

Ford Madox Ford Society

Newsletter 8

5 November 2001

Honorary Members: Julian Barnes, Bernard Bergonzi, A. S. Byatt, Samuel Hynes, Alan Judd, Sir Frank Kermode, John Lamb, Sergio Perosa, Ruth Rendell, Michael Schmidt, The Hon. Oliver Soskice, John Sutherland, Gore Vidal.

Executive Committee: *Chair:* Max Saunders *Treasurer:* Sara Haslam *Secretary:* Jenny Plastow

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INTERNATIONAL FORD MADOX FORD STUDIES

We are launching this annual series early in 2002. It will be published by Rodopi in the Netherlands. Each volume will be on a specific theme. It will be distributed to members of the Society as part of their subscription, but will also be sold as a free-standing book by Rodopi.

The first volume, *Ford Madox Ford: A Reappraisal*, edited by Tony Davenport and Robert Hampson, focuses on works other than *The Good Soldier* and *Parade's End*. The second volume, edited by Robert Hampson and Max Saunders, will be entitled *Ford Madox Ford's Modernity*.

A volume on Ford and the City is envisaged for 2004: prospective contributors please contact Dr Sara Haslam, Department of Literature, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA. Email: S.J.Haslam@open.ac.uk. Dennis Brown and Jenny Plastow have proposed a volume on Ford and Englishness (for publication c.2005). Anybody interested in contributing to this volume should contact either of the proposing editors. Proposals for further volumes should be sent to Max Saunders.

Max Saunders
max.saunders@kcl.ac.uk

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Ford Madox Ford and The Republic of Letters An International Symposium Bologna, 11-14 January 2001

promoted by

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere Moderne
The British Council
Associazione Culturale Italo-Britannica
The Ford Madox Ford Society
COTEPRA (European Thematic Network on Comparative Studies)

From the 11th to the 14th of January the Society was very privileged to be involved in a splendid conference on ‘Ford Madox Ford and the Republic of Letters’, hosted by the Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere Moderne of the University of Bologna. The conference was organized by Professor Vita Fortunati and Dr Elena Lamberti, and was supported by The British Council, the Associazione Culturale Italo-Britannica, and COTEPRA (European Thematic Network on Comparative Studies). The event was well-attended. The standard of papers was extremely high. Some offered strikingly new ways of approaching Ford’s work; others made us re-think areas we thought we knew well; there was also a stimulating amount of comparative work, providing new contexts for Ford’s writing. The standard of hospitality and the beauty of the settings were also outstanding. On behalf of the Society I’m most grateful to the organizers and sponsors.

Max Saunders

The idea underpinning the four-day conference, ‘Ford Madox Ford and the Republic of Letters’, was the bringing together of scholars and authors, as well as ‘passionate readers’ of Ford, with the purpose of suggesting new approaches to his works and theories. The organizing committee intended to investigate particularly the role played by Ford Madox Ford against his cultural, literary and historical backgrounds, as well as to assess the importance of his achievements in the development of critical perspectives and schools of thought. Therefore, it was not only Ford the ‘imaginative writer’, but also Ford the ‘thinker and critic’, and Ford ‘the social historian’ that was conceived as the centre of most papers and discussions. Speakers compared Ford’s literary and technical achievements with other media forms; they compared his work with that of other Modernist and Post-Modernist writers and critics; they considered questions of translation studies, literary internationalism and globalization.

‘The Man of Letters and the Mass Society’; ‘Ford and the Canon’; ‘Ford and the Media’; ‘Ford and Twentieth-Century Criticism’; ‘Ford and History’; ‘Ford and James’; ‘Ford and the Others’: even standing alone, these titles of the various sections of the symposium indicate the comparative approach to Ford. They also suggest the spirit of his time, that same spirit that he tried to *render* incessantly in all his works. The abstracts enclosed here will flesh out this picture, and reveal the richness of new themes and areas of exploration that were investigated by all speakers. Similarly, the plenary lectures, given, in turn, by Vita Fortunati, Roger Poole, Sergio Perosa (who delivered the Ford Madox Ford Annual Lecture), and Max Saunders, not only emphasized the vitality in new ways of reading Ford’s works, but also contributed to the retrieval of Ford’s role in the establishment of a broadly conceived International Republic of Letters.

Overall, the conference itself was a sort of International Republic of Letters: scholars came from Italy, other European countries, the USA, and Australia, and shared the *bolognese* setting for four days. They brought Ford and his words to life as they speculated, passionately and eagerly, about the importance of literary and artistic standards in today's world. In the discussion that animated the round table on 'Creative engagements with Ford's experiments' (at which contemporary authors discussed Ford), writers Elisabetta Rasy and Caroline Zilboorg confirmed the modernity of Ford's thought. The discussion also focused the explicit attention on an International Republic of Letters, as expressed, and hoped for, by Ford. This coming together of imaginative (and critical) writers from all over the world, who share a passion for the Arts and for literature, is much more than a 'forlorn hope', then. It should be seen as the first, fundamental step towards a true understanding among nations and a renewed international harmony.

Elena Lamberti

This event will linger long in the memory of Ford scholars and fans. This is due partly to the painlessness of the organisational period. All those who were to attend received regular updates as to progress, and detailed information as to how and when they were to speak, or to listen, at the conference. Such skill lasted throughout the conference itself. Its longevity will also owe much to the papers themselves, scrupulously detailed in the collection of abstracts, and delivered professionally and in exquisite surroundings. It will owe much, too, to the welcome and hospitality provided, from the opening cocktails to the lunches at Il Caffe Della Corte, and the Society Dinner at Drogheria della Rosa. For impoverished academics, it will also be remembered as a conference where we didn't have to pay fees, thanks to the generosity of the University, the British Council, the EU, and thanks to Elena's persuasive powers (not to say incredibly hard work). This was true to the spirit of the conference (this was a republic of letters after all), and true to Ford's spirit also. We had a fantastic time. Thank you Vita and Elena, and all others involved!

Sara Haslam

For a copy of the program please see Newsletter 7 in the Ford Madox Ford Web Site Archives.
For further information please consult Elena Lamberti, at Lamberti_Elena@hotmail.com

CALL FOR PAPERS

History and Representation in Ford Madox Ford's Writings

The International Meeting of the Ford Madox Ford Society will take place at
The Pyle Center,
702 Langdon St.,
Madison, WI 53706

on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 20-22 September 2002.

The focus of the meeting will be **History and Representation in Ford Madox Ford's Writings**.

The Society invites proposals for 20 minute papers that deal with Ford's fiction, especially his historical novels (proposals for papers on **The Good Soldier** are discouraged), his poetry, autobiographies, biographies, critical studies, propaganda, travel writings, sociological writings, art criticism, and literary history and criticism.

Proposals should be sent no later than 15 March 2002 to:

Joseph Wiesenfarth,
Department of English,
University of Wisconsin-Madison,
White Hall,
600 N. Park Street,
Madison WI 53706-1475

or faxed to him at 608 233 2295

or emailed to jjwiesen@facstaff.wisc.edu

For additional information about the conference please go to http://www.rialto.com/fordmadoxford_society.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Ford's Family Contexts

London, Saturday 15th December 2001: 10.00 – 6.00

This one-day meeting will focus on Ford's family connexions. We are very happy to announce that Oliver Soskice will give the annual Ford Madox Ford Lecture on Ford's sister and her family. The day will also include talks by Jörg Rademacher on the Hüffer family; and by Max Saunders on Janice Biala.

It will be held in the Joseph Conrad Study Centre of the Polish center:

POSK
238 King St
Hammersmith
London W6

Suggestions for other talks to Max Saunders please.
We hope to see you all there!

The day will also include the following:

The Annual General Meeting of the Society

This will also take place at POSK, at the above address, from 3.30 to 4.30 p.m. on Saturday 15th December. Please send items for the agenda to Jenny Plastow, at jenny.plastow@uk.uumail.com by 1st November at the latest. The A. G. M. will include elections to the Executive Committee, which will meet after the A. G. M., from 4.30 p.m. Nominations for election to the Executive Committee must be sent to Jenny Plastow in writing at least fourteen days before the meeting. If there are more than twelve nominations, a ballot will be held at the A. G. M.

PUBLICATIONS AND NEWS

Susan Sontag on *The Good Soldier*

Looking at Sontag's review at

A CRITIC AT LARGE

NEW YORK BOOK REVIEW

WHERE THE STRESS FALLS

The novel as self-portrait.

by SUSAN SONTAG

Issue of 2001-06-18 and 25

Ford Madox Ford looms large in Susan Sontag's recent review of Glenway Wescott's neglected novel *The Pilgrim Hawk*. Indeed, her review opens with the words, "It begins, this great American novel, with the voice of recollection; that is, the voice of uncertainty." This is perhaps an echo of Ann Barr Snitow's monograph *Ford Madox Ford and the Voice of Uncertainty*. And the reviewer proceeds by listing the similarities between Wescott's novel and *The Good Soldier*.

Here is the first paragraph of *The Pilgrim Hawk* in which Ms. Sontag – and each of us, I'm sure – hears clear echoes of *The Good Soldier*.

The Cullens were Irish; but it was in France that I met them and was able to form an impression of their love and their trouble. They were on their way to a property they had rented in Hungary; and one afternoon they came to Chancellet to see my great friend Alexandra Henry. That was in May of 1928 or 1929, before we all returned to America, and she met my brother and married him.

Needless to say, the twenties were very different from the thirties, and now the forties have begun. In the twenties it was not unusual to meet foreigners in some country as foreign to them as to you, your peregrination just crossing theirs; and you did your best to know them in an afternoon or so; and perhaps you called that little lightning knowledge, friendship. There was a kind of idealistic or optimistic curiosity in the air. And vagaries of character, and the various war and peace that goes on in the psyche, seemed of the greatest interest and even importance. [*The Pilgrim Hawk*]

Alwyn Tower is the novel's central intelligence, and the words Ms Sontag uses to describe him – "recessive", "spectator", "voyeur" – could very well apply to Dowell.

She goes on to compare the two story lines – about marriage, about the "pitfalls of understanding", about "the vagaries of novel-writing" – and the two main characters' "frenetic reflectiveness". The whole first part of her review brings evidence to prove her argument that *The Good Soldier* was indeed the source of inspiration for the composition of *The Pilgrim Hawk*.

The opening of the novel suggests the uncanny speed at which an omnivorous observer might form "an impression" of two hitherto unknown people: "You did your best to know them." It also proposes a masterly vagueness about when this impression was formed: "That was in May of 1928 or 1929, before we all returned to America." Why would Wescott choose to make the narrator unsure of the year? Perhaps to mute the import of 1929, the year of the Crash, for his two idle-rich American expats—not Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald rich but seriously rich, as in a Henry James novel about Americans "doing" Europe. Or maybe this vagueness is simply the good manners of someone assigned the all too Jamesian name of Alwyn Tower. And good manners may dictate the narrator's fits of doubt about his own acuity: an Alwyn Tower would not wish to appear to be trying to be clever.

[...]

Is this frenetic reflectiveness distinctively American? I think so, without being able to prove it. The only English novel I know with something of these tones—the tormented diffidence and the muffled anguish—is

one that plainly served Wescott as a partial inspiration for "The Pilgrim Hawk": Ford Madox Ford's "The Good Soldier" (1915). Ford's novel is also both a story of marital agony breaking through the routines of idleness and a project of recollection undertaken by an American expatriate whiling away his life on the Continent. At the center of the drama is an English couple abroad, friends of a rich American couple. It is the American husband, now a widower—his wife has died since the time of the "sad affair" he is recalling—who tells the story.

Both in fiction and in autobiography, first-person narrating generally needs a pretext—also known as a justification—to begin.

[...].

The Good Soldier starts with its deracinated narrator explaining that he sits down "today" in order "to puzzle out" what he lamentably did not understand when it was happening. "My wife and I knew Captain and Mrs. Ashburnham as well as it was possible to know anybody and yet, in another sense, we knew nothing at all about them." Not to know then—by the rules of fiction, where (unlike life) something *has* to happen—is to know now. The narrator may re-state his bewilderment, fret from time to time over his inability to describe properly, worry that he has not got some fact quite right. There is no way for readers to take these avowals of deficient understanding other than as evidence that he sees—or, rather, allows us to see—the doomed Captain Ashburnham all too well.

The two narrators have a similar destiny and consequently, Ms Sontag claims that there "is only one way for such a narrator to conclude: with yet another recoil from his own knowingness."

Susan Sontag refers to many other authors and books in her lengthy and thorough review, but the stress seems to fall on Ford.

M.C.

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- Ford is one of the authors featured in a display, in the Round Reading Room at the British Museum, of books by authors who used the Reading Room.
 - 'Please consider yourself a friend of Jeopardy', the Chairman of the Society was told, when approached by a researcher for the Los Angeles-based Television quiz show of that name. They were planning to ask contestants the name of the author of whom Ford said that he had read only six words by him before vowing to 'publish everything he sent' him, and wanted verification of Ford's story. 'Jeopardy' indeed! Please do not send answers on a postcard, nor challenges as to his editorial veracity. . .
 - *Parade's End* was picked out as one of the major novels of the First World War in *The Guardian* on 21 April 2001.

Jeff McCarthy's Ford Web Page: http://www.weslc.edu/pers_pages/j-mccart/ford_page

Ford Madox Ford Society Web Site: http://www.rialto.com/fordmadoxford_society

Information regarding collaboration: http://www.feedmag.com/deepread/dr309_master.html

The collaborative texts of Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford:

<http://mindit.netmind.com/go/1/13861885/2736376>

Text of *The Good Soldier*: <http://eldred.ne.mediaone.net/fmf/gs.htm>

RENEWALS OF SUBSCRIPTIONS

IMPORTANT CHANGE TO SUBSCRIPTION POLICY (AND BENEFITS!!)

From now on subscribers are asked to pay their subscriptions in **January** each year.
An annual volume of Ford studies will soon be part of what subscribers to the society will receive.

If you pay your membership fee between January 1st and January 31st, 2002 you will receive a copy of the first annual volume. **Payment by direct debit** would be most appreciated, as it facilitates processing and helps coordination. If you decide to take up this option, please contact me.

Bank account details:

The Ford Madox Ford Society
HSBC
St. Clement Danes
194 Strand
London WC2R 1DX
Sort Code: 40-06-29
Account no. 21391100

For those who do not wish to pay in January next year (perhaps because it would mean losing a few months' worth of membership), please pay next in January in 2003 in order to qualify for the next annual volume. Can I take this opportunity, however, to note that most subscribers have gained a few free months here and there because of the difficulty of tracing exactly when people first joined! This is part of the reason for introducing a standard subscription date. And a large number of you originally joined in January anyway. If you wish to debate this with me (gently), or ask anything else about it, please get in touch.

Sara

Rates:

Pounds sterling:

Individuals: £12; Concessions £6; Member Organisations £25

Please send Sterling cheques to:

Dr Sara Haslam, Department of Literature, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.

Email: S.J.Haslam@open.ac.uk

Tel. 01 908 652 472

Fax 01 908 653 750

US Dollars:

Any category: \$25

Please send US dollar checks to:

Prof. Joseph Wiesenfarth, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Helen C. White Hall, 600 North Park Street, Madison, WI 53706-1475, USA

You may print and send the form below to the above addresses:

Ford Madox Ford Society
Membership Form

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Category: Individual Concessions
Member Organisations Others

Academic institution _____

Address

Telephone _____ Fax _____
E-Mail _____

Total Membership Fee Enclosed _____

Date _____ Signature _____

If you received this newsletter by mail, but have an e-mail address, could you please send a message to that effect to: max.saunders@kcl.ac.uk

Any material or ideas for the Ford Madox Ford Society web page or this newsletter would certainly be appreciated. Please note that our intention is to include a list of publications on Ford by Society members. Any information you can provide would be most welcome.

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