

## MAPLINES: VISIONS OF FRANCE IN FORD MADOX FORD'S *NO ENEMY*

Ellen Lévy

The most literal map in Ford Madox Ford's *No Enemy* is drawn by the soldier-poet Gringoire on the Western Front, atop Mont Vedaigne. A seminal scene in this 'oblique or displaced autobiography' (the expression is used by Max Saunders in his discussion of Ford's book on Conrad),<sup>1</sup> the scene allows Ford to set out, through an exploration of the protagonist's levels of awareness, his theories of perception, hierarchised, multiple, split in this case between the acting intelligence officer doing his map-drawing duty, the soldier subliminally scanning his surroundings for traps and camouflage, the physical man seeking sustenance, the aesthete startled into consciousness of the inappropriate but undeniable beauty of exploding shells.

Later, when Gringoire has taken over the narration of his own story from his Boswell-cum-amenuensis, the Compiler, the notion of a topographical map is de-realized, transformed into a survey of mental landscape, in remarks he makes on his failure to communicate with the French Minister to whom he has been ordered to report in Paris. Asked to produce books of propaganda when he is preoccupied with procuring ferrets to control rats in trenches, Gringoire explains:

*Quand on est poète* one requires – one requires a little reëntrant, with water – a little stream, indicated by a wavy line in blue pencil; copses, indicated by dotted-in round o's with tails to them; rushes, indicated by hieroglyphs like the section of a hairbrush; a gingerbread cottage, for which the symbol is a hatched square.<sup>2</sup>

For real topography may quickly be submerged, effaced, coloured over by emotion, association, memory, by the distractions of parallel lines of thought – a notion shared by Christopher Tietjens, in *No More Parades*, when he sees the world 'as a map [. . .] an embossed map of greenish *papier maché*' with the blood of his erstwhile companion, O Nine Morgan, 'blurring luminously over it'.<sup>3</sup>

The maplines along which visions of France are traced in *No Enemy* are, certainly, those of war (front lines, trench lines, mule lines,

frontiers) and of relations between combatants (in particular, ruptured lines of communication between allies) but also lines of memory (France at peace, France at war) and of genealogy (literary lines that in *No Enemy* seem to replace any suggestion of personal or familial lineage), as well as the lines of grace and beauty that come to symbolize hope for another kind of post-war world.

For one may map a state of mind, as one maps a landscape, map stories, as Robert Macfarlane has suggested, as well as grids,<sup>4</sup> trace lines of thought as one traces the traverses of trenches, follow the track of memory as one rides trainlines across a territory. When Gringoire is stationed at Albert, for example, its features play mnemonic tricks on him: his frequently culinary mind-space is invaded by the savour of an omelette enjoyed in the town twenty years earlier, while certain roads in the vicinity bring back boyhood recollections of walking or cycling ‘from Calais to Beauvais, by way of Arras; from Paris to Tours and along the Loire [. . .]’ (*NE* 63), these routes spinning memories ‘like a string unravelling from a ball’ (*NE* 30). The attempt to billet men in Pont-de-Nieppe calls up pictures of military training in Wales, an experience that had once, itself, conjured tormented thoughts of fellow soldiers crawling through the ‘immense ribbon of territory’ that the war had scarred and ‘beaten to a pulp’ (*NE* 65) in a paroxysm of bellicose erasure. In such conflated instances, dimensions collapse in a web of intricate connection: time is spatialized, a road into the past; space temporalized, two time zones, or three, imprinted on a single place. Frontiers give way, just as the demarcation of Flanders and northern France is effaced, with lines of conflict re-drawn, separating, on the one hand, military and civilian populations and, on the other, distrustful military allies.<sup>5</sup>

When Gringoire is summoned to Paris from the battlefield both these latter rifts are exacerbated. The first is couched in literary terms through a chance encounter with an English officer who has abducted his little girl from her misbehaving mother. Gringoire, who has been reading Henry James at the Front, thinks of the child as Maisie. His growing alienation from civilian interference in the war’s conduct fuses with the atmosphere of intrigue and suspicion in which James engulfed his little heroine who, it is to be remembered, at the culmination of her troubles, dreams, Ford-like, of escaping to the south of France with the step-parent she loves best.

On the same trip to Paris, Gringoire notes the reserve, even the taciturnity, of the French officers he meets. Ford had explored the

potential for such bi-cultural misunderstanding in *Between St. Dennis and St. George* (1915) in which the French are depicted as a people apart, experienced in invasion, inured for centuries to being the object of their neighbours' covetousness. In the face of immemorial menace, they endure:

For it is because the French peasant, the French farmer, the French handicraftsman, and the French small trader do not expect vast things of life, do not strive after the immense fortunes of the modern industrial system, that they remain so much more largely than any other race, patiently and efficiently working on the acres that saw their births. And it is because these patient, efficient, sober, industrious, and splendid populations remain upon their acres that France will have saved Europe, if Europe is to be saved.<sup>6</sup>

In *No Enemy*, the probing of the Gallic temperament continues in a letter written from behind the Lines and highlighted by its double inclusion – in English in the main text and in French in an appendix. (It would also be included in Ford's 1926 *A Mirror to France*.) It delineates the disapprobation of a French officer watching a group of Tommies playing a raucous cricket match during a break from combat. The Frenchman thinks it would be better for men so situated to pray and to meditate rather than play. Gringoire is indignant over the officer's begrudging a bit of relaxation to boys just in from the trenches, but when Ford reviews the episode in *A Mirror to France*, he alters his judgment: 'the truth is that the French cannot afford to be thought-free – not ever! [. . .] As long as they possess Provence or one inch of the shores of the Mediterranean they will always have [. . .] potentially devastating foes'.<sup>7</sup> The full measure of such Anglo-French estrangement is taken on the train to Paris and during the interval of an opera performance there. On both occasions Gringoire speaks to French officers in their native tongue, only to be addressed by them in English, an inversion that signals their refusal to engage with him as an intimate.

Other trains, however, that crisscross the textual plains of *No Enemy* bring about the *meeting* of minds. It is during a journey by train in the company of Lieutenant Morgan, whose death haunts him as O Nine Morgan's death later haunts Christopher Tietjens, that Gringoire listens sympathetically to an outline of his companion's life history. Gringoire's imagination is equally haunted by the tears of a little recruit, who during a pre-war train journey, wept as he travelled from his home in the south to join a regiment in the north. The narration of

this episode is typically labyrinthine. In it, two train journeys proceed on parallel tracks: in the first, the weeping recruit is consoled by compassionate fellow travellers who, without knowing him, understand his desperation (“Ah! Ah! Yes,” said the listeners. – “The marchings are long; the drills difficult; and the rifles heavy.” – “Yes: heavy are the rifles!” – “Ah! Ah! Yes!” – “And the little recruit is away from home [. . . .]!””; *NE* 89); in the second, Gringoire, on a separate journey, as his train nears the little recruit’s hometown of Orange, recalls the earlier episode and surmises, as the southern landscape flashes in picture frames before his eyes, the reasons for the commiseration displayed to the young soldier by utter strangers. Through the text march the bootsteps of strangers less benign:

For there was no house in all that landscape whose women hadn’t known the suspense of absences; there was no stack whose builder hadn’t at one time gone, or come back. And there was not one, of all those objects, that did not dread – that for forty years had not dreaded – the hard footsteps, the shames, the violations, or the incendiary fires of conquerors who should come from ‘beyond Lille on the frontier’. (*NE* 90)

Later, when Gringoire is himself at Orange and looks out from the heights of the Roman theatre, he thinks once again of the little recruit (‘that is how the mind really works’, he comments, ‘linking life together [. . .]’; *NE* 89) and, at the same time, the tower at Orange is doubled by the balcony of the Opéra de Paris from which Gringoire had gazed at the darkened streets of the capital, seeing beyond them, a vision of the conflagration of war and the faces of his dead companions.

Rail-lines may serve as a figure of the nation, their tracks the lifeline of the body social.<sup>8</sup> This configuration presents itself gradually to Gringoire, through the trope of a tightly-packed skein unthreading itself. The process begins with the recurring motif of the onion, used to evoke the centrifugal layers of a nation’s hierarchical structures. The minister in Paris, for instance, may be forgiven for knowing little of the conditions at the Front, since he is buried like the heart of an onion, far from the mud of the trenches, beneath innumerable protective wrappings (*NE* 133). This image opens out, transforming itself into one of receding spatial planes: ‘[. . .] round the Palace of the Sacred Emperor, there must be the Great City, and round the Great City must be La Grande Nation – stretching away and away, for miles and miles and miles. . . .’ – an aposiopesis which leads into a

metaphor of the nation as 'twenty-seven hours of railway journey,' a journey both in space and time: 'past Etaples, where I had spent years before, long days in *chalets* amongst the pine wood; past Calais where my grandfather was born [. . .]' (NE 133).

Little Maisie, another centrifugally-placed figure, connects to the rail-line imagery as well when she asks Gringoire how to find the 'cog-wheel railway' that will help her reach her mother who, she has been told, has gone to Heaven, a remark which draws from Gringoire the moral that to separate a child from its mother is perhaps 'a worse crime than crossing the frontier at Gemmenich' (NE 55), this latter phrase, one that radiates like an obsession through Ford's work, recalling the frontier passed by humankind on 4 August 1914.

Ford's text presents a network of intertextual connections (to both extra- and intra-Fordian writings), establishing explicitly, for example, its literary lineage in a footnote provided by the Compiler which explains the origin of Gringoire's name – a nickname, in fact, bestowed by schoolmates, after reading Alphonse Daudet's 'La Chèvre de Monsieur Seguin'. Daudet's narrator, an ancestor of Ford's Compiler, addresses an admonition to *his* Gringoire, an impecunious poet of uncompromising principle, reminding him that those who refuse to graze in the meadows of conformity will be eaten themselves by hungry wolves.

Max Saunders has noted the genealogical line of Gringoire, from the late fifteenth-century poet-dramatist, Pierre Gringore (1475-1539), transformed by Victor Hugo into La Esmeralda's unwitting betrayer in *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) and resuscitated by Théodore de Banville in his one-act comedy *Gringoire* (1866).<sup>9</sup> This latter Gringoire, although upholding the general rule of the convergence of art and starvation, does manage to achieve conjugal happiness and to articulate a stirring defence of the poet in society. When his beloved, Loyse, expresses amazement that poets seem to content themselves with writing poetry when there are so many more heroic feats that they might accomplish, de Banville's Gringoire explains:

Eh bien, ce qui fait le poète, le voici: toutes ces douleurs des autres, il les souffre; tous ces pleurs inconnus, toutes ces plaintes si faibles, tous ces sanglots qu'on ne pouvait pas entendre passent dans sa voix, se mêlent à son chant, une fois que ce chant ailé, palpitant, s'est échappé de son coeur, il n'y a ni glaive ni supplice qui puisse l'arrêter; il voltige au loin, sans relâche, à jamais, dans l'air et sur les bouches des hommes. Il entre dans le château, dans

le palais, il éclate au milieu du festin joyeux, et il dit aux princes de la terre: –  
Ecoutez!<sup>10</sup>

Ford's Gringoire, too, sees himself as a saviour of humanity through the practice of 'good cooking, thinking, and the arts' (NE 51), practices, of course, excelled at by the French. In England, however, Gringoire can only be an eccentric, a member of the 'XVIIIth Category' of 'totally unproductive' members of society that Ford would wryly enumerate in *It Was the Nightingale*.<sup>11</sup>

Gringoire's companion in his Gingerbread Cottage is Mme Sélysette, a descendant perhaps of one of the title characters of Maeterlinck's *Sélysette et Aglavaine* (1896), a wife so devoted that she commits suicide by throwing herself from a tower rather than interfere with her husband's on-going love-life. The Sélysette of *No Enemy* is said by her companion to be as loyal as she is good-humoured. A dark-haired beauty of the South, she connects to other continental ladies in Ford's *oeuvre* with whom, despite conspicuous differences, she shares certain qualities.

Ford had sung the praises of such women in *Between St. Dennis and St. George* and would do so again in *A Mirror to France*: women who can trim a hat so well that its feathers do not lose their shape under stress and who, like the Cathedral in Amiens or the city of Carcassonne, symbolize the greatness of a culture that gives 'attention to details because honour demands that this attention should be given' (BSDSG 195); women who make domestic life into an art, holding everything that is not done by hand to be suspect, installing, as Valentine Wannop declares in *Last Post* about her life with Christopher Tietjens, Frugality as a Deity. Although physically and socially dissimilar from Mark Tietjens' blond, northern Marie-Léonie, Madame Sélysette can produce shandygaffe just as Mark's helpmeet produces apple cider, she is an adept of *potage bonne femme* as Marie-Léonie is of the soup that she feeds so lovingly to her paralysed *homme*, while all the while denouncing the iniquities of English turnips.

Such women are in the line of Rosalie Prudent, a re-incarnation in *No Enemy* of the Rosalie Martin who was portrayed in Ford's long-unpublished 'Epilogue'<sup>12</sup> and of whom a variant appears in *A Mirror to France* in the person of a washroom attendant who, like Rosalie, lost her husband and two sons in 1914 and who refuses to desert her post in a Paris theatre, despite lucrative incentives to decamp. In *No Enemy*, Rosalie Prudent (who admittedly is Belgian, not French, but

who is encountered by Gringoire on the French side of the frontier) embodies the idealized Housekeeper,<sup>13</sup> the source of home comforts, the darner of shirtcuffs, patient, stoic, eternal, endowed with the unspoken courage of simple people of heart. Her forehead is glimpsed subliminally as a gleaming triangular patch of light through the dark window of a house near the ruined church of Pont de Nieppe, a motif that links her to the lozenges and ovals, the glowing expanses and the green vignettes of sanctuary which beckon to Gringoire throughout *No Enemy*. She takes the wet and unbilleted officer into the house, warms him, digs up potatoes for his evening meal, releasing in Gringoire the haptic memory of the feel of warm earth in a night-dug vegetable patch, a warmth he remembers likening to that of a woman's bosom. Despite her northern provenance, Rosalie is an avatar of 'Dame Provence,' the careful housewife, who sits at home with her account books, with 'in her apron pocket, the one bulb and the sole herbs that cure all indigestions, crises, impulses to massacre. . . .'<sup>14</sup>

Such steadfast heroism finds a masculine standard-bearer in Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, a purveyor of the Line of Grace both in his person and in his art. Integrating into the novel a piece he had written for the *English Review*<sup>15</sup> and which he would re-publish in *Thus to Revisit* (1921), Ford presents the young sculptor as an Apollo-figure, casting a god-like sunbeam into the dark caverns of English cultural life or, switching mythologies, 'like the dove in Early Italian pictures' (*NE* 106). Gringoire links Gaudier to what is eternal in art, noting in one of his sculptures, the 'tightened softness of the haunches of a fawn – of some young creature of the underwoods, an ancient, shyly-peopled thicket' (*NE* 109), tying Gaudier's art to the spirits of woods that, as Ford says in *Provence*, 'were old when Zeus was new-born' (*Provence* 85-6). Although Gaudier was killed in battle in June 1915, his memory survives as a sign that the salutary spirit of Art abides, even in the 'low' unperceiving 'teashop' of an unappreciative and uncultured England.

The carved lines of Gaudier's fawn transmute into the lines of verse which punctuate the text of *No Enemy*, marking beginning, middle and end, leading to a dénouement which Cornelia Cook has described as a 'shared reconstruction',<sup>16</sup> the collective recitation of a poem linking past and present, war and peace, conflating a moonlit battlefield and the moon over the fragile sanctuary to which Gringoire has finally attained. His poetry, he declares, must be the barbed wire that keeps the wolf of starvation from his door (*NE* 114).

Ford uses such locutions as this to pull meaning taut, forcing disparate elements into fruitful conjunction, connecting, doubling back, overlaying, for as any map-reader knows, paths bend, weave, double back on themselves, interlace, meet in nodes of arresting juncture. Thus, in *No Enemy*, the name Rosalie, used by the troops to designate a bayonet, is bestowed on Gringoire's symbol of fortitude and compassion. His post-war garden, the symbol of the French-inspired horticultural economy that, along with art, will save the world, is evoked in military terms: its lines of plantation are 'trenches' (NE 21), its flowers wave stiffly like 'a battalion on parade' (NE 13). The safety Gringoire seeks must be 'a dugout, as proof as possible against the shells launched against [him] by blind destiny' (NE 135), an image which in its turn calls up the memory of a redoubt that was transformed into a regimental garden. Most strange is an inversion created between the wartime exultation experienced at a moment when Gringoire has escaped what he believed to be certain death, a moment, which recurs in an altered version in *A Man Could Stand Up* –, when Gringoire strides joyfully through vegetation beneath which lie the dead, feeling as though he were an antique god<sup>17</sup> and the despair that the peacetime gardener feels when he realizes that slugs have attacked his seedlings or drought his crops: 'the worst feeling in the world,' Gringoire insists, 'like death':

That is perhaps why farmers are so often passionately disagreeable and apparently unreasonable men. For there is nothing that so much resembles contact with, wrestling with, a personal devil as to awaken one morning and to find that a whole crop of seedlings has vanished before a myriad of slugs. That happens. If you don't believe it, read White's "Selborne". It is loss, ruin perhaps. It is like death: a profound and unforeseen disaster. And your mind personifies the slug as intelligent, malignant, a being with a will for evil directed against you in person. I think that, whilst it lasts, it is the worst feeling in the world.

Drought is nearly as bad. (NE 25)

And, of course, there is the Gingerbread Cottage discovered by the soldier Gringoire on Mont Vedaigue and, from that war zone, grown into a vision of desired home. On Mont Vedaigue, as the sun goes down, Gringoire catches sight of the glimmer of the sea beyond Dunkerque in a moment that crystallizes his longing for the sanctuary of English country. In *Between St. Dennis and St. George*, Ford had described a moment before the war that crosses this vision: breaking through the wall of a house in Kent, making a window, having pierced

through plaster, brickwork and tile, he stepped back as would an artist from his easel and looking through the newly-formed aperture, saw 'a most astonishing picture':

– a belt of painfully vivid blue, a belt of painfully vivid pink, and above the pink another belt of blue. And in the belt of pink, which was formed by the French cliffs, there were nacreous markings, for all the world like the little ruddled and bluish shadowings of mother-of-pearl – they were the Cathedral of Boulogne, the houses of Boulogne, and the column that Napoleon I erected to commemorate the invasion of Great Britain. (*BSDSG* 209)

The mischievous irony of the presence of a monument to Anglo-French strife only adds to the utter miraculousness of the view, since this rare sight of France from the coastal region of England is, for the author, the most beautiful spectacle in the world, producing in him a state of intense emotion, his residences in the southernmost counties of England accounted for, as he recounts in *It Was the Nightingale*, by the fact that thence he could most easily escape to 'the land of Nicolette' of which he had dreamed all his life (*IWN* 10).

Indeed, in an *oeuvre* which coheres, re-works, returns obsessively to phrases and themes, incrementing and restating them in the on-going exploration and experimentation that was Ford's writing life, *No Enemy* seems to form with *It Was the Nightingale* one of these telling intersections: the former memorializing the tears that are present in things while it creates a paean to a beckoning homeland; the latter expressing the call to the returned soldier and poet who feels displaced in his native land, of a new sanctuary – the sanctuary of *la France*.

*No Enemy's* art reposes on such intersections, its webs of interconnection – geographic, communicatory, mnemonic, genealogical – spun across the abyss of war, of exile, of absence, of artistic isolation. A good map, it has been said, should allow for more than one line of contemplation.<sup>18</sup> Ford, who took pride in the 'duplicate cerebration' with which he was credited by a critic in the *New York Times* (*IWN* 143), multiplies the means by which his text, itself the product of pioneering genetic crossbreeding, breeds meaningful patterns that in the end themselves become a form of asylum.

## NOTES

- 1 Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 180.
- 2 Ford, *No Enemy: A Tale of Reconstruction* [1929], ed. Paul Skinner, Manchester: Carcanet, 2002 – henceforth *NE*; p. 81.
- 3 Ford, *No More Parades* [1925], in *Parade's End*, Manchester: Carcanet, 1997, p. 494.
- 4 'Broadly speaking, there are two types of map: the grid and the story. A grid map places an abstract geometric meshwork upon a space, within which any item or individual can be co-ordinated [. . .] The power of grid maps is that they make it possible for any individual or object to be located within an abstract totality of space. But their virtue is also their danger: that they reduce the world only to data, that they record space independent of being. Story maps, by contrast, represent a place as it is perceived by an individual or by a culture moving through it.' Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, London: Granta, 2007, p. 141.
- 5 Certain associations slip out of chronology altogether, connecting experience to what is immemorial: a group of market women gathered near a stout gendarme brings to mind Chantecler surrounded by admiring pullets, while the fairytale 'Gingerbread Cottage' so incongruously perched near the summit of Mont Vedaigue is inhabited by an old Flemish couple who seem to have stepped out of a weather house.
- 6 Ford [Hueffer], *Between St. Dennis and St. George: A Sketch of Three Civilisations*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1915] – henceforth *BSDSG*; p. 68.
- 7 Ford, *A Mirror to France*, London: Duckworth, 1926, pp. 278-9. Although written after *No Enemy, A Mirror to France* was published earlier.
- 8 'L'imaginaire du train commence à passer par une image concrète très particulière, un dessin, celui de la carte de France avec son réseau de lignes convergente vers la capitale ....' This 'système sémiotique graphique' represents the nation. Philippe Hamon, *Imageries: Littérature et Images au XIX Siècle*. Paris: Jose Corti, 2001, p. 376. Hilary Mantel speaks of English train tracks as 'the veins and arteries of the nation': '... is this not the country, this mesh flung over the uplands and river valleys, this net of metal which holds it safe, marked out in points of light?' Mantel, *Giving Up the Ghost*, New York: Picador, 2003, p. 108.
- 9 Saunders, *op. cit.*, p. 623, n. 3.
- 10 Théodore de Banville, *Gringoire*, Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1866, p. 55. 'Well, here is what makes a poet: he suffers all the pain that others feel, all those unknown tears, those soft complaints, those sobs that have gone unheard, find expression in his voice, blending with his song, at the moment that the song, winged and quivering, has flown forth from his bosom; neither sword nor scourge can stop it; it flutters away, ceaselessly, forever, in the air and on the tongues of men. It enters the castle, the palace, it bursts out in the middle of joyous feasts, and it says to the princes of the earth: – Hark!' (my translation).
- 11 "“Travelling showmen, circus performers, all writers not regularly employed on newspapers, tramps, pedlars, all painters not employed as house, factory, industrial, carriage, or sign-painters; all musicians, all unemployable persons . . .”

and, oh, irony! "Gentlemen, independent." Ford, *It Was the Nightingale* [1933], Manchester: Carcanet, 2007, p. 243.

- 12 See Ford, *War Prose*, ed. Max Saunders, Manchester: Carcanet, 1999, pp. 57-63.
- 13 This is the term Ford uses to translate Flaubert's 'bourgeoise' from the opening of 'Un Coeur Simple'. See the chapter entitled 'Félicité' in *Between St. Dennis and St. George*. It is to be noted that one of Rosalie Prudent's daughters is called Félicité.
- 14 Ford Madox Ford, *Provence: From Minstrels to the Machine* [1935], Manchester: Carcanet, 2009 – henceforth *Provence*; p. 68.
- 15 Samuel Hynes, 'The Genre of *No Enemy*', *Antaeus*, 56 (Spring 1986), 131.
- 16 Cornelia Cook, 'Constuctions and Reconstructions: *No Enemy*', *Ford Madox Ford's Modernity*, ed. Robert Hampson and Max Saunders, International Ford Madox Ford Studies 2, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003, p. 204.
- 17 ' . . . through the thistles, dusty in the hot sunlight, Gringoire went with immense, joyful strides. He said that he was extraordinarily fit in those days! And an innumerable company of swallows flew round him, waist high, just brushing the thistledown. "They were so near," Gringoire said, "that they brushed my hands, and they extended so far that I could see nothing else. It is one of the five things of the war that I really see, for it was like walking, buoyantly, in the pellucid sunlight, waist-high through a sea of unsurpassed and unsurpassable azure. I felt as if I were a Greek god. It was like a miracle.'" (NE 24)
- 18 Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800–1900*, London: Verso, 1998, p. 8.