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Book Review: Four Lives in Paris

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American expatriate scene in Paris between the World Wars, when so many of our budding artistic heroes sought intellectual stimulation in the French capital. This migration is not particularly surprising however, as novelists, poets, composers and artists of former colonies have always returned to their imperial capital for spiritual refreshment even as they rejected political exploitation. To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, they seek what the capital offers or they hope the capital takes nothing away. But Paris excelled in its seductive powers, attracting an international circle of luminaries who apparently considered along with Thomas Jefferson that they had two homelands, the other being Paris. From Dublin came James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* would be first printed in its entirety by the American expatriate Sylvia Beach; Stravinsky fled the USSR to premiere his early ballet scores under the baton of the French conductor Charles Munch; Spain lost Picasso to Paris and to the Americans Leo and Gertrude Stein whose Paris salons championed his early works.

Professor Ford, of the English faculty at Trenton State College, has written other works on this era; on this occasion he offers biographical sketches of lesser known expatriates. He suggests that their lives and works illuminate this era with comprehensiveness and depth, with fewer of the myth-making qualities which tend to obscure these years in works on more eminent persons. These four lives in Paris are no less interesting for being less studied than those of their better known compatriots.

The brash "Futuriste-terrible" composer, George Antheil, managed to incense audiences in London, Germany and Paris while sponging off the Ladies' Home Journal heiress Mary Louise Bok. The rare discordant mountain constructed from an Critics indulged in their best punning challenger to Stravinsky and Schoenberg Their irritated jeers confirmed that the USA had not yet produced a worthy preposterous antics notwithstanding. Some weeks in New Jersey before either sonorous hardware store tools and George Antheil, managed to incense airplane propellers, did nothing to prepare critical successes he achieved in France, (Antheil's avowed goal), the composer's for Carnegie Hall audiences, however. His stewardship of the French conductor Charles Munch; Spain lost Picasso to Paris and to the Americans Leo and Gertrude Stein whose Paris salons championed his early works.

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Another of Professor Ford's subjects, the publisher and critic Margaret Anderson, had given Antheil lodging for some weeks in New Jersey before either had set out for Europe. Their paths were to cross again in Paris, where Anderson engaged Antheil for a bit part in a Jean Cocteau film. She had indulged her esthetic preoccupations in several literary publications in the USA and continued her involvement with the Little Review well into the Paris years. Anderson's often precarious existence depended on the largesse of Georgette Maeterlinck's family, who housed the two of them in a sumptuous chateau where the decadent atmosphere nourished Margaret's growing interest in Oriental mysticism. More important perhaps than Georgette's material contributions was her intellectual companionship, for many years Anderson would ponder Georgette's question: Why were the Americans "so eager to experience France, when, unlike the French, who had learned to sit down, Americans were a people en marche?" The critic Harold Stearns, interrupted a promising career to flee collapsed American liberalism. Distraught in his personal life, Stearns' stints on the Paris Herald, Paris Tribune and Town and Country did little to cure him of the indolent procrastination which finally resulted in friends' racetrack bets and lonely nights on Parisian park benches. Beset with these spiritual crises, Stearns became the model for Harvey Stone in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*: that literary "acclaim" was to contrast sharply with Stearns' job as the Tribune's horseracing columnist under the assumed name of Peter Pickem. The spacious lawns of Chantilly and the elegant crowds of Longchamps racegoers created in Stearns a "kind of soft haze of pleasant unreality" which prompted F. Scott Fitzgerald to suggest that he write for Scribner's an *Apologia of an Expatriate.* Stearns finally admitted that he hated being an expatriate (impecunious or not) and returned to Depression, New York, where friends rallied to his assistance. He quickly published two books, *Rediscovering America* and *The Street I Knew.* In his 1938 *America Now,* Stearns turned optimistic about his homeland, the cycle of rejection-acceptance having come full turn in his successful remarriage.

The writer Kay Boyle, "the last of professor Ford's subjects, took pitty on the apathetic Harold Stearns, washing his shirts, mending his socks and pressing his suits. Stearns became Wiltshire Tobin in her 1939 *Monday Night,* the chronicle for a writer outstanding in every way except that he had not written any books. Kay Boyle's career engages our attention in a way unlike the other three because her doomed marriage to a French engineer was the immediate cause of her trip to France. Her association with *Broom,* an international magazine of the arts, introduced her to the literary publishing world; her novel *Nightingale* was serialized in *This Quarter* whose tubercular editor, Ernest Walsh, was her mentor and the father of her first child. Her remarriage to Laurance Vail, a "true" dadaist and former husband of the art collector Peggy Guggenheim, brought her Vail's children and an almost bourgeois tranquility. Of Professor Ford's subjects, it is perhaps Kay Boyle who has achieved the most literary recognition and Ford applauds her desire to render the expatriate age in its most human terms, with equal shares of agony and triumph.

For all its distortions, the mythical quality of those Parisian expatriate years lingers in our current time. Kenneth, Saul Bellow's narrator in *More Die of Heartbreak,* has returned from Paris to the USA "where the action is." He refers to his father's decades abroad and claims that "No European could possibly have made such a success of European life." Could Professor Ford say as much of Antheil, Stearns, Boyle and Anderson?