FROM DISFIGURED TO TRANSFIGURED PAST:
MEMORY AND HISTORY IN *THE GOOD SOLDIER*

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Abstract
Narration in *The Good Soldier* has been most noted for its disconnectedness and deliberate unreliability. Dowell not only comes out as an undependable story teller, but repeatedly highlights his own untrustworthiness through the novel. I wish to argue that Ford uses this flawed narrator as a tool to investigate the process of storytelling. Given the historical framework of the novel and the relentless focus on the Fourth of August date, the question of storytelling itself may be also considered as leading to a larger interrogation of the way in which history is written. My perspective is mainly informed by Ricœur’s analysis of the relationship between time and narration, and between memory and history. It may indeed appear that Dowell in *The Good Soldier* establishes and explores a phenomenology of memory. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur examines the ‘refiguration’ of time via narration. This chapter contends that the unavoidable refiguration of the past, whilst it may initially appear as disfiguring truth, may ultimately be construed as a transfiguration which is in no way inferior to the original event. Ford intimates to us that in the awareness of the limits of recapturing time past through memory, which is key to his theory of literary impressionism, also lies an updated ethics of the narrative.

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**History and Narrative**

Ford’s involvement in history and history writing is well established. Some of his novels were unambiguously conceived as historical fiction, such as the *Fifth Queen* trilogy, or are directly steeped in historical events, such as *Parade’s End*, the genesis of which Ford explained in these terms: ‘I wanted the novelist in fact to appear in his really proud position as historian of his own time’. Some of his non-fiction works are also explicitly presented as historical surveys, such as *A History of our Own Times*, or *The Cinque Ports*, whose subtitle is ‘A Historical and descriptive record’. I wish to examine the way in which *The Good Soldier*, whilst less openly historical and primarily concerned with narration – its subtitle and Ford’s original title, which later became the first sentence of the novel, both describe it as a ‘tale’ and a ‘story’ – has in fact as much claims to being considered as a historical novel: a work not only on history, but also and perhaps more importantly, on history writing.

*The Fifth Queen* aims at an impressionist rendering of the innermost feelings of historical figures and of the private background behind public events. We might consider *The Good Soldier* as taking the reverse route: using private figures and individual drama with public events acting as a meaningful, albeit silent backdrop. Ultimately, however, the aim in both novels is the same. Ford’s vision of history writing is of course an impressionist one, building up layer upon layer of features, epiphenomena, personalities, that all participate in the big picture – and contribute to its eventual collapse in the case of the pre-war era described in *The Good Soldier*. In the International Ford Madox Ford Studies volume on History and Representation, Elena Lamberti reminded us that Ford ‘wanted to render “the spirit of an age, of a town, of a movement”, something that, Ford tells us, cannot be done with “facts”, but with “impressions”’. The object of Lamberti’s essay was Ford’s explicitly historical work in *A History of Our Own Times*. Our focus here shall be on the historiographical dimension of *The Good Soldier*, and of its consequences on narration.