Ford and Conrad met in September 1898 and collaborated over a period of ten years. Yet their influence on each other extended far beyond their joint writings. Some of Conrad’s most important publications date from this period and Ford was on his way to becoming the author of the modernist masterpiece *The Good Soldier*. The nature of their friendship is hard to pinpoint, despite the fact that its history is fairly well documented. Different narratives emerge depending on the point of view of the biographer in his or her capacity as Conrad or Ford specialist. In his *Ford Madox Ford: a Dual Life*, Saunders shows that Conrad’s letters tell a very different story to the memoir Ford wrote after Conrad’s death. From the letters it appears that Conrad did not perceive Ford as an equal. Yet he was the one who initiated their collaboration, praising Ford’s qualities as a stylist in the English language. As Ford described it in his preface to *The Nature of a Crime* from 1924, their collaboration was ‘almost purely oral’: ‘We wrote and read aloud the one to the other’ (1924, p. 11). Conrad seems to have relied heavily on their discussions and reading sessions for the progress of his own work. They also planned the *English Review* together, the avant-garde magazine that cost Ford a fortune but became the most important literary magazine of their time, publishing all the key writers of the era. As Saunders points out, their relationship must have been intimate even if Conrad sometimes belittled Ford in his letters to others or tried to distance himself from Ford. Their friendship ended with a near complete break in 1909 when they fell out over, amongst other things, Ford’s treatment of the mathematician Arthur Marwood, who had allegedly made ‘improper advances’ towards Ford’s wife Elsie. Marwood was not only a close friend of Ford but also his business partner in the *English Review* – a fact that heightened Ford’s sense of betrayal. Conrad and others doubted Elsie’s account...
of these advances, but Ford felt that his honour was at stake. He chose to believe Elsie and broke with Marwood. In the aftermath of this affair, there were other incidents that one or other of the two took to heart and Conrad ‘abruptly terminated his serial of Some Reminiscences for the English Review’ (Saunders, 1996, vol. 1, p. 271). Differences about who should finance the English Review played a part, as well as Conrad’s uneasiness about Ford’s conflicted love life and his quarrels with mutual friends (cf. Saunders, 1996, vol. 1, p. 273).

In the period between Conrad’s best known work Heart of Darkness to Ford’s masterpiece The Good Soldier, they co-authored three works: The Inheritors (1901), Romance (1903) and the long short story The Nature of a Crime (1909). They began with Ford’s fragment ‘Seraphina’, which was to become Romance, but took four years to finish the book. Both authors worked on the draft, with Conrad writing most of Part 3 and almost all of Part 4. The story of ‘Seraphina’ was based on an essay from Dickens’s All the Year Round that was called ‘Cuban Pirates: a True Narrative’ and appeared on 22 January 1870. It related the adventures of a certain Aaron Smith who was tried for piracy in 1823 (cf. Ford, 1965, p. 23). While working on Romance, Ford wrote a draft of The Inheritors and read it to Conrad, who suggested they finish it together. Although Conrad did little of the writing himself, Ford later emphasised his importance: ‘Conrad’s function . . . was to give each scene a final tap; these in a great many cases, brought the whole meaning of the scene to the reader’s mind’ (1965, p. 136). With its colonialist theme and its critique of an efficient and cold-blooded administration, the political subject of the novel is clearly indebted to Heart of Darkness. David Glover points out that, ‘the Système Groenlandais reaches back to one of Heart of Darkness’s probable sources . . . namely Sir John Franklin’s disastrous Polar expedition of 1845, which ended in starvation, disarray and cannibalism’ (2001, p. 37). Nonetheless, the book was mainly Ford’s work and it must have been disappointing that some reviews did not even mention his name. The third work co-authored by Conrad and Ford, The Nature of a Crime, was written much later. It is a confessional letter in several parts to a married woman whom the writer professes to love, and it is written on the eve of an impending revelation which is itself only gradually revealed. The writer has used the money of his ward, the young Edward Burden (Nomen est Omen!), for himself, has practically stolen it, and the sham is about to be revealed. Should this occur, the writer announces his intention to commit suicide – but he is saved at the last minute by his ward’s trust in him. As the letters detailing his deception have already been sent out, he is now in the hands of his beloved.