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10.15290/cr.2016.13.2.05

Understanding Self and Others: Marriage Scenarios in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*

Abstract. Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* establish a literary and cultural dialogue through the exploration of the individual's private space. The two writers are undoubtedly intrigued by a fluid nature of the individual: marriage appears to reveal inner conflicts, doubts, anxieties, as well as longing for happiness. Although pursuing different agendas when indulgently devising sentimental love stories and outrageous adulteries, Ford and Tolstoy echo each other when delivering their vision of self and other. This essay explores the *topos* of marriage as an element that amplifies the textual double-coding and reveals ethic and aesthetic values Ford and Tolstoy communicate.

Keywords: marriage, fluidity, changeability, anxiety, uncertainty, doubt, sincerity.

Marriage has long been a focus of literary inquiries: the changeability that the marriage topic reveals is rather exemplary in terms of ontological and epistemological instability and uncertainty. Additionally, marriage creates space for narrative maneuvers: humor, irony, sarcasm can easily be intertwined with philosophical, political, moral queries. Among a myriad of marriage stories, two novels stand out due to a variety of peripeteia, subplot mixes, moral confusion and desire to hear one's own self: Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915) and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877). The two novels, which are notorious for the depiction of adulteries and infidelities, may appear different. *The Good Soldier* is primarily discussed in the context of modernist writing and *Anna Karenina* has long been an inseparable part of the Russian realism discussion. However, the two novels incorporate marriage as an aesthetic device to expose the individual's doubt, anxiety, and emotional confusion. Although demonstrating an adherence to realism, *Anna Karenina* is also described in terms of transitional status: Tolstoy's style fluctuates between realism and mod-

ernism.¹¹ The analysis of aesthetic potential of marriage produces productive perspectives for the exploration of Ford's and Tolstoy's literary and cultural dialogue.

This essay examines the *topos* of marriage as one of the textual elements that appear to establish and maintain a literary bridge between Ford and Tolstoy: based on an array of marriage stories, *The Good Soldier* and *Anna Karenina* reveal the individual's fluid nature, which evokes a sense of uncertainty.¹² Additionally, this essay will attempt to address the question whether uncertainty is presented as destructive and paralyzing, or whether it is conceptualized as unavoidable, and thus it is perceived as acceptable. These inquiries will be explored through the analysis of Dowell's existential journey (*The Good Soldier*) and through the examination of the relationship dynamics between Kitty and Levin (*Anna Karenina*): the development of the two cases is intricately connected with the characters' understanding of and involvement in marriage concerns.

Although literary critics have frequently underlined the overpowering presence of marriage concerns raised by Ford¹³ and Tolstoy¹⁴, literary discussions can benefit from comparative trans-literary investigations. *The Good Soldier* and *Anna Karenina* demonstrate Ford's and Tolstoy's keen interest in the individual and their inner modifications, augmented by the changing environments. Although chronologically separated by more than 35 years, the two novels illuminate doubts and anxieties caused not only by historical and social circumstances but by the individual's seeking spirit as well.¹⁵

11 In *Framing Anna Karenina: Tolstoy, the woman question, and the Victorian novel*, Amy Mandelker details the modernist and realist nuances Tolstoy embraces.

12 As Stephen Lovell points out, Tolstoy struggled to come to terms with age and death: "As he grew older, the only way he found to keep his fear within reasonable bounds was to talk it into temporary submission" (304). This struggle results in Tolstoy's acceptance of self's fluidity: "Tolstoy was more convinced of the self's fluidity than of its wholeness" (304). The notions of fluidity and changeability significantly shape the writer's ethic and aesthetic edifice. On the one hand, this characteristic signals Tolstoy's adherence to realism; on the other hand, existential instability that intensifies spiritual confusion and lostness establishes a link with modernist detachment and isolation.

13 The discussion of Ford's manipulation with the *topos* of marriage is often blurred by the exploration of gender, social, political, religious nuances. Thus, Anne Flanagan, Rose De Angelis and Betty H. Kirschstein explore marriage from the perspective of gender roles. Ford's presentation of marriage encourages the analysis of blurred gender boundaries. As Kirschstein emphasizes, Ford himself crossed gender boundaries, "enjoying 'womanly' activities such as cooking, and seeking comfort in domestic spaces and female companionship" (xi).

14 Tolstoy's interpretation of marriage and family has received more critical attention than Ford's. However, a detailed analysis of Tolstoy's ideas concerning love, marriage, and family is primarily confined to the Russian Tolstoy Studies: Shklovsky, Strakhov, Chernyshevsky, Biriukov, Merezhkovsky, to name but a few. This research is also marked by the blurriness of the marriage focus. Tolstoy's canonical status as "a great Russian writer" requires considering political, social, philosophical, religious, spiritual scopes when addressing the marriage topic.

15 The two novels provide rich material for the understanding of Ford's and Tolstoy's personal vision of marriage. If *The Good Soldier* represents Ford's anxiety regarding gender roles, *Anna Karenina* reflects doubts and anxiety that Tolstoy develops while reconsidering his own marriage. *Anna Karenina* was written during the years when Leo Tolstoy and his wife, Sofia Andreevna, were happy. As Hugh McLean notes, despite some minor fights and quarrels "on the whole the Tolstoy marriage from 1862 up to the completion of *Anna Karenina* in 1877 could be classified as fundamentally harmonious" (66). After that, "came the master's 'crisis'" (66).

At first glance, the marriage topic forms a skeleton of both *The Good Soldier* and *Anna Karenina*. The novels involve the stories of married couples, whose lives appear to be displayed for approvals and judgments, sympathies and condemnations. In *The Good Soldier*, John Dowell, in an aloof and cold-hearted way, describes adulteries, cruelties, suicides that he witnesses. Detailed pictures of dramas and tragedies are provided in *Anna Karenina* by the omnipresent narrator, who encourages the audience to decide who to sympathize with and whom to condemn. Additionally, the ironic tone, imbuing the beginning of the two novels, locates marriage in the realm of reconsiderations and subversions, illuminating the loss of certainty.

The Good Soldier opens with a pathos phrase, introducing incredulity and suspicion regarding the reliability of the unfolding narrative: “This is the saddest story that I have ever heard” (5). A few lines into the story, the narrator subverts the intensity set up at the beginning: “I believe, a state of things only possible with English people of whom, till today, when I sit down to puzzle out what I know of this sad story, I knew nothing whatever” (5). The narrative is shaped by unreliability and uncertainty. On a large scale, “the saddest story,” which involves dramas and tragedies of the married couples—the Ashburnhams and the Dowells—is an illusion of life: Ford employs the *topos* of marriage to emphasize the individual’s loneliness as a mode of existence. The characters of *The Good Soldier* struggle to maintain meaningful connections that can help overcome emotional detachment. Thus, the irony introduced at the beginning of the novel, subverts traditional premises of marriage, defying stability and introducing uncertainty.

Subversion—narrative and ethic—also imbues *Anna Karenina*. It should be noted that, akin to *The Good Soldier*, irony is introduced in the beginning of the Russian novel. The Oblonskys’ undergo a family crisis: “Everything was in confusion in the Oblonskys’ house. The wife had discovered that the husband was carrying on an intrigue with a French girl, who had been a governess in their family, and she had announced to her husband that she could not go on living in the same house with him” (1). A playful irony, however, is mitigated by Tolstoy’s insightful observation: “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (1). Marriage invites the conversation not only about happy families but also about existential confusion, intensified by the loss of certainty and stability. Not only is Darya Alexandrovna’s routine life shattered, her emotional and psychological stability undergoes turmoil.

The Good Soldier and *Anna Karenina* reveal marriage as the individual’s space, which allows the subversion of social stereotypes and the manifestation of the individual’s inherent fluidity and changeability. Ford and Tolstoy devise situations, in which their characters have to face ceaseless ontological fluidity and to construct their epistemic frameworks that will justify their truths and beliefs. The two writers emphasize doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety as key elements of the existential journey. In this light, marriage provides space for self-reflection: changes that the characters undergo lay the foundations for the ability to construct individual worlds out of multiple fragments.

John Dowell, the narrator of *The Good Soldier* who is rather disconnected with the world and with others, laments over the loss of stability and attempts to find the way to restore tranquility and “perfect smoothness” of being: “Isn’t there any heaven where old beautiful dances, old

beautiful intimacies prolong themselves? Isn't there any Nirvana pervaded by the faint thrilling of instruments that have fallen into the dust of wormwood but that yet had frail, tremulous, and everlasting souls?" (11). The answer to these questions is epitomized by the inevitability of loneliness. Dowell confesses: "I know nothing—nothing in the world—of the hearts of men. I only know that I am alone—horribly alone" (13). In *The Good Soldier*, marriage discloses loneliness as a mode of existence, and the struggle with emotional confusion turns into a lonely journey, highlighting the individual's disconnection with others. "It is as if one had a dual personality," says Dowell as "the saddest story" progresses, "the one I being entirely unconscious of the other" (186-187). Observing the outside world, Dowell moves inward: loneliness appears to be accepted as a way of being.

Pointing out Dowell's estrangement, DeCoste states, "Dowell himself reports his fundamental estrangement from other human beings with utter equanimity" (110). Moreover, estrangement becomes pervasive:

Just as the Dowell's marriage is rendered barren by our narrator's flight from vulgar intimacy, left nothing but a loveless tissue of routine betrayals and truths carefully left unspoken, so too is the Ashburnhams' perfection predicated upon an alienation perpetuated by silence. . . . The primary fact of this relationships is its not-expressive character, its being a union in which only separation is possible, precisely because nothing may be said. (111)

Distance and detachment help survive in the environment of undermined certainty: Dowell is deprived of unshakeable belief. In this context, Dowell's marriage, marked by disconnection and the lack of intimacy (the Ashburnhams' marriage is no exception) highlights the utmost loneliness, which can hardly be healed. In light of Dowell's loneliness, John Rodden acutely notes, "Unable to forge a family romance and unable to control his projected objects and thereby himself, Dowell suffers extreme loneliness and paranoid anxiety" (880). Dowell is overwhelmed with loneliness and anxiety; however, his perception of this state is rather ambiguous. While being aware of his emotional lostness, Dowell appears to be ready to embrace instability.

Doubts dominate and control Dowell's life. The narrator seems to be unable (or reluctant?) to see his wife's infidelity, which gestures toward the lack of stamina to resist doubt. However, I would like to suggest that Dowell is indifferent to his wife's affairs, rather than unable or reluctant to accept the fact that numerous adulteries damaged his marriage. For Dowell, indifference is a way to deal with doubt: not being attached to anything liberates and empowers. Detachment and indifference allow Dowell to see and experience the environments from different perspectives. In his narrative, Dowell unveils not only his life but also the life of his wife and the Ashburnhams. This strategy intensifies the narrative's all-inclusiveness, in which a variety of impacts and affects is considered. When narrating the adulteries, in which he himself is involved, Dowell represents multiple viewpoints (his own, Edward's, Leonora's, and Florence's), which disclose a multiplicity of perceptions, subverting any harmonious unanimity. In one of his observations, Dowell laments:

Upon my word, I couldn't tell you offhand whether the lady who sold the so expensive violets at the bottom of the road that leads to the station, was cheating me or no; I can't say whether the porter who carried our traps across the station at Leghorn was a thief or no when he said that the regular tariff was a lira a parcel. The instances of honesty that one comes across in this world are just as amazing as the instances of dishonesty. (64)

The details mentioned in this paragraph—violets which are bought at the bottom of the road and the porter at the station at Leghorn—seem insignificant. However, minor occurrences are followed by more **Abstract** speculations: “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” (64). The intermingling of narrative dimensions extends Dowell's loss of certainty to the all-encompassing level. In this context, marriage in *The Good Soldier* is a site of inner, as well as outer, struggles, where the individual is presented in the epicenter of uncertainty and chaos.

In Ford's novel, marital relationships are chaotic and uncertain: Florence manipulates Dowell; Edward and Leonora resemble dishonest business partners; Dowell seems to manipulate everybody, avoiding any kind of ties and connections. Apart from political and social subcontexts that Ford's chaotic marriages may evoke, they also reveal the individual's confusion, which is brought forward by the repercussions of the *fin de siècle* atmosphere. Anxiety and uncertainty pervade Dowell's narrative: his inability to connect with others marks the loss of basis that structures *weltanschauung*. “But upon my word,” says Dowell, speculating on the nothingness of his life, “I don't know how we put in our time, how does one put on one's time? How is it possible to have achieved nine years and to have nothing whatever to show for it? Nothing whatever, you understand” (63). Nothingness seems to be the core of Dowell's life: he does not have a partner, he does not believe in love and friendship, he is incapable of sympathy and understanding. Although overwhelmed with the void, Dowell makes an attempt to find meaning in a meaningless world. Chaotic marriages that do not have space for connection and connectedness emphasize the existential loneliness.

Aestheticizing loneliness, Ford liberates both its destructive and constructive energies. No character in *The Good Soldier* can maintain connection with others; nevertheless, loneliness, at least for Dowell, produces space for inquiries and questions, reflecting not only his anxieties and uncertainties but also his doubts. Dowell's unreliability as a narrator reflects his doubtful soul as well. He seems not to doubt one thing—he has doubts. Doubt keeps the narrative moving back and forth, producing space for liberty and creativity, which nourishes the confused mind.

In *The Good Soldier*, loneliness is an accepted fact of the individual's existence. Tolstoy employs the marriage topic to *deal* with loneliness, to find ways to overcome uncertainty. This conversation about loneliness and uncertainty creates a crossing point between Ford and Tolstoy. In addition, the two writers involve doubt that reflects fluid and changing identity. Although inseparable from uncertainty and from the loss of stability, doubt signals an inquiring spirit, gesturing toward existential freedom. Ford and Tolstoy echo each other in their attempt to reveal an ambiguous nature of uncertainty: as a notion that encompasses both constructive and destructive components.

Tolstoy develops his characters' nature by including doubts into their worldviews: *Anna Karenina*, Darya Alexandrovna, Konstantin Levin, even Stepan Arkadyevitch. However, Kitty's struggles exemplify a painful confrontation with doubts, entailing further spiritual transformations that expose the fluidity of the individual. Refining Kitty's complicated character, Tolstoy masterfully connects spiritual doubts with heart matters and marriage ideals.

Kitty is first introduced as a beautiful young woman who is in love with Alexey Vronsky. (At least she believes she sincerely loves him and dreams to become his wife.) For this reason, she rejects Levin's proposal, hoping to build a happy marriage with Vronsky. Her heart, however, is broken after Vronsky meets and falls in love with Anna: Kitty suffers from depression, which worries and puzzles her parents, who cannot understand the origin of their daughter's physical and emotional ailment. In search for the physical, emotional, and spiritual balance, Kitty opens herself to the world, attempting to come to terms with her pain and discomfort.

After meeting Madame Stahl and Varenka, Kitty believes that she discovers "the new life," in which she will be able not only to recover from the pain caused by Vronsky but also to find spiritual peace and tranquility, deprived of emotional turmoil: "In Varenka she realized that one has but forget oneself and love others, and one will be calm, happy, and noble" (204). Tolstoy portrays Kitty as an independent seeker for her own truth: instead of abiding by the traditions of the aristocratic society in which matchmaking and marriage business are common practices. Kitty does not believe in loveless marriages organized on the basis of financial profit. After her painful experience with Vronsky, Kitty is convinced that the secret to meaningful life lies in the service to mankind and in the wholehearted self-sacrifice. Nevertheless, doubt disturbs Kitty's confidence and seemingly resumed peace: "This doubt poisoned the charm of her new life" (206). Her suspicions concerning the sincerity of Madame Stahl's and Varenka's deeds and intentions are augmented by her father's (prince Alexander Shtcherbatsky) indirect subversion of their generosity and charity: ". . . [I]t's better when [one] does good so that you may ask everyone and no one knows" (210). It may seem that Kitty is influenced by her father's comments; however, her hesitations develop long before the prince's remark. In *Anna Karenina*, doubt is a manifestation of independent thinking and individual choice, accompanying spiritual and existential quest. Kitty's quest also epitomizes the individual's changeability and fluidity, discovered through the emotional confusion.

Kitty's emotional turmoil and her longing for certainty, to some extent, is intertwined with Levin's quest for inner peace. The intersection of the two narrative lines represents the individual's interaction with others as a way to overcome doubt and loneliness, which, according to Tolstoy, disturb inner peace and harmony. As Ford, Tolstoy views uncertainty as an inextricable part of existence. Unlike Ford, however, Tolstoy introduces the idea that doubts can (and should) be processed and reduced through genuine interaction with self and others.

For Levin, marriage is a sacred union, which brings emotional and spiritual stability: "He was so far from conceiving of love for woman apart from marriage that he positively pictured to himself first the family, and only secondarily the woman who would give him a family. . . . For Levin it was the chief affair of life, on which its whole happiness turned" (87). Kitty's rejection shatters his

dreams: “He felt himself, and did not want to be any one else. All he wanted now was to be better than he before. In the first place he resolved that from that day he would give up hoping for any extraordinary happiness, such as marriage must have given him, and consequently he would not so disdain what he really had” (85). To cope with his pain, Levin decides to emotionally detach from the worldly environments and indulge in his isolation: “This lovely spring roused Levin still more, renouncing all his past and building up his lonely life firmly and independently” (137). Although spring brings the sense of resurrection, it primarily emphasizes physical well-being while hiding wounds that still need to be healed. At the moment of resolute decision to never pursue marriage, Levin feels that “in the depth of his soul something had been put in its place, settled down, and laid to rest” (88). However, this state of illusory peace and tranquility, deepened by isolation and seclusion, highlights the loss of hope and despondency. The individual’s strong spirit inspires openness to others: isolation is a sign of a damaged self.

Loneliness which Levin considers blissful reveals its artificial nature as soon as he finds out that Kitty did not marry Vronsky. It is peculiar that Levin’s solitude—physical and emotional—is disturbed when he connects with nature. Nature serves to emphasize the naturalness of seeking connection with others, as opposed to isolation and seclusion. When Stepan Arkadyevitch comes to his estate, Levin attempts to block his fond memories of Kitty. Stepan Arkadyevitch is impressed with his happiness; and Levin seems confident to declare: “Perhaps because I rejoice in what I have, and don’t fret what I haven’t” (147). However, this episode exposes his deliberate self-deception. Discovering that Kitty suffers physically and emotionally, Levin cannot hide his rejoice: “On the way home Levin asked all the details of Kitty’s illness and the Shtcherbatskys’ plans, and though he would have been ashamed to admit it, he was pleased at what he heard” (150-151). Levin experiences emotional resurrection: he still sincerely loves Kitty.

For Tolstoy, sincere love and sincere marriage are steps toward the life grounded in faith and certainty. However, this life transpires when a seeking spirit develops: the individual has to find their own way to existential satisfaction and to gain control over doubt and uncertainty.¹⁶ As Kitty, who is tormented by the necessity to make a choice between prioritizing her own self and serving others, Levin seems to be tortured by doubts regarding the benevolence of his solitude. Tolstoy employs love stories to narrate changes that take place when the individual faces contradictions and ambiguities. The emphasis on the individual brings forth intimacy, which appears to sustain a sincere dialogue with self and others.

After breaking up with Kitty, Levin develops sensitivity, accompanied by vulnerability. When Levin makes his decision to separate himself from Kitty, he is anxious to be honest with himself. Rationalizing his choice, he convinces himself that loneliness is his true path. Choosing detach-

¹⁶ Tolstoy’s *Resurrection* can be rather productive for further transliterary and interdisciplinary explorations of anxiety, doubt, emotional confusion and of the ways to recover from negative experiences in order to modify one’s life. This novel also provides material for the analysis of how damaging experiences shape the individual’s perception of self and others.

ment and isolation, Levin deviates from his sincerity. Although he may have found some serenity, residing in his estate and devoting his time to agricultural business, Levin suffers from anxiety and restlessness, intensified by his doubtful and questioning mind. He unsuccessfully attempts to persuade himself that he follows his “true” voice when choosing a secluded life. His sincere and genuine love for Kitty, as well as his genuine desire to find happiness while being married to the woman he sincerely loves, are reignited the moment Kitty re-enters his life: “No,” he said to himself, ‘however good that life of simplicity and toil may be, I cannot go back to it. I love her’” (252). Sincerity becomes a uniting element for Levin and Kitty. If Levin sustains his sincerity throughout his painful process of coping with the rejection, Kitty discovers sincerity when managing the pain caused by Vronsky’s indifference. Levin and Kitty experience excruciating doubts before they discover a sincere connection that creates space not only for happiness but for doubt and uncertainty as well. While doubt and anxiety constitute part of life and existence, sincerity is a means to turn their destructive energy into a constructive one.

In Tolstoy’s interpretation, sincerity is granted to everyone. However, it is also presented as a choice. Marked by the lack of connection and sincerity, the relationship of Oblonsky and Darya Alexandrovna, for instance, is doomed: the two people are engaged in a show marriage. Anna and Vronsky are also given a chance to develop the ability to hear others and to connect with others while cultivating sincerity and genuineness. Instead, they are trapped in their worlds, which do not have space for others.

In *Anna Karenina*, sincerity signals the individual’s ability and willingness to develop connection with others while expanding one’s own world by integrating a diversity of voices. This ability facilitates the establishment of contact zones where different views and perspectives combine. From this perspective, marriage reveals itself as a dialogue of individuals who are open to hear others and to embrace inherent fluidity of existence.

Do Ford’s marriages include sincerity? Describing Ford’s novel, Walter G. Creed notes, “*The Good Soldier* is a novel of deception. Dowell’s wife deceives him, so do the Ashburnhams. Dowell deceives himself, mostly because he wants to be deceived, and in telling his story, he deceives us as well” (215). At first glance, deceptions—narrative and marital—dominate Dowell’s story. Dowell changes his narrative angles as if following his swinging moods. Nevertheless, this sense of narrative lostness is a trick that Dowell employs to elude certainty and finality.

Scrutinizing the Ashburnhams’ relationship, Dowell at times develops understanding and compassion, followed by scorn, intolerance, and impatience. As far as his wife is concerned, Dowell is not ashamed of revealing his mixed feelings. Florence is a target of intolerance and disdain, as well as pity. Dowell is rather comfortable about his openness regarding inner conflicts that the marriage brings into his life. Whenever his wife is involved, Dowell’s narrative acquires multiple shades: “Florence was singularly expert as a guide to archeological expeditions and there was nothing she liked so much as taking people round ruins and showing you the window from which some one looked down upon the murder of some one else” (68). Avoiding direct criticism, Dowell expresses his irony and sarcasm, exposing bitterness that signals emotional detachment from his

spouse. Their relationship resembles a contract that contains a series of agreements that none of the partners want to follow. Nevertheless, they follow the rules, which they still violate one way or another. Although the violation is rather invisible, it contributes to inner tensions and conflicts. Describing an excursion to the ancient city of M—, Dowell provides a number of details: “I don’t suppose the Ashburnhams wanted especially to go there and I didn’t especially want to go there myself. But, you understand, there was no objection. It was part of the cure to make an excursion three or four times a week, so that we were all quite unanimous in being grateful to Florence for providing the motive power” (63). Although marital relationships in this episode do resemble a show, Dowell does not hide his sarcasm toward his wife. Neither does he conceal his irritation, which is intensified by the presence of his wife and the Ashburnhams. At the same time, being aware of his feelings and emotions, which can hardly be categorized as pleasant, Dowell is rather genuine and sincere revealing his “ugliness.”

Dowell scrutinizes with irony and sarcasm the melodramas that Edward and Leonora are involved into. Through these observations he also discloses himself. On the one hand, Dowell paints a repelling picture of Edward’s and Leonora’s marriage, in which dishonesty, adultery, and manipulation reflect power and dominance play. On the other hand, Dowell’s non-interference demonstrates his detachment and indifference. The characters of *The Good Soldier* question the possibility to maintain connections with others, to have friends, and to cultivate tolerance and understanding. Nevertheless, they seem sincere while maintaining their disbelief in a genuine connectedness. From this perspective, Ford’s novel does contain sincerity, which, however, differs from Tolstoy’s emotional and spiritual sincerity. In *The Good Soldier*, sincerity is shifted toward self, bruised with lostness, detachment, and uncertainty: a traditional happy marriage turns into an illusion. Yet, being sincere with self and others is one the elements of accepting and embracing doubt and uncertainty.

The Good Soldier and *Anna Karenina* conceptualize marriage as a liminal territory where the personal and the communal, subjective and objective, inner and outer combine, bringing forward interrelations and interinfluences, which the individual experiences. Understood as a mediator between multiple dimensions, the marriage *topos* locates the individual in the *in-between-ness* (Gregg and Seigworth 1) of the external and internal, encompassing their changeability and fluidity. Multiple overlapping stories of *Anna Karenina* and a seemingly amorphous structure of *The Good Soldier*, which celebrates fragmentation and disjunction, include marriage as an aesthetic element that produces the effect of double-coding: factual plots encode multilayered texts, creating narrative labyrinths, involving a diversity of emotional and psychological concerns that reveal anxieties, intensified by doubt and uncertainty.

In *The Good Soldier*, emotional and psychological confusion is inevitable. An array of unsuccessful marriages, revolving around infidelities, distance, and disconnection, emphasizes the inner chaos as an accepted fact of the individual’s existence. In *Anna Karenina*, emotional lostness also accompanies the protagonists’ struggles, whose intensity increases as doubt and uncertainty become part of epistemic paradigms. Thus, this conversation about doubt and uncertainty cre-

ates a crossing point between Ford and Tolstoy. The two writers are intrigued by the individual's response to the lack of order and structure. Dowell, who is overwhelmed with the sense of lostness and loneliness, which, however, is masked with irony and with the lack of connectedness with others, may seem to choose aloofness as a way to protect his own self from disintegration. Kitty and Levin, on the other hand, when experiencing doubt and the lack of certainty, strive to re-organize their worlds affected by instability. Orchestrating marriage turmoil, Ford and Tolstoy introduce doubt as an accompanying element of spiritual journey: the two writers reveal the ambiguity of instability, which encompasses destructiveness and constructiveness. This gesture toward blurring the boundaries of conventional concepts is rather characteristic of modernist writing. While Ford advances modernist modifications, contributing to the ethic and aesthetic fluidity, Tolstoy seems to enter a new territory. As a realist, Tolstoy objectively portrays the reality, including a variety of nuances. As a modernist, the writer makes a turn toward representing multiple realities: multiple realities reveal multiple truths, bringing existential confusion. A collection of marriage stories that *Anna Karenina* comprises demonstrates diverse visions of life and reality, foregrounding modernist fragmentation and disintegration.

The Good Soldier and *Anna Karenina*, which may appear different at first glance, share the acceptance of doubt and anxiety as an inextricable part of existence. Moreover, the two novels describe the individual's confusion as natural, as one of the steps toward self-acceptance and inner freedom. Ford and Tolstoy also value sincerity, which is presented as a way to deal with the sense of lostness and uncertainty: being sincere is being able to hear ones' own voice and to engage in dialogue with others. However, as Ford and Tolstoy demonstrate, sincerity has different shades. *Anna Karenina* reveals sincerity that helps establish connection and connectedness. In *The Good Soldier*, sincerity appears to undermine self and others, but this destructive energy does not reach its ultimate level: the undermining potential of sincerity accompanies fundamental existential reinvention. This aspect, however, is open for further literary investigations: a detailed exploration of Ford's and Tolstoy's ethic and aesthetic nuances will broaden the scope of transliterary and trans-cultural studies.

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