



## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF *THE GOOD SOLDIER* AND *NATALIE NATALIA*: THEME OF ADULTERY

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<p><b>Received:</b> December 14<sup>th</sup> 2023</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> January 10<sup>th</sup> 2024</p> <p><b>Published:</b> February 20<sup>th</sup> 2024</p>	<p>Adultery is one of the most important themes in literature. Up to the current time, many writers have approached this theme from different perspectives. Ford Madox Ford's <i>The Good Soldier</i> and Nicholas Mosley's <i>Natalie Natalia</i> are regarded as two of the most famous novels in this regard, which narrate the story of several adulterous characters; thus, through a comparative analysis, the present paper is going to probe into their similarities and differences. It will be found that despite some slight differences, both <i>The Good Soldier</i> and <i>Natalie Natalia</i> share many parallels regarding such different aspects as their characterization, setting, the whole story, and, most importantly, the theme of adultery.</p>

**Keywords:** Adultery, *The Good Soldier*, *Natalie Natalia*, Similarities, Desire.

### INTRODUCTION

*The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion* (1915) is the title of one of the most popular novels by Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939), a British author, poet, critic and editor. The setting is before World War I, and the story revolves around the life of a soldier named Edward Ashburnham. Throughout the novel, Ford employs the technique of flashbacks.

It can also be stated that each of Ford's novels rotates around a significant theme: "the problem of getting the modern world into focus, of acquiring historical perspective in a quickly changing world" (Green, 1981, p. 219). Besides, Ford used his life's events, like his various affairs, to write this book.

As a rich American, Dowell is the narrator of a story about Edward's incapability to stay loyal to one woman and his rejection to stop his flawless vision of existing as a feudal aristocrat even though he lives in the twentieth century. Edward is attracted to many women throughout the story, including Mrs. Basil, Maisie Maiden, Florence Dowell, and Nancy Rufford. Like his author, Edward has relationships with all these women while still married to Leonora.

On the other hand, *Natalie Natalia* is a novel by the English novelist Nicholas Mosley (1923-2017), initially published in 1971. This novel is about a middle-aged British member of parliament who gets involved in an adulterous affair with a co-worker's wife.

*Natalie Natalia* was not Mosley's only novel, and it can be noted that during this writer's long writing career, his novels experienced lots of substantial alterations regarding their themes. For instance, his early novels, *Spaces of the Dark* (1951) and *The Rainbearers* (1955), are set after World War II.

His other novels include *Corruption* (1957), which is about Corruption and unfairness and reveals the effect of Henry James and William Faulkner; *Meeting Place* (1962), in which an alienated couple comes together; and *Accident* (1965), which tells of ethical and demonstrative impacts of unsuccessful love affairs and a deadly car accident. Finally, Mosley implemented a briefer style in *Impossible Object* (1968) and *Natalie Natalia* (1971).

He mixed, in a distinctive way, Christian morals and experimental practices and thus presented difficult psychological glitches. It should also be added that his capability to overcome the limitations of writing and to experiment with something very dissimilar caused his reputation even more.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Both the novels, which are the subject of the present study, have been analyzed by diverse scholars. In this part, there will be an account of some of these researches. For example, "The Trauma of Betrayal in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*" (2018) presents a reading of *The Good Soldier* as a trauma narrative with its various characteristics of John Dowell as a traumatically affected character. This research has investigated the disordered storyteller and how he acts out his trauma of betrayal in the forms of suppression, obliviousness, delayed action, and emotional disorienting.

Next, this paper attempts to concentrate on how he copes with his traumatic reminiscences of adultery by altering them into an inclusive narrative, but he is unsuccessful. This paper proposes that although trauma theory originates in psychoanalysis, it allows reading literary texts such as *The Good Soldier* from a different viewpoint.

The next research mentioned here belongs to Saunders' (2004) "Modernism, Impressionism, and Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*". It is stated in this article that modernism is what makes *The Good Soldier* so attractive to teachers. Its simple first-person point of view and recurring time shifts are signs of modernist technical self-consciousness. Also, *Ford Madox Ford's Novels: A Critical Study* (1962) is the name of a book in which Meixner has offered an enlightening analysis of Ford's novels.

"Irony and the Marriage Plot in *The Good Soldier*" By Pines (2003) is the name of an article that discusses the importance of marriage narratives in modernism and how modern marriages are mostly flawed or not complete, leading the characters to such acts as adultery. "Narrative triangulations: Truth, identity, and desire in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*" (2007) discusses that,

In *The Good Soldier*, the periodical disruptions beget a narrative in which only triangulated repetitions can sustain the passion of the relationships in the novel. For Dowell, these repetitions result in the deconstruction and reconstruction of truth, and all but one of these relationships, Edward Ashburnham, remains the nearly silent object of desire in the tradition of the many women who have occupied that position before and after him. Although Edward is a pathological libertine, his role in Dowell's narrative is not to act but rather to be acted upon, for Dowell presents Edward as the victim of others' desires. (De Angelis, 2007, pp. 425-426)

*The Paradox of Freedom* by Rahbaran (2007) mixes a debate of the writer's unbelievable biography with an examination of his writing. The son of Oswald Mosley (the leader of Britain's fascistic Blackshirts), a British Lord, a Christian convert, a war veteran, a voracious reader, and a significant theorist, Nicholas Mosley has applied all of these experiences and ideas in novels and diaries that aim to define the paradoxical essence of liberty. "The Way of Seeing the Story: An Interview with Nicholas Mosley" (2002) by Flanagan is another valuable source of an interview with Mosley and his writing career.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper will investigate *The Good Soldier* and *Natalie Natalia* through comparative analysis. Thus, these two novels' similarities and differences will be analyzed by emphasizing the theme of adultery.

### **Significance and Purpose of the Study**

This research aims to analyze *The Good Soldier* and *Natalie Natalia* through the methodology of comparative investigation. The significance lies in the fact that there cannot be found a single analysis regarding the examination of these two novels side by side, and thus, this article is the first one to fill the existing gap. Also, the emphasis will be on the theme of adultery and how these two novels were related to the authors' real life. Furthermore, as noticed in the literature review part, the articles related to Mosley's *Natalie Natalia* are few, which is another important point of this paper.

### **DISCUSSION**

Published in 1915, *The Good Soldier: A Tale of Passion* is set mostly in Europe before the Great War. As soon as publication, it attracted so many critics' attention. One critic admired the novel's "extreme beauty and wisdom," whereas another critic referred to it as "of more use to the pathologist than to the decent British reader in search of an account of the joys and sorrows of normal human life" (Stannard, 1995, p. ix). Still, Rebecca West, as a well-known critic, "recognized the book's quality" (Mizener, 1971, p. 278). "It was perhaps the unevenness of Ford's private life" that influenced the critic's positive reviews of his novel (Green, 1981, p. 217).

As mentioned, Ford referred to his love experiences in writing *The Good Soldier*. Ford and the novel's main character, Edward, were engaged in numerous love affairs while married to wives who could not satisfy their desires. In *The Good Soldier*, Edward falls in love with Maisie Maudslayi while still writing to Mrs. Basil. According to Mizener (1971), "No doubt the Edward Ashburnham in Ford occasionally suspected the same thing; no doubt the Dowell in him sometimes made his voice heard. But most of the time Ford, like Edward, felt that in even his most casual affairs he was exploring the horizon, was driven by his passion to find an ultimately satisfying woman" (p. 178).

Additionally, although Edward had an affair with Dowell's wife, Dowell would think of him as a good, kind, straight, and truthful soldier. Through Edward, Ford formed a character who signified modern society's lack of old morals. One of the most noticeable parallels between Ford and his novel's main character is their pursuit of an extensively sufficient woman. Arthur Mizener (1971), a Ford biographer, has referred to Ford as "unreasonably generous" who "loved generous gestures as much as Edward Ashburnham" (p. 159). Both Ford and Edward were also in pain due to psychological hitches, which were mostly caused by their affairs. For instance, Ford suffered from public humiliation due to his liaison with Violet Hunt and also underwent a mental disorder that made him think of suicide.

After losing Nancy, Edward had the same misery and committed suicide. Moreover, both Ford and his characters had a complex life. Ford lived an intricate life, and *The Good Soldier* is about the more intricate lives, loves, and marriages of John and Florence Dowell and Edward and Leonora Ashburnham, a group referred to as "our little four-square coterie" (Ford, 1995, p. 11). Finally, just like Ford, who felt embarrassed due to his infidelity, Edward suffers from guilt because of his adultery.

The similarities are not limited to Ford and Edward because they same as Ford and Edward, who would think alike about marriage. Their wives also had the same outlook on marriage because both hoped that their sinful husbands would be sorry one day. Elsie did not intend to divorce Ford because of the consequences on her children and even went to court to get compensation for marital privileges. In the novel, we see Leonora, who remained with Edward through all his affairs.

As the second novel to be analyzed in this paper, *Natalie Natalia* narrates the story of Anthony Greville, a member of the parliament who is a married man with two children. His son Adam is seventeen, and his daughter Sophie is eight. Even though he seemingly lives a happy life, Greville has an affair with Natalia Jones as a sculptor. She also has two children and a husband who works as a politician and sometimes cheats on her. Greville's wife is away at the family's country retreat for weeks, and his children are at their school, so Greville enjoys being with his lover. Still, he likes a woman named Madeleine, as well.

*Natalie Natalia*, considered one of Mosley's supreme accomplishments, is less experimental. The storyline, about a politician, Anthony Greville, involves love, adultery, disgrace, and collapse. The title that refers to the two names for the same woman as Greville's mistress exemplifies Mosley's obsession with the unknowable incongruities of life because she is a living illogicality, both voracious Natalie and innocent Natalia.

Despite his easy lifestyle, Greville is not a content man, and this issue is one of his similarities with Edward in *The Good Soldier*. This novel is chiefly about Greville's displeasure and confusion. For example, although Natalia does not make any demands on him, and his wife prefers not to be informed of his affairs, Greville is stuck between the two women. He wants to be with Natalia when he is with his wife and vice versa.

One of the other similarities between Greville and Edward is that he is involved in an adulterous affair with Natalie and paralyzed by his marital life, which altogether leads to his suffering from a psychological downfall. It is also known that just like Ford, Mosley would heavily depend upon his real-life experiences in writing his novels. For example, the novelists, whose personal life involved their desires, often struggled with conservative decency and the costs of not following it. And just the same in *The Good Soldier*, the plot line of *Natalie Natalia* is, to some extent, hard to follow since the linear description is disturbed by Greville's views, dreams, and illusions.

These two books depict narratives about sexually aberrant actions and provide their audiences with distressing stories about how Edward and Greville would cheat on their wives. We also read how their wives would thoroughly realize their adulterous relationships. For example, in *The Good Soldier*, Leonora gets gradually mad by the endless agony. Edward and Greville satisfied their immoral desires and persecuted their wives with suspicion, dishonour, and lack of confidence.

In *The Good Soldier*, we read about two marriages. The couples are, in fact, friends; however, Edward, as one of the husbands, has an affair with one of the wives and also cheats on both women with other women. Hence, it can be stated that he is disloyal. Edward is driven only by his desire and wish for power.

The theme of adultery is highlighted in both the novels in this paper because the writers intended to stress the necessity of loving and respecting one's commitments in their marital life. These morals would have saved the characters from their disastrous fate.

## CONCLUSION

This paper was a comparative analysis of *The Good Soldier* and *Natalie Natalia*. Thus, at first, they were introduced, and then the theme of adultery was studied in these two novels. It was found that Ford would borrow from his romantic affairs in writing *The Good Soldier*, which is why his main character, Edward, is like him. This statement verifies what Robert Green (1981) has stated in his article "The Exploded Traditions of Ford Madox Ford", proposing that *The Good Soldier* is popular because Ford "found a way of expressing through them the tensions of his own life and times" (p. 222). As the other novel that was selected to be analyzed, *Natalie Natalia* was also studied, and it was found that, in many ways, it resembled *The Good Soldier*. For instance, both the stories are about a male character whose dissatisfaction with his life leads to his adulterous affairs. The characters, settings, and the whole story also share similarities. Eventually, it should be concluded that both novels depict two men whose adulterous affairs lead to their downfall.

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