1915 and set just before the Great War, *TGS* is about two couples, an aristocratic English couple (Edward and Leonora Ashburnham) and a wealthy American couple (John and Florence Dowell), who meet at a spa in Nauheim, Germany in 1904. John Dowell, as the involved first-person narrator, tells the story that revolves around Edward's and Florence's inability to remain faithful to their partners, Edward's love affair with several women (Mrs. Basil, Maisie Maiden, Florence Dowell, Nancy Rufford etc.), Edward's refusal to give up his idealized dream of living as a Victorian gentleman, and John Dowell's struggle with how to interpret and narrate all these events. Although seemingly the major themes of the novel are like typical Victorian issues, the novel is one of the early examples of modernist novel since the narrator of the novel pretends to be an amateur disclaiming any literary skill (Lodge 1984: 41). Ford's aim is not to oppose social mimesis but to go beyond it and he achieves this with *TGS*. Through Dowell, Ford develops an unreliable narrator from whose perspective the irrationality of a supposedly rational world is revealed.

As claimed by David Lodge the "*point of using an unreliable narrator is indeed to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter*" (1994: 154–5). Although when compared to a conventional omniscient narrator the anti-narrator Dowell is unreliable, in the novel this unreliability leaves a liminal space where the notions of reality and appearance are questioned, and new possibilities are enabled. Phelan and Martin in their discussion of unreliable narrator also underline that "*misreporting, misreading, misevaluating*" of an unreliable narrator direct reader to reconstruct the narrated events and fill the gaps in the narration (1999: 94-95). Through misreporting, misreading and misevaluating, an unreliable narrator tries "*to blur the reality and deceive the reader into believing that what they are telling is true for their own advantages*" (Mete 2016: 21). Thus, such narrative unreliability makes readers resolve textual incongruities and interpret the text for its textual existence. Ford Maddox Ford in the "Preface" of *The Awkward Age* openly states that in "sketching" his project first he "*drew...the neat figure of a circle consisting of a number of small rounds disposed at equal distance*", the central object "*was [his] situation, [his] subject itself, to which the thing would owe its title, and the small rounds represented so many distinct lamps, as [he] liked to call them"*, the function of each of which *"would be to light with all*

due intensity one of its aspects" (1987: 323). Dowell's narration in the novel is based on contradictions resulting from his circular manner of presentation, and this circular narrative structure of his novel makes its interpretation difficult.

II. THE ROLE OF THE UNRELIABLE NARRATOR IN *THE GOOD SOLDIER: A TALE OF PASSION*

The term "unreliable narrator" was first introduced by literary critic Wayne C. Booth in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961). Booth calls "*a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not*" (1961: 158-9). In this formulation the implied author is the one who is responsible for the totality of the textual signifiers and who is a representation of a disguise that the real author uses to tell the story with a certain effect. Booth highlights that the implied author as "the writer's second self" stands between the real author and the work taking a position in the "world of values" (1961: 212). This implied author creates the narrator as the spokesman. The implied author is therefore the text *"and moral standards it conveys to the reader";* thus, *"the narrator rather than the text as a whole must be termed unreliable*" (Horstkotte 2007: 138).

M.H. Abrams redefines unreliable narrator as the "*one whose perception, interpretation, and evaluation of the matters he or she narrates do not coincide with the implicit opinions and norms manifested by the author, which the author expects the alert reader to share*" (1993: 168). In *TGS* the incongruity between the norms and values of the implied author and impressions of Dowell is the basis for the unreliability of this narrator since Dowell's first-person narration mainly relies on his impressions as he tells "*the story as it comes*" (Ford 1946: 108). When Rimmon-Kenan's formulation of an unreliable narrator is taken into consideration, the textual features that indicate the narrative unreliability in the *TGS* are: (a) discrepancies between Dowell's views and the facts; (b) the gaps between the true outcome of the actions and Dowell's erroneous earlier reports; (c) the clash between other characters' views and Dowell's; and (d) the internal contradictions in Dowell's own language (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 7-8). Dowell's defamiliarizing unreliability increases the narrative distance between the narrator and the reader.

In the title of the novel, "good" as an adjective is used to modify the word "soldier". Although 'war' is not one of the major themes in the novel, the title of the novel "The Good Soldier" is an ironic designation which ostensibly refers to Edward, since he is not a proper Victorian gentleman and he behaves immorally. Although there are many hints and signs to the contrary, Dowell believes that Edward is essentially gentle and good because of "his good soldiering," "his saving lives at sea," and his being "the excellent landlord that he was and the good sportsman" (1946: 244). The other main characters of the novel are John Dowell's wife Florence, Edward's wife Leonora, and Nancy Rufford. Dowell narrates the past fourteen years according to what he remembers considering recent revelations: Ashburnham's and Florence's love affair, their suicides, and Nancy's mental breakdown because of Edward's overtures. There are four parts in the novel. The first two parts revolve around Florence, Dowell, Edward, and their relations. Part two ends with the suicide of Florence in 1904. The other two parts centre on how Nancy is involved in the story and her relationship with Edward. The forth part ends with Edward's suicide in 1913. In between part one and four, moving back and forth in his narration, Dowell, like the readers, searches for the truths and reasons for the suicides of Ashburnham and Florence. He rambles through

associations and varying perspectives of Leonora, Edward and Florence, trying to narrate the story as it occurs to him.

> *For, if for me we were four people with the same tastes, with the same desires, acting — or, no, not acting — sitting here and there unanimously, isn't that the truth? If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core and discover its rottenness only in six months less four days, isn't it true that to say for nine years I possessed a goodly apple?...And if you come to think of it, isn't it a little odd that the physical rottenness of at least two pillars of our four-square house never presented itself to my mind as a menace to its security?* (Ford 1946: 12).

In his other book on criticism, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth underlines that a narrator can be identified as an unreliable one when "*he is unable to escape recognizing either some incongruity among the words or between the words and something else he knows*" (1975: 10). There is an inevitable distance *between the narrator and the reader as a result of unreliable narration*; thus, it should be *remembered that any narrator in fiction is a potentially deceptive narrator* (Mete 2016: 21). The very first sentence of *TGS* reveals that Dowell's narration will be a part of such irony. He starts his story by saying, "*This is the saddest story I have ever heard*" (1946: 1). When first read, there is no incongruity in this opening sentence, since the narrator simply starts telling a story that he has heard, but on further reading, it becomes clear that the narrator himself is in fact one of the major characters in the story to which he refers. Although Dowell is one of the major participants in the story, he avoids the responsibility of directing readers to certain answers, and therefore he refuses to render any concrete judgment in telling that he is going to narrate a story which he hears from some other sources. This major irony also starts the unreliable narrative flow in the novel. John Dowell, as the involved character-narrator, attempts to grasp the true nature of the relationship of the two couples by (re)creating it from the various points of view of the other involved characters. However, even Dowell is isolated in his own narration. No matter how hard Dowell tries to create a realistic world for the reader, his digressions in the narrative – and his inability to understand the people around him and to form a unified structure for his story – all become essential parts of his unreliable narrative technique.

Dowell's unconventional narrative style mainly stems from his unusual presentation of the events and the scenes. A conventional realistic novel starts with the introduction of its characters, setting, and time of the events; then the narrator speaks with confidence to the reality of what s/he is going to recount, basing his narration on the assumption of a one-to-one relationship between a signifier and the thing it represents. To get a better understanding and make a comparison between the reliable and the unreliable narrator from a more informed vantage point, here is the conventional beginning of a story as Monika Fludernik frames in her book, *An Introduction to Narratology*:

> *The customary way to do this is to give the text what Harweg terms an emic opening, that is to sayto introduce characters by an indefinite article and a modifying phrase (indef. ART + (adj.) NP), forexample Once upon a time a rich farmer lived in a small town. This indefinite reference is followed up by the use of the definite article and/or a proper name: The farmer's name was George and he had three daughters, the youngest and most beautiful of whom was called Arabella* (2009: 44).

Within the conventional frame, the implied author invents a narrator who tells the whole story and also who stands between the writer and the reader as the transcendental centre that produces the realities for the readers. In the beginning of *TGS,* John Dowell, like a

typical all-knowing narrator, gives specific numbers, dates and ages of the characters: "*When we all first met, Captain Ashburnham, home on sick leave from an India to which he was never to return, was thirty-three; Mrs Ashburnham Leonora—was thirty-one. I was thirty-six and poor Florence thirty. Thus today Florence would have been thirty-nine and Captain Ashburnham forty-two; whereas I am forty-five and Leonora forty"* (1946: 6). This method gives readers the impression that the story of Dowell is factual; however, two pages later this reliable narrator starts to show self-doubt, and his reliability turns into unreliability: "*I don't know... I know nothing—nothing in the world… I don't know; was that last remark of hers the remark of a harlot, or is it what every decent woman, county family or not county family, thinks at the bottom of her heart? Or thinks all the time for the matter of that? Who knows?*" (1946: 8-10). Dowell, as the involved first-person narrator, does not know what he is going to narrate nor how he is going to start the story, and this creates narrative ambiguity.

The 19th century novelists of social realism, such as Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot, employ the power of omniscience in their novels. The all-knowing narrator type they use is above and beyond all the people, events and elements in the story. Contrary to a conventional all-knowing narrator, the unreliable narrator of *TGS* uses such expressions as: "I suppose" (50), "I don't know" (50), "I think" (33), "I mean" (155), "I don't think" (200). The main question of the novel, how the relationship of the couples shapes the character of Dowell, his wife Florence, Edward Ashburnham and his wife Leonora, cannot be evaluated according to the standards set in nineteenth-century fiction. What is ironic is that most of the time Ford's narrator fails to comprehend the full implications of what he is narrating and what his readers can understand. When Florence and Dowell travel to Paris on their honeymoon, she sleeps with Jimmy, her first lover, after telling Dowell that she cannot sleep with him because of her weak heart condition. While narrating that they slept in two different rooms, Dowell does not pass judgement directly. This irony provides "*the formal means by which distance is created between the views, actions, and voice of the unreliable narrator and those of the implied author*" (Olson 2003: 94). Dowell does not want to follow the steps of a conventional narrator, in his words "taking everyone for granted". Dowell speaks clearly that, "*After forty-five years of mixing with one's kind, one ought to have acquired the habit of being able to know something about one's fellow beings. But one doesn't…the modern English habit of taking everyone for granted is a good deal to blame for this"* (1946: 36). Dowell first self-consciously deconstructs the traditional mode of narration, then uses broken images of different perspectives, and invokes our suspicion to discover the true nature of past and present appearances. In his description of Edward Ashburnham Dowell self-consciously frees himself from the role of a traditional all-knowing narrator when he states that "*the fellow talked like a cheap novelist.- Or like a very good novelist for the matter of that, if it's the business of a novelist to make you see things clearly*" (1946: 109).

Dowell's impressionistic narrative style is the main reason that makes his narration unreliable. He justifies his unusual narration in process by saying: "*I have given you absolutely the whole of* ***my collections"*** (emphasis added, 1946: 93). Dowell mostly dwells on his impressions; therefore, he does not have tendency to search for the signifieds behind those appearances. The two couples take a trip to Marburg and there Florence, "looking up into Captain Ashburnham's eyes", shows them the "Protest document" and "signatures of Martin Luther, and Martin Bucer, and Zwingli" (1946: 69-70). There, she touches Edward's wrist and Leonora understands that they are having an affair. Although particularly in Chapter 4 Leonora tires to reveal the love affair between her husband and Florence many

times, Dowell even misunderstands her attempts and what she tries to explain. He is shocked after discovering that his wife was Edward's mistress for nine years. For nine years, Dowell, who provides the reader with many superficial details that spring up in his mind, cannot comprehend the true nature of the relationship between the two, even though the readers understand it while reading the fourth chapter. The clash between the other characters' views and Dowell's perceptions leads to narrative unreliability. Dowell confesses that his memory fails to reflect all the necessary details about the past since his recollection "*is only the sort of pinkish effulgence*", and his narrative is based on the impressions that are "*like floating globes*" (1946: 92). The accounts of Dowell's story are Edward's Victorian mannerism, suicide, obsession with his ward Nancy Rufford, and his adulterous relationship with Florence Dowell; Florence Dowell's betrayal of John Dowell with a succession of men and her suicide. The problem is that even Dowell is not sure of the nature of these accounts and he constantly assumes the validity of appearances.

TGS heavily depends upon the impressions and sensational experiences of Dowell. To illustrate, in Dowell's description of Germany, the reader may be lost in the physical and sensational details:

> *German railway train: It is so pleasant to be drawn along in front of the spectacular towns with the peaked castles and the many double spires. In the sunlight gleams come from the city—gleams from the glass of windows; from the gilt signs of apothecaries; from the ensigns of the student corps high up in the mountains; from the helmets of the funny little soldiers moving their stiff little legs in white linen trousers. And it was pleasant to get out in the great big spectacular Prussian station with the hammered bronze ornaments and the paintings of peasants and flowers and cows* (1946: 42-43).

Dowell's narration here employs series of physical details, colourful and interesting images; however, the reader may be perplexed because of Dowell's detection of those impressions. In another example, while narrating the last scene when Florence learns Edward's passion for Nancy, Dowell focuses on "the picture" but not on the story: "*you have: the immensely tall trees, elms most of them, towering and feathering away up into the black mistiness that trees seem to gather about them at night; the silhouettes of those two upon the seat; the beams of light coming from the Casino, ... It is melodrama; but I can't help it*" (1946: 110). Dowell's unconventional narrative technique represents an amalgamation of diverse pieces of impressions onto one tableau, yet it does not lead to a unity of meaning. Readers are presented with these impressions, but they are not directed towards a finalized signified.

Dowell's impressionistic narrative technique makes him omit some parts of the story, which causes digressions in the narrative flow. Dowell's back and forth storytelling deconstructs the idea of a conventional linear plot line. Dowell does not feel that like a conventional narrator he should apply a unified form and linear story telling technique; instead, he is aware that his unconventional narrative technique "*is a thing, with all its accidents, that must be taken for granted*" (Ford 1946: 114). Thus, instead of strictly following a chronological order, he tells the story in an emotional and a psychological order. Causing narrative gaps, such digressions make his narration both unconventional and at the same time unpredictable. Dowell is aware of the gaps in his narration and self-reflexively questions them: "*Is all this digression or isn't it digression? I don't know*" (1946: 19). How Dowell's story should be interpreted heavily depends upon both sensorially perceived information located in the novel and the repertoire of its readers. In consequence, Dowell's impressionistic narration reflects the difficulties inherent in the construction of a linear story.

Dowell's unexpected philosophical, emotive or subjective comments and reactions, and his back and forth narrative movements, while creating digressions also raise uncertainty about the nature of narrative truth. Furthermore, in the novel, the observations and discoveries of John Dowell are never-endingly subject to the flux of new evidence and circumstance (Tytell 1971: 365).

> *Why, not even Edward Ashburnham, who was, after all more intimate with her than I was, had an inkling of the truth. He just thought that she had dropped dead of heart disease. Indeed, I fancy that the only people who ever knew that Florence had committed suicide were Leonora, the Grand Duke, the head of the police and the hotel-keeper. I mention these last three because my recollection of that night is only the sort of pinkish effulgence from the electric-lamps in the hotel lounge. There seemed to bob into my consciousness, like floating globes, the faces of those three. Now it would be the bearded, monarchical, benevolent head of the Grand Duke; then the sharp-featured, brown, cavalry-moustached feature of the chief of police; then the globular, polished and high-collared vacuousness that represented Monsieur Schontz, the proprietor of the hotel* (Ford 1946: 92).

As it is observed in the quotation above, while recollecting "that night" and talking about Edward and Florence, Dowell is bombarded with "floating globes" (different associations), then he continues with the description of "the Grand Duke". Dowell's nonlinear emotional narrative makes him lose track of the chronology of the events in the story. Dowell reveals his critical awareness when he says, "*I have been casting back again; but I cannot help it. It is so difficult to keep all these people going. I tell you about Leonora and bring her up to date; then about Edward, who has fallen behind. And then the girl gets hopelessly*" (1946: 222). In the novel, there are plenty of such narrative digressions where he cuts the present act of telling to engage in philosophical reflection, to pass his personal comments, and to 'interrupt' the course of action with detailed descriptions. For instance, while talking about the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Ashburnham, he suddenly utters, "*Forgive my writing of these monstrous things in this frivolous manner. If I did not I should break down and cry*" (1946: 61); then he confesses, "*I have, of course, had appetites, impatiences. Why, sometimes at a table d'hote, when there would be, say, caviar handed round, I have been absolutely full of impatience for fear that when the dish came to me there should not be a satisfying portion left over by the other guests*" (1946: 46-47). Dowell's own comments highlight that his narration is not only based on his impressionistic storytelling but also his strong feelings to the people and events. Thus, Dowell's unreliable narration is also because of his own passions, appetites and impatience, as well as his including those powerful feelings into his narration.

The time shifts are also essential aspects of Dowell's digressive narrative technique. Because of the gaps in Dowell's memory, since memory is a selective rendering, when Dowell tries to reveal the nature of the relationship between Edward and Florence, his narration switches from past to present without any explanation, and he changes his past visions with his present comments as well as recreating the past in his present perspective. As Dowell explains, "*One remembers points that one has forgotten and one explains them all the more minutely since one recognises that one has forgotten to mention them in their proper places and that one may have given, by omitting them*"; thus, he consoles himself "*with thinking that this is a real story and that, after all, real stories are probably told best in the way a person telling a story would tell them. They will then seem most real* (1946: 50). As Dowell's words clarify, he is conscious that his way of remembering and telling the story is unconventional and non-

linear since he recounts it in the present as it comes to him. He explicitly worries about the narrative form, language, chronology and structure that he must adopt. Because of his sudden thematic and time shifts, Dowel loses the path of the story and shares his struggle to find a way out with his readers. Just after a few pages from the beginning he says, "*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*" (1946: 37). Dowell tracks an order which is based on what he feels, remembers and how he recreates them as the present for his readers; thus, in his narration there are some temporal narrative jumps. Dowell overtly acknowledges that he is not happy to be the presenter of such an intricate story since "*It is so difficult to keep all these people going".* Dowell *"tell[s] you about Leonora and bring her up to date; then about Edward who has fallen behind. And then the girl gets hopelessly left behind*" (1946: 142). Besides these, many examples can be given to illustrate Dowell's narrative jumps. While talking about Peire Vidal and Florence, he starts commenting on his technique; after this digression he continues with the Hurlbirds, then with the story of the Four Castles, then again "with the Hurlbirds" (51). In another example, Dowell starts narrating how Leonora and Florence first met. Florence first sees Leonora "boxing Maisie's ear"; then Dowell tells the reader the reasons why she behaved in that manner. He explains that since Edward must pay a blackmailer Leonora is frustrated. However, he continues his narration with Edward's past and present financial problems in "India" and "Monte Carlo" (1946: 158), then Dowell focuses on Edward's love affairs. When Dowell starts talking about the tortured marriage of Edward and Leonora, his narration switches from past to present without any explanation. He interrupts the flow of his narration to explain that he is not sure whether "*a very minute study of their progress towards complete disunion is necessary*" (1946: 144). According to Dowell "*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*" (1946: 183). Being aware of this, he pauses to explain:

> *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. Well, she was bright; and she danced. She seemed to dance over the floors of castles and over seas and over and over and over the salons of modistes and over the plages of the Riviera—like a gay tremulous beam, reflected from water upon a ceiling. And my function in life was to keep that bright thing in existence* (Ford 1946: 14).

Through the end of the novel he announces that he is going to end the story with these words: "*that is the great desideratum of life, and that is the end of my story*" (1946: 160). He uses the present tense while trying to reach the end of his narration. But Dowell continues his narration since he forgets to say "*how Edward met his wife*" (161). Just like these examples, throughout the novel, Dowell goes back and forth in his narration as he forgets to say something. This is the spontaneous flow of Dowell's narration since he composes the story as it "suddenly occurs to [him]" (1946: 23, 57). Dowell's unreliable narration, like an associative chain, shifts back and forth; and he knows that this is an unusual way of composing a story. As claimed by Rimmon-Kenan, these gaps cause narrative unreliability.

Being aware of the time shifts, Dowell sometimes decides to follow a casual mode by addressing an imaginary friend or a listener. Before he describes Edward, Dowell starts addressing an imaginary reader: "*So I shall just imagine myself for a fortnight or so at one side of*

the fireplace of a country cottage, with a sympathetic soul opposite me. And I shall go on talking, in a low voice while the sea sounds in the distance and overhead the great black flood of wind polishes the bright stars" (1946: 12). Dowell's direct addresses to this imaginary listener create digressions which deconstruct realistic storytelling and make him an unreliable narrator. He tries to create a realistic form, but he cannot. He voices this difficulty with these words:

> *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. I have stuck to my idea of being in a country cottage with a silent listener, hearing between the gusts of the wind and amidst the noises of the distant sea, the story as it comes. And, 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. I console myself with thinking that this is a real story and that, after all, real stories are probably told best in the way a person telling a story would tell them. They will then seem most real* (1946: 183).

In the quotation, Dowell self-consciously questions his own narrative style and the problem of telling the story; this awareness shows that he does not only tell the story of the past fourteen years, but also muses over the narrative technique that he tries to form. Dowell's search for an aesthetic form also makes the reader question "the truth of the tale and our perception of that truth" (Nigro 1992: 387). Being aware of these digressions, Dowell shares his views on his way of telling the story with his silent listener: "*Is all this digression or isn't it digression? I don't know. You, the listener, sit opposite me. But you are so silent* (19)"; "*But I guess I have made it hard for you, O silent listener, to get that impression* (152)"; "*may strike you, silent listener, as being funny if you happen to be European* (199)". This quotation clearly indicates that Dowell is a self-conscious narrator who can detect the unconventionalities in his narration.

TGS gradually discloses a series of events, impressions and associations that are quite different from what the introduction leads the reader to believe. As it is discussed in the earlier examples, the gaps between the true outcome of the actions and Dowell's erroneous earlier reports also lead to narrative unreliability. In *TGS* the author does not provide the readers with a reliable judgment of the narrator which can direct us to determine how to take what he tells us. Dowell seemingly tries to follow the realist tradition, but this remains only a pretension. In a highly changing world, in the search for meaning, Edward, Leonora, Dowell and Florence, like Hemingway's frustrated types, are engaged in public meetings and small trips to add meaning to their lives. Ford's choice of a passionless, unreliable and incompetent narrator shows that "real intimacy, real passion, is only possible within the indeterminate world inhabited by those characters in *The Good Soldier* other than Dowell" (Nigro 1992: 83).

III. CONCLUSION

In *The Good Soldier,* Dowell starts his narration with the question "why I write", and he closes it with "I don't know what to say". Although Dowell is one of the major characters in the story, he cannot understand the paramount events of the story he is narrating, and even at the end he does not know what to say. Thus, it can be concluded that Dowell's narrative technique is one of the reasons why he is regarded as an unreliable narrator. Dowell's nonconformist narration first makes us hear and see the scenes with novelistic imagery, then complete the narrator's version of the events, and finally reconstruct the text from Dowell's impressions.

As highlighted in the discussion part, instead of following a linear path, Dowell follows different circular narrative lines opening different dimensions and possibilities. Dowell's narration is based on contradictions resulting from his circular manner of presentation. Thus, the function of unreliable Dowell is to report, evaluate, and interpret characters, facts, and events. Dowell self-consciously frees himself from the role of a traditional all-knowing narrator when he states that the business of a novelist is to make you see things not to make you believe. In this regard, truth is always incomplete, leading to endless relations of questioning and a continuing liberalization process both for the narrator and reader; therefore, *TGS* is not a typical Victorian realist novel.

In conventional realistic novels, a linguistic sign is used as the signified referring to an object of the outside world; what is more, the readers are made to believe that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is essentially natural. In *TGS,* Dowell's impressionism, with its denial of order and his presentation of highly fragmented universes in the fictional world of the novel, deconstructs language down to its most basic building blocks and he acts like a postmodernist scriptor. It is clear that both the language and narrative technique Dowell uses are incapable of conveying the essential meaning of anything and are instead merely a chain of impressions. Consequently, by re-constructing the story from Dowell's impressions the reader immediately becomes an active participant in Dowell's writing of the story rather than the usual passive reader.

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