

Everything is true; only its opposite is true too; you must believe both equally or be damned.

R.L. Stevenson, 1894¹

1. Introduction: In the mirror of L. Durrell



Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist

The Portrait of Dorian Gray, 1891

Lawrence Durrell may undoubtedly be termed a «Fordian» writer: more than a comparison may be drawn between the two writers who shared the common fate of being too hastily ranked

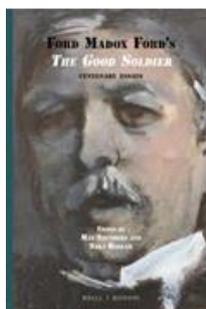
¹ R.L. Stevenson's letter quoted by S. Heath in L. Pykett ed., *Reading Fin-de-siècle Fictions*, London and New York, Longman, 1996, p. 75.

as second-rate. In the present essay I mean to show how the Fordian heritage clearly evident in Durrell's writing can contribute to the critical perspective on Ford's work by highlighting a further connection of Ford's with his literary background.

Unusual as the reference may sound, it is R.L. Stevenson—another great master of Durrell's whose lesson combines and blends with Ford's in his works—who suggests that *The Good Soldier* should be read keeping in mind the fact that this Georgian or Edwardian novel is deeply rooted into the late-Victorian imagination as it was shaped by the intellectual debate on evolution which, since the mid-seventies, flooded the pages of papers and magazines², producing such an influential «deposit» as *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). About a quarter of a century later, *mutatis mutandis*, *The Good Soldier* may be read as Ford's own version of *Jekyll & Hyde*, as well as *The Secret Sharer* (1910) may be Conrad's, or *The Invisible Man* (1897) Wells', or *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1891) Wilde's.

These references came to me while reading Durrell whose view of *the double* finds expression in a narrative technique certainly more exuberant, but in many respects essentially similar to Ford's. The catalyzer of my critical intuition were however the letters of Charlotte Brontë I was translating at the time: confronted with the easy facility with which Brontë could take a likeness or draw a full portrait in a few lines, Ford's insisted criticism of the Victorian novel and its objective certainties seemed to take on shades of envy, undertones of frustration³ and nostalgia for a self-portrait it was no longer possible for him to achieve. The extent of Ford caring for a self-portrait may easily be inferred from the number of his autobiographical writings. And one of his best self-portraits, if not the best—I agree with Saunders in his introduction⁴—is certainly to be found in the narrative form of *TGS*.

2. Durrell and Ford



I know, yet I do not know
what I knew then
what I learned in the garden
in the long route of exile
Rhythm of joy and despair

L. Durrell, 1947⁵

² See E. Block, «James Sully, Evolutionist Psychology and Late Victorian Fiction», *Victorian Studies*, Summer 1982, 442-67; B. Battaglia, «R.L. Stevenson e il gotico tardo-vittoriano», in G. Imposti ed., *Lo specchio dei mondi impossibili*, Alethea, Firenze, 2002.

³ See «Introduction», *The Bodley Head Ford Madox Ford*, vol. I, London, The Bodley Head, 1962, p. 12.

⁴ M. Saunders, *FMF: A Dual Life*, OUP, 1995, vol I, p. 13

⁵ Fragment of a poem composed in Greek, dated Bournemouth, 1947, manuscript from L.D.'s Special Collection, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (italics mine). Reference to the two parts of this collection will be made following R. Pine [*Lawrence Durrell: The mindscape*, New York, St Martin Press, 1994, p388] as SIUC/...

À *Propos* of this «nephew»⁷ of Ford's, I'll begin with saying that L. Durrell is a very significant writer whose rank in literary histories is still lower than his worth. He is in fact not only the author of the *Alexandria Quartet*; he is also the alluring and intriguing writer of a series of very original *island books*; and the fantastic dystopist of *The Revolt of Aphrodite*; and the poet-philosopher of the *Avignon Quintet*, (not to quote his poetry, drama and criticism).

It is the rest of his production, in its range and variety, to show how limiting it is to read Durrell according to the western canon, as a late experimentalist, a word epicurean, a mannerist exploiting the modes of modernism for their own sake⁸.

His «baroque novel»⁹, his anti-novel¹⁰, his inexhausted quest for narrative effects have the essential aim of giving Myth a voice.

Durrell's view on Myth deeply differs from Eliot's and the modernists¹¹. In this respect Durrell appears as an anti-Joyce and an anti-Burgess¹²; he seems rather to belong, like D.H. Lawrence, to *the school of Morris*¹³.

It is Durrell's concept of myth— or «the spirit of place»—, in its depth and complexity (not to be discussed here), which is the primary cause, responsible for the huge technical effort we may witness throughout his works. What is most evident in fact, since the very first pages of *Justine*, is that the narrator Darley, Ford's Dowell's counterpart, in his effort to bring Alexandria to full life, anxiously resorts to all kinds and combinations of narrative techniques, so that *The Quartet* may truly be compared to *TGS* in being «un deposito di esempi per mostrare agli studenti le più svariate procedure teorizzate dalla narratologia»¹⁴, that is to say 'a fictional and metafictional repertoire of all the virtuositities that can be developed from the combinations of the technical devices out of Ford's *new novel*'.

If, disregarding Darley's theoretical assumptions¹⁵, we turn to the very voice of the Author in his letters or interviews, just a few significant sentences will suffice for the Fordian critic to acknowledge the relationship:

⁶ *The Alexandria Quartet*, London, Faber and Faber, 1962, p. 216.

⁷ L. Durrell was born in 1912 and the literary "heroes of his generation were the Lawrences, the Norman Douglasses, the Aldingtons, the Eliots, the Graveses" (see J. Mitchell and G. Andrews, «The Art of Fiction XXIII: Lawrence Durrell», *Paris Review*, 1960, p.37)), that is the writers who were «the young» to Ford.

⁸ See W. Dasenbrock, «L. Durrell and the Modes of Modernism», *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol.33,n.4, Winter 1987, pp. 515-528.

⁹ G. Steiner, «Lawrence Durrell: The Baroque Novel», *Yale Review*, 49, no 4, June 1960, pp.488-95.

¹⁰ See R. Scholes, «Lawrence Durrell and the Return to Alexandria» (1964), repr. in A.W. Friedman ed., *Critical Essays on Lawrence Durrell*, G.K. Hall & Co, Boston, Mass.,1987, pp.171-177.

¹¹ See C. Corti, «Il recupero del mitologico», in G. Cianci ed., *Modernismo/Modernismi*, Milano, Principato, 1991.

¹² See J. Holloway in B. Ford ed, *From Orwell to Naipaul*, Penguin Books, 1995, p..66.

¹³ W.B. Yeats, *Autobiography*, London, 1955, pp.191-2.

¹⁴ P. Pugliatti in V. Fortunati and R. Baccolini eds, *Scrittura e Sperimentazione in FMF*, Firenze, Alinea, p. 111.

¹⁵ Durrell himself says: «The most interesting thing about it [*Alexandria Quartet*] is form, and those ideas [Darley's or the other characters'] are not mine» (J. Mitchell and G. Andrews, *cit.*, pp. 33-61).

[...] the wooing and seduction of form is the whole game [...] Form is the primary interest.¹⁶

I agree that I have never made any proper distinction in my writing between real people and imaginary persons.¹⁷

The theme of art is the theme of life itself. The artificial distinction between artists and human beings is precisely what we are suffering from.¹⁸

[...] a very visual imagination [...] I think that's the juggling quality I have [...astrologically]. I am the supreme trickster [...] illusionist [...] a pretty hefty liar.¹⁹

This self-diagnosis should be kept in mind when trying to trace Durrell's relation to Ford.

Durrell declares in fact: «I am probably the the biggest thief imaginable. I steal from people—my seniors I mean [...] all the writers I admire. But they didn't influence me. I pinched effects. I was *learning the game*»²⁰.

Such «professional» language would have made Ford happy²¹.

Since as a writer «he owed it to himself to pick up *the tricks of the trades*»²², Durrell had no secrets in naming his numerous borrowings; so I was rather puzzled when among them I couldn't find any mention of Ford, and the more so, considering Durrell's long life friendship and correspondence with Richard Aldington.

From an enquiry among the members of the Durrell Society, I have found out that the relation between the two writers is still to be studied in its significance for both the 20th cent. literary scene and the further critical perspectives on their works that may arise from the comparison.

I learnt that Durrell had read a lecture on Ford at Pasadena in 1974—The CalTech Lecture—but, according to his biographer Prof. I. Mc Niven, no record-tape seems likely to turn up.

Only very recently a two-page note of this lecture has been found by R. Pine among the unpublished manuscripts at Carbondale²³. In this note Durrell places himself in the tradition of the «extraterritorial» writers, such as James, Conrad and Ford; and he concerns himself mainly with *TGS*, which he repeatedly maintained he had read as late as in 1959²⁴, after writing *Justine*.

«I am so glad I didn't read TGS before writing *Justine* or I might have never finished her! The novel is such an eye opener with its brilliant organization and gathering momentum; it's fit to put beside the best work of our time!»²⁵

Durrell's answer recalls D.H. Lawrence's «trust the tale», but also Ford's recurring warning not to trust the characters, above all when they are good and seem reliable. («Observations on technique», Notes on a lecture given by FMF at Olivet College, June 1938).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 46, 61.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, (italics mine)

²¹ See the chapter on H.G. Wells in Ford's *Portraits from Life, On Impressionism*; also V. Fortunati, *Ford Madox Ford: Teoria e tecnica narrativa*, Bologna, Patron, 1975.

²² L. Durrell in *Paris Review*, cit. (italics mine)

²³ «F.M. Ford's Lecture». See R. Pine, *cit.*, pp. 418-9.

²⁴ G.S. Fraser, *L. Durrell: A Study*, London, Faber & Faber, 1968, p. 124.

²⁵ *Encounter*, Dec. 1959, Interview.

Durrell's «disclaiming» leaves Prof. Godshalk a little sceptical (as he writes to me): «I do remember that Durrell once said that, had he known about *Parade's End*, he would not have written the *Quartet*. Should we believe him?»²⁶ The gentle bit of rhetorical irony rightly sets the issue of Durrell knowing or not knowing Ford's novels as unimportant.

What is indeed significant is the fact that a man like Durrell *did* use a narrative technique he himself recognized so essentially similar to Ford's as to feel compelled to justify himself for having used a technique that had been devised about half a century earlier. The implied similarity of vision and sensibility prompts a question: is it Durrell we are to regard as an epigone, or is it Ford we have to recognize as a pioneer?

In the few direct opinions (which make up my scanty collection), Durrell seems to consider Ford as a contemporary since he openly admires his ability in solving expression problems which with himself are still at issue. In the CalTech notes²⁷ he praises the poetical effects of Ford's skills in selection and juxtaposition:

[Ford was] «a major talent» with the «capacity to range [...] over the whole field of memory selecting events or sequences of events from all the tenses of memory past, future, perfect, pluperfect and the novelistic present (the historic present) and fit them together so that they will supplement and comment on each other as images in a poem do».

The purpose of this admired Fordian technique emerges from a telling comparison between *TGS* and *Justine* in another opinion, reported by Kenneth Young²⁸:

[...whereas *TGS* is] «all tucked in and painless [...] a Mozartian weave», «the rugged ends [in *Justine*] illustrate the principle of Indeterminacy. This is deliberate. I deliberately scribbled down at the end of *Clea*, for instance, five or six pieces of data which themselves could make five or six novels, either interpolated or extrapolated—this is not to infuriate the reader, but simply to indicate that it would be possible to expand the *Quartet* without it becoming *roman fleuve*».

(I restrict myself to a few, obvious considerations:)

Not only does Durrell understand the formal problems in Ford's novel, but he can also single out its distinctive characters: such words as «tucked in», «painless» and above all «Mozartian» catch and define the effects of a very important lesson Ford more than once acknowledged: the lesson of Jane Austen's narrative art.

In *TGS* in fact, Ford's «aesthetic of duality» takes form through a technique of authorial self-effacement which was the favourite method of the *chameleonic*²⁹ authoress of *Mansfield Park*.

²⁶See K. Rexroth (1960) in *Critical Essays on I. Durrell*, cit., p.29: «Durrell has said [...] that he had never read Ford Madox Ford's *TGS* or his Tietjens series. I don't doubt his word, but find the fact astonishing [...] I know of no modern novelist more like Durrell.»

Just to exemplify Durrell's Fordian style, I quote from the *Alexandria Quartet*, after the death of Purswarden: «How much of him can I claim to know? I realize that each person can only claim one aspect of our character as part of his knowledge. To everyone we turn a different face of the prism. Over and over again I have found myself surprised by observations which brought this home to me. ... And for Purswarden, I remember, too, that in the very act of speaking ... he straightened himself and caught sight of his pale reflection in the mirror. The glass was raised to his lips, and now ... That remains clearly in my mind: a reflection liquifying in the mirror of that shabby, expensive room which seems now so appropriate a place for the scene which must have followed later that night».

²⁷ R.Pine, cit., p. 419

²⁸ quoted in G.S. Fraser, cit., p. 124.

«Ford generally expressed his aesthetic of duality through paradox»³⁰, the paradox being «that the conscious artist strives for the effacement of conscious art, for the impression of a natural and unselfconscious expression». Well, this very paradox appears so perfectly worked out in *Mansfield Park* as to take in even H. James, but not Ford (nor, later, the perceptive authoress of *Orlando*³¹).

It is a fact that not only did Ford consider Jane Austen. «as being the one consummate artist that the English nineteenth century produced [...] even the Master himself [...] was heavy-handed beside her»,³² but also he paid tribute to her in his last work, *Portraits from Life*, when, writing from a desert island in the land of fiction, and requested of a list by an Ariel unwilling to fetch him from the British Library more than thirteen novels, Ford began his list with the Austen double— *Pride and Prejudice & Mansfield Park*— in the first place.

Ford shares with Austen some characteristics which are generally absent in Durrell: moderation in tone, well-bred self-restraint and a prevailing reliance on *chiaroscuro*, a technique used since Austen times to express indeterminacy in the «pre-impressionistic» painting of Constable and Turner.

So Durrell needs to intervene deliberately in order to emphasize what in *TGS* or *Mansfield Park* didn't need emphasizing: that is the *expansion* or *openness* of the novel, the feeling that the story the narrator has told us and we have read is but one of the many different versions or perspectives in or under which that very story could have been told or read.

Since the narrative techniques for indeterminacy and expansion have already received a lot of critical attention, I'll limit myself to point out that Durrell's need to underline and draw attention to his aim clearly reveals his awareness that his novel can't reach Ford's ironical depth and complexity.

And it couldn't be otherwise, since Durrell's attempt at rendering the indeterminacy of reality and the fragmented multiplicity of the self is not to be seen as an ultimate goal, but just as a necessary step—an indispensable, preliminary diagnosis—in his quest for a reintegration of the self³³: «the struggle is not to record experience but to record oneself»³⁴.

To *know thyself* is to know the world, and the book of oneself will become a paraphrase of the human condition³⁵: «mes livres sont un genre d'autobiographie spirituelle, non seulement de moi-

²⁹ M. Lascelles, *Jane Austen and Her Art*, O.U.P., 1939. "JA's Chameleonic Art and *A Poetics of Postmodernism*", *JA Oggi e Ieri*, a cura di B. Battaglia, Ravenna, Longo, 2002, pp. 37-46.

³⁰ M. Saunders, *FMF: A Dual Life*, vol. I, O.U.P., 1995, p. 391.

³¹ V. Woolf's «Let other pens dwell in sex and sexuality...» sounds as a quotation from the closing paragraph of *Mansfield Park*: «Let other pens dwell in guilt and misery...» which shows how well-aware Woolf was of the ambiguous parodic irony informing the whole novel.

³² FMF, *The March of Literature*, (1938), The Dalkey Archive Press, Normal, 1994, pp. 785-6. In *Some do not...: «I don't read novels»* Tietjens answered «...there has been nothing worth reading written in England since the eighteenth century except by a woman...» (*Parade's End*, Manchester, Carcanet, 1997, p. 19).

Ford's admiration for Austen's technique need not be surprising, if we consider that multiplicity and play of perspectives are not an invention of the 20th cent. All people of taste, thank to the picturesque theorists, were familiar with perspectives, foregrounds, distances, middle distances and their varying, from the characters inside the picture to the author of the picture to the spectators outside it.

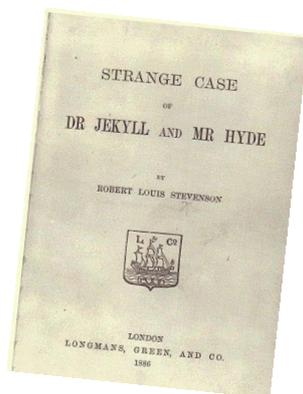
³³ «My real objective has always been a sort of religious quest...» (Conversation with the Author, in R. Pine, *cit.*, p. 55); «what reintegration is possible for the poet in order to recompose the ego» (*A Key to Modern Poetry*, London, Peter Neville, 1952, p. 162).

³⁴ *The Black Book*, (1930), New York, Dutton, 1960, p. 121.

³⁵ See R. Pine, *cit.*, p. 8: «To *know thyself* is thus to know the world, and the book of oneself will become a paraphrase of the human condition. For Durrell this was both an aesthetic and a political imperative: "c'est la seule réponse poétique que l'on peut apporter à une situation très grave" (CERLD, *cit.*). Naturally this clarifies the question of whether Durrell has a "place" in literary history and whether or not he was a "modernist" writer, or whether has any relevance to poststructuralism. But a writer who was so far beyond the conventions of national

meme tant qu'individue, mais aussi de mon époque»³⁶. Myth is essential in Durrell's view, as I stressed before, because it is end and means for a recomposition of the self.

3. Durrell and Stevenson.



Truth's metaphor is the needle,
The magnetic north of purpose
Striving against the true north
Of self:

L. Durrell, 1941³⁷

Hobbled by this shadow,
My own invention of myself, I go
In wind, rain, stars, climbing
This ladder of compromise into Greece
Which like the Notself looms before
My politics, my invention and my war.

L. Durrell, 1944³⁸

The quest for selfhood implies the realization that «the old stable ego of fiction has disintegrated»³⁹, which means that you are faced with the problem of *the double* and its proliferation, that is with the fact that «you become no longer one, but many [...] that you have become a phalanstery of selves»⁴⁰. These themes, and particularly the relationship between *the doubles* and the very concept of *the double* in Durrell's early works—in *The Black*

culture, class, creed and psychology as to create books which defy *the raison d'être* of those cultures must be considered principally in terms of the contexts in which those books were created, rather than the contexts of the cultures themselves.»

³⁶ CERLD, uncatalogued typescript of an interview, "Entretien avec Lawrence Durrell...propos recueillis par Jean-Luc Moreau et Jean Didier Wagneur" shortly after the completion of *the Avignon Quintet*.

³⁷ «Fangbrand», *Collected Poems*, London, Faber and Faber, 1960, p.95

³⁸ «Byron», *Ibidem*, p. 120.

³⁹ «From the Elephant's back», 1981, p. 4. C. Pierce (in L. Gamache ed., *D.H. Lawrence: The Cosmic Adventur*, Neocan, Borealis Press, 1996, p. 39) notes that L. Durrell in *A Key to Modern Poetry* (cit. p.49) quotes a passage from DH. Lawrence's Letters: «You musn't look in my novels for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to which the individual is unrecognizable».

⁴⁰ From a note by Durrell in his copy of Wyndham Lewis's *Time and Western Man*, 1927, p. 127 cit. by R. Pine, p. 409. By the time he reached the *Quintet* Durrell had developed the idea of the double so far that it became necessary for each book to be written by two people.

Book, The Dark Labyrinth but also in *The Quartet*—are evidently expressed in Stevenson terms⁴¹.

To Durrell Stevenson was an acknowledged Master for his unparalleled ability to bring forth the spirit of place through his «magnificent evocation of Scots landscape»⁴². Stevenson's ability to give a voice to the landscape, to the spirit of place, and with it to the past, plays an important part in his masterful building of the double perspectives we can witness in his historical romances, allegorical fiction and fantastic short-stories (such as *Thrown Janet* or *Olalla* or *The Merry Men*)

The Stevenson looming so large in the early Durrell is not simply to be identified with Kiely's «the novelist of adventure»⁴³, nor with Fiedler's «the man who speaks too well to children»⁴⁴, but with a more complex writer, that is the *impressionistic* writer who, as recently shown by Sandison, would look for reality «in the dazzling interplay of the different perspectives», so «reaching out beyond the modernism fin de siècle to anticipate some of the characteristics of postmodernism»⁴⁵.

It is Durrell's narrative technique—very *Fordian* in its complexity, but far less concerned with quiet talking and self-effacement—to suggest the influential presence in *TGS* of the writer who literally could see double:

Everything is true; only its opposite is true too; you must believe both equally or be damned.⁴⁶

About Stevenson's concept of *the double* many and varied interpretations⁴⁷ have been expressed, without essentially affecting the prevailing stereotypical image now firmly rooted in the collective imagination: Jekyll is the good one and Hyde the bad one.

In the early Durrell the relation is of course more complex and, it seems to me, in more correct terms as regards to the late Victorian intellectual background.⁴⁸

To sum up briefly: on the various levels, from the psychological to the social, *the double* comes into being at the moment of self-definition. The act of defining the self automatically produces, as the indispensable condition for the existence of the self, a *not-self*, *the other*, *the shadow*, *the double*, *the scapegoat*⁴⁹.

The problem lies in the fact that the author of the definition will define himself as the positive one, while the «not-self» is automatically created as the negative one.

⁴¹ *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, ch. X (trad. it. cit): «l'uomo non è unico, ma duplice ... l'uomo verrà riconosciuto come un risultato di molteplici, incongrui ed indipendenti unità».

⁴² L. Durrell, «Landscape and Character», in *Spirit of Place*, (1958), New York, Marlowe & Company, 1969, p. 162: The «capacità di evocare lo spirito dell'ambiente circostante il mondo reale» is an ability Ford appreciates in H. James (*Portraits from Life*, Italian transl., 37). See: *Ancient Lights* (quoted in Saunders, p. 5) «...I try to give you what I see to be the spirit of an age, of a town, of a movement. This can not be done with facts».

⁴³ R. Kiely, *RLS and the Fiction of Adventure*, Cambridge, Harvard U.P., 1964.

⁴⁴ L. Fiedler in W. Veeder & G. Hirsch eds, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde after 100 years*, The University of Chicago Press, 1988., p. IX.

⁴⁵ A. Sandison, *R.L. Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, Macmillan, 1996, pp. 9, 12.

⁴⁶ See n. 1.

⁴⁷ See A. Calanchi, *Quattro studi in rosso*, Società Editrice «Il ponte Vecchio», Cesena, 1997, pp. 115-49.

⁴⁸ A. Locatelli, «Paradigmi del doppio», *Rivista di Studi Vittoriani*, Anno I, gennaio 1996, pp. 39-59.

⁴⁹ In L. Durrell's words: «The Ego: the subliminal self: the cosmic self rather the astrological brother: the shadow: In all this I see man's attempt to sunder the total self to stifle the voice which desires to speak from the totality of the individual...» (*A Key to...*, cit., p. 42)

The «not-self» cannot be held responsible for anything whatever since it is but the result of the operation of the self.

In short it is Jekyll who is to be responsible for everything, since he is the origin of evil. Hyde is but his creature, full of fear and hate, and, in a sense, always at the mercy of the self⁵⁰.

Except in the case of Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*, the relationship which sets up between «self» and «not-self», is, beyond its aspects of nostalgic attraction, essentially an agonistic one.

It is an *agon*, but not to the same ends: on the part of the self, the will to control and dominate; on the part of the «not-self», rebellion to the operation of the self and vengeance (which may easily turn into persecution).

It is on the outcome of this *agon* that the mental health and social success of the individual will be depending. Similarly it is on the balance of power between the two that the formal structure of the tale depends.

The word and the pen will be in fact the prerogative of the winner, that is of the survivor (I am of course referring to the late Victorian context). It is Jekyll who tells the story (though with the help of other narrative voices required by its tragical conclusion⁵¹), as it is the captain in *The Secret Sharer*, as it is Dowell in *TGS*.

4. The Good Soldier as Ford's own version of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

.

Hunt read the book [*TGS*], calling Ashburnham and Dowell Ford's Jekyll and Hyde—⁵²

For I can't conceal from myself the fact that I loved Edward Ashburnham — and that I love him because *he was just myself*. If I had had the courage and virility and...

I guess he could see in my eyes I didn't intend to hinder him. Why should I hinder him? *I didn't think he was wanted* in the world...

TGS may be regarded as Ford's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* written in the ironic style of *Mansfield Park*⁵³.

⁵⁰ *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*, cit., p 133: «...quando io [Jekyll] rifletto sul suo terrore che io possa por fine alla sua esistenza con il suicidio, trovo ancora nel mio cuore un briciolo di pietà per lui». For Hyde supporters see G. Fink, *R.L. Stevenson*, Eurasia, Torino, 1990.

⁵¹ See I.S. Sapoznik, *R.L. Stevenson*, New York, Twayne, 1974, p. 96.

⁵² M. Saunders, cit., I, p. 409.

⁵³ See B. Battaglia, *La zitella illetterata: parodia e ironia nei romanzi di Jane Austen*, Ravenna, Longo, 1983; 2009.

In his introduction to *Mansfield Park*, Tony Tanner is drawn to a spontaneous comparison with *Parade's End* on ideological ground; a comparison with *TGS* in the field of form and narrative techniques would be still more rewarding, though it would require too many pages to be dealt with here.

Like *Mansfield Park*, *TGS* appears as an ironic parody; which means—restricting ourselves to a few fundamental aspects of our critical perspective, i.e. the two characters who make up the main *double*—that it is impossible to decide which of the two male protagonists is Jekyll and which is Hyde, which is the hero and which is the villain.

As with *Mansfield Park*, in the end we might discover that the character, who has appeared or had been presented as the hero, might turn out as the villain, and viceversa; and then, with sublime irony, as in the ending of *Emma*⁵⁴, that it might not be so very important to ascertain the difference between appearing and being, or even between the good and the bad and, most probably, there is no need to ascertain anything whatever⁵⁵.

This conclusion, of course, reflects ironically back on the narrator and his work.

The narrator is Dowell, who is the survivor, the winner, at least as far as the making of the novel is concerned: of his own making is the tale; of his own making is the character of Ashburnham. Obviously, Dowell will be the hero and Ashburnham the villain⁵⁶: isn't Dowell called after a character in *Piers Plowman*, while the other's name is evocative of the sinister flames of Hell?

The tale, we know, is carefully constructed by Ford in strict adherence to the character of Dowell, who is evidently a writer, the surrogate novelist⁵⁷. But, for all his skill and ambiguous ipocrisy, Dowell can't prevent his Hyde from appearing handsome and alluring, so splendid a fellow⁵⁸ as (on his coming into a room) to snap up the gaze of every woman in it⁵⁹. It is Dowell instead, who appears as having the characters of Stevenson's Hyde, not only for his physical look but also for the sense of unease and slight repugnance he usually inspires in people who will treat him as if he were «an invalid... a poor chap in a bath chair...»⁶⁰.

But then why ever does Ford the Author have *a tale of passion* like this—so full of sex and poligamous desires—told by a eunuch who knows nothing of the hearts of men?

The narrator is, in all evidence, not up to the task. His relation will be inadequate⁶¹ and this realization will produce the involvement of the reader.

Starting from the impressions of the narrator, the reader or the «silent listener» is induced to carry on the narrative, supplying all that the narrator is unable to render, that is the whole field of the passions, and the emotions which are at the basis of the actions of the characters.

⁵⁴ In the end of *Emma* (ch. 54), after the bulk of moral discrimination which have made up the novel, we hear these surprising words from the best of Austen heroes: «I wish our opinions were the same. But in time they will. Time, you may be very sure, will make *one or the other* think differently, and meanwhile we need not talk much on the subject».

⁵⁵ See R. Green, *FMF: Prose and Politics*, Cambridge, CUP, 1981.

⁵⁶ *TGS*, cit. p. 225: «Well, that is the end of the story. And when I come to look at it I see that it is a happy ending with wedding bells and all. The villains—for obviously Edward and the girl were villains—have been punished by suicide and madness. The heroine—the perfectly normal, virtuous and slightly deceitful heroine—has become the happy wife...» This ending has an undeniable Austenian flavour.

⁵⁷ See Saunders, *cit.*, n. 10 p. 594.

⁵⁸ *TGS*, cit., pp. 89,91.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁶¹ L. Durrell: «...since words are inadequate they can only render all this negatively—by an oblique method» (*Personal Landscape—A Magazine of Exile*, vol.1, no.4, 1942)

Starting from Dowell's feelings of attraction, repulsion, envy, nostalgia, admiration, anger, the reader is charged with the creation of Ashburnham, Dowell's *the other*.

This task draws the reader on to the other side and has him to identify with Dowell's *the other*. So Ashburnham's becomes an *open* character, that is alive and vital as long as there are readers willing to involve themselves in the business of interpreting and creating. In the end, like Austen's Emma, Edward may be compared to «a person not to be comprehended fully and finally by any other person»⁶².

Through the narrative technique a double perspective is set up, just as in *Mansfield Park*: one is the perspective of the narrative voice, whose reliability is most uncertain and anyway not to be identified with the author's; the other is the perspective of the reader or the silent listener, who has to be a «sympathetic soul» in order to carry on the narrative on his own, developing, correcting, completing the narrator's version of the tale. (Also this relationship between narrator and reader will turn out agonistic in the end.)

Dowell's perspective seems to dramatize the inadequacy of art to life: his continuous, tired «I don't know»; his lamentations over «a picture without a meaning». On the contrary the reader's perspective can dramatize the triumph of form and consequently of the written word in that the written word can turn itself into the emotional and intellectual activity of the reader⁶³.

TGS appears as a self-parody in which Ford the Author tries to express his inner duality between the writer and the man, the novelist and the reader.

In his relation to the other characters in the novel, Dowell appears as a truly *formidable* character, inferior only to Leonora; in him Jeckyll's unexhausted passion for anatomical analysis combines with Hyde's absolute lack of human sympathy. He embodies art split from life and turning into tautology and madness⁶⁴.

Dowell's character reflects a parodic self-portrait of the Author: it is often humorous, nonsensical, ironic, sometimes verging on burlesque if not on grotesque, thus revealing Ford's exorcising and self-defensive intention: «That's how I 'd be like, if I let the Ashburnham within me be killed».

This doesn't mean that, as Saunders tells us, he wouldn't at times have his inner Ashburnham cut his throat, but only sometimes, and not for long.

So it seems rather natural that the «self-portrait» should have had two titles as well as that Dowell's title—*The Saddest Story*—should have been discarded in favour of *The Good Soldier* which, even taking into due account Ford's disclaiming in the «Dedicatory Letter», appears as the rightful one.

TGS appears as the fittest title for more than one reason: first, as it describes Ford, the Author, as a «good soldier» in his struggle to keep his two parts successfully together, while giving them adequate expression; and secondly, because the authorial struggle could be successful thanks to the artistic triumph of the character of Ashburnham, (which is the true technical theme in the impressionistic painting as well as the protagonist in Dowell's tale). So, while Dowell, the

⁶² M. Schorer, «The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse», *The Literary Review*, vol. II, n. 4, Summer 1959, p. 563.

⁶³ The openness of the character allows and enhances the openness of the novel, that is the feeling that the story could have been told from so many different points of view as there are characters in the novel. From Edward's point of view for instance his relationship to Leonora could be told as a gothic romance.

⁶⁴ I have no time here to dwell on Dowell's monologue or memoir as example of DeManian irony but the purposelessness of his relation inside the novel is more than evident in the choice of the autobiographical memoir: all the facts he relates are influential on the development of the story. Nobody seems interested in what he is saying, not Leonora, nor Nancy who often look absent-minded. Why does he write? What does he want to know? He simply doesn't know. What he wants is just to be listened to. He has no other way to come into emotional contact with people.

narrator kills his hero at the end of his tale, Ford the author shows no need of making choices: he simply gives both his parts an appropriate voice out of their respective materials. (Wasn't Ashburnham a reader?).

If, as Ford once wrote, it is in the last phrase, in the last sentence that we have to look for the «the psychological significance of the whole»⁶⁵, the death of Ashburnham at the end of *TGS* as it is related, seems to stress the intention of the author: detached from life, art is invalid, irresponsible, immoral as Dowell trotting off to Leonora with his telegram in hand, while Edward was dying.

It seems to me that Ford self-portrait in *TGS* doesn't agree completely with Violet Hunt's portrait of him as of «an artist *unfortunately* doubled with a man». The adverb should be reversed: a writer can't be an artist unless doubled with a man.

The context may allow an «impressionistic» conclusion of mine: if ever there was a part of himself that Ford, in his moments of crisis, feared might take the upper hand and become his Hyde, that must have been the novelist. And to prove to himself that he knew how to check it, he wrote *TGS*.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ FMF, «The Old Man», 1932: «...But the whole novel was to be an exhaustion of aspects, was to proceed to one culmination, to reveal once and for all, in the last sentence—or the penultimate—in the last phrase, or the one before it the psychological significance of the whole..»

⁶⁶ There may be *another double* hiding in the Dowell-Ashburnham relationship, and it should be *the novelist & the romancer*. This suggestion too comes to me from the comparison with Durrell: considering two writers using very similar techniques, one is drawn to wonder about their aims and purposes. Now, while Durrell's aims, in my view, are clear enough, not so I can say of Ford's. I'm not suggesting that, for a number of historical reasons, his modernist side has perhaps been stressed too much; I just mean to verify if his side as a writer of romances has been stressed enough.