

## The Hueffers and the Conrads in 1899

Perhaps even the most dedicated Conradian or Fordian might reasonably ask what a further written account could add to the long-running debate about the personal and professional relationships between the Hueffers and the Conrads after 1898.<sup>1</sup> But Gene Moore's fine edition of John Hope Morey's *Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford: A Study in Collaboration* (2021) and Susan Zhang Maginn's recent article in *The Conradian*, "'Everything was against us in our secret partnership': Re-thinking the Conrad-Ford Collaboration' (2021) have both demonstrated that these relationships (and the products of them) still have plenty to offer a critical observer. And diaries, when they emerge, especially when compiled by a significant contemporary witness, warrant particularly close attention. In this short article, therefore, I aim to address gaps in the biographical record by attending to the diary written in 1899 by Elsie Hueffer, neé Martindale, who married Ford in 1894 (and remained his legal wife even after their separation). As a diarist, Elsie Hueffer has much still to reveal to scholars interested in the early years of her marriage to Ford, but also to those for whom 1899 is important primarily as the first full year of Ford's and Conrad's collaboration.<sup>2</sup> Elsie tells us about her own professional aims and output, and Ford's; about her management of their household; but also about the local and creative networks in which the couple moved; and about the stresses of living a life dedicated to art, especially when income was scarce and one was also a parent.

### Marriage, and an early diary fragment

After the scandal of their elopement and the subsequent court case in the summer of 1894, Ford and Elsie settled at Bonnington, on the edge of the Romney March, Kent, to begin their married life.<sup>3</sup> As far as records show, Elsie first kept a diary across the bleak and impoverished Easter of 1895 ('the one topic of the present & the past four days' – she notes on Easter Monday – 'is & has been that we have not a penny between us'). (Easter Sunday fell on the 14th.) This is a fragmentary record, covering in its 4.5 pages April 9th to 23rd of that year. Uncited in any biographical account of the period, it provides evidence of the fact that Elsie was both writing independently for publication, and conceiving of herself as a

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<sup>1</sup> Some aspects of what were significant relationships for all involved are uncontroversial. However, years of controversy followed the publication of Ford's memoir of Conrad in 1924. Key interventions included Edward Garnett's and Jessie Conrad's at the time, both of which are included by MacShane (1972). Many scholars have returned to the controversy since. John Hope Morey's treatment (originally completed in 1960 and newly available thanks to Moore's edition), very much a 'judicious assessment' of 'literary friendship and interdependence' as the cover claims, is one of the most detailed. On names, Ford Hueffer finally became Ford Madox Ford in 1919.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical accounts have settled on the first week of September 1898 for their first meeting. The collaborative work began with Ford's work-in-progress *Seraphina* in October - but not for long. (This novel was eventually published as *Romance* in 1903.) Both writers moved onto other projects before the end of 1898.

<sup>3</sup> Elsie was made a Ward of Court on 11 April 1894 as part of her parents' campaign to separate her and Ford. Dr Martindale then applied for a court order, at which point the couple married. The case was heard in June, but given that it was to prevent marriage it was too late, and the judge took no further action. Olive Garnett's diary offers the most impressive account of this six-month period. So involved was she in events around the court case that she had no time to keep a daily record – and looked back from June 14<sup>th</sup> to when, for example, Elsie 'was very much flushed and excited', staying with the family after the court was adjourned on the 6<sup>th</sup> (Johnson 1993: 87-8).

writer, although she was still only 18. In addition, the confidence and ambition on display in this diary encompasses both husband and wife, even when Ford's spirits were flagging: 'Ford in his hopeless way says we shan't succeed – but I think we can' (April 9th). Most strikingly, perhaps, this autobiographical text contains character sketches similar to the closely observed 'peasant biographies' Ford was later praised for, especially in the non-fiction *Soul of London* trilogy (1905-08), his first success.

## The Diary for 1899

Elsie's 1899 diary was a more formal affair. Kept almost entirely faithfully in a commercially available volume, only five days do not receive an entry. Held still by Elsie and Ford's descendants in Dublin, and available only to Arthur Mizener among Ford's biographers (*The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford* was published in 1971 in New York), it provided the basis for some of Mizener's observations about the working relationship between Conrad and Ford in the later 1890s, and also an unpublished novel by Ford.<sup>4</sup> The diary opens soon after the Hueffers have moved house (again).

As is well documented, the Hueffers sub-let the Pent, a farmhouse on the Pilgrim's Way at Postling, to the Conrad family – Borys Conrad had been born to Jessie and Joseph in January - in October 1898.<sup>5</sup> Once Conrad was settled, Ford and he would begin to collaborate on Ford's work-in-progress, a novel about pirates (Saunders I: 111-115). Ford and Elsie had moved out of the Pent temporarily once before, making way on that occasion for Walter Crane. After a holiday in France and a period when the Hueffers and the Conrads co-habited, the couple and their young daughter Christina (born on 3 July 1897) moved again to Grace's Cottage, Limpsfield.<sup>6</sup> They left their home, along with many of their possessions ('The time approaches for me to step in amongst your relics', Conrad wrote<sup>7</sup>), to a writer who was in dire need of a more amenable workspace, as well as a good climate to help manage his gout.<sup>8</sup>

How far they in fact 'left' it, and how much of a 'second home' the Pent remained to the Hueffers during 1899, are important questions.<sup>9</sup> Analysing Elsie's diary in quantitative terms can help to answer them, adding to the detail already available in the record. The entries, some only a few words' long, while some fill the available space (the weather is often described in the narrow margins surrounding the boxed format), begin on 14 January and conclude on 6 January 1900. There are 16 specific mentions of Conrad, and a further nine

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<sup>4</sup> Katharine Hueffer (1900-78), Ford and Elsie's second daughter, married the Irish painter Charles Lamb in 1927

<sup>5</sup> The Hueffers had moved there from Bonnington in October 1896, after Dr Martindale had become unhappy about the damp (see Saunders I: 93 on the 1895 rapprochement with Elsie's parents).

<sup>6</sup> The architect William Harrison ('Harry') Cowlshaw was born at Limpsfield in 1869. He designed Grace's Cottage but had been commissioned before that by Edward and Constance Garnett to build the Cearne, close by. Harry and Lucy Garnett (Edward and Olive's sister) married in April 1897 and also stayed local, living at Kiln Farm. Grace's Cottage was 'two fields away' from the Cearne (Saunders I: 98). Ford published a piece, 'The Work of William Harrison Cowleshaw' [sic] in the *Artist* in September 1897. He followed this up with one called 'William Hyde: An Illustrator of London' (January 1898). Hyde and Ford soon worked together on the *Cinque Ports* (Harvey, 1962: 140-41).

<sup>7</sup> Karl 1986: 110.

<sup>8</sup> Karl 1986: 93-94; 110-11.

<sup>9</sup> Saunders describes it as operating as a 'second home' from the time the Hueffers moved out, to 1907, when the Conrads did (I: 96).

references to travels to or from the Pent. The Hueffers tend to do the travelling, evidence that the Pent was the shared base – though Elsie records that the Conrads ‘turned up’ on 12 June and made a planned visit on 4 December. Some of these single references, however, refer to overnight or longer stays. The longest of these almost certainly took place in February and March, when Ford stayed at the Pent while he looked for a new house to rent. Ford left Limpsfield on 27 February, Elsie had a letter from him by the second post on 4 March, and it’s quite possible that he remained at the Pent until she and Christina joined him there on Friday 10 March (‘The Hueffers with their kid camp here on a house hunt’, Conrad told Galsworthy).<sup>10</sup> Elsie records ‘X [Christina] very shy with the Conrads’.

The Hueffers were back in Limpsfield by 21 March as Elsie was packing up the house for the move, but the diary does not give the exact date of their return from the Pent. On 28 March, though, they were once more with the Conrads, while their effects were moved to Aldington Knoll, the cottage Ford had found on 13 March. Conrad’s gout was bad, and evidently the Conrads did not expect Elsie that day, but she stayed with them, along with Christina and Cromwell the dog, for two days while Ford readied their new home. It was a couple of months before the families were in close contact again. There was an abortive trip to see the Conrads when they were away from home on a visit to Stephen and Cora Crane at Brede, but, in May, there was publication news to share, and related books for Ford to collect from his library, and on June 12, the Conrads arrived at Aldington for an unannounced visit. Typically detailed about the animals who shared their lives, Elsie recorded that ‘Xina was distressed because Borys would not appreciate Cromwell’. In adjectives Elsie rarely employs in her diary, Conrad was described as ‘very affecte [affectionate]’, and the Conrads were described as ‘very loving’ when Elsie visited the Pent with Mrs Walker in August, while Ford was away.<sup>11</sup> Elsie was pregnant (with Katharine) and suffering morning sickness on the later date. Elsie’s diary does not provide evidence of shared accommodation again until 31 October, when Ford went to stay, returning home ‘dismal’ on 1 November. They had a happier trip as a family to the Pent on the 13<sup>th</sup> of that month, once again staying over. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, Ford took Christina with him to visit, and the year concluded with a flurry of trips. The Conrads came for a day. The Hueffers made three journeys to the Pent, and stayed for one night, on the 6 December. H.G. Wells was also present on that latter occasion.

The Hueffers spent time with members of both their families over Christmas 1899. It is clear from the diary, however, that, aside from the locals who were part of their daily living, including, more frequently than they would have wished, Dr Maude, the Hueffers devoted most of their time to the Conrads in that year. Being able to be precise about the amount of time they shared, and so quickly after their first meeting, matters in this case, but equally importantly Elsie’s account establishes particularly vividly the context for what more than one critic characterises as the ‘intimacy’ of the Conrad/Ford collaboration.<sup>12</sup> Her commentary demonstrates as well, in other words, the *kind* of time they shared, its emotional and domestic texture, and the speed with which that inter-familial dependency developed. Borys’s growth, his teething, is worthy of note to Elsie. No other child features in this way aside from her

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<sup>10</sup> Karl 1986: 175. This letter is dated ‘[25 March 1899]’ by the editors.

<sup>11</sup> Meary Walker, chief amongst the locals who shared and influenced the Hueffers’ lives in Bonnington. For recent word on Walker’s ‘mushroom catsup’, see Robert Hampson, ‘From the Soil: hunger, haute cuisine and food production’ in *Last Post* (Autumn 2020 vol. 1, no. 5), 28-45 (28-30).

<sup>12</sup> ‘[C]ollaboration is best carried on in an atmosphere of intimacy’, says Morey, before discussing their particular embodiment of it (32-34). See Mizener on their ‘happy intimacy’ also (48).

own. Similarly, Elsie records that Conrad was ‘depressed’ on 6 December, while Jessie had a ‘bad headache’, and that Conrad was ‘very bad with gout’ on 28 March. There was health-related misery on the Hueffer side too.

One of the happier entries, that of 12 June, describes Elsie singing ‘some of F’s songs’ when the Conrads were there. Elsie sang ‘magnificently’ according to Olive Garnett.<sup>13</sup> She had also been practising from time to time the Wagner music bought on a London trip in early February, when she enjoyed *Tristan and Isolde* with Mary (‘Wonderfully impressive. Miss Lucile Hill [the American-born soprano] splendid in the Liebestod’).<sup>14</sup> Elsie also mentions her reading on several occasions, but nowhere does she say she was writing – a conspicuous absence given the related detail and ambition of the 1895 fragment.<sup>15</sup>

### Writing lives: Elsie’s record

The new relationship with Conrad had much riding on it owing to the Hueffers’ financial precarity. From the beginning of 1899 Elsie ties her understanding of Ford’s writing, and/or of his potential success, very closely to Conrad, who features in her first detailed entry, on 19 January. That day, Ford’s planned book on the *Cinque Ports* was the subject of a (‘second’) letter from the publisher Constable & Co. In addition, a synopsis of the book was sent to both ‘B’woods & Conrad’. Morey notes Conrad’s familiarity with the *Cinque Ports* (in relation to ‘Amy Foster’), and his warm support for the book, and Elsie’s diary records carefully that Ford’s collaborator was brought into the earliest discussions.<sup>16</sup> It was a serious business for the Hueffers. Elsie states their financial situation in the same entry: ‘£5 in the bank and we have £15 of debts’.

Although the early burst of Ford’s and Conrad’s collaboration on *Seraphina* (later published under both names as *Romance*) fizzled out almost as quickly as it had been ignited in the autumn of 1898, their individual projects were not, in fact, as individual as all that. Critics have noted their mutual and immediate need of one another, and this is something the diary underlines in terms of the social context it details as discussed above, as well as what it contributes about the work itself.<sup>17</sup> Conrad’s opinion was immediately crucial to Ford. Symptomatic of the reasons, perhaps, was the fact that Ford’s creative year had begun with Edward Garnett laughing at his new play. Conrad, on the other hand, asked after it encouragingly.<sup>18</sup> Conrad also godfathered *The Cinque Ports* for Ford, which was ultimately published by Blackwood rather than Constable, Ford’s initial choice. On 17 May, Elsie notes that they ‘Heard from B.woods they accept C.P. book’. The very next day, ‘F. went to Conrads to tell him the good news & get books’. The following Monday, a Bank Holiday, he

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<sup>13</sup> Johnson 1993: 91.

<sup>14</sup> The trip took place over the weekend of 3 February. ‘Up late’, she wrote on 5 February. ‘Attacked Tristan without much result’.

<sup>15</sup> For more on Elsie’s writing, and on the couple’s shared writing in the early years of their relationship, see Haslam (2020). See Maginn (2021) on what are described as the psychosexual elements of the men’s collaboration.

<sup>16</sup> Morey: 41; see also 30 January 1899 letter from Conrad to Ford about the book having ‘gone to Edinburgh with very warm recommendation’ (Karl 1986: 154). Elsie records its ‘positive news’ the following day.

<sup>17</sup> Mizener (1985: 43-48) offers a very useful summary of the time frames and that mutual need.

<sup>18</sup> In the 30 January letter cited in note 16. Work on the play progressed to the extent that it was typed up, as Elsie records receipt from the typist on 31 January, but then the trail goes cold.

went again. No doubt encouraged by the contact, Ford wrote fast, and continued to do so. He finished the 'Winchelsea' chapter on 1 June and bought books to begin 'Rye' on 3 June, which he finished a week later. He turned his attention to 'Hastings', but Elsie recorded that they hadn't heard from the publisher about the first completed chapters, sent on 18 June. That meant 'no money & no anything' (4 July) – but this changed on 6 July: 'money came from B.woods at last'. Ford finished the 'New Romney' chapter on 22 July and the first 'Hythe' chapter a week later. Two 'Dover' chapters were sent off on 19 August. 'Sandwich II' was finished on 2 September and an unspecified one a week later. Perhaps not surprisingly, given how punishing the schedule, completion of the 'Appendix' leads to the third 'Hurrah!' in the diary, on 15 September.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the lull in collaborative labour on *Seraphina*, Conrad's writing year had begun similarly with appreciation of Ford's encouragement: 'Just a word of thanks. The story I told you of holds me. It grows like the genii out of the bottle in the Tale. Won't be done til Sat. Till then I am distracted'.<sup>20</sup> Conrad had the proofs of the first two instalments of 'Heart of Darkness' back from Blackwood by February 12. The final section will have probably been with him in February or March – coinciding with the longest period of the writers' co-habitation in 1899, as noted above.<sup>21</sup>

Writing fast was mainly dictated for Ford by the pressing economic drivers Elsie details throughout her diary. He was publishing poems (Elsie records, for example, 'Aldington Knoll' being taken by the *Speaker* on 2 February); he had at least two stories accepted too.<sup>22</sup> But it was advances for longer works that they needed – even though the money (£1.2) that Edward Garnett brought when he visited on 4 March was pronounced 'very acceptable'. By the autumn of 1899, Ford and Conrad were trying to generate that income jointly again, with Conrad advising and supporting work on a novel that Ford had begun - *The Inheritors*. Meanwhile, however, Ford and Elsie had been looking elsewhere for ways of generating urgently needed cash, including, apparently, on the walls of the Pent. In her 1935 reminiscences, Jessie Conrad described some of the 'really fine' Hueffer possessions the family left behind: 'there was a writing desk that had once belonged to Christina Rossetti, a big table designed by William Morris, and a picture cupboard belonging, or having belonged, to Ford Madox Brown. There were also hanging above the couch in the front room a death mask of Dante G. Rossetti and one of Oliver Cromwell, gruesome relics that held for me a good deal of awe' (1935: 66).

The novel that Elsie records Ford working on (in her entry for 5 October) is almost certainly a reference to *The Inheritors*. Predictably, as soon as there was enough to show to Conrad, Ford went to the Pent. Perhaps the fact that Conrad 'was upset' with it (7 October) knocked

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<sup>19</sup> *The Cinque Ports*, which was published in 1900, has 15 chapters and Appendices A-G, totalling 395 pages.

<sup>20</sup> Conrad to Ford, 3 January 1899 (Karl 1986: 146).

<sup>21</sup> See Morey 2021: 84. Owen Knowles notes in his edition of the text the speed of revision sometimes necessitated by Blackwood's schedule for serial publication (Conrad 2010: 279), which may lend support to Robert Kimbrough's suggestion that the proofs Ford talked about seeing many years later were for the projected Blackwood volume of 3 stories, rather than the initial magazine publication (Conrad 1988: 212 n.3).

<sup>22</sup> 'Aldington Knoll' was published on 4 Feb (XIX, 154) and reprinted in *Poems for Pictures* (1914) and *Collected Poems* (1936). Another three poems by Ford appeared in the *Speaker* that year: 'In Adversity' (XIX, 51); 'The Gipsy and the Townsman: A dialogue pendant to "The Gipsy and the Cuckoo"' (XIX, 371); and 'A Ballad of an Auction' (XIX, 661). See Harvey (141). Saunders (2000: 135) adds a further poem, 'The Evolution of a Lyric', *Outlook* 3 (22 April, 387-8) and a story, 'L'Affaire Ingram', *Outlook* 3:74 (1 July, 709-10); and more recently 'An Unpublished Letter', published in the *Sketch* on 15 March (331).

Ford's confidence, galvanising him into making a London trip to the Fine Art Society the following week to see about selling one of those 'gruesome relics' (11/12 October). On 14 October, Ford was 'going on with his novel', but returned 'dismal' from the further trip to the Pent on 1 November. He was 'still rewriting his novel' three days later, apparently more successfully on this occasion. On 12 November Conrad assured Ford that 'Heinemann (and McClure too I fancy) are waiting for our joint book' (Karl, 1986: 219). Though Conrad did little of the writing of *The Inheritors*, Morey notes he 'did help with the book', also citing Conrad's assertion that 'My share of actual writing is very small' (138-9). Elsie's diary does not suggest, at any point in early November, that she thought Conrad had 'induced' Ford to waste his time (as Conrad expressed it to Ford on 12 November), but it is clear that Ford was miserable following the feedback from Conrad, and perhaps there was some anxiety that, whatever Conrad now thought, the novel would not fly. What Elsie does tell us is that the Hueffer family drove over together to the Pent on 14 November, and 'they were very pleased to see us I think'. Inter-familial relations were restored at this point. They had survived a near full year of 'collaboration' on multiple levels, to the degree that, following this trip, Ford stayed again overnight on 20 November, and returned with Christina on 29 November, while Elsie went on 6 December to stay, and Ford on 21 December. On none of these occasions is anyone described as 'dismal' as a result.

Elsie may have written little in 1899, but she returned to fiction in later years. Ford supported her; he published her work even as he sought a divorce in 1909 (Saunders I: 263). Conrad supported her as well, particularly in her translation of nine of Maupassant's stories (1903), and he offered what Helen Chambers has termed 'thoughtful commentary' on the novel that she published in 1909, *Margaret Hever*.<sup>23</sup> The atmosphere of Hueffer/Conrad collaborative creative endeavour, shared in and recorded by Elsie as it developed across 1899, also served to nurture the diarist's more publicly directed literary ambition and see her into print.

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<sup>23</sup> Chambers 2018: 190.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Max Saunders and Charles and Gillian Lamb for their comments and assistance in the writing of this article.

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