

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH: FORD MADDOX FORD 1873-1939
Anne P. Ogan for The Novel Club of Cleveland, November 2019

Ford Maddox Ford wrote or co-authored 82 books, 32 of which were novels. This was remarkable productivity for a man who was never particularly healthy. But he was highly disciplined, writing a thousand words or several hours almost every day from his teenage years until he died at age 66 in 1939. In addition, he founded and edited two literary magazines, wrote many articles and essays and was for one year writer in residence at Olivet College in Michigan, where he subsequently held an honorary professorship. Not all of his works were fiction; he wrote A History of Our Own Times and a major survey called The March of Literature. Two of his books are collections of poetry; the subject of his poems were heaven, love and war. T.S. Eliot wrote that Ford's poem "Antwerp" was the only good poem ever written on the subject of war. (Source listed below, p 265)

Ford's first book, The Brown Owl, was published in 1891, when he was just 18. The Good Soldier, perhaps Ford's most famous novel, was published in 1915. Work on the Parade's End tetralogy began around 1924, after Ford had attended Proust's funeral.

Biographer Alan Judd writes, "Like most novelists, Ford's best work was written after his 20s, but it was during that decade that the strata from which they were mined were laid down. The basic themes – passion, anguish, loyalty, infidelity, conscience and duty – were during those years embedded in his soul." (source listed below, p??) Judd opines further that, "He (Ford) does not deny that novels can bring about social improvement but does assert that the social impact, which derives from artistic effect, is less the more overtly propagandist the novel. ... A good novelist would, in Ford's view, remain aloof, even cold, so that what was important could be *shown* but never *told*. ... Properly adult novels were not about the idiosyncrasies of character, nor about causes, social, moral, or political; they were a rendering of life, above and beyond all characters and causes, including them, but not about them. ... 'Life' was what occurred in the interaction between the individual and the world; it was what happened to people as a result of their relations and of their beliefs and conventions. That was what the novel was supremely suited to render, and the novelist could best show it if he kept himself, his comments and prejudices, out of his books." (source below, pp 54-55) "... he made his subjects the moods, feelings and states of mind that confrontation provoked..." (p312) "The major themes of his artistic maturity – passion and renunciation, altruism and selfishness, integrity, and deceit -- may all be seen in his first four books." (p.37)

Ford Hermann Hueffer ("hooper") was born to Catherine Ford Hueffer and Franz Hueffer in Surrey December 17, 1873. A younger brother, Oliver, was born four years later and a sister, Juliet, four years after that.

His father Franz belonged to a prosperous publishing family in Munster, Germany. Franz emigrated to England where he was a musicologist, a proponent of Schopenhauer and Wagner. Liszt and Turgenev were friends, giving Ford material to impress young female admirers 30 years later. Franz composed librettos, was the editor of a magazine, and a writer of philosophy and history. He served as music critic of The London Times. His

family was Roman Catholic, but he was an atheist. He died in 1889; Ford was 16. Two years later, Ford converted to Catholicism.

Ford's mother was the daughter of the Pre-Raphaelite painter Ford Madox Brown. After the death of his father, Ford and his mother and siblings moved in with Ford Madox Brown. Ford wrote a biography about him in 1896, three years after his death.

Ford married Elsie Martindale in 1894, at age 20; she was just 17. Their families had not approved, and they snuck off to London to marry. Their two daughters were born three years and six years subsequently. Although he was still married to Elsie when he died, their marital relationship was over by 1907. This set a pattern that persisted throughout Ford's life.

Ford met Violet Hunt in 1908, and her diary indicates that she became his mistress on June 10, 1909. Her father was an Oxford don and a painter, and she had been brought up in the Pre-Raphaelite/"Victorian Great" scene, in a family more socially prominent and wealthier than Ford's. A writer of six novels, she was said to have charmed Oscar Wilde before moving on to several prominent older (usually married) lovers, including Somerset Maugham. She had turned down several offers of marriage and had had many affairs. She wrote about a failed attempt to seduce Henry James. In 1905, she had been told that she had syphilis, and she was taking arsenic under the impression it would keep her from aging. In the first couple of years they knew one another, Ford was promoting her books and giving her advice on writing.

She was 11 years Ford's senior, and, at 45, was probably fearful of losing her notable good looks and desirous of being married. Ford is thought to have asked Violet if she would marry him, once he had become divorced. Violet's mother is said to be the basis for Mrs. Wannop. It appears that Ford and Elsie had indeed discussed divorce. Violet and Ford moved to Germany in 1910 to attempt to secure the divorce which never came. Ford considered becoming a German citizen, and he allowed Violet to become known as "Mrs. Hueffer." This did not sit well with Elsie, and many of Ford's friends recommended that he and Violet live abroad. By 1915, their mutual infatuation seems to have subsided; Ford by now was aware of the syphilis and perhaps more of her colorful history. He joined the Army, took up his post in France and left Violet to suffer her fate alone as the second Mrs. Hueffer in England.

In 1918, at 44, Ford met 23-year-old Stella Bowen, an Australian who had moved to London to study painting. She wrote, "what he did not know about the depths and weaknesses of human nature was not worth knowing. The hidden places of the heart were his especial domains... To me, he was simply the most enthralling person I had ever met." A decade after his death and 20 years after their separation, Stella wrote, "... our union was an excellent bargain on both sides... Ford got ... the domestic peace he needed, and eventually he got his baby daughter. He was very happy, and so was I." Stella and Ford moved to France with their daughter Julia in 1922. By this time, Ford had abandoned his birth name in acknowledgment that his German affiliations would not be well received in either France or England. Certainly his war commitment gave him

acceptable credentials, which is not to say he relished relinquishing his fondness for Germany and his family ties there. In 1924 he began editing the *Transatlantic Review* in Paris. During this time, he had an affair with Jean Rhys, whom he met before she had become a successful writer.

By 1927, Ford and Stella were growing apart. Ford remained in a small apartment in Paris while Stella and Julia moved to larger space and eventually returned to England. Stella and Ford did, however, remain friends, and Ford was able to be an involved father to Julia in a way he had not been with his first two daughters. The elder of those had become a reclusive nun, and the younger was estranged.

In 1930, at 55, Ford met a 26-year-old American painter named Janice Biala at a tea in Paris. She had come hoping to meet Ezra Pound, who was not present, and instead fell victim to Ford's loquacious charm. She referred to their relationship as "a long passionate dialogue" which lasted until his death. They lived in the United States from 1931 to 1936. It was she who calculated that Ford had significant relationships with 18 different women.

The only actual job Ford held was his military service in the first world war. His life was entirely dedicated to literature. Even in the trenches, he and his associates were writing, limericks and sonnets. He knew and admired the established authors he met, like Henry James, W. H. Hudson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He affiliated in London and Paris with many literary contemporaries including H G Wells, John Galsworthy, and Ezra Pound. He was an early admirer of James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway. Although Joseph Conrad was significantly his senior, they were not just friends but worked together on several novels. Having met in 1898, they collaborated as well as criticized and corrected one another's work. Their closeness spanned decades. In fact, some of the manuscripts of Conrad's novels are in Ford's handwriting.

In addition, Ford, particularly through his work as editor of literary magazines, however unsuccessful those publications were financially, was very influential in bringing on new writers. He encouraged many young authors, critiquing the material they submitted to the reviews. Ford is said to have "discovered" DH Lawrence, and he was an early fan of William Carlos Williams.

Ford was the one author who crossed over from the 19th century Victorian style to the modern novel. He was old-fashioned and formal; a Tory, a gentleman. In the words of his biographer, Alan Judd, "When he talked about duty, about being a gentleman and a member of the ruling class and so on, it was not a pose but part of his moral universe." (Source, p.265) After his death, his wife Elsie wrote that he was the most principled and moral man she'd ever known.

Stout for much of his life, with a pink face and blonde hair, Ford was often described as having sparkling blue eyes. He was very sickly for much of his life. He suffered from agoraphobia, hallucinations, neurasthenia, insomnia and depression. At one point, he claimed to be suicidal. In 1904, he may have had what we would now call a nervous

breakdown, following which he went to Germany to convalesce. Another breakdown came in 1912 and, after his war experiences at the battle of the Somme, shell shock so severe he was removed to England to recover. Some health problems may have been brought on by exhaustion, and some from worry. In typical English fashion, he was repressed and refused to discuss the issues, which were numerous even if often self-inflicted. His serial relationships, however monogamous at the time, caused family problems, and there were always money problems since his books, though enthusiastically reviewed, rarely sold well. Accustomed from childhood to a high standard of living, he nonetheless was not distressed by lack of creature comforts. He and Stella lived very modestly in the country where he became a good cook. Despite poverty, he drank a great deal of very good wine – probably too much. There were periods in his life where his friends and family worried about his excessive alcohol consumption. Ford developed heart trouble in his 60's, along with gout and arthritis, and died in Deauville in June 1939 at 66.

Principal Source: Judd, Alan, Ford Maddox Ford. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press_1991.