WHAT HEMINGWAY LEARNED FROM FORD

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Abstract
Ford played an important role in Hemingway’s literary apprenticeship by engaging him as sub-editor of the transatlantic review. Hemingway had much to learn from Ford’s vast knowledge of literature, critical insight, and personal acquaintance with writers like Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Stephen Crane, who contributed significantly to Hemingway’s formation as a writer. From Ford he learned how Crane had gone about gathering material for The Red Badge of Courage and followed Crane’s example in writing his own war novel. He also learned much from reading Ford on the subject of writers like Stendhal, Turgenev, and Flaubert, who were to become his exemplars, and from reading the first three volumes of Parade’s End as they were written. To the end of his life he kept the only known typescript of No More Parades. Though Hemingway took a personal dislike to Ford, reflected in the disparaging portrait of Ford in A Moveable Feast, there can be no doubt about Ford’s importance as a mentor.

Ford Madox Ford was a true cosmopolite. His background was international to begin with. His father and one whole side of his family was German. His maternal grandfather, Ford Madox Brown, was more French than English in his upbringing: born in Calais and raised there until the age of 13, when he left for Belgium, where he had all of his training as an artist. Ford himself traveled and lived on the continent from an early age, visiting his German relatives and sojourning in France. ‘Before I was twenty,’ he recalled in Return to Yesterday, ‘I had spent three winters in Paris and two summers in Germany’.1 With such a background, he readily acquired fluency in languages, chiefly in French and German, but he had facility with other languages as well, as evidenced in his use of Flemish in Flanders during the war. ‘I speak French with a bad accent,’ he said, ‘but write it more easily than I write English’.2 ‘My French I had from my grandfather who […] knew French better than English […] But he insisted characteristically that […] one must speak it with a marked English accent to show that one is an English gentleman’.3

Ford’s fluency was of course the reason he was engaged to translate Conrad’s French thoughts into English prose. Thus he and
Conrad were able to discuss Flaubert and *le mot juste* in its proper tongue. Thus, too, he was able to provide us with a glimpse of Conrad conversing with Henry James in French, which they always spoke together, and the delightful revelation that James spoke ‘an admirably pronounced, correct and rather stilted idiom such as prevailed in Paris of the seventies’ while Conrad spoke the French of Marseilles ‘with a strong Southern accent as that of garlic in *aioli*’ (*RY* 31).

Ford was at home wherever he went, whether with country folk in England, lawyers in Tarascon, the bourgeoises of Pont-l’Évêque, social and intellectual circles in New York, or the ‘Puritans’ of Oak Park. When he and Stella Bowen decided to leave the cold and wet and mud of the English countryside for the sunshine of the Mediterranean world, he was returning to a country and a people with whom he felt most completely at home. His ruminations in *A Mirror to France* reflect his lifelong love and profound appreciation of the French, their way of life and their values. For him it was ‘a country that is certainly the centre of the world’ (*MF* 111).

In November 1922 Ford and Stella stopped off for a month or so in Paris before proceeding to the South of France, arriving in time to attend Proust’s funeral and remaining long enough to ‘get a fair view of the literary situation’, beginning with Ezra Pound ‘stirring up all the wasps’ nests’. Ford met with many writers, renewing his acquaintance with the French literary scene but consorting even more with the expatriates who flocked to Montparnasse in the post-war era, many of them Americans drawn there by the presence of some of the movers and shakers of modern literature. They came to pay homage to James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and in due course to Ford himself. Ford had known Pound for many years and Stein as well. Now he became friends with Joyce, whose *Ulysses* had been published in Paris that year, and met its publisher, Sylvia Beach, along with other admirers. But after a month or so, the cold of the Paris winter drove him and Stella on their way to Harold Monro’s little villa overlooking the Mediterranean (*IWN* 197-205).

They returned to Paris the following September, and this time they settled in. They had difficulty finding good lodgings but adopted a domestic routine of dining regularly at the same restaurant. As Ford wrote in a letter to Pound, who had left Paris and moved to Rapallo, ‘We dine practically every evening at the Nègre de Toulouse, next the Closerie des Lilas and almost invariably go to drink coffee at the