PARIS *FLUCTUAT*… FORD MADOX FORD'S URBAN PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY

Georges Letissier

Abstract
Though he was born in London, Ford reported that he would never regard that city as his own and dismissed the idea of having come '*back* to London' when he did return, as if the English metropolis knew not him. Paris was linked to the ebb and flow of Ford's affects and emotions and to his artistic ventures. The ups and downs of the writer's mindscape inscribe the persistence of the Parisian city in the essays. Working from the premises of psychogeography, from Guy Debord to Will Self, this chapter investigates Ford's Paris as an impressionist cityscape. Indeed, if the geography of Paris remains the same, the mental images change and Ford shows how impressions from childhood are superimposed on the adult's, with the Left Bank consistently standing for a whole continent. Invariants do persist across the years, such as the subjective image of the impassable cleft separating the Left Bank from the Quartier de l'Étoile, like two brain hemispheres. In the last resort, Paris is lived as a text, or palimpsest, affording a thorough artistic experience. Therefore this chapter attempts to read Ford's Paris through a kaleidoscope of his writings: *Between St. Dennis and St. George*, *A Mirror to France* and *It Was the Nightingale*, to show that the sense of space is deeply influenced by History in the troubled inter-war period.

The Latin verb *fluctuat* triggers a constellation of meanings relating to Ford Madox Ford in various ways. The metonymic association with sea-crossing immediately springs to mind and, with it, the silhouette of the author landing at Cherbourg on returning from New York to collect funds for the *transatlantic review*. Besides, the undulating movement of choppy seas emblematises the fate of the review, as documented by Bernard J. Poli,[1] which encapsulates on a reduced scale and within a much shorter time span Ford's own destiny, marked by turns of fortune, alternations between periods of depression – probably originating in low self-esteem – and moments of exhilaration entailed by the prospect of new literary ventures.

The harsh judgments of a highly respected father taunting his son by referring to him as 'the patient but extremely stupid donkey'[2] may at least partly account for the writer's suicidal impulses, when he conveyed his innermost emotions through the persona of a character who felt 'naked beneath the pitiless stars'.[3] By contrast, when the time

had come to launch the *transatlantic review*, the emotional low tide yielded to sheer enthusiasm when Ford became convinced that war destructiveness was about to be defeated by the energy of the collective, creative *Zeitgeist*:

> All this clamorous life seemed to call for its organ.… […] It was not merely Paris that was alive to the Arts: it was the whole world. […] It was the real reaction from the war; the artist making the claim for glory as against the glory of the warrior. Mars was to be disgruntled.[4]

Ford was writing from the crest of a wave of artistic creativity which he meant to encourage.

Fluctuat is of course the first word of the Paris motto inscribed on the city's coat of arms. Ford evinced a marked interest in cities' emblems as metonymic condensation for everything a city stood for at the sensorial and emotional level. Speaking about Avignon in *Between St. Dennis and St. George*, he alludes to the wind element as a fit symbol for the papal city:

> The emblem indeed of the proud city of Avignon is a medieval head with wild hair blown straight back from the forehead and face, since Avignon is the city of the mistral.[5]

Paradoxically for a landlocked city, Paris, or rather *Lutetia*, is associated with the water element since the blazon features a ship tossing on rough seas. This stems from the fact that it was the river Seine boatmen's corporation that had ruled the city's trade since Roman times. There is actually an analogical link between the image perennially attached to the city: *fluctuare* and the writer's own plight. This could be illustrated through an anecdote that is an allegory of the writer's predicament. In *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* Ford relates how his close friend evoked the solitude of the man of letters:

> You write and write, Conrad said, and no one understands, either what you're trying to say or how much blood and sweat you have put into the work. It's as if *you had rowed about* all your life in a huge river in dense fog. *You row* endlessly without ever seeing a signal light on the invisible banks to indicate whether *you're going upstream or drifting with the current*.[6]

Writing is *fluctuare*, either floating with a set purpose or drifting.

Fluctuare may also express a particular way of subjectively responding to outer stimuli: lines, colours, movements impressing on the retina an image that is not fixed but vacillating. Much has been written

on impressionism and it might be worth noting that metaphors of liquidity are often used to call up the specificities of a mode of perception blurring the demarcating lines between inner consciousness and outer phenomena:

> In addition to the permutations of limited points of view, one of the primary characteristics of much impressionist work is that distinctions and boundaries between subject and object or between an object and another are fluid as an observer perceives an object in the context of a seamless flow of experience.[7]

From *fluctuare* to *fluere* (to flow) stretches the whole continuum between artistic experience and aesthetic reception.

Paris features little in Ford's novels, beyond passing allusions, such as to Tietjens's wedding in Paris,[8] so it is necessary to turn to what some would call the author's lesser writings to see how the French capital is pictured. As a matter of fact, Ford does not endorse the traditional hierarchy between fiction as the highest expression of creative talent as opposed to the more pedestrian essay-writing and journalism: 'You should never say to a novelist that you prefer his "serious" writings to his fiction, though I find that such few novelist friends as I have always say that to me' (*IWN* 25). No easy dichotomy can indeed be drawn between creative imagination and autobiography where Ford is concerned. A perfect illustration of this fluctuating perception tugged between the 'here and now' and the 'there and then', which has been tagged as 'time-shifts' in the case of fiction-writing, is not difficult to find in *It Was the Nightingale*. It is hardly worth recalling, for a start, that the whole train of recollections is reassembled from a present affording a privileged vista over a sea which Ford favoured over all the others: 'I nearly always write in my dressing gown and slippers. I am doing it at this moment – in a room that looks over the Mediterranean.…' (*IWN* 139). Thomas C. Moser shows how the view of the sea, however distant on the horizon, is liable to provide a form of relief to the agoraphobic Ford: 'no landscape is restful […] unless the horizon is somewhere broken into by the line of the sea'.[9] 'Broken into' is the key expression given that the sea line is most likely to be undulating.

In Chapter One of *It Was the Nightingale*, it is from within this fluctuating frame that Ford reminisces about a single event that soon divides itself up into a twin one. The binary rhetoric of the extract reflects the wave-like motion of a mental image that fails to stabilise into a distinct, well-fixed recollection. It all starts with a factual, seemingly objective remark: 'The last time I saw him was on the quai Malaquais'

(*IWN* 19). Ford remembers seeing the Anglo-Irish novelist George Moore loitering somewhere between the Pont des Arts and the Pont du Carrousel near the bookstall holders (*les bouquinistes*): 'before the old books, under the grey benches of the plane trees, above the grey Seine' (*IWN* 19). The precision of the remembrance, isolated from the stream of shifting memories, soon gives way to a nearly spectral vision: 'His pale eyes were unseeing in his paler face' (*IWN* 19). 'Pale eyes' is of course an odd combination so that the initial realism of the recollection is soon dispelled. Moreover, the pale/paler polyptoton seems to erase George Moore's image almost at the same moment as it calls it up, a fact which is borne out by the proximity between 'I saw' and 'his eyes were unseeing'. So the boundary line between the perceiving subject and the perceived object becomes flimsy since both are involved in an act of perception which finds itself denied just as it is mentioned. Indeed, it clearly transpires that Ford is in the process of losing track of this visual trace that keeps receding further and further. The pendulum movement of the wavering image is rendered through assonances: 'quai'/'Malaquais', and the near homophone 'seen'/'Seine'. The duality involved in the tension between presence and absence, through the waning recollection of a man on the brink of death, is redoubled by the allusion to another death superimposed on the former. Indeed Ford, from the peace and quiet of his Provence abode, is simultaneously recalling the very circumstances in which he had been apprised of another death, that of his friend John Galsworthy, from a newspaper headline. One death was to follow hard on the heels of another, as only the week before George Moore had passed away.

The whole passage is therefore caught up in a fluctuating movement between flashes of memory, summoning up two antithetical figures who were both to some extent Ford's tutelary literary figures. Memory does not fix itself on either one or the other but swings to and fro between one and the other and the text is, as it were, lexically and stylistically saturated by this mnemonic flux and reflux. To set the scene of this gloomy late January evening, Ford chooses to translate word for word the typically French expression 'between dog and wolf', meaning at nightfall, but no sooner are the words introduced than they take on another meaning, as if they were caught in a semantic vortex.[10] Indeed, Galsworthy is the dog, metonymically because he owned a black spaniel, but also metaphorically on account of his obstinacy or doggedness. Moore, for his part, is the wolf, because he is as fast and lonesome as Galsworthy is painstaking and sociable. So, the sense of place is seminal

for Ford and, in his mental recollection of this late wintry evening in a Parisian café, the printed letters on the newssheet announcing Galsworthy's demise soon shift on to the sea-like Kentish countryside which the writer of *The Forsyte Saga* had cherished: 'dull green hop-lands rolling away under the mists of the English North Downs' (*IWN* 18). And, eventually, in a see-saw, syntactic movement calling up the waves through hypotyposis, Moore and Galsworthy succeed each other in the ebb and flow of Ford's recollection: 'Sexagenarian greynesses [standing for the books Moore had beheld on the stalls from Quai Malaquais] as, when I saw the news of the other death, my eyes rested on thirty-year-old Kentish greennesses' (*IWN* 19). The chiasmic balance between the odd plural forms, greynesses/greennesses, points to the fusion between the two memories before they fragment into many colour shards as may be seen on a mottled sea.

Ford's impressionist vision of Paris is, as has been briefly suggested, emblematized by the first word inscribed on the city's device: *fluctuat*, which the prolific writer was subsequently to use, together with a sailing ship, as a crest for the *transatlantic review* in 1924. So the fates of the city and of the review that was born in it and could only have been born in it, because Paris was the capital of artistic creation, as Ford insisted, were jointly sealed:

> The *transatlantic review* arose almost accidentally, though I have said that when I had been passing through Paris on my way to the Riviera an idea had passed through my mind. It was a vague sense rather than an idea.… It seemed to me that it would be a good thing if someone would start a centre for the more modern and youthful of the art movements with which in 1923 the city, like an immense seething cauldron, bubbled and overflowed. (*IWN* 248)

This suggests the tight bond between on the one hand literature and art and, on the other, place, both being so closely bound up that Ford repeatedly expressed his experience of the city by using the very narrative tools that he had purportedly designed for his fiction, and conversely more often than not perceived the city through the lens of textual memory. So Ford's Paris, a hotbed of intense artistic creativity and the founding site of a review largely dedicated to literary productions in all its guises, is a textual palimpsest. In a number of different pieces, the writer worked out what amounts to an epistemological compromise between essay writing, autobiographical records and geography. Ford himself was perfectly conscious of the potential hybridity of his writings, when for instance in *It Was the Nightingale* he claims that he 'was not

completely unaware of Paris's geography' (*IWN* 191). What he means through this statement is that he was alive to the feuds and conflicts of interest between rival reviews in the Parisian context: *Mercure de France*, *Nouvelle Revue Française* and all those who, like André Gide, had their own axes to grind. However, since only a few lines before, he had also evoked the hill Montparnasse through the lines of Livy or Cicero, this urban geography may also be construed as a treasure trove of textual gems: 'the slopes of Mount Parnassus, which is one of the Seven Hills of Paris' (*IWN* 181). In any case, this is the projection of a man's personal culture onto the Parisian urbanscape.

Even if the term psychogeography may seem slightly anachronistic when dealing with Ford, as is shown below, the very idea of intercrossing radically different approaches such as human geography and a phenomenological, subjective relation to a historicised space is perfectly in line with the author's versatile cast of mind. Indeed, some of the associations he claimed for himself might have appeared as maverick to some of his contemporaries. Didn't he praise the merits of part-writing, part market-gardening in *It Was the Nightingale*? In order to apprehend Ford's multifaceted take on Paris, this chapter will offer a brief review of the tenets of psychogeography before turning to Ford's diachronic outlook on Paris.

Ford and Psychogeography

Psychogeography is an intricate appellation that can be envisioned from either the French cultural background or the English one. Prior to applying the notion to Ford it is probably safe to set out the premises of this interdisciplinary field of study. The term 'psychogeography' derives from the Lettrist and Situationist internationals from the late 1950s and 1960s. The word originally had a certain anti-establishment ring to it which is of course sharply at odds with both Ford's Tory political leaning and his conversion to Roman Catholicism on 7 November 1892 (Moser 8). It emanates from the Parisian post-war neo-Marxist avant-garde and was glossed by Guy Debord, one of its champions, as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'.[11] This idea of emotional response ties in harmoniously with Ford, unlike the political agenda that the French Situationists also hastened to propound in their eagerness to usher in radical transformations to the city environment. As Debord remarked: 'from any standpoint other than that of police control, Haussmann's Paris is a city

built by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' (ICUG 6). In actual fact, Ford could not agree more, even if he did not go as far as to contemplate razing it to the ground and, admittedly, with the English writer the diatribe is less vitriolic than in the case of the Gallic philosopher. 'I detest the Quartier de l'Étoile […] I dislike all the boulevards built by Hausmann and his imitators' (*IWN* 232) asserted Ford, although he had no intention whatever to set forth new plans for a renewed urban programme.

On the other side of the Channel, psychogeography already has a fairly long history of its own, given that it emerged some ten years after its French counterpart and the least that can be said is that it is still very active. Will Self, the English novelist, has published for years now a column in *The Independent*, and in 2007, he released in book form a selection of these articles illustrated by the cartoonist Ralph Steadman. According to Self, psychogeography is linked to the physical activity of walking, in an age when the geographic contact with space has been somehow lost, due to an unprecedented proliferation of faster and faster means of communication. As Self explains, walking 'blows back the years, especially in urban contexts. The solitary walker is, himself, an insurgent against the contemporary world, an ambulatory time traveller'.[12]

Walking features prominently in Ford's exploration of Paris and needs to be investigated as lying somewhere between Benjaminesque ludic *flânerie* and the kind of spatio-temporal liberation induced by 'dérive' or 'drifting', as theorized by Debord. The close connection between geography and literature has been manifest ever since the term 'psychogeography' was first introduced in Britain. Indeed, it was used specifically in relation to London writers like Peter Ackroyd, Michael Moorcock or Ian Sinclair, who by excavating the city's hidden past and investigating its more cryptic aspects, cultivated a form of urban mysticism. Ackroyd quotes Ford's *The Soul of London* in his *London: The Biography* to underscore the tentacular presence of the London underground on the collective imaginary of true Londoners.[13] Even if the author of *The Good Soldier* lived a few decades before the inception of what became known as psychogeography, there is no doubt that he belongs in some way to a lineage of literary walkers, including among others Daniel Defoe, Thomas de Quincey or Arthur Machen.

How a typically Fordian take on Paris, bearing the mark of the writer's own idiosyncratic impressionism, might derive from such perambulating, is an issue that needs exploring. Four points will now be considered in turn; first it will be shown that Ford's vision of the French

capital is inflected by the passage of time, so that he may be regarded as an 'ambulatory time traveller' to take up Self's previous remark. Then Ford's Paris is perceived through a kaleidoscopic montage of other metropolises like New York and London, as will be argued in a second part. A third will focus more specifically on literary Paris whilst a few concluding remarks will be dedicated to the trope of the mirror with a view to initiating some reflections on Ford's urban aesthetics.

Plays on Temporal and Spatial Perspectives

Ford's preface to Jean Rhys's *The Left Bank and Other Stories*[14] is a long meandering text in which Paris is hardly the point; the crux of the matter is the writer's celebration of Rhys's innate instinct for form and her commitment to rendering passion in a context of darkness and degradation. For all the exceptional gifts which Ford recognises in this young, rather inexperienced writer, he nonetheless points to what could be a weakness in a less talented author: the total absence of a sense of place. In a delicate manner, he condones this negligence which is nothing compared to Rhys's talents but insists, however, on the fact that publishers and readers do expect topographical data. So the preface opens on a long, nearly incidental development on Paris which may be taken as an instance of urban pyschogeography.

The lineal, peripatetic journey anticipates what the French writer Julien Gracq does with the city of Nantes in *The Shape of a City*.[15] The expression 'the shape of a city', quoted in the book's epigraph, comes from Baudelaire's 'The Swan' and refers to Paris: 'The shape of a city, as we all know, changes more quickly than the mortal heart':

> *Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel.*
> *Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville*
> *Change plus vite hélas! Que le cœur d'un mortel);*
>
> As I was crossing the new Carrousel.
> – Old Paris is no more (cities renew,
> Quicker than human hearts, their changing spell).[16]

The English translation elides the nominal reference to 'the shape of a city', but without losing anything of the mood of nostalgia that is conjured up. This affective and temporal perspective is present in Ford's preface to Rhys's collection of short stories. The evocation is indeed anchored in the writer's biography and filiation, and is suffused with his own emotions and sentiments. There are at least three perceptible

temporal strata: the first one corresponding to 1926, the time when the preface which is largely drawn from *A Mirror to France* was written; the second one which is steeped in childhood memories expressing mostly detestation for the Hausmannized Quartier de l'Étoile; and the third one delving deeper into a past that is merely touched upon. In the early nineties when Ford was barely twenty he used to visit a painter, a friend of his grandfather's, 'in the small village of studios that is next door to the Santé prison' (*Reader* 239), therefore in the vicinity of the Montparnasse area. The old artist had known the Latin Quarter in the days of Henry Murger, the author of *Scenes of Bohemia* which would be immortalized by Giaccomo Puccini's opera. This temporally distant Paris going back to the 1830s is only known to Ford by proxy, through stories whose actual contents are left tantalizingly pending. They nevertheless add their touch to the memory kaleidoscope of the Left Bank, which Ford as a boy recalled as projecting a yellow purplish haze.

Added to the time-shifts, preventing any freezing of Paris in a stable, mental image, the second striking feature is the compartmentalization of space into discrete areas rendered through separated paragraphs and self-contained narrative units. The antithesis between the Left Bank and the Right Bank is brought to the fore. In the former 'no winds have ever entered' (*Reader* 238), while the latter is said to be 'stony and infested with winds' (*Reader* 236); the coldness of the stately stone buildings of the financier quarter stands in sharp contrast with the patina covering the walls in the less affluent Left Bank district. Yet, beyond the close attention paid to minute details in a way reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelite painterly techniques, is Ford's skill in enlarging the perspective of his urban investigation, from locally confined observation to panoramic extension, from the anecdotal incident to the general rule of principle, and from deeply personal recollections to extrapolations of universal laws and so forth. Clearly, the dynamics of the whole preface which, despite the want of a plot, achieves some sort of suspense, stems from the unpredictable modification of stances adopted by Ford. To put it differently, the geography is shape-shifting and correlatively the mental image keeps changing.

The more pedestrian level, so to speak, is afforded by perambulating, a standard practice amongst psychogeographers. But, in a typically Fordian manner, walking is not concerned exclusively with the onward, linear progression of a single man recording his impressions along the way. It is confronted with an aporetic experience – aporetic in the etymological sense of an impassable passage – because, somehow,

the walker is hampered in his progress, so the action of walking is not completed. There are two reasons to account for this: first because Ford has come to realize from the Left Bank 'how minutely little one can know even of one street thickly inhabited by human beings' (*Reader* 237-8). Secondly, a walk from the Île St-Louis to the Observatoire provides one with the odd sensation, frequent in dreams though, of exerting oneself to the utmost of one's capacity to no avail: 'the impression of long walks with the legs feeling as if you dragged each step out of sands …' (*Reader* 238). Strikingly enough, Ford, like Charles Dickens, evokes the image of the desert to describe urban experience, Paris for the former and London for the Victorian novelist. The point of the parallel is radically different however. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the Holloway district is compared to 'a tract of Suburban Sahara'[17] because drought and the all-contaminating dust from the production of tiles and bricks connote the spiritual emptiness which Modernists like T. S. Eliot saw as signs of an encroaching wasteland. Ford, for his part, sees the Left Bank as 'a vast, sandy desert, like the Sahara' (*Reader* 237), not to underline its barrenness or spiritual void, but to suggest the opposite: that, owing to the proximity of the Sorbonne and the Beaux Arts, 'it is the region of Pure Thought and the Arts' (*Reader* 237). What he intends to do probably is to hoist up the Left Bank to the unreal, or surreal level of unfathomable wonder. Hence, the choice of inflated rhetoric with the mounting crescendo conveyed by means of anaphora: 'like the Sahara … but immense. More immense than the world of Europe, more immense than even Australia, which Australians tell me is the largest continent of the world' (*Reader* 237). Ford may jokingly repeat what sounds like an Australian's boast as he probably knows that Australia is the largest island but the smallest continent. The Australian the writer knew best was of course Stella Bowen, so this remark could be a passing acknowlegement of the Australian painter who shared his life whilst he was writing this foreword for his lover Jean Rhys's book.

Such elevation of a Parisian district to the magnitude of a whole continent is no mere literary fireworks. Ford's purpose is to endow the Parisian Left Bank with a universal dimension. 'The Rive Gauche is French' (*Reader* 237), granted, but from this factual geographic given, Ford extrapolates a whole theory of Left Bankism, as it were, from 'the Left Bank – to the Left Banks of the world' (*Reader* 243). In other words, a specific Parisian district becomes paradigmatic of city areas all around the world, given over to unruled, creative pursuits, usually related to art. Ford, whose admiration for Rhys at that time was not purely

intellectual, commends her attraction to the Left Banks the world over, by founding his argument on his immediate surroundings of a much beloved Parisian area with 'its gaols, its studios, its salons, its cafés, its criminals, its midinettes – with a bias of admiration for its midinettes and of sympathy for its law-breakers' (*Reader* 244). The description of the Paris Left Bank thus becomes an artistic manifesto surreptitiously denouncing a smug, bourgeois attitude towards creation: 'with its perennial bias towards satisfaction with things as they are' (*Reader* 244). To put it in a nutshell, Paris through its Left Bank comes to represent the epitome of what art should be about.

The cleft between the Left Bank and the Right Bank, which Ford compared to the Mappin Terraces, those artificial mounds erected in London Zoo to keep wild beasts at some safe distance from visitors, marks the unbridgeable gulf between internationalism and cosmopolitism. The Quartier de l'Étoile is plagued by the 'cosmopolitan-sordid, marble-begilded'[18] sort of veneer that threatens to reduce all the different cities in the world to a condition of lacklustre, nondescript sameness. Ford articulates what amounts to an ethical message on the new trend in urbanism. The message is all the more poignant as it originates in the city which he probably holds as the most unique. The onslaught against the Right Bank is indeed scathing as if it had somehow betrayed the ideal of a congenial lifestyle; the Hausmannized district of Paris is branded as 'never soft, […] never warm', worse still as 'incapable of mellowing like the wines they serve you in all the Hotels Splendides et des États-Unis of the Sleeping-car world […] incapable of supporting as the refrigerated meat that in those establishments you must eat' (*Reader* 236). This comospolitism is flavourless and stultifying and the harbinger of a bland global village. In sharp contrast, what marks off the Left Bank is its fruitful internationalism, summarized by the Latin phrase '*E Pluribus Multa*',[19] which Ford uses as epigraph to the third section of *It Was the Nightingale*. The seething, clamouring and roaring Rive Gauche: 'Paris gyrated, seethed, clamoured, roared with the Arts' (*IWN* 259) then suggests an image of Paris as a crossroads of multiple cultural influences which Ford values highly.

Kaleidoscopic Montage

Ford is a nomadic writer, often on his way to somewhere else. This sense of itinerancy is reflected in his fiction writing. *The Good Soldier* for example captures something of this urgency when Dowell confesses his impatience at missing trains and deplores the fact that '[t]he Belgian

State Railway has a trick of letting the French trains miss their connections at Brussels'.[20] Ford's representation of Paris is influenced by this constant habit of travelling. Paris is often on the way between two destinations: it is either time to drift through Provence northwards to Paris (*IWN* 225) or to get back to Paris before proceeding to Mr Belloc's county of Sussex (*IWN* 232). Even the idea for the *transatlantic review* seems to have sprung up almost by chance as Ford was only passing through Paris on his way to the Riviera. This image of transience and transitoriness to which Paris is invariably attached colours the vision of the French capital. Moreover, Paris is seldom perceived as isolated, but as caught in an interplay with images of London and New York, so that ultimately Ford propounds a kaleidoscopic montage of the modern metropolises of the twenties.

The First World War, or Armageddon, is a decisive chronological break in Ford's sense of urban temporality, and this applies equally to Paris and London. In *It Was the Nightingale* the writer insists on the devastating consequences of the air raids on London: 'the baptism of fire' (*IWN* 82). Such tragic events are bound to leave scars and, through his mental trick of connections, Ford establishes a parallel between, on the one hand, the flippant, frivolous comportment of Parisians before the siege of 1870-71 and their grimness immediately after and up to 1914, and on the other hand, the sadness that prevailed in London in the war and post-war period: 'War-time England had been like a lunatic asylum' (*IWN* 54). When he was demobbed in 1919, Ford thus returned to a London that he felt he no longer belonged to: 'When I went to London after that it would never be "back to London"' (*IWN* 64). The city's motto: '"*Domine dirige nos*…." – "Lord guide us"' (*IWN* 64) hardly made sense in an alienating urban environment prolonged by sprawling, meaningless suburbs. What the first section of *It Was the Nightingale* records could be probably construed as post-traumatic stress disorder, not because the writer expresses his own fears as a result of the temporary memory loss that he suffered after fighting in the trenches, but on account of the very narrative structure harping obsessively on the decision to leave London once and for all. Indeed, the experience of losing one's bearings in one's own city of birth appears to be just as harrowing as the one of risking one's life day in day out on the front line.

What would be analysed as *progression d'effet* in fiction writing – 'a narrative […] gathering momentum, as each word adds to the cumulative effect of the whole, and as each incident contributes to the inevitable outcome'[21] – is used in *It Was the Nightingale* to probe a

consciousness in the throes of working out a momentous decision: that of leaving London. The moment is first dramatized by the impossibility of fixing a date precisely: 'A few days later – or a few days before – for I am hazy as to this chronology […] Just after that earthquake, I paused with one foot off the kerb at the corner of the Campden Hill waterworks' (*IWN* 15), then, some fifty pages later, the same obsession recurs with a tentative effort to situate the episode in time, as if to mark a definitive change in the novelist's relation to the city: 'It was in that way I should still have written of this city of my birth until I stood on that kerb in Campden Hill, say on the 1st March, 1919….' (*IWN* 64). Finally, some twenty pages after, the same allusion to the momentous episode is reintroduced: 'But on that Campden Hill kerb that day […] many things were opened to me' (*IWN* 84) followed shortly after by the so-called *coup de canon*, a double-barrelled one to boot: '…. This then was the last of England, the last of London….' (*IWN* 86) and '… At any rate I saw, standing on that Campden Hill kerb, that as far as London was concerned there was nothing to do but to get out or go under!' (*IWN* 88). The urban topography is paramount, the epiphanic moment coming as it does, precisely as Ford is standing on a kerb and about to proceed to cross the street. What should have been a quick, spontaneous action is protracted over nearly seventy pages. The same technique of *progression d'effet* correlated with urban topography, again involving street crossing, occurs when Ford fortuitously encounters his younger brother Oliver in, of all places, a road refuge on the Boulevard Saint Michel (*IWN* 248-9, 255, 259). The punctilious details of urban locale, superimposing London and Paris – a kerb in London Campden Hill and a traffic refuge on the Boulevard Saint Michel – act as momentous triggers in Ford's psyche.

Paris, London and New York overlap in Ford's psychogeography, as if the writer himself were the perfect example of the *homo duplex* which he describes in the following terms: 'a poor fellow whose body is tied in one place, but whose mind and personality brood eternally over another distant locality' (*IWN* 197). Ford, indeed, sees New York through the lens of Paris, and Paris whilst roaming in London. London is constantly offered to exploration, as is clear from *The Soul of London*, whereas it is possible to keep a bird's eye view of Paris as it is neatly divided up in well-demarcated *arrondissements*. New York is not America because she is the negation of nationality and the expression of an ideal vaster and more humane than the country of George Washington as a whole could ever stand for. Conversely, Paris is infinitely more French than much of France (*IWN* 197). So, in his writings on Paris,

Ford evinces this capacity for duplicate cerebration which Ford said the *New York Times* spotted in his novels and praised him for (*IWN* 143). Thus whilst reflecting that Paris frightens a little and that London saddens him immensely, Ford may find himself fancying that he is crossing Sheridan Square. This superimposition of coterminous urban experiences calls up an effect of intensification and entitles Ford to the status of modern expatriate.

Subterranean Work and Volcanic Eruption

Ford tends to idealise the natural propensity of the French to turn to literature, going as far as to speak of an unparalleled intimacy. It is especially striking that a whole chapter dedicated to the English novel should be headed 'Towards Flaubert'.[22] In establishing a distinction between the 'nuvvle' telling stories 'more or less rattling in which the characters were as sharply differentiated into sheep and goats'[23] and the novel of aloofness with its Flaubertian pursuit of the *mot juste*, Ford tipped the scale in favour of the French style, to the detriment of Anglo-Saxondom. The fact that the English author's relation with Paris is closely linked with the destiny of a review, the *transatlantic review*, is evidenced by the common motto between the city and the twelve-number publication. The context is crucial to understand the interrelationship between history, place and art. On the French literary scene, the early 1920s were characterized by impassioned Gallic feuds. In *It Was the Nightingale* Ford mentions Proust's demise in November 1922 as casting a pall of grief on the Parisian population. He somehow dramatizes the picture by claiming that the whole city was in mourning, that every taxi driver on being hailed by someone dressed in black would immediately take the darkly-attired person to the place where the great man, namely Marcel Proust, lay in state. Then Ford embarks on a panegyric of the French novelist, which is perhaps slightly over the top at this stage, as it was not before Proust's death that his works reached a comparative degree of fame. The lyrical flight warrants attention in its own right however, because it establishes an interesting parallel between psychogeography and literary reception. In a subtle way, Ford suggests that Proust may still not have enjoyed any large scale celebrity but that he was nevertheless a major literary figure, whom one had to reckon with. To convey this paradox, he places on a military pedestal the valetudinarian man of letters, who was not even drafted on account of his poor health, by calling him the 'Unknown Soldier of the literature of the decade' (*IWN* 179). The gist of the argument is to draw an analogy

between the obscure, solitary task of the writer and the equally strenuous exertions of the anonymous French people who, unbeknownst to all, contributed to the victory over the Prussians. The terms used are 'subterranean' and 'subterraneously':

> the country had a sense of the subterranean and ignored strivings of that steadfast personality [Proust's] […] indeed, he had been the personification of the obscure beings who, working subterraneously with small spades in hidden tunnels, had saved France for the world. (*IWN* 179)

Not only is the connection between pen and spade, which Ford as a gardener praises, clearly stated but literary fame is called up through geographic metaphors of mining and excavation and underground exploration. Incidentally, the spatial slant is worth noting in a writer who was liable to think literary history in terms of geo-cultural areas of influences by pointing to the 'Nordic-Mediterranean contest' in *The March of Literature* for instance.[24]

To dramatise the French literary scene, framing the publication of the *transatlantic review*, Ford does not hesitate to evoke Proust's death simultaneously with Anatole France's, though a two-year gap actually separates the two: November 1922 and October 1924.[25] The decision to create proximity between the two events is in keeping with Ford's dual turn of mind but it also serves to heighten historical tension: 'At the same time Paris was preparing the paroxysm of hatred that attended the hideously stage-managed last hours of Anatole France' (*IWN* 178). The enforced parallel both sets up the volatile context and adumbrates the destiny of the *transatlantic review* that was fated to be tugged apart between the young and the so-called conservatives. In his study, Bernard J. Poli points out that Ford was to be accused of holding a reactionary position in the highly polemical context of Anatole France's death (Poli 127). In fact, it is astonishing to realize how dependent on the French (that is, to a large extent, the Parisian) cultural context the destiny of the review proved to be. Even if lack of funding eventually tolled the knell for the publication, the rift between a younger generation of French intellectuals close to the Surrealists and a former generation willing to preserve the legacy of highly respected figures percolated through the Anglo-French American review. It all culminated with the publication of *Le Cadavre* (not the exquisite cadaver) but the rotten corpse, a deliberately provocative and most outrageous firebrand, which sent shock waves through French public opinion. When obituary columns in newspapers, ranging from the right-wing *Le Figaro* to the left-wing

L'Humanité, unanimously extolled the memory of Anatole France, a collective manifesto signed jointly by all the members of the surrealist group, among whom were Paul Éluard and Philippe Soupault, who had both collaborated to the *transatlantic review*, drew an obnoxious portrait of Anatole France, posthumously accusing him of having been no more nor less than a fraud. It started with the blunt assertion that France was a plain, ordinary man, before charges of scepticism, irony and even cowardice were levelled at him. It was wondered whether there might not be a link to be found between 'France', the patronym, and vestigial traces of conservatism that sometimes passed for the 'French' spirit. André Breton provokingly issued a refusal to grant a proper burial certificate and went on by rejoicing over the fact the year 1924 had seen Loti, Barrès and France die, respectively the moron, the traitor and the cop. And to top it all, Breton brazenly asked the question: have you ever slapped a dead man's face?

All these events are reported in *It Was the Nightingale*, but in *A Mirror to France* published in 1926, Ford had already written about this spate of incidents which is symptomatic of a country whose cultural life, centred as it is on one single metropolis, happens to be riven by aesthetic and political differences. Some of the vitriolic power of the Surrealists' devastating attack is palpable through Ford's words:

> Anatole France, going to his grave with Republican honours, was to the Young a hideous figure; the honours bestowed upon him a menace for the world. He stood for scepticism such as was born in tranquil and be-statued gardens a little before the French Revolution; but he stood also for laziness, for indifference, for, even, wealth! […] He represented a school of French thought that we, the outside world, consider to stand for France, but that is now, if not gone for ever, at any rate submerged beneath desperate waves. (*MF* 97-8)

Gallia mergitur, Anatole France's death was the pretext to engulf a certain France. Under these circumstances, Ford could only steer a conciliatory course by praising the lionized author of the Third Republic who was now mercilessly reviled. He indeed praised the late writer's stylistic merits but without antagonising the talented, albeit pressing, members of the young, who made no secret of their attraction to the iconoclasm of the nascent Surrealist movement (Poli 123). Indeed, the absence of any outstanding literary figures on the French literary scene left room for creative impulses, unhindered by towering tutelary authors: 'The level of literature and the Arts is in France always amazingly high, though from time to time there will be no great outstanding figure. That

was the case in the days of the *transatlantic review*' (*IWN* 315). Unfortunately it was already too late for the *transatlantic review*: '"Nec mergitur"–"and it does not sink." … It was not to be' (*IWN* 237).

Loose, Slippery Geographies: Mirroring and Space Shifting

The trope of the mirror is seminal in Ford's writings and provides an objective correlative to the subtly nuanced theory of impressionism. In this sense, the mirror would be to Ford what the window is to Henry James in the House of Fiction.[26] The first pages of *A Mirror to France* set out the premises of what Ford defines as 'the purest, the most will-less impressionism' (*MF* 18) in his rendering of France, and by the same token of Paris. By endorsing the function of a mirror, the writer first bestows encomiums on a country, this is the meaning of '*Mirror to* rather than *of France*' (*MF* 7). He also allows for the many variations and sometimes major differences that mirrors of all shapes and conditions may reflect. In other words, the same geographic reality can be projected with significant alterations according to the state of the mirror. Specular reflections proffer different images of the same, seemingly objective outer data. Ford then proposes to efface himself, to get back into his box, as he puts it humorously, whilst adding that this authorial absence will by no means entail a stable, transitive and utterly objectified counterpart for the real. Indeed, the surrender of the author's willpower to the mirror is bound to bring to the fore the sheer diversity and ever fluctuating shapes of reflected images apparently taking a life of their own on a looking glass 'as will-less, really as any rolled surface of quicksilver, as true and no doubt, as misleading' (*MF* 9). This is the quicksilver, in other words the fickle and wavering, image of Paris which the eponymous mirror reflects.

Shifting mirroring effects first result from the reintroduction of nearly the same text, with minor inflections, from one work to another. Thus the wreaths of immortelles laid at the foot of the Statue of Strasbourg on the square of the Concorde are first evoked in *Between St. Dennis and St. George*, published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1915 to reappear in the introductory section of *A Mirror to France* in 1926, which incidentally also bears the title "Between St Dennis and St George".[27] From the version written in war time to its post-war revision the mirrored image undergoes variations. Likewise the Left Bank preface to Rhys's collection of short stories in 1927 is not strictly identical with the chapter bearing the same title in *A Mirror to France*; the former is meant to be read as part of a literary essay paying homage to a young,

promising novelist and the latter as an ethno-methodological inquiry probing into the unwritten codes that pertain to social relationships, here with the French.

As L. L. Farrar Jr. convincingly argues, although *Between St. Dennis and St. George* may be seen plainly as a piece of wartime propaganda it nevertheless 'take[s] us to the origins of [Ford's] fiction and seem[s] to support the contention that the artist reveals himself in his lesser as in his greater works'.[28] In his reflection on Germany, France and England, Ford does not merely gather up documentation; his remarks are of course founded on historical sources – *Quellen*; but it is through the writer's individual mental camera that the psychology of each individual country is reconstructed. Thus, collating two versions of Ford's childhood memories of the wreaths of immortelles ends up producing the same effect as the plates of composite photographs. The 1915 text is overly praising French military efforts and evincing confidence in the possibility of winning over the enemy: 'The most militant concrete phenomenon that has ever moved me in France was the brown, faded and rustling wreaths of immortelles […] There are of course, other atmospheres of other militarisms that one may recapture from place to place all over France' (*BSDSG* 19). The 1926 version is, to all intents and purposes, imbued with a lingering sense of nostalgia:

> Before that the most concrete military phenomenon that ever moved me in France – for actual warfare had in it so little of the military and the pompous! – was the brown, fading and rustling wreaths of immortelles crepitating in the chilly winds round the statue of Strasbourg in the Place de la Concorde [….] There are of course other atmospheres of other militarisms that the boyish mind could recapture from place to place all over France to-day even. (*MF* 22)

The truth of the impression has to be negotiated in the shift between two reflections held by two temporally distant mirrors. It lies in the gap between the child's perceiving eye and the adult's mind's eye. The persistent image fixed on the retina is that of the well-named immortelle, as if the colour imprint had not faded long after the flower had wilted. But the pictorial *image fixe*, by punning on *idée fixe*, is framed in a totally different mindset in the piece of propaganda and in the travel essay. So, eventually what remains is a mental picture of Paris which is submitted to mood swings. The 'bluish and […] silvery pin-pricks' (*MF* 8), which Ford mentions on the surface of a looking glass as potentially interfering with the reflected image would be here the state of mind of the author, passively recording: 'will-less […] as any rolled

surface of quicksilver' (*MF* 9), however from within the frame of a subjectively inflected mindscape.

The mercurial picture of Paris that emerges from Ford's œuvre is therefore the result of successive reappraisals and revisions on the author's part. There are, to quote another example, marked variations between 'Rive Gauche' and 'The Left Bank Again', two successive chapters from *A Mirror to France*, both evidently referring to the same quarter but through a different lens. The first one is permeated by the flavour of bohemianism, conjured up through the list of names of callings and trades, sometimes in French like the chapter's title. Within roughly a square mile there may be found the buzz of friendly conversations in a tight-knit community living on the margin of the impersonal Right Bank, and possibly of modern economy, as in a rural village. In this respect, the Rive Gauche may be seen as epitomizing all that is identified as typically French:

> For you get here, concentrated, the efficiency, the personal dignity, the regard for the *métier*, the seriousness, the frugality and the *terre à terre*, cheerful, usable philosophy that account for the fact that only in France can a Paris of the Other side be a very extended affair. (*MF* 69)

In this area the gulf between the poor and the less poor is somehow unacknowledged and the only potential source of misunderstanding is linguistic, such as when a French person proficient in English translates 'good enough' by 'shabby genteel', a gross misapprehension as Ford subsequently argues at some length (*MF* 81-2). The second part of the diptych dedicated to the Left Bank in *A Mirror to France* is dystopian in sharp contrast with the first. The possibility that there might some bitterness in Ford's return to a much beloved place, crystallising all that he had idealized previously, cannot be dismissed totally; there is the mark of this world weariness or *Weltschmerz* expressed in the adverb again: 'The Left Bank Again'.

Still in the revised version is there the same admiration for the French people's passion for art and culture, for what was designated as 'the region of Pure Thought and of the Arts!' (*MF* 63) in the previous twin chapter. Yet a prevailing mood of doom and gloom has set in. Now the booksellers' rows on the bank of the Seine look morbid as if thought were wrapped up in a shroud in a bibliophilic grave (*MF* 92). The writer's judgments have now become harsh, and the 'Jeunes', who had been treated with a certain paternal understanding before, now take the flak from his criticism:

> there is no strong current amongst the French young of to-day and, were I to have to put a name to any French movement that at all predominated amongst the Jeunes of the Latin Quarter, I just could not […] I can perceive no general direction in it all. (*MF* 96-7)

Even Montparnasse is shown to have lost its former convivial atmosphere and the warmth, and celebratory ambience that once reigned, has given way to 'inexpressive saturnalia with an ever present under-current of hatred' (*MF* 108). Worse still, in his diagnosis of what has become of Montparnasse, Ford is led to register all the early symptoms of the plague of modern tourism, including the foreigners' quest for the cheapest, loose morals while abroad, and the dishonesty of waiters always ready to swindle and of tight-fisted hotel-keepers always on the look-out for easy prey. The genuine sense of internationalism that had been the hallmark of the quarter has been replaced by clannish groups of foreigners teaming up according to their nationality. In this Babel of modern times, foreigners are looked down on by the local denizens: 'We are the invaders' (*MF* 109). And, as is almost invariably the case, some make themselves heard more than others: 'You have cafés full of Swedes, Finns, Letts, Danes, Polish and Russian refugees, amidst whom the Americans make so much noise that you would imagine the whole population came from New York or the Middle West' (*MF* 107). So much for cultural diversity! In this general linguistic rivalry, the self-withdrawing British cut a pitiful figure: 'the numerically preponderant English are so nationally glum and taciturn that you would think there were none there' (*MF* 107).

Conclusion

Ford's psychogeography is coloured with his impressionism: it is steeped in a subjective vision oscillating between changing frames of mind. In a self-penetrating assessment of his skills, the author finds the very words to account for this deeply personal stance: 'For, though my heart, I assure you, is in the right place, alas, my geography is the weakest part about me, and without maps I have not the remotest idea where any […] places are' (*MF* 86). It may sound like a paradox that a novelist giving such insightful descriptions of the places he travelled to and valuing the sense of place as crucial to artistic production should have expressed such low self-esteem about his skills as a geographer. But of course what Ford had in mind was a scientific approach to geography of the type that may be found in ordnance survey maps. What he could offer instead is an

alternative mapping of the type which is propounded by those who promote psychogeography as another means of relating to space. The thing is that, with or without maps, Ford succeeded in projecting his own, subjective geography on Paris. The Left Bank in this idiosyncratic reconstruction of territorial limits marks the ultimate Northern border-line, so keen was he on annexing all that lay South of the river towards his much beloved Provence.

NOTES

1 Bernard J. Poli, *Ford Madox Ford and the Transatlantic Review*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1967 – henceforth Poli.
2 Ford, dedication, *Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections: Being the Memories of a Young Man*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1911, p. ix.
3 Ford, *The Heart of the Country*, London: Alston Rivers, 1906, p. 14.
4 Ford, *It Was the Nightingale*, 1933, London: William Heinemann, 1934 – henceforth *IWN*; p. 260.
5 Ford, *Between St. Dennis and St. George: A Sketch of Three Civilisations*, 1915, Milton Keynes: Lightning Source UK Ltd., 2011 – henceforth *BSDSG*; p. 55.
6 Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance*, 1924, New York: Octagon Books, 1971 – henceforth *JC*; pp. 275-6. Emphases mine.
7 John G. Peters, *Conrad and Impressionism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 45.
8 Ford, *Some Do Not . . .*, ed. Max Saunders, Manchester: Carcanet, 2010, p. 20.
9 Thomas C. Moser, *The Life in the Fiction of Ford Madox Ford*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980 – henceforth 'Moser'; p. 139.
10 See Sara Haslam's discussion of this phrase in her essay: 'Dowell and Dopamine: Information, Pleasure and Plot', in *Ford Madox Ford's 'The Good Soldier'*, ed. Max Saunders and Sara Haslam, International Ford Madox Ford Studies 14, Leiden and Boston, Brill/Rodopi, 2014, pp. 117-32.
11 Guy Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', 1955, in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb, Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1980 – henceforth ICUG; p. 5.
12 'Will Self: On "Psychogeography" and the Places that Choose You', interview with Frank Bures, 17 Dec. 2007, *WorldHum. The Best Travel Stories on the Internet*, 22 Feb. 2015, http://www.worldhum.com/features/travel-interviews/will_self_on_psychogeography_and_the_places_that_choose_you_20071217.
13 Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography*, London: Vintage, 2001, p. 569.
14 Ford, preface, *The Left Bank and Other Stories*, by Jean Rhys, 1927, reprinted in *The Ford Madox Ford Reader*, ed. Sondra J. Stang, Manchester: Carcanet, 1986, – henceforth *Reader*; pp. 236-45.
15 Julien Gracq, *La forme d'une ville*, Paris: José Corti, 1985, trans. *The Shape of a City* by Ingeborg M. Kohn, New York: Turtle Point Press, 2005.

16 Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Cygne', 1859, in 'Tableaux Parisiens', *Les fleurs du mal et autres poèmes*, Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1964, p. 107; Roy Campbell, *Poems of Baudelaire: A Translation of* Les Fleurs Du Mal, London: The Harvill Press, 1952, p. 116.
17 Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 1865, London: Penguin Classics, 1997, p. 42.
18 Ford, *A Mirror to France*, London: Duckworth, 1926 – henceforth *MF*; p. 69.
19 This is of course an echo of the American motto *E pluribus unum* to emphasise the convivial gatherings of American expats who had chosen the French capital in which to set out on their artistic, or existential adventures, away from the States. The diversity of the reasons why they had migrated from their homeland may be suggested by the adjective 'multa'. There is amongst them none of the desperation that was to be found amidst the writers of the so-called 'lost generation', to whom incidentally Ford makes a passing allusion (*IWN* 68).
20 Ford, *The Good Soldier*, 1915, Norton Critical Edition, ed. Martin Stannard, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995 – henceforth 'Stannard'; p. 38.
21 Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford, A Dual Life*, 2 vols, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, I, p. 156.
22 Ford, *The English Novel: From the Earliest Days to the Death of Joseph Conrad*, 1929, Manchester: Carcanet, 1997, p. 65.
23 Ford, *Henry James*: *A Critical Study*, 1915, New York: Octagon Books, 1969, p. 70.
24 Ford, *The March of Literature: From Confucius to Modern Times*, 1938, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1947, p. 722.
25 See Max Saunders' essay in this volume on Anatole France's importance to Ford.
26 Henry James, 'The House of Fiction', in preface, *The Portrait of a Lady*, 1881, New York edn., 1908. Originally published in *New York Review* 17 (Dec. 1897), rpt. in Stannard, pp. 256-7.
27 The fact was pointed out to me by Alexandra Becquet whose erudition on Ford has been an invaluable help.
28 L. L. Farrar Jr., 'The Artist as Propagandist', *The Presence of Ford Madox Ford*, ed. Sondra J. Stang, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981, p. 145.