

PEACE and THE GOOD SOLDIER

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 04 Dec 2000

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 04 Dec 2000, 12:43

Synchronicity moment, friends!

"THE GOOD SOLDIER is, Eugene Goodheart claims, `one of the most puzzling works of modern fiction.' It is notoriously hard to make sense of Ford's characters, their backgrounds, and their actions. There is critical dissension on such issues as whether the title (in so far as it refers to Captain Edward Ashburnham's `goodness') is ironic or not. The narrative is speckled with what look like factual contradictions (about such crucial data as when and where the Dowells first met the Ashburnhams). Close inspection reveals that the chronology is awry at almost every point. `Is this,' Martin Stannard asks, `Fordian irony or simply carelessness about details?' Should we lay the inconsistencies at the door of an artfully unreliable narrator (John Dowell), or at the door of a slipshod writer (Ford Madox Ford)? Some critics, Vincent Cheng for instance (who has assembled a convincing chronology of THE GOOD SOLDIER), believe that Ford is writing in `the French mode of *vraisemblance*,' and that it is legitimate to ask `what actually happens?' with a reasonable expectation of getting `right' answers. Other commentators, such as Frank Kermode, see THE GOOD SOLDIER as the *locus classicus* of modernist indeterminacy. `We are in a world of which it needs to be said not that plural readings are possible (for this is true of all narrative) but that the *illusion* of the single right reading is possible no longer_.'"

That's a long quote, but the article gets even better: the title of the piece is "Whose daughter is Nancy?" and it becomes something rather like our Doris enigma. It is in a neat little paperback book (Dan'l and hello there Henry Kaiser, they have 'em at Half Price Books [which is a used bookstore chain based in Texas, Roy]) titled CAN JANE EYRE BE HAPPY? which is a sequel to IS HEATHCLIFF A MURDERER? GREAT PUZZLES IN 19TH-CENTURY FICTION.

Heads-up Jonathan Laidlow, since there's an article on Tristram Shandy called "Slop Slip." (I can give more details if you need.)

Hey, wish I could give everybody here copies of these books for Christmas, so go out and get them. The author is John Sutherland. Published by Oxford University Press as part of their World's Classics series.

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