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ARTS COUNCIL
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bookbinding. She looks after the physical side of books; hers don't get out of hand as mine can!

Notes

- 1 ∈, Gallimard, Paris, 1967
- 2 See *Impératif catégorique* (Seuil, 2008), p. 55, writing of his early years teaching at university: 'Je pensais aussi que la mathématique n'était pas le but principal de mon existence. Le but de mon existence était la

poésie... La mathématique... me donnerait de la compréhension des choses.'

- 3 *Le Grand Incendie de Londres, récit avec incises et bifurcations* (Seuil, Paris, 1989). English edition: *The Great Fire of London: A Story With Interpolations and Bifurcations* (Dalkey Archive Press, 1992), translated by Dominic Di Bernardi
- 4 Published by Le Seuil, 1993

The Dalkey Archive Press website can be viewed at www.dalkeyarchive.com

JASON ANDREW

Ford + Biala: A Fateful Meeting

The Letters of Janice Biala 1929–1931

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. 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... into expatriation. For them there is... Paris.

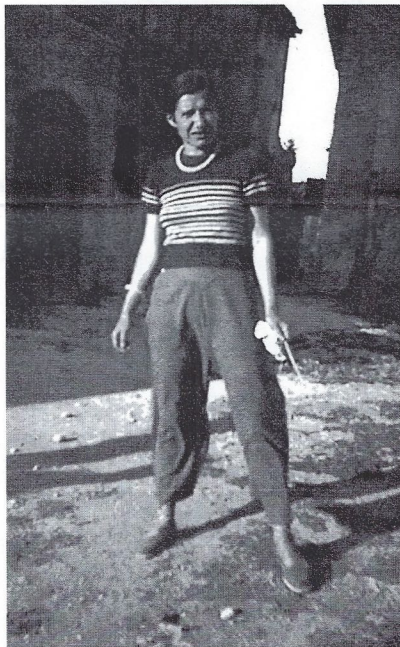
Ford Madox Ford, *New York is Not America*¹

When the young American painter, Janice Biala, met the great English novelist Ford Madox Ford, she was twenty-six and he was fifty-seven. They met in Paris on May Day, 1930, at one of Ford's regular Thursday afternoon salons. She had arrived from New York just five days prior, travelling at the invitation of her best friend Eileen Lake, an aspiring poet.

Lured to the gathering at Ford's with the promise of meeting Ezra Pound, whom she much admired, Biala instead found herself alongside Ford, the incorrigible romancer. Ford, legendary and proud, perched himself on the edge of the long divan, and in the dim light the pair 'seem to be alone...' recalled Ford in his collection of poems dedicated to Biala.² Their meeting was the kind of spontaneous fiction for which Ford was famous – the principal character being himself.

Biala hoped that France would offer a new life she so desperately desired. She had a massive fascination with France. As a child she collected 'as many books as one could find on the subject'. These well-worn novels and picture books, tucked secretly under her bed, fed her already excessive imagination. She would later tell French art critic René Barotte that it was because of Porthos that she became an artist.³ *The Three Musketeers* was her favourite.

Biala was a feisty and articulate New Yorker. A Russian émigrée, born Schenehaia Tworkovska in 1903, she arrived in New York from her native Bialystok on 26 September 1913 with her older brother Jacob and her mother. Reuniting with her father, a tailor, the family lived on Ridge Street where she became one of the millions of tenement dwellers on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Like many immigrants arriving from ports all over the world, the



1. Brush in Hand: Biala in Antilles, 1934. Photograph taken by Ford while on a trip with the Anthells. Copyright Estate of Janice Biala, courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.



2. *Ford on the Terrace, Villa Paul, c.1931*. Painted by Biala. Copyright Estate of Janice Biala, courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

Tworzkowska family underwent a series of name changes as Jack and now Janice Tworzkow struggled to assimilate to American culture at the turn of the century.

'The 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.'⁴ Janice most certainly shared her brother's experience. However, what was to save Janice was painting.

Jack and Janice shared a unique vision of the future for themselves. Jack, after exploring a career as a writer, dedicated himself to the life of an artist and 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. It was there that the pair would meet Charles Hawthorne, who had established an artist colony in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Jack was taken with the remote yet thriving Provincetown art scene. Janice too spent time in Provincetown, but returned to New York City and her life in Greenwich Village. Brother and sister exchanged vivid conversations about art. Both instantly shared a particular interest in Cézanne upon seeing his work at the Brooklyn Museum in the spring of 1921.

By late 1920, Janice was an established young artist with a growing reputation. She was a frequent exhibitor at the GRD Studios in New York, 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 and Provincetown, generating close friendships

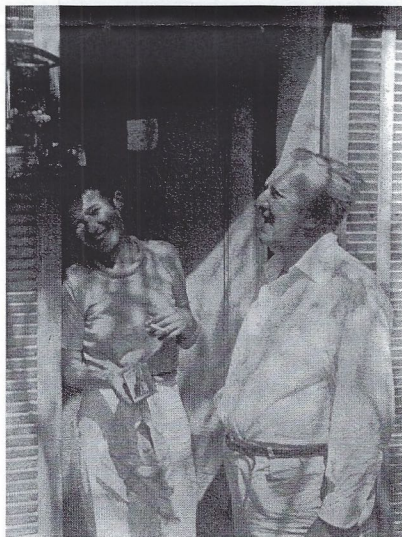
with now legendary American artists Edwin Dickinson and William Zorach. In fact it was at the suggestion of William Zorach that Janice changed her name to Biala. 'I decided to change my name for this exhibition in order not to be confused with you,' Janice wrote to Jack. 'My name is now Biala.'⁵

Opinionated and tough, the young brunette with a soft Eastern European face was a free thinker of the highest order. She had passion for life that fuelled a rather obnoxious societal independence. A true bohemian, Biala longed for a 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.⁶

Biala's situation grew even more critical with the Wall Street Crash of October 1929. '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.'⁷ Moreover, Biala realised that painting was the only thing she could do well. 'If there were anything else I could do, I'd do it.'⁸

Then, in April 1930, Biala left for France. France would free her from the ties of a complicated life in New York.

'Of all the people I know, I think you would enjoy Paris most,' wrote Biala the very day she arrived in Paris in what would be the first of a lifetime of letters from France to her brother. '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



3. The painter Biala with the writer Ford Madox Ford, Villa Paul, c.1934. Copyright Estate of Janice Biala, courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

good deal of the left bank as far as the Louvre on foot in an effort to get my bearings.⁷

What impressed Biala most about Paris was the food: '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.⁸

Five days later, Biala arrived at Ford's place. Their afternoon extended into dinner at the invitation of Willard Trask and later Ford took both Eileen and Biala out dancing. Friends close to Ford reported knowing straightaway that Ford was in love with Biala. Biala too was quite taken by Ford, and before long, the hours stretched into days and days stretched into weeks.

Nearly a month would pass before Biala wrote to Jack. A brief postcard mentioned nothing of Ford and by this time couple had become an inseparable pair – *the tout le monde en parle* of Paris. '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.'¹⁰

By August, Biala could no longer hide from her conscience



4. Ford + Biala in Ford's garden, Villa Paul, c.1931. 'If it wasn't for Ford's garden, we'd starve,' wrote Biala. Copyright Estate of Janice Biala, courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

and announced her relationship with Ford. '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,' she told Jack.

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 has 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.¹¹

Don't tell this to *anyone* please, even if you hear any scandal about it [...] Also any scandal about Ford effects [*sic*] 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 history¹² of the last 50 yrs. 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'm frightfully worried about the family end of it but I don't see what I can do. I am so tired of trying to run my life to summit them [...] Anyway I'm worn out worrying over the matter and I don't care what happens. I'm remaining here.

[...] I haven't met any celebrities so far except for [George] Antheil and Nathan Ash. If they're celebrities. Antheil is very nice and Ford's writing a libretto with my



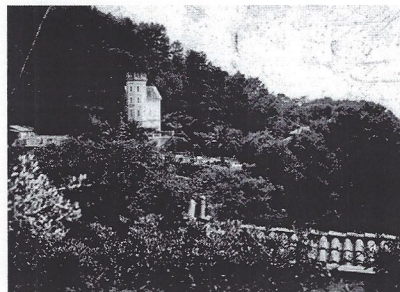
5. The path to the sea, Villa Paul, c.1931. Photograph taken by Ford. Copyright Estate of Janice Biala, courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

help for Antheil's next opera. Ash I don't like, much. Oh and I met Mme Rubinstein¹³ 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.¹⁴

Biala was a rejuvenating force for Ford, becoming his most important muse and critic. Ford 'quickly discovered in Janice a kindred spirit who shared his complete devotion to the arts,' wrote Arthur Mizener. 'Even better, she was a fighter, 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 [...]. This quality must have been all the more moving to Ford because she was very much a woman – small, feminine, young. He could not have been luckier, and he knew it.'¹⁵ As



6. 'View from our Terrace (at Villa Paul),' wrote Biala, c.1931. Copyright Estate of Janice Biala, courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

Ford put it, 'She'll keep him rolling along!'¹⁶ 'Biala was his first thoroughly bohemian partner,' wrote Max Saunders, 'caring little for money, social status, and domestic comforts.'¹⁷

In turn Biala was 'taken in hand by Ford'¹⁸ and led through the towns and cities that he adored. Ford shared secrets of the world that only a great historian could share.

Although perfectly paired, their relationship was fraught with challenge. The extreme difference in age put off many of their Paris friends. She was sure of her decision to stay with Ford, but Biala pleaded with Jack to keep her relationship with Ford secret until she could sort it all out. But the social pressure was suffocating. 'Gossip travels so fast, and Paris is the home of scandal as far as I can see,' Biala stated.¹⁹ '[...] when you know Ford you won't talk about his terrible superiority in age [...] 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 [...] For he is as young as you and I are mentally but physically he is a colossus [...] I believe him completely that I am the only woman he ever loved.'²⁰

'It's too long a story to go into,' Biala continued, '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 Ms. Ford.'²¹

Ford's health was another worry. '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.'²²

The lack of money was always a concern. Ford was incredibly poor and 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.'²³ When she wasn't painting, Biala was infamous for penning a fierce letter to Ford's publishers.

Only once did Biala write with regret. 'A fatal trip to Europe I took,' Biala wrote, '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.'²⁴

Through it all they lived the life they wanted – enduring the difficulties and celebrating good news.

'Ford's reminiscences²⁵ are setting the Thames on fire,' Biala wrote.

It even has the aurora 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



7. 'Ford Madox Ford' by Biala, 1931. Copyright Estate of Janice Biala, courtesy Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York.

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.²⁶

Ford and Biala began regular sojourns to the South of France in January of 1931. Toulon was their place and at the Villa Paul on Cap Brun they had their view, with the sea below them 'like ruffled satin and the mistral sings an infinite number of lays in Latin', as Ford wrote.²⁷

'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 two dollars a month extra for our furniture. We have a large garden in which we are growing, artichokes, tomatoes, corn, carrots, beans, watermelons, mushmelons,²⁸ 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 two weeks.²⁹

Ford's poem *L'Oubli – Temps de Sécheresse*, relates the success of their garden to the survival of their relationship:

Do you remember
When the lemons were little, the oranges smaller than
peas?

We have outlived sweetcorn and haricots,
The short season of plentiful water and the rose
That covered the cistern in the day of showers.
And do you remember the thin bamboo-canes?
We have outlived innumerable flowers [...] ³⁰

Biala was the last companion of Ford Madox Ford until his death in 1939. During their time together his prose and her paint interwove a canvas artistically rich and historically significant for both writer and painter. 'The years I spent with him were a long passionate dialogue,' Biala said, 'Starting from opposite points of view, opposite backgrounds, each convinced the other, converted the other.'³¹ Ford told Ezra Pound that Biala was 'rather modern',³² Together they practised their art and lived by it 'in the teeth of every disaster'.

'Bohemianism is a career itself. It takes too much out of you if you want to do any thing else,' wrote Biala. '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.'³³

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Notes

- 1 Ford Madox Ford, *New York is Not America* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, Inc., 1927), p. 161.
- 2 *Fleuve Profond: Nuitée à l'Américaine*, a poem by Ford Madox Ford reprinted in *Buckshee: Last Poems of Ford Madox Ford* (Cambridge: Pym-Randall Press, 1966), p. 5.
- 3 René Barotte, 'Janice Biala est devenue peintre grace a Porthos...', *L'Intransigeant*, Paris, 30 May 1967, p. 5B.
- 4 Jack Tworikov, 'On My Outlook as a Painter: A Memoir', *Leonardo* 7 (Spring 1974), p. 112.
- 5 Letter to Jack. Monday, 27 January, 1930.
- 6 Letter to Jack. Friday, 3 January 1930.
- 7 Letter to Jack. 23 October, c.1929.
- 8 Letter to Jack. 3 January 1930.
- 9 Letter to Jack. Monday, 28 April 1930.
- 10 Postcard to Jack. 2 July 1930 (Postmarked Ballancourt Seine et Oise to Jack Tworikov / Provincetown, Mass).
- 11 Ford's sister Juliet married the Russian émigré David Soskice. He was Jewish, but not religious. It is this grain of truth round which this 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 might cause her family and specifically Jack. The rabbi brother-in-law: one of the self-inventions for which Ford was famous!
- 12 *Return to Yesterday*. Reminiscences (up to 1914).
- 13 Helena Rubinstein (b. Chaja Rubinstein, 25 December 1870, 1871 or 1872, Kraków, Austria-Hungary (now Poland) – d. 1 April 1965, New York, USA) was a Polish-American cosmetics industrialist, founder and eponym of Helena Rubinstein, Incorporated, which made her one of the world's richest women.
- 14 Letter to Jack. 11 August 1930.
- 15 Arthur Mizener, *The Saddest Story: A Biography of Ford Madox Ford* (New York: World, 1971), p. 394.
- 16 *Fleuve Profond*, p. 7.
- 17 Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 371.
- 18 Letter to Jack. 25 April 1930.
- 19 Letter to Jack. 9 August 1930.
- 20 Letter to Jack. 26 September 1930.
- 21 Letter to Jack. Thursday, 16 October 1930.
- 22 Letter to Jack. Thursday, 16 October 1930.
- 23 Letter to Jack. 20 May 1931.
- 24 Letter to Jack. Thursday, 16 October 1930.
- 25 *Return to Yesterday* was published on 2 November 1931.
- 26 Letter to Jack. 30 November 1931.
- 27 *L'Oublié, Temps de Sécheresse*, a poem by Ford Madox Ford reprinted in *Buckshee: Last Poems of Ford Madox Ford* (Cambridge: Pym-Randall Press, 1966), p. 15.
- 28 Muskmelon or muskmelon: a cantaloupe or other moderate sized melon.
- 29 Letter to Jack. 20 May 1931. Ford relates to this experience regarding the admiral and the asphodel plant in *Providence*, 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 Providence 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...'
- 30 *L'Oublié, Temps de Sécheresse*, p. 16.
- 31 Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford*, p. 371.
- 32 Letter to Ezra Pound, 8 March 1933, reprinted in *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, edited by Richard M. Ludwig (Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 218.
- 33 Letter to Jack. 30 November 1931.

The Manchester Writing Competition: The Manchester Poetry Prize 2008



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Judges: Gillian Clarke, Imtiaz Dharker and Carol Ann Duffy.

For an entry pack or more information, please contact James Draper on +44 (0)161 247 1787 or j.draper@mmu.ac.uk You can also enter online at www.manchesterwritingcompetition.co.uk

* Terms and conditions apply.

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