

FORD + BIALA: A LONG AND PASSIONATE DIALOGUE

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Introduction

The life of Biala (1903-2000) is an extraordinary story. A painter recognized for her sublime assimilation of the School of Paris and the New York School of abstract expressionism, she was the perfect representative of American bohemia in 1930s France and made a unique contribution to the rise of modernism throughout her lifetime in Paris and New York.

Biala was the last companion of Ford Madox Ford. During their time together – beginning on May Day, 1930, and ending with Ford's death in 1939 – his prose and her paint inter-wove a canvas artistically rich and historically significant for both writer and painter. Their life together was what Biala described as 'a long and passionate dialogue' on art, culture, and life.¹

Ford played an influential role in the lives of many writers, composers and visual artists of his time and beyond. His presence was no less critical to the maturity of Biala as artist. Although Biala would adamantly disagree, it was her presence that functioned as catalyst for the revival of Ford as writer and poet. Ford and Biala formed a unique bond from the onset of their first meeting – a bond that strengthened both artists considerably.

Ford often said, 'Live merrily and trust to good letters'. And rightly so. Biala wrote avidly to her older brother, the painter Jack Tworkov. These transatlantic letters provide a fresh impression of Ford from the viewpoint of his greatest admirer.

New York: 1913

1913 was the year Ford recalls springing from atop a Parisian bus to chase down the avenue Miss Gertrude Stein who was driving with 'the air of awfulness of Pope or Pharaoh'.²

The same year the Armory Show opened in New York City and with it Modernism arrived in America.³ Lauded as one of the most influential events in the history of American art its legacy rivals the

raucous premiere of Stravinsky's ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, which would open three months later in Paris.⁴ The purchase of a Cézanne⁵ by the Metropolitan Museum of Art from the Armory Show signaled the integration of modernism into official art channels. However, it was the shock and outrage from Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Staircase*⁶ and Matisse's *Luxury*⁷ that connected the Armory Show with the historic avant-garde.

Five months later, on September 26, 1913, 10 year-old Schenehaia Tworowska arrived in America with her older brother, Jacob, and their mother. Reuniting with their father, the family resided on Ridge Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Like many immigrants arriving in New York from ports around the world, the family Tworowska underwent a series of name changes, as Jack and now Janice Tworok struggled to assimilate to American culture at the turn of the century.⁸ '[T]he first years in New York I remember as the most painful in my life', wrote Jack, 'Everything I loved in my childhood I missed in New York, everything that had been painful in my childhood grew to distressing proportions [...] in the new land I had to face a new culture and adolescence at the same time. What saved me then was reading'.⁹ Janice most certainly shared her brother's experience. However, what was to save Janice was painting.

Janice Tworok

It is impossible to establish the exact circumstances in which Janice first became interested in painting.

By the early 1920s, Jack, after exploring a career as a writer, had dedicated himself to the life of an artist. He began studying at the Art Students League of New York in early 1923. Janice registered for art classes at the National Academy of Design later that year. And it was there that the pair would meet Charles Hawthorne who had established an artist colony in Provincetown (MA). Neither at the time would have imagined the roles each would play in the various movements associated with twentieth century American art.

Sister and brother exchanged vivid conversations about art. Jack was taken with the remote yet thriving Provincetown art scene and remained there experiencing modernism through the artist Karl Knaths. Janice too spent time in Provincetown, but returned to New York living the bohemian life in Greenwich Village.

They supported each other both emotionally and financially. They shared the struggle to sell and exhibit their work and relied

heavily on critiques of each other's pictures. They debated about art and exchanged opinions about artists. The pair instantly shared a particular interest in Cézanne upon seeing his work in the early 1920s.¹⁰

Biala for Tworokov

By late 1920, Janice was an established young artist with a growing reputation. She was a frequent exhibitor at the G.R.D. Studios (NY), a gallery that would later fuel the careers of many important American artists. She remained at the forefront of the fledgling art colonies of Woodstock (NY) and Provincetown (MA) generating close friendships with now legendary American artists Edwin Dickinson and William Zorach.

She was a strong woman – devoted to herself, to her art, and to the people she kept close. She was opinionated yet freethinking; an independent and headstrong young woman with a passion for life and loaded sense of humor.

But more importantly she was a dreamer. A true bohemian, Janice longed for time when she would be free from the confines and restrictions of family and society. 'If I ever get a hundred dollars I'm going to Europe and stay there', she wrote to Jack.¹¹ *The Three Musketeers* was her favorite book, and she would later tell the French art critic René Barotte that it was because of Porthos that she became an artist.¹²

January 1930 was a pivotal time for Janice. With the Wall Street Crash in October 1929, she, like many Americans, felt the enormous struggle to strive. Work was scarce yet she managed to support herself with various jobs. 'I got fired at Macey's [*sic*] and realize myself that I don't fit into that sort of thing. Everything in modern business is so standardized that there is no chance for an ordinary human being'.¹³ Moreover, Janice realized that painting was the only thing she could do well. 'If there were anything else I could do. I'd do it'.¹⁴

Three weeks later heralded the arrival of Biala the artist: 'I decided to change my name [...]', she wrote to Jack, 'in order not to be confused with you [. . .] My name is now Biala'.¹⁵ And so Janice Tworokov became the artist Biala.

Then, in April 1930, at the invitation of her best friend, the aspiring poet Eileen Lake, Biala left for Europe.

Biala in Paris

‘There must be young men and women, of genius even, who are unsuited to gain their early living at normal occupations, or whose feelings will not let them do so’, Ford wrote. ‘For these New York is the best place in America ... but it is not a good place because it does not arrange itself to suit their necessities. Until it does so it must be content to see such young men and women drift [. . .] For them there is ... Paris’.¹⁶

These words perfectly illustrated Biala’s position. On April 25, 1930, she arrived in Paris.

‘Of all the people I know, I think you would enjoy Paris most’, wrote Biala in what would be the first of a life time of letters from France, ‘and believe me, you should get a little more interested in coming here. I don’t mean for the gay “bohemian life” and the conversations on art and art itself [...] but for the loveableness of Paris, and its physical beauty, which is perverse and grand at the same time. I have already seen a good deal of the left bank as far as the Louvre on foot in an effort to get my bearings’.

‘But what, so far, is most marvelous about [Paris] are the bread shops, the food and the hors d’oeuvre [*sic*] [...] I can’t describe the food [...] except that it is just what Porthos must have eaten [...] And there are flowers everywhere, of varieties I have never seen. I haven’t got the time to tell you any more, because we’re going out. Love, Janice’.¹⁷

Ford and Biala

Once Biala arrived she most certainly made up her mind never to leave Europe. But as the weeks passed she felt the emotional burden of commitments to her family and her life in America. She was torn between two lives, and two places (a position Biala would find herself throughout her life) yet she remained determined to build a future in France.

Five days after her arrival, Biala met Ford Madox Ford. It was May Day 1930.

Nearly a month would pass before Biala would write again. A brief postcard to Jack mentioned nothing of Ford though by this time Ford and Biala had become an inseparable pair (plate 26). ‘Impossible to write letters because so much to say, but think of you often. Seen

damn little art, but much of life. And a vale of jeers it is. Why haven't you written? Likely to stay on yet, so do write – Janice'.¹⁸

By August, Biala could no longer hide from her conscience and wrote to Jack.

This is the third letter I've started to you and I only hope it doesn't share the fate of the others which were not mailed. This country is so damn beautiful it is impossible to think of anything else. You are making a mistake in saying that you don't care about coming to Europe. I assure you, now that I'm well out of it, America looks more like a stony prison [. . .]

So much as happened here that I'm in despair of ever being able to tell you of it. I'm in a hell of a mess. In short, I don't want to go back to America ever [. . .] And what has finished off my misfortunes is that there is another man on the scene. He is Ford Madox Ford, and seems to be a celebrity here – I never heard of him myself, or read his books. I don't suppose you have either, anyway he wants to marry me or something and I'm sorry to say I return the sentiment which is even more fantastic than it sounds, as he is considerably older than myself, and I dread the talk that will arise even more than the talk there's been in Paris [. . .]

As the family's concerned, I should think being in Europe I could, with a few well placed lies announce a marriage to them so that they'll stop worrying over me. He's got enough Jewish relations to make me feel easy about passing him off as a Jew. Tho if they ever saw him they'd see right away he's a fake. Anyway, his brother-in-law is a Rabbi, and besides that, I'm so up to my neck with him [. . .] I couldn't get out to please them, even if I wanted to.

Don't tell this to anyone please, even if you hear any scandal about it [. . .] Also any scandal about Ford affects the sale of his books, and he's so poor already, that if he gets any poorer we'll starve.

I suppose you will disapprove of all this but what can I do. Aside from all sentiment, and believe me there's plenty on both sides, this is the only offer of a decent life I've ever had and am ever likely to have and I'm taking it for as long as it will last. That Ford's a celebrity gives me a pain in the neck as I have to consider so much I never had to consider before, but he's the most interesting man I've ever met and a great one in my estimation.

I am sure you would like him. Any way, he discovered and first printed Joyce, which ought to recommend him to you. And he's a friend of Picasso and Matisse, and thinks Picasso is the greatest painter in the world, which ought to please you. Also he's supposed to be a great cook and is a great authority on wines [. . .] he's just finished the first volume of a history of the last fifty years which stands a good chance of not being published because of its communistic tendencies and he tells the funniest stories in the world [. . .] he's a Russian Pole, tho born in England. And to wind up the description, he looks like a meal sack.

[. . .] I haven't met any celebrities so far except for [George] Antheil and Nathan Ash [*sic*]. If they're celebrities. Antheil is very nice and Ford's writing a libretto with my help for Antheil's next opera. Ash I don't like, much. Oh and I met Mme Rubinstein the beauty specialist and she's not at all beautiful [. . .]

Ford made a letter to Picasso to come and meet me but he'd just left town so I didn't [. . .] Any way, I suppose I'll meet him some other time. We're going

down to Toulon on the first of December and that's the hang out of all the French painters. I'll tell you about it.

Once more, please don't mention the fact that you're as good as a brother in law to Ford [. . .] And for Pete's sake write me – Janice.¹⁹

Within weeks Ford and Biala had become the talk of the town. 'All of the women [Ford] lived with wrote or painted', wrote Max Saunders, 'But Biala was his first thoroughly bohemian partner, caring little for money, social status, and domestic comforts'.²⁰ Biala quickly became more than simply one of Ford's *jeunes* (the young artists that he had always courted). Ford 'quickly discovered in Janice a kindred spirit who shared his complete devotion to the arts and his scorn of the "tradesmen" who batten on artists', wrote Arthur Mizener. Biala became Ford's greatest defender 'ready to fly at anyone who was not ready to give Ford his due, in a way that Ford himself was never able to do'.²¹ Biala's tough personality made her formidably suited to stand with Ford in the cultural world in which Ford continued to be central. She studied Ford's novels even memorizing passages. And when she wasn't painting, Biala was penning fierce letters to Ford's publishers.

In turn, Biala was 'taken in hand by Ford',²² and led through the towns and cities that he adored, shown the secrets of the world that only someone as steeped in history as Ford could share. 'There wasn't enough time for all we had to say to each other', Biala said, 'There was plenty to argue about because we always converted the other to his or her point of view'.²³ Ford told Ezra Pound that Biala was 'rather modern'.²⁴ They shared a socio-political stance; both believing communism and fascism were mass-manias. Both feared for the future of their Europe 'with the unspeakable Mr. Hitler as head'.²⁵ Biala had hoped that Ford might use his influence with the press when it came to the fate of the Jews. Ford began a letter campaign to friends and publishers in hopes that the subject might be broached. One such letter went to Theodore Dreiser:

Do you suppose you would like a little [article] about the state of Jewry, which in Europe has become pretty parlous with the arrival of Hitler and the closing of Palestine? I was a little responsible for the Balfour Declaration and have for a long time wanted to write something about Zionism. There is a great deal to say about the matter but I might be able to boil something down into about 3,000 words if you could let me have that amount of space in two numbers.²⁶

Biala wrote to Jack:

Ford made every effort about the Jews but everyone refused to print him. And the article he wrote on Germany for Harpers last October was carefully cut and trimmed, so there isn't a thing against Germany in it or about the Jews. And diabolically, they just printed it, so that it looks well for Germany. The despairing thing about it is that the editor of the magazine is a German Jew himself and he is responsible for the cuts. However, the French haven't stopped their efforts nor has England.²⁷

When Biala met Ford, she said 'my life began'. Although perfectly paired, their relationship was fraught with challenges. Firstly, there was the gossip. 'Biala was less than half Ford's age, a fact which disconcerted their Paris friends', wrote Saunders.²⁸ Biala muscled her way along side Ford, after all, it was her dream to be in Europe, but the social pressure was suffocating.

It's too long a story to go into, what a person of my age can see in one of Ford's. It seems just as unnatural to me [...] but as long as I can stand the looks and the whispers I will [...] but you cannot blame a dying man for catching at anything that gives him back his life and youth as well [. . .] Even you will not believe that I just very simply love Ford [. . .] I might just as well resign myself to never again knowing anybody – because I can see that I will go down in history as the notorious Mrs. Ford.²⁹

Dear Jack when you know Ford you won't talk about his terrible superiority in age. It is true he is almost 25 yrs older maybe less, but he is not in his dotage by any means. I admit it sounds fantastic, especially since you haven't seen his belly which looks pregnant with triplets, but I am terribly in love with him [. . .] Ford is as young as you and I are mentally and physically he is a colossus [. . .] It's conceit on my part to say it – but he says it's so – but we're very like each other aside from looks. And he's not an old man in his dotage with opera glasses on a girl's legs. I believe him completely that I am the only woman he ever loved.³⁰

Then there was Ford's health. 'Not the least of my troubles is the fear that Ford may die and leave me alone to face all this rabble. That is the penalty of living with someone twice your age [...] you're afraid he may die any minute'.³¹

Last was money and they rarely had any. Biala's ability to paint was determined by whether they could afford supplies:

If it weren't for Ford's garden we would starve [. . .] I haven't painted for a month because we simply couldn't afford the canvas, but someone lent us \$40, and Ford had urgent business in Paris, where he's just gone up for two days, and he will bring me back \$4 worth of canvas which will last me for some time.³²

Only once in their ten-year relationship did Biala write with regret. ‘A fatal trip to Europe I took. That is how God answers all one’s prayers. I suppose in time I’ll get used to all this – to my notoriety [. . .] Christ I feel so damnably lost. Don’t give my address to anybody. I don’t wish to hear from anybody but you. Love, Janice’.³³

Through it all, Ford and Biala lived the life they wanted, enduring the difficulties and absolutely celebrating good news. ‘Ford’s reminiscences³⁴ are setting the Thames on fire’, Biala wrote:

It even has the aura of a wild scandal to make it more glamorous. The King asked him to cut out a paragraph in the next edition [and] really likes it very much, as it puts him into a very nice light in regard to the Irish question, but Lloyd George is furious. They had enormous headlines about it in the English papers [. . .] All this has had the most curious effect on people in Paris. Ford was supposed to be finished, due to drink or woman or something, and it’s been a great shock to them having him suddenly [...] happy, and in the list of best sellers once more.

The result is that all his bitterest enemies are recircling [*sic*] themselves to him, and profess to be greatly honored at knowing me. I rather enjoy it, cynically. The seal was set the other day when Gertrude Stein climbed all these stairs to pay us a visit, and was attacked by a mad woman on the floor above to boot [...] every body in Paris who is on the make is rushing forward. If they knew how poor we were they probably wouldn’t. A year ago I would have been ashamed to talk like this, much less tell you about it, but we’ve gone thru so many hardships this year, that I feel I’ve earned whatever amusement I get.³⁵

The Villa Paul

Wherever they were, wherever they went, Ford would set a writing desk, often precariously propped, and Biala would find the perfect light whereby to paint. ‘Ford is well (knock on wood) he is writing what he considers his best book and I’m so full of ideas about painting that I can’t sleep at night.’³⁶

Toulon was their base in Provence, and at the Villa Paul (plate 27) on Cap Brun they had their view. ‘I am still hoping mildly that sometime you will come to France, and more particularly, to us’, wrote Biala.

If one had no worries like the kind I’ve had here – how happy one could be. Do you know we’ve been living on \$4 a week and still not so badly? Of course we couldn’t have done it but for the fact that we grow our own vegetables, but then we have six (not very magnificent) rooms, and a garden but with the finest view in the world (we are on a hill overlooking the

Mediterranean) and a private path down to the sea; for exactly \$10 a month. We pay \$2 a month extra for our furniture. We have a large garden in which we are growing, artichokes, tomatoes, corn, carrots, beans, watermelons, mushmelons, squash [. . .] We have a cherry tree, several pear trees, almond trees, fig trees, orange and lemon trees, peaches, apricots [. . .] We have every imaginable flower, and thousands of roses. For pleasure we pay 2c carfare into Toulon, and drink 6c worth of beer in the café where I'm writing [Grand Café de la Rade], which if the beach in Provincetown were paved, and where the houses were, there were cafés and shops, you would have almost the same view, that is the harbor and commercial ships – and we watch the world go by [. . .] So you see, for a poor painter, this is the place to be.

Our landlord, who is a nice admiral in the French navy, on hearing Ford was a poet, went 200 miles in his car to another part of the country to find Ford an asphodel plant, because he said all poets should have the asphodel in their garden. You can't imagine a nice admiral in America having anything but contempt for a poet, can you? And he gives me his rarest flowers so that I can paint them. So you see, even if European civilization is effete, it is still better for people like us to live here, where we are considered if possible a little more than human, than in America where we are a little less. And don't think one gets so softened by this enervating civilization that one does not work. I work harder than I ever did in my life, house work, shopping, gardening, typing and I painted several quite good pictures in 2 weeks.³⁷

Bohemianism is a career itself. It takes too much out of you if you want to do any thing else [. . .] But that's how life is. Ford says he's a very tolerant man, but I must wash my face at least once a week. And he hangs up all my clothes.³⁸

Nearly every letter from Biala was full of vivid adventure:

Yesterday we came back from an overnight trip from Cassis, which is eight miles from Marseilles. We were invited there by a Frenchman, Le Son and his American wife. They were camping there, and every year, the day before they left, they gave a bouillabaisse party [. . .] Well, we went to the party. The other guests were a fisherman and his wife, a pig dealer of about 80 (who to reach us walked twenty-five miles over the mountains taking five hours to do it), his daughter and son-in-law who helped him raise the pigs, the chef from a neighboring hotel with his wife, children and father. They were all peasants, and aside from the diamonds they wear, they were dressed exactly the way they dressed to do their work in. Nothing picturesque. We swam, then cooked the meal all of us together (I forgot to say the fisherman, Marius, rowed us over in his boat to a cove same distance out, of the most unimaginable and fantastique [*sic*] beauty, it was all enclosed with mountains as high as skyscrapers and much the same shapes). The old man, the pig dealer, makes the most wonderful wines, he having enormous vineyards, not a bottle of which he would sell if you gave him its weight in gold. He brought about fifty bottles of it (we only drank about twenty-five). The dinner consisted of bouillabaisse which is at least two meals in itself, then a wonderful paté made

out of chicken livers and truffles, and enormous roast chicken, salad, then cylinder of the local cheese which is made of goats cream and is very sweet, over which you pour sugar, and the French version of apple jack, about fifty years old. Then there was ice cream with biscuits, then Spanish melons and the local peaches. After that coffee and liquors. The meal lasted four hours, the old man wouldn't let me stop eating for a moment. Every time I stopped he threw another fish onto my plate and said we were weaklings. He said he was what he was because he ate a lunch like that everyday of his life, but in the evenings he drinks only milk mixed with water, and to prove to me how strong he was he picked me up and threw me over his shoulder. He was shorter than I, thin as a lathe and strong as steel. Then the cook sang the *Pastoral* which they've sung every Christmas since Christ. Everybody joined. They had beautiful voices and sang in Provençal. And it wasn't what is called church music or even religious. It was about how Joseph looked for a room in the inn and they said there wasn't a single room etc. It was exactly like a legend of their own village speaking of things they all knew, and both the music and the words were like that. It made it all the more real, that in Cassis it is impossible to get a room in the summer, and we ourselves had slept the night on very sharp rocks by the sea for that reason. I hate Christianity, but this was a fairy tale and very moving. Then the Cook sang *Manon*, and his father recited something about the war of 1870, and we would have sung for them if they'd been at all interested. Finally we all left in the boat, mostly because Ford and I had to return to Toulon to feed the chickens.³⁹

In 1932, Biala painted a portrait of Ford reclining in a sun chair with a book she tagged 'Cezanne'. Painted at the Villa Paul and titled *Portrait of a Critic* (plate 29) it is a masterpiece of Biala's maturing style. 'The features in this portrait are not accurate', noted Biala, 'but the painting nevertheless gives a pretty good idea of him – the amount of space he took up', she added humorously.⁴⁰ Biala's portrait elicits the experience of life and not factual representation – color laid down in measured gestures to narrate form and fact. Additionally, in the portrait of Ford, one can't help but see the influence of Biala knowing Matisse. 'I have always had Matisse in my belly', Biala would write some thirty years later.⁴¹ She had arrived at a style of painting similar to Ford's impressionistic style of writing. As C. H. Sisson wrote in his essay on the *Critical Attitude* of Ford's prose:

Ford believed that the artist who recorded the life of his day was adding to knowledge, and if he [Ford] denounced the accumulation of facts it was merely because the knowledge he was interested in was – he thought – of a refinement which made it dependent on the observer who could set down his own impressions as only the artist can.⁴²

Ford often explained, ‘I don’t really deal in facts; I have for facts a most profound contempt. I try to give you what I see to be the spirit of an age, of a town, of a movement. This cannot be done with facts’.⁴³

Ford was a major influence on Biala’s early development (‘I haven’t spoken to a soul about pictures since I’ve been in France, except Ford’).⁴⁴ His critique gave Biala the creative permission to experiment with composition and form. Yet it is impossible to discuss Biala’s influences without mentioning the greatness of her early mentor Edwin Dickinson, the noted Provincetown artist and teacher, whom in 1924 Biala had hitchhiked from New York to Provincetown to meet.⁴⁵

Dickinson’s philosophy paralleled Ford’s modern approach. ‘The path to originality [...] that Dickinson both practiced and taught, involved approaching one’s subject freshly without mental preconceptions and viewing the motif abstractly in terms of form and color’, writes Dickinson scholar Mary Ellen Abell. ‘Thus the artist is led by the demands of the plastic elements in a process of continual discovery and fresh surprises. In his own process, Dickinson [...] often felt detached from the identity of his subject and could easily lose consciousness of what category of object he was painting – whether a still life, landscape or portrait’.⁴⁶

The combination of both Dickinson’s and Ford’s aesthetic was the makeup of Biala’s practice.

Ford’s Artists

From before and beyond the *transatlantic review*, Ford had met many originators associated with the rise of twentieth century modern art, literature and politics. Biala would meet them all. From the Fauves to the Cubists, Picasso to Matisse, Brancusi to Giacometti, Gertrude Stein to George Antheil. With Ford, Biala visited their studios and spent days in conversation with them at a nearby café.

I have seen some magnificent Picasso’s at Gertrude Stein’s (who is a hateful bitch by the way) but they were all old Picassos I suppose. Truth compels me to say that one of the canvases I like best was one of Gertrude herself, and as it was hanging right next to a Cézanne portrait [. . .] I also saw a Matisse which was wonderful.⁴⁷

Gertrude Stein, who looks like a Rabelesian monk and laughs like a sergeant major, swore last year, she would never buy an Englishmen’s [*sic*] pictures or sit for a woman. This year she bought 30 pictures by an Englishman, and she’s been sitting for a portrait to me for a year without knowing it. I’ve only

seen her three times, but once or twice more and she'll be sorry she ever made that boast. Some day I'm going to exhibit it calling it a portrait of her.⁴⁸

Constantin Brancusi held a special place in her heart:

Brancusi is coming to-morrow to see my painting [. . .] Somebody told him I was good. I'm rather frightened but there's no real need. None of these great ones take any real interest in any one else's work I've noticed. But Brancusi is one of the most loveable people I've met and it would give me pleasure if he liked my work. He looks exactly like our grandfather, by the way, and I think some of my affection for him is on account of that.⁴⁹

Significant as it may have been to meet and move among these great artists, Biala retained the essence of herself; believing 'for the first time in my life I'm convinced that I am really an artist'.⁵⁰

By 1932, despite her struggle to sell pictures, Biala was exhibiting in Paris.⁵¹ One such exhibition was held at Parc des Expositions. Titled '1940', the exhibition fashioned itself at the cutting edge of modern painting and included work by Arp, Mondrian, Picabia, and Villon among others and featured a retrospective of some fifty-nine paintings by the Dutch Neo-Plasticist, Theo Van Doesburg. Alexander Calder was the only other American invited. Biala was represented by four paintings.⁵² Word of her inclusion was reported in the *The New York Times*,⁵³ and Biala responded, referring to the critic, 'The damn fool had to give me the wrong name (I do not sign myself Janice Ford Biala,) and what hope is there when someone thinks one paints like a slow dance of joy or some such twaddle'.⁵⁴

Ford was proud of Biala's success and growing reputation. When Biala opened an exhibition at Gallery Zak in Paris in March, 1938, Ford wrote to Edward Crankshaw, 'it turned out rather a triumph. Not only did she sell some pictures – one to the State for the Jeu de Paume! – but the gallery proprietor Mme Zak has taken on her fortunes'.⁵⁵

Ford and Biala: Their Collaboration

'If you want to know our life', Biala said, 'There is *Provence* and *Great Trade Route*'. True, these books provide the greatest insight into Ford and Biala's life, offering a sampling of the pair's extensive dialogue with art and culture, travels and histories reminisced by Ford and illustrated by Biala. In both Ford used the 'strange device of inventing a male character, "the Patient New Yorker", and dividing

Biala's role in both *Provence* and *Great Trade Route* between her *propria persona* and this fictionalized *alter ego*.⁵⁶

Provence, published in 1935, was written accumulatively over three years. 'This is to be a book of travel and moralizing – on the Great Trade Route from Cathay to the Cassiterides', wrote Ford. The *New York Times* reported:

[*Provence*] is not only a magnificent revelation of 'the frame of mind that is Provence', but an autobiography, a history and a philosophy as well: for it is, as he [Ford] says, a book of his thoughts on 'faiths and destinies and chances and cuisines and digestions and the stage and music and the fine arts and the neglect of writers and love and [...] treason and death and strategies.' [...] this reviewer must say a word of praise for the charming illustrations that Biala has created for this book. They are naïve and light-hearted; by some magic of brush and pen, they achieve an engagingly subtle humor that is in perfect harmony with the witty and genial text.⁵⁷

Biala's original illustrations for *Provence* (plates 33, 37-38) and nineteen related paintings were the feature of her first one-person exhibition in New York City.⁵⁸ The exhibition was accompanied by a small brochure with an essay by Pierre LaMure.

When *Great Trade Route* was published in 1937, the *New York Times Book Review* pronounced 'Mr. Ford has found a new way to continue his inexhaustible autobiography'.⁵⁹ The *Glasgow Herald* reported '[*Great Trade Route*] is covered in a coat of [...] delightful entertainment [...] added to appreciably by Biala's illustrations. Biala seems to draw with some acid pigment of magic invention but draws still with a charm of someone who is quite heedless of canons'.⁶⁰

Biala opened her second one-person show in New York City, coinciding with the publication of the book, and exhibited her twenty-four illustrations for *Great Trade Route* supplemented by eleven paintings.⁶¹ The exhibition was accompanied by a brochure containing a foreword by Theodore Dreiser, calling Biala's work 'arresting', and a statement by Ossip Zadkine, the French sculptor. *Art News* reported:

[the] paintings by Biala are gay, whimsical, and imaginative in their decorative, primal attire [...] each are approached with cosmopolitan sophistication but painted with evident provincialism that offer a naïve contradiction [...] perspective and scale are turned to Biala's specific purpose which is to refashion the life, movement, and gaiety of her subject.⁶²

The exhibition travelled to Olivet College (Michigan) where Ford was writer and critic in residence (plate 28). It was on this occasion that Biala gave a rare lecture on art:

The very first spot of paint that you put on your canvas sets the note for everything that must follow. Just as in writing a novel [. . .] every word you write must lead up to your climax, and no word or phrase must be there just because you happen to like it, so each spot of paint in your picture must lead up to some definite movement and must connect with every other spot of paint in the picture. Because red is not red itself; its full quality of redness only becomes apparent when it has green beside it or the full quality of green is brought out only when it has purple beside it and so forth. Then against the color you play your forms, lines, and texture.⁶³

Where ever Ford and Biala went, they had a remarkable presence and progressive influence on the people around them. Their time at Olivet College was no different:

Ford and I did a lot of good to that place in another way. Socially the sexes were rigorously separated. There were constant parties either for men only or for women only. We put a stop to that. The first time Ford was invited to one of those men-only parties he replied politely, 'Sorry, I don't go to parties where there are no women'. And the first time I was invited to one of those only-women parties, I replied, 'Sorry, I don't go to parties where there are no men'. So then the younger crowd decided to follow suite and pretty soon all the parties were mixed.⁶⁴

From late 1935 to the end of his life, Ford was preparing essays on various cities that when compiled, would complete the third volume of his travel trilogy. Ford and Biala would continue their dialogue of places and culture, history and politics. *Portraits of Cities* took many forms as 'the list of cities to be included continued to change, reflecting not only Ford's and Biala's travels and travel-plans, but also his developing thoughts about civilisation and politics', write Sara Haslam and Max Saunders.⁶⁵ As the years pressed on, *Portraits of Cities* was never completed. Ford's death left many of the whimsical ink drawings by Biala without text (plates 34-35).

The Death of Ford

'Perhaps Ford knew [...] that he was going to die soon', wrote Allen Tate, 'for he went to France in the spring to spend the summer, as he had not done for several years [. . .] It is well that he died in France, a

country that he not only loved but that he represented far more than he ever did England his native country'.⁶⁶

The return journey to France from America in June 1939 took its toll on Ford. 'We arrived alright', Biala wrote, 'but Ford got sick on the boat and has been ever since. There is only a faint ray of hope that he will survive. Don't speak of this to anyone, just in case he does'.⁶⁷

On June 26, Ford died. 'We were entirely alone', wrote Biala to Jack and Wally Tworkov:⁶⁸

He died very suddenly and quickly speaking to me [...] I was so glad – because he had been suffering horribly for three weeks and neither of us could stand his suffering any longer. I did my best to keep it from him that he was dying. Perhaps he did the same for me. At any rate he didn't know it when it happened. It could have been so much worse [...] I hope some day you will understand that Ford and I were true lovers and what seemed incongruous and shocking to you was a misfortune we had to put up with, and was something that wasn't really so important besides the thing we created between us.⁶⁹

Ford left Biala, just as he found her. On that fateful day in 1930, Ford sat perched on the edge of a long divan, and in the dim light the pair 'seemed to be alone...' as Ford recalled in his collection of poems dedicated to Biala.⁷⁰ In the moments before his death Ford asked to go to the chaise percée. 'I led him to it and a second or two later he [...] fell forward into my arms. I don't believe he was at all conscious of what was happening. He died almost immediately'.⁷¹ Their meeting, their life together, was the kind of spontaneous fiction for which Ford was famous – the principal character being himself. Biala's commitment to Ford and his art did not soften at his death. 'Ford hasn't stopped needing me', Biala wrote four days after his death, 'I have to look after his literary life and I have to paint too [...] I can't come back yet. In the first place I want to paint. In the second place all my history that counts took place here [...] Ford is alive and with me in all the places that we loved [...]'.⁷² One month later, just as war would consume all of Europe, Biala returned to the Villa Paul, risking her life to rescue their library and Ford's papers.

'The most important thing about Ford was that he was an artist', Biala wrote, 'He practiced his art and lived by it in the teeth of every disaster [...] He lived and died in the great tradition of saints and artists'.⁷³

‘There is in life nothing final’, Biala wrote. And so carrying Ford’s memory and papers, Biala returned to America with every intention of remembering and returning to France.⁷⁴

NOTES

- 1 Letter to Arthur Mizener, October 3, 1968, currently at the Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University, and quoted with the Library’s permission. All the other personal letters by Biala quoted in this essay remain in the Estate of Janice Biala, New York. Her letters are quoted with the permission of the Estate.
- 2 Ford Madox Ford, *It Was the Nightingale*, Manchester: Carcanet, 2007, p. 161.
- 3 The Armory Show opened on February 17, 1913 and was held at the 69th Regiment Armory on Lexington Avenue between 25th and 26th streets, New York City.
- 4 *The Rite of Spring* premiered on May 29, 1913.
- 5 Paul Cézanne (French, 1839–1906), *View of the Domaine Saint-Joseph*, late 1880s, oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 32 in. (65.1 x 81.3 cm). Collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1913 (13.66).
- 6 Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887-1968), *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2*, 1912, oil on canvas 54 1/2 x 35 in. (146 x 89 cm). Collection of Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- 7 Henri Matisse (French, 1869-1954), *Luxury No.1*, 1907, oil on canvas, 86 1/2 x 54 1/4 in. (210 x 138 cm.). Collection Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris.
- 8 Upon immigrating, the family Tworokovska assumed the name of their sponsor family which was Bernstein. Bernstein would be the family name Biala’s mother and father used throughout the rest of their lives.
- 9 Jack Tworokov, ‘On My Outlook as a Painter: A Memoir’, *Leonardo* 7 (Spring 1974), 112.
- 10 In 1921 the Brooklyn Museum staged an exhibition of French painting that included fourteen Cézanne canvases and twelve by Matisse, Biala’s brother Jack credits this exhibition as having a great impact on him as an artist. See Dore Ashton, *The New York School, A Cultural Reckoning*, New York: Viking, 1972, p. 27. It is assumed that exhibition had the same impact on Biala.
- 11 Letter to Jack, Friday, January 3, 1930.
- 12 René Barotte, ‘Janice Biala est devenue peintre grace a Porthos...’, *L’Intransigent*, Paris, May 30, 1967, p. 5B.
- 13 Letter to Jack, October 23, c.1929.
- 14 Letter to Jack, January 3, 1930.
- 15 Letter to Jack, Monday, January 27, 1930. Janice changed her name at the suggestion of William Zorach (Lithuanian-born American Abstract Sculptor, 1887-1966).
- 16 Ford, *New York is Not America*, New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927, p.161.
- 17 Letter to Jack, Monday, April 28, 1930.

- 18 Postcard to Jack, July 2, 1930 (Postmarked Ballancourt Seine et Oise to Jack Tworkov / Provincetown, Mass).
- 19 Letter to Jack, August 11, 1930. Ford's sister Juliet married the Russian émigré David Soskice. He was Jewish, but not religious. It is round this grain of truth that the story must have accumulated. Ford most likely concocted this story as something for Biala to write home about in efforts toward alleviating the distress her announcement may cause her family. The rabbi brother-in-law was one of the self-inventions for which Ford was famous. The 'volume of a history of the last fifty years' Biala refers to is *A History of Our Own Times*, which wasn't published until fifty years after Ford's death and with the encouragement of Janice Biala; ed. Solon Beinfeld and Sondra J. Stang, Manchester: Carcanet Press; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988. Biala meets Helena Rubinstein (b. Chaja Rubinstein, December 25, 1870, 1871 or 1872, Kraków, Austria-Hungary (now Poland) – d. April 1, 1965, New York, USA), a Polish-American cosmetics industrialist, founder of Helena Rubinstein, Incorporated, which made her one of the world's richest women during her life time.
- 20 Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 – hereafter 'Saunders'; p. 371.
- 21 Arthur Mizener, *The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford*, New York: World, 1971 – hereafter 'Mizener'; p. 394.
- 22 Letter to Jack, April 25, 1933.
- 23 Letter to Arthur Mizener. October 3, 1968.
- 24 Letter to Ezra Pound. March 8, 1933, rpt. in *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Richard M. Ludwig, Princeton University Press, 1965 – henceforth *Letters*; p. 218.
- 25 Letter to Jack, August 18, 1932.
- 26 Letter to Theodore Dreiser, 27 February 1933, rpt. in *Letters* 217.
- 27 Letter to Jack, April 25, 1933.
- 28 Saunders 371.
- 29 Letter to Jack, Thursday, October 16, 1930.
- 30 Letter to Jack, September 26, 1930.
- 31 Letter to Jack, Thursday, October 16, 1930.
- 32 Letter to Jack, May 20, 1931.
- 33 Letter to Jack, Thursday, October 16, 1930.
- 34 *Return to Yesterday* was published on November 2, 1931.
- 35 Letter to Jack, November 30, 1931.
- 36 Letter to Jack, November 30, 1931.
- 37 Letter to Jack, May 20, 1931. Ford relates this experience regarding the admiral and the asphodel plant in *Provence. From Minstrels to the Machine*, New York: Lippincott, 1935, p. 228 (only in Ford's version the admiral drives 150 miles!): 'Or, for the matter of that, what would be the emotion of an English or American ex-naval officer of high rank on learning that he had let one of his houses to a "poet"? Yet, as I have elsewhere related, the first emotion of my landlord here in Provence when he had that news was to get into his car and drive a hundred and fifty miles to fetch me a root of asphodel. Because all poets must have in their gardens that fabulous herb...'. The 'mushmelon' or muskmelon grown in the garden is a cantaloupe or other moderate sized melon.
- 38 Letter to Jack, November 30, 1931.

- 39 Ford references this experience in *Provence*, p. 167: 'It is not two years since I was privileged to attend one of these occasions ... I owed the privilege not to the fact that I am *poète* but to my local reputation as a *chef* who can dispute as to the correct preparation of *bouillabaisse* through a whole afternoon and far into the evening. These rehearsals are kept rather secret and are held in the *calanques*, the inland arms of the sea between the wine-red cliffs of the promontory near Marseilles. So they can only be approached by water'.
- 40 *The Presence of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Sondra J. Stang, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981 – hereafter 'Stang'; p. 394.
- 41 Letter to Jack, December 22, 1966.
- 42 Stang 113.
- 43 Bernard J. Poli, *Ford Madox Ford and the 'Transatlantic Review'*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1967, p. 144.
- 44 Letter to Jack, August 17, 1931.
- 45 Mary Ellen Abell, *Edwin Dickinson in Provincetown: 1912-1937*, exhibition catalogue, Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 2007 – hereafter 'Abell'; p. 49.
- 46 Abell 18.
- 47 Letter to Jack, August 17, 1931.
- 48 Letter to Jack, November 30, 1931. The location of this painting is unknown, however sketches for this painting remain in the Estate of Janice Biala.
- 49 Letter to Jack, May 27, 1936.
- 50 Letter to Jack, September 26, 1930.
- 51 Letter to Jack, January 15, 1932 ('I'm exhibiting in several places but my things seem very dull to me. I've been doing my best getting 'on the make' in the hope of selling something so as to send it home, but every body is too broke and I feel too blue. It's a humiliating job anyway').
- 52 The four works exhibited by Biala were titled: *Le rocher*, *Nature morte*, *Tête verte*, and *Couleur de rose*.
- 53 Ruth Green Harris, 'Les Americains in Paris'. *The New York Times*, February 28, 1932.
- 54 Letter to Jack, April 9, 1932.
- 55 Ford to Crankshaw, n.d. [but c.17-21 Mar. 1938]. The painting bought for the Jeu de Paume was *Battle of Chancellorsville* (Biala's *curriculum vitae*: Olivet). See Saunders 517.
- 56 Saunders 628-9.
- 57 Noel Savage, 'An Admirer's View of Provence' *The New York Times*, March 24, 1935.
- 58 'Paintings of Provence by Biala', Georgette Passedoit Gallery, New York, NY, April 25-May 9, 1935.
- 59 Peter Monro Jack, 'The World and Ford Madox Ford', *The New York Times Book Review*, February 21, 1937. (Incidentally, Caroline Gordon's civil war novel *None Shall Look Back*, is reviewed in the same issue).
- 60 Reid Anderson, *Glasgow Herald*, February 1937.
- 61 'Paintings and Drawings by Biala', Georgette Passedoit Gallery, New York, NY, February 23-March 13, 1937.
- 62 M. D. 'Biala: A Gay Tapestry'. *Art News*, March 13, 1937.

- 63 Janice Biala, 'A talk about painting delivered to the colony club Detroit', October 29, 1937. The notes on the lecture are in the archives of the Estate of Janice Biala.
- 64 Stang 222.
- 65 Editorial Note to *Portraits of Cities*, in *Ford Madox Ford and The City*, ed. Sara Haslam, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005, p. 211.
- 66 Stang 16.
- 67 Letter to Jack & Wally. June 20, 1939.
- 68 Rachel 'Wally' Wolodofsky Tworokov (1917-1991) married Jack Tworokov in 1935. She was a secretary to Ford during his time in Clarksville, TN, and instrumental in transcribing *The March of Literature*, later published by the Dial Press in 1938.
- 69 Letter to Jack & Wally. June 30, 1939.
- 70 'Fleuve Profond: Nuitée à l'Americaine', reprinted in Ford Madox Ford, *Buckshee: Last Poems*, Cambridge: Pym-Randall Press, 1966, p. 5.
- 71 Letter to Julie. June 27, 1939.
- 72 Letter to Jack & Wally. June 30, 1939.
- 73 Stang 197-8.
- 74 Biala did return to France. In New York City, 1940, she met Daniel 'Alain' Brustlein, an acclaimed cartoonist for the *New Yorker*, who was born in the Alsatian town of Mulhouse, France. She married Alain on July 11, 1942. In 1947, Biala returned to Paris visiting all the places she loved and missing all the people she lost. The couple would divide their time between Paris and New York until Alain's death in 1996. On September 24, 2000 Biala died in their house in Paris she was 97.