“If love is an element, like weather or wind, then it must go unchallenged.”
KAY BOYLE, YEAR BEFORE LAST

“In Kay Boyle’s long journey, a few themes remain constant: a belief in the absolute essentiality of love — whether on a personal or a global scale, an awareness of the many obstacles to its attainment, and a tragic sense of loss when love fails and the gulfs between human beings stand unbridged.”
SANDRA SPANIER, KAY BOYLE: ARTIST AND ACTIVIST

“I think your thesis about my work is deeply right: that all human misery can be seen as the failure of love.”
KAY BOYLE IN A LETTER TO SANDRA SPANIER

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The Absolute
Essentiality of Love

For a person of my generation, it’s hard to say it and not sing it; it’s hard to say it and not imagine Chris Kattan and Will Farrell bobbing their heads in unison. But I find myself often asking dance artist Haddaway’s timeless question, “What is love?”

There are few questions more important and few words that poets, novelists, and philosophers have spent more time trying to define. In a letter to her lover Henry Miller, writer Anaïs Nin answered the question plainly: “What is love but the acceptance of the other, whatever he is.” Acceptance is certainly a big part of love, but isn’t there more to it than mere acceptance? Acceptance is just the tolerating of that which is other, that which is not alike. Philosopher Theodor Adorno went a bit further, saying: “Love is the power to see similarity in the dissimilar.” He moves beyond mere acceptance of difference and sees love in a way as undermining difference. Love here becomes a sort of connective tissue.

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy to a friend,” preached Martin Luther King, Jr.

Yet for a writer like Charles Bukowski, the connective tissue of love is illusory. He wrote, “Love is a fog that burns with the first daylight of reality.” Ernest Hemingway, who had four wives and who-knows-how-many lovers, knew this all too well: “If two people love each other there can be no happy end to it.” Just because it’s tough though doesn’t mean we shouldn’t try, of course. James Baldwin knew, “Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up.”

Yes, writers have had a lot to say on the topic, but they’re not the only ones for whom love looms large, and thus, they’re not the only ones who say enlightening things on love. Actress Katharine Hepburn said, “Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get—only with what you are expecting to give—which is everything.” The giving aspect of love seems crucial. French mystic Marguerite Porete found violence in the giving and in the acceptance. To her, love involves some self-destruction. She wrote, “One must crush oneself, hacking and hewing away at oneself to widen the place in which love will want to be.”

Simon Critchley, in his book The Faith of the Faithless—an excerpt of which concludes our issue—takes Porete’s views of love as a touchstone for his ruminations on the subject. He sees love as an act of spiritual daring and an act of impoverishment, where, as Porete describes, you empty yourself, making space for love to enter. Porete is not the only thinker foundational to his argument, for Søren Kierkegaard plays a major role as well. It’s worth noting that Kierkegaard wrote in his journals: “It is really remarkable that while all the other attributes ascribed to God are adjectives, ‘Love’ alone is a substantive, and it would scarcely occur to one to make the mistake of saying: ‘God is lovely.’ Thus, language itself has given expression to the substantial element that is found in this attribute.”

While we won’t exactly attempt a definition of the strange phenomenon of love, we at The Scofield have chosen it as our theme for our second issue and hope that through the various definitions and descriptions of the
Boyle, who is certainly more well-known for her novels, short stories, and poetry, but it is where I began all those years ago. It was my actual port of entry. The book stands as one of the greatest memoirs of Paris in the twenties. In fact, it was this book, and a few others on the period, that started to really get me interested in underrated writers, writers who time seems to have forgotten. So without Being Geniuses Together there might never have been the magazine you are currently reading, which is the end result of a decade-old love affair with writers no one reads.

So let Kay Boyle be a writer no one reads no longer. When you sit down to read her work, we expect you will find what we found: that love is predominant—not just in its flowery, romantic form, but in its absence and its loss, and not just as an emotion between two private individuals, but as a state of political action. But, I’ll admit, there was some trepidation in choosing love as the theme: “Should we really have our first issue on a female author focus on the theme of love? Doesn’t that read at best cliché, at worst sexist?” Yet when we read Sandra Spanier’s Kay Boyle: Artist and Activist, we noticed that she found the same fascination with love in all its forms in Boyle’s writing that we had. Spanier explains, “In Kay Boyle’s long journey, a few themes remain constant: a belief in the absolute essentiality of love—whether on a personal or a global scale, an awareness of the many obstacles to its attainment, and a tragic sense of loss when love fails and the gulfs between human beings stand unbridged.”

You see, great writers on love don’t just write sonnets about how beautiful their lovers eyes are, making comparisons between body parts and flowers or stars or whatever. It’s too easy to do the whole roses-are-red-
THE SCOFIELD

TYLER MALONE

violets-are-blue thing. Honest writing on love is often
doing what Beach Boy Brian Wilson speaks of in his
song “Love and Mercy”: “I was standing in a bar
and watching all the people there. Oh, the loneliness in
this world, well, it’s just not fair.” It makes sense that
our Love Issue comes after our Solitude Issue because
writing on love is often a cataloguing of the ways in
which it is lost and the places where it is absent. That is
what Kay Boyle so often does in her work. There’s always
an underlying hope and wish for love and mercy, on
both a personal and a global scale, but there’s also an
acknowledgement that all too often love fails.

As Boyle wrote to Spanier in a letter: “I think your
thesis about my work is deeply right: that all human
misery can be seen as the failure of love.” With that kind
of endorsement, we couldn’t say no to a Kay Boyle &
Love Issue.

We have here in this issue some of Boyle’s earliest
work—her first published poem “Monody to the Sound
of Zithers” and two early unsigned “Briefer Mention”
reviews she did for The Dial—in addition to some of
her more substantial contributions to literature, with
excerpts from two of her phenomenal out-of-print novels,
Year Before Last and Monday Night. In addition, we have
a number of scholars, writers, and readers responding
to her work in various ways, through essays, interviews,
and pieces less easy to define. Of course, only part of the
issue focuses on Boyle, there is also plenty of other work
here, much of which circles the various forms of love, the
central theme of the issue.

We may never be able to properly define it, categorize
it, quantify it, but we do know one thing about love: it
is a fundamental quality of the human condition. Or, as
is suggested in Boyle’s novel Year Before Last, it is one
of this world’s unchallenged elements. It’s what gets us
through the days, the weeks, the years, our lives. We
will forever seek it, forever gain it, forever lose it, forever
create it, forever destroy it, forever engage with it. So
that’s what we’ve done in this issue: engaged not only
with Kay Boyle’s woefully underrated oeuvre but with
the thing her biographer, Sandra Spanier, called an
“absolute essentiality.”

Love and mercy to you and your friends tonight.
Kay Boyle
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Her white hair is waved and swept dramatically up from her face, pristine, impeccable. Her scarlet lips remind us of the belles of the twenties in Greenwich Village and Paris some seventy years ago. Large white earrings in the shape of flowers tell us who she is. Now she proceeds from her book-filled studio apartment, which is as spartan, as neat as she, although it is dotted with photographs of her third husband, once the Baron von und zu Franckenstein, a tall, blondish, handsome man with a look of shy vulnerability in his eyes. Alongside rests a framed portrait of craggy-faced Samuel Beckett. There are also photographs of a young Apple, the daughter now dead.

She makes her way to the elevator, ascending to the cafeteria for lunch. Two women join her, but they will not say “Good afternoon,” nor, they have given her to know, do they wish her to join them in the dining room.

Today she does not need them, for she has a guest, a publisher who is about to reissue one of her fourteen novels. This one, *Gentlemen, I Address You Privately*, was her third, first published in 1933. The passionate physical love at the heart of this novel is between men, and it’s treated as natural and with dignity, without a trace of self-consciousness or condescension.

“Why do so many old people get mean?” Kay Boyle inquires of her companion, Noel Young, who is of a certain age himself, if some twenty years her junior.

The other women at The Redwoods, a retirement community in Mill Valley, California, do in fact have grounds for their irritation with the famous writer who lives among them. For Kay Boyle has garnered an admirer, Dr. Tom Stone, recently retired, who comes frequently to take her to lunch or dinner. And although Dr. Stone attended these other women as well, it’s only Kay Boyle he now returns to see.

“You have to be over eighty and write thirty books,” Kay Boyle says sardonically. The indignities of old age have never led her to forget who she is.

For she’s frail now, her hands so gnarled by arthritis that it has become painful for her to write. She’s eighty-eight, and if her hair is still impeccably arranged, her signature white earrings in place, and her lips scarlet, she is also shrunken and unsteady on her feet; she is no longer the tall, imperious, black-haired, misty blue-eyed figure of drama and authority, “the writer Kay Boyle,” whose fame her mother, born in 1874 on the Kansas prairie, had dreamt of her since her “Katherine” was only six years old. But if she is the survivor of many losses and unrelenting illness—the second of her six children, Apple, died two years ago—she remains, emphatically, Kay Boyle.

In October of 1990 another operation, one for abdominal surgery, weakens her. She has survived nearly every ailment to which the species is heir: cerebral meningitis, disease of the gallbladder, pneumonia, diverticulitis, breast cancer twice, a hysterectomy, broken bones late in life, angina, crippling arthritis, increasing deafness, incipient blindness, and all the weakening of
superb literary magazine, *Broom*. Having married a French engineer named Richard Brault, Kay alighted in Brittany, where she began her lifelong autobiographical chronicle in prose and verse. From Les Brossis, Pleudihen, the Côtes du Nord, Le Havre, La Chartreuse, Harfleur, Cannes, Grasse, and Annot, with a hiatus in Stoke-on-Trent, England, she found her way to Paris—just in time.

In drama and intensity, her life rivaled her work, while her work reflected the life not only in its emotional truths, but in plot. Kay Boyle herself became the central figure of most of her novels. “I have put only my talent into my works,” Oscar Wilde, the sly mentor of Boyle’s Paris friends Harry and Caresse Crosby, once declared. “I have put all my genius into my life” By her mid-twenties, the same could be said of Kay Boyle.

The year 1926 found her in the South of France, having escaped the dull Brault to become the lover of the dashing Irish-American poet-editor of *This Quarter*, Ernest Walsh. They knew each other because Walsh had sought for his magazine, along with those of Pound, Joyce, and Hemingway, the poems and stories of twenty-four-year-old Kay Boyle.

Kay and the wild, handsome, dying Irish poet are in Grasse in March. Already he has entered the final stages of consumption. May places them in Mougins; in June they move to a mountain village called Annot, where they remain for July and August. The man whom fifty years later Kay Boyle would still call “the love of my life” dies in Monte Carlo in October. A few months later she bears his child, Sharon, the first of her six.

In 1927 Kay Boyle, impoverished and alone, demands that *This Quarter* survive. “It’s been wound up by a fierce integrity and it ought to keep going,” the twenty-five-year-old asserts, as if she could will it to happen. Words
like “fierce integrity” and “courage” are already coin of the realm for her life as for her art. By her mid-twenties she has achieved what Dickens’s David Copperfield hoped for himself when he wondered whether he would “turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else.” No supporting player, she has become the heroine of her own life.

Only in 1928 does Kay Boyle reach Paris. Eugene Jolas has already published her in transition. Instantly she becomes the golden girl among the expatriates, among her new friends not only Harry and Caresse Crosby but James Joyce, Marcel Duchamp, Brancusi, Picabia, Hart Crane, and Robert McAlmon. If not the friend, she is the acquaintance of Gertrude Stein, whose Tender Buttons echoed through her youth. For much of 1928 she is prey to the self-styled guru Raymond Duncan, brother of Isadora. From him she must effect a dramatic escape.

The place names multiply: they are now Paris street names: 17 rue Louis-David, 58 rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, the rue de Courcelles, the rue d’Alésia. At Le Moulin du Soleil, outside Paris, the mill Harry and Caresse Crosby bought from Armand, Comte de la Rochefoucauld, the pipes freeze in winter and they all drink 1811 brandy. Crosby with his Black Sun Press will be the publisher of Kay Boyle’s first book, called Short Stories. He draws a line down through literary history: “Sappho Jane Austen Kay Boyle.” Before she is thirty, Kay Boyle will have invented a new form for the short story which will become the signature for one of the most important American magazines of the second half of the century.

She was a great beauty, Kay Boyle, tall and angular, elegant, and always the one pursued, not the pursuer. Only two men whom she loves fail to take her to their hearts, one because his predilections forbid, the other mistakenly believing that in her early sixties she was on the threshold of old age. Many of the artists and writers of her generation fell for her and they didn’t forget her: Archibald MacLeish, and William Shirer, and James T. Farrell, and Nelson Algren. “Kay,” Farrell scrawls in 1958, nearly thirty years after their first meeting, “you are gentle / And I have loved you / Down the years … know chéri Kay / You were loved since 1931…. ” Requited and unrequited, love multiplies.

As lover of the brilliant, madly flamboyant painter and surrealist Laurence Vail, former husband of Peggy Guggenheim, again a pregnancy ahead of her next marriage, Kay perfects her craft at Sainte-Aulde outside Paris, and then once more in the South of France, at the Villa Coustille, at Col-de-Villefranche. Growing rich in stories, poems, and novels, as the wife of Vail she lived in Vienna, witnessing the rise of fascism and writing about it, her great theme of the thirties. From snowy Kitzbühel in the Tyrol, the Vails flee to Devon for a year of respite in England.

Always she dramatized the unlikely and inhospitable places where she plied her writer’s trade. Kay Boyle would remember “a room in a rundown Paris hotel in the Latin Quarter, a room that looked out on a cluttered courtyard in which pigeons complained all day and drunken drifters cried all night.” Her “remote corner of a terrace in the South of France” turned out to be a place where “French invalids came for a sight of the Mediterranean shining somewhere below.” Her room in Austria was “bare as a monk’s cell, in a mountain hut ten thousand feet above sea level, with the wide avenue of a glacier passing outside in total silence.” Wherever she was, she wrote.

In the summer of 1936, a chalet in Mégève in the
Haute-Savoie in France became home for the Vails. Kay Boyle was raising Vail’s children, Sindbad and often Pegeen, as well as her own four. The German invasion brought new place names: Cassis-sur-Mer, Marseilles, and then Lisbon, gateway to the land she had not seen for eighteen years. Having fallen in love with a refugee Austrian baron named Joseph von und zu Franckenstein, an antifascist nearly eight years her junior who has been the children’s tutor, Kay masterminds his escape to freedom. It is Jane Eyre in reverse, the woman artist as heroine in a real-life romance rivaling Casablanca in drama and intensity.

Kay Boyle’s sojourn in Europe seemed over. She had published four novels, three novellas and three collections of short stories, a volume of poetry, a ghostwritten memoir, a ghostwritten thriller, three translations, and one children’s book, as well as a good number of the entries in a compendium called 365 Days. She was among the finest American artists who had gone to Europe.

By 1941, apart from Gertrude Stein, Kay Boyle was considered by some to be the foremost woman writer of her generation. Katherine Anne Porter called her “among the strongest” to have emerged from the shadows of Stein and Joyce. “Hemingway’s successor,” pronounced Mary Colum. And then a chain of misfortune, injustice, tragedy became midwives to Kay Boyle’s artistic failure of nerve.

There are now in 1941 less glamorous places where she must exercise the habit of her craft. Colorado is the scene of her third marriage, to the Austrian baron, soon to become a war hero. Alone in America, Kay Boyle shuts herself in the toilet with her typewriter while two new babies sleep. As never before, she must now write for money. After a wartime interlude in New York, Europe once more beckons.

Foreign correspondent for The New Yorker, Kay Boyle in 1946 is back in Europe at the Hôtel de France et Choiseul in Paris, or at the Château de Nesles, Nesles, par Rosay-en-Brie, or at Le Vésinet, France; she is in Germany at Marburg, at Frankfurt am Main, at Bad Godesburg when McCarthyism extends its arm abroad, as Cohn and Schine, vicious twins of iniquity, find their way to her door. Branded traitors, Kay and Joseph wearily make their way home, he demoralized, she ready to fight.

They retreat to Connecticut, to a cottage at West Redding, and then to Rowayton, and a house on the grounds of a girls’ school on an inlet of Long Island Sound. Kay Boyle hurries away mornings to a rented room to write. Her youngest daughter, Faith, beautiful and haughty and clever, the image of the young Kay Boyle, recalls her mother in the fifties as “a Queen in exile.”

Something happens to the work, to Kay Boyle’s reputation, as she continues to enact her life on a cosmopolitan stage, the stage of world history. Audiences are bewildered by Kay Boyle’s characters, Europeans moving in unfamiliar landscapes, people facing the unrelenting demands of history in overwhelming times of upheaval. They suffer life under fascism; they break their hearts in the French resistance; they must survive the betrayals of the Spanish Civil War. They are people about whom few in America wish now to read. At the height of her hard-earned and unmistakable achievement as an artist, Kay Boyle begins to become—unknown.

Once more the place names change. Betrayed by the adopted country to which he had given his heart, Joseph Franckenstein sickens and dies. And yet in the 1960s here is the widowed Kay Boyle, in her sixties, emerging in San Francisco. She takes up residence in the Haight-Ashbury in a gaudily gingerbread Victorian house recalling the
century against which her mother had so vociferously rebelled.

A political activist now, Kay Boyle becomes once more a figure of legend, of myth, as she immerses herself in the struggles for civil rights and against the Vietnam War, for student rights, against injustice in America, in Iran, in the Soviet Union. The sixties are her sixties as her life spans the century. Ageless in the ferocity of her beliefs, and in the stalwart integrity of her commitments, Kay Boyle for the next three decades will redefine what it means to be a “woman of age.”

New place names chart her path: Hollins and Boston and Roxbury, and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. She is incarcerated at Santa Rita prison. She moves to Oregon, to Washington, and finally to Oakland, where in her eighties she sits writing at a simple white-painted kitchen table, as serviceable a desk as any she has graced. In her trademark white carved plastic earrings, her back straight with indignation, a great beauty through the ninth decade of her life, she carries on.

The unbending enemy of self-pity, unrelentingly dedicated to her art, she is now the author of forty-five volumes. Nearly ninety, she settles at Mill Valley, Marin County, California, where at a retirement community she organizes what surely must be her last chapter of Amnesty International. Emotional and romantic, she has survived illness, death, and betrayal, a stranger to tears.

For this most unapologetically autobiographical of writers, her work has been the story of her life. The life to which she devoted her genius provided ample, worthy venues for literature. But there were literary pitfalls, turbulent zones of which she took too little heed. The life for Kay Boyle, as for Oscar Wilde, sometimes so imitated the art that it seemed even as if she were living her life as a dress rehearsal for coming fiction. Truth resided in the work; in her life she adhered to lesser standards. There were times too when the work abounded in mannerisms, in posturing; her stories and especially her novels became self-justifying, as if they suffered for being apologias for the life.

With the passing years, Kay Boyle felt increasingly committed to values beyond the perfection of her craft. Unlike Wilde in this, she concluded that the artist must be a force for social and political good. With a warrior mentality, an epic heroine now, she cleaved her way through so that her style carried her militance. Fierce in the defense of her convictions, thriving on outrage, even as the years weakened her, Kay Boyle, in her work as in her life, welcomed risk, and never blinked. Unintimidated from her earliest youth, when she stood up to “Puss,” her grandfather, a man rooted in bourgeois respectability, she was never daunted by convention. Citizen of the planet, Kay Boyle lived the history of the century, bearing arms.

“Isn’t Vail a Jewish name?” Ezra Pound is said to have inquired of her husband’s origins. Howsoever much she liked him, Kay Boyle left Ezra Pound behind.

“My dear fellow, do what you feel,” Bertrand Russell once advised parliamentarian R. H. S. Crossman, who was plagued over whether to leave his wife to marry the woman he loved. Kay Boyle required no one’s sanction when she left her first husband, Richard Brault, to follow Ernest Walsh, nor when she left Laurence Vail to begin life anew with her Austrian baron. “You’re just like Mama!” her older daughters, still angry twenty years after the breakup of the Vail marriage, accused her youngest, Faith Franckenstein, who would live by her own lights, modeling herself, she would say, after her mother. In her family Kay Boyle became not “Grandma” but an
to class at tumultuous San Francisco State. Desirable to men, a conqueror of the male heart, she was sexually puritanical. A woman of great moral and physical courage, she imparted to her children many fears: of water, of mountains, of those horses which stampeded through the pages of her fiction with such defiance.

“My life can be known through my work,” she dismissed one would-be biographer. Rich in love, in work, in commitment, the life of Kay Boyle has been a personal chronicle of the century which it spans. This, then, is a biographical impression of that life, as, inevitably, it becomes as well a story of our time.

Like Chaucer’s Wyf of Bathe, Kay Boyle has had her world “as in my tyme.” She chose a full authentic life before feminism would give it a name. Never would she allow herself to be tagged a “woman writer.” From the age of twenty, learning from her mentor Lola Ridge, Kay Boyle stood up for “the liberation of all people, both women and men.” Kay Boyle’s has been many lifetimes: an American life, a French life, a Paris life, an Austrian life, a wartime American life, a German life, a Connecticut life, a California life, all these place names of her fiction.

Those who would revive the silenced reputations of American women writers have strangely ignored her. In a 1900 New York Times Magazine article, Mary Gordon, attempting to overturn the “overwhelmingly male” canon, invokes the familiar names of Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Flannery O’Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, and Eudora Welty. Kay Boyle had been too international, too little susceptible to easy definition to be useful. She has situated the relationships of men and women amid the drumrolls of history and politics. Harry Crosby might have linked her to Jane Austen, but she was never domesticated. And she eschewed latter-day feminism as too narrow a politics for one who had been familiar since her youth with socialists no less than with suffragettes.

The years honed her character, this woman of manifold contradictions. Cold and pale, her white hair alive with indignation, she was both imperious and self-deprecating, honest yet given to exaggeration and mythologizing. A writer who exquisitely anatomizes suffering and failures of love, she was never given to introspection either in her life or in her art. Modest and yet vain, she appeared as the political radical in a Paris suit carrying a fine leather briefcase and a fountain pen...
If you’re interested in Kay Boyle, but have no clue where to begin, here are some recommendations for you from some writers and scholars intimately connected with Boyle and her oeuvre.

**Andrew Mason on The Crazy Hunter by Kay Boyle:**

There’s a reason why Kay Boyle once wrote to her sister that *The Crazy Hunter* is the best thing she’s ever written, namely that it is. Katherine Anne Porter took that claim even further when she wrote, “The Crazy Hunter is the story closest to perfection that I have ever read.” A novella about a girl returning home, falling in love with a blind horse, and doing everything in her power to give that blind horse a purpose, the book puts the central issues of Boyle’s work on display. Here love is both personal and political, and our capacity for hope and mercy go hand-in-hand with our want and need for love and compassion and companionship. The book acts as a distillation of everything that haunts Boyle’s bibliography: aesthetically beautiful, crystallized sentences that wander in and out of characters’ heads; an affection for characters no matter their personal flaws and failings; an understanding that love is the most important phenomenon underpinning our everyday actions in both the public and private spheres; an acknowledgement that this mysterious phenomenon of love is difficult to sustain as the chaos and entropy of the universe plots to unravel what we try to create; and an ambiguity, a mystery, a doubt of what the future might hold—hopeful, but never certain. The book is bold, and beautiful, and as Boyle as Boyle can be.

**Anne Reynes-Delobel on Year Before Last by Kay Boyle:**

*Year Before Last* (1932) was the first novel by Boyle I read and it has remained a personal favorite ever since. It drew its inspiration from the time Boyle spent on the French Riviera with poet and little magazine editor Ernest Walsh before he died prematurely of tuberculosis in October 1926. A young American, Hannah, leaves Normandy and her French husband to recover from a lung disease in the South of France where she falls in love with Martin Sheehan, the ailing editor of a new Anglo-American literary magazine. The pace of the novel is masterful. Unhurried descriptions rich with vivid details underscore the story’s tension, while the irrevocability of time and the obdurate facts of mortality actually intensify the protagonist’s belief in the power of a rejuvenated poetic idiom and the communal possibilities for life and literature. In the blink of an eye, ordinary scenes turn into defamiliarized landscapes, thus betraying Boyle’s familiarity with surrealism. In achieving a delicate balance between finitude and freedom, the novel is an unforgettable tribute to love.

**Linda Hamalian on My Next Bride by Kay Boyle:**

*My Next Bride* is an engrossing, fictionalized account of the early days of Kay Boyle’s complicated relationship with Harry and Caresse Crosby. The novel, Boyle’s fourth, has been described as yet another rendition of expatriate life in Paris in the twenties: after all, in May 1928 Eugene...
Jolas introduced Boyle to the raffish and glamorous Crosbys at the Bal Nègre in Montparnasse. More importantly, the book provides a sharp picture of Boyle’s vibrant personality, of her determination to write even if that meant selling, in a shop on boulevard St.-Germain, togas, sandals, and scarves produced by a commune in Neuilly, or borrowing money outright to ensure that, however temporary, she and her daughter would have a place to call home. The intimacy that grows between Kay Boyle (Victoria in the novel) and Caresse Crosby (Fontana) foreshadows a devoted friendship that would last forty-two years.

K. Thomas Kahn on Avalanche by Kay Boyle:
Written during the latter part of the Second World War and published in 1944, Boyle’s Avalanche represents a critical shift in her writing; while still demonstrating a stylistic debt to modernist figures such as Henry James, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein, Avalanche sees Boyle pressing forward into more overtly political work—a thematic sensibility that will color her work to come, especially with the advent of the Vietnam War. In many ways, while she is one of American expatriate literature’s most unique prose stylists, one that is sadly forgotten and whose reputation is horrifically buried in literary culture today, she is also the twentieth century’s most vocal chronicler of war, covering and spanning every war’s repercussions for America, the world at large, and those individuals poised precariously between borders and nations. In Avalanche, the American Fenton Ravel travels to war-torn France in order to find her lost lover, Bastineau, who has put his knowledge of mountaineering and the frontiers to good use in assisting French nationals to escape from Germany across the Alps. In what is perhaps Boyle’s most brilliant and cinematic opening chapter—demonstrating a debt to James as well as to Alfred Hitchcock—Fenton travels in a blacked-out train with two men whose faces she can see only by the light of a paltry match used to light proffered cigarettes. On the journey, Fenton tries to decipher their nationalities based on their accents, their opinions about world politics, their manners, and the way they interact with each other—launching one of the first extended interior monologue scenes in all of Boyle’s novels. However, it becomes clear that in a world ruptured by war and in which no one feels wholly at home, national identity is a myth, at best. And this is the central predicament with which Fenton deals in Avalanche on her quest to rejoin her lover Bastineau. Along the way, not only are patriotism and national allegiance called into question, but so are the ineffable yet persistent callings of the heart: as in all of Boyle’s work, Avalanche’s themes of love and espionage examine the dialectical relationship between these states, just as her characters play out a sociopolitical chamber drama in which the heart knows nothing about borders, and love knows no bounds of national or political allegiance.

Thomas Austenfeld on Generation without Farewell by Kay Boyle:
Kay Boyle’s novel Generation without Farewell, published in 1960, was the last major text she wrote about Europe after having lived there for 25 years as an expatriate American. It appeared at a time when the reading public faced more and more texts and movies that explicitly and implicitly dealt with Germany, the Holocaust, and questions of historical guilt. Katherine Anne Porter’s Ship of Fools would follow in 1962 (filmed in 1965, the same year in which The Sound of Music
appeared); Leon Uris’s *Exodus* (1958) and its film version (1960) preceded it. Boyle’s novel gives us the story of a German journalist returned home from a POW camp in Colorado in uneasy cooperation—he serves as translator—with a motley group of American occupiers and war profiteers who are baffled by their tasks. Only one of them realizes what is wrong: to achieve anything worthwhile, occupiers must be intellectuals. Boyle spends considerable time in the novel evoking Germany’s cultural history, especially in classical music, as the proper tool for the (re-)education of people misled by totalitarian ideology. The novel is born out of deep knowledge and profound humanitarian thinking, and it stands up well to being re-read at a time of international conflicts about religion, resources, and ideologies.

**Deborah Denenholz Morse on “Winter Night” by Kay Boyle:**

Kay Boyle’s most anthologized story, “Winter Night” (1946), tells of a nameless woman who is a concentration camp survivor and her night of babysitting a little girl, Felicia, who is neglected by her fashionable mother. The story would act as a perfect port of entry for uninitiated readers of Boyle because it deals with the writer’s greatest thematic obsessions in microcosm. Set in New York City at the end of World War II, before “the fathers came back,” the story is concerned with the power of love and maternal nurturance to survive even the most virulent hatred. Here, Boyle’s “ethics of care,” a term Thomas Austenfeld ascribes to her, is necessarily connected to a judgment of those who refuse to take responsibility for others. I see these “ethics of care” that oppose fascism in Boyle’s work as gendered, an ethos that begins with the resistance to patriarchal dominance. There is still a chance to salvage what is human in us if we can take responsibility for others, if we can love enough. By the end, the winter night—for the characters and also for the reader—no longer feels so cold nor so long.

**Tandy Cronyn on “The Lost” by Kay Boyle:**

I stumbled across Kay Boyle because I am an actor and I was searching for material that might lend itself to the creation of a one-woman show. I looked up her bio online because a playwright friend of mine told me she would make a great subject, but I wasn’t very interested in doing a dramatic biography—one cannot easily shovel a person’s life into a single evening of theater. I happened to pluck a volume of her short stories, *Smoking Mountain: Stories of Germany During the Occupation*, off the shelf at the New York Public Library. One story in that collection grabbed me by the throat and would not let me go. Kay Boyle’s story “The Lost” is singularly dramatic. In adapting this story for the stage, the playwright, Simon Bent, lifted some of Boyle’s dialogue almost unchanged into the play, now called *The Tall Boy*. “‘That’s right,’ said the tall boy. ‘His wife, she done pass on back in ‘43, and he ain’t got no one left to care for. He’s an ignition expert, and I learn how to suhvice cars with him.’” So speaks a fifteen-year-old Czech boy of his G.I. mentor (a black sergeant from Chattanooga, Tennessee) in the southern drawl he learned from the soldier who has taken him under his wing. Or the fourteen-year-old Polish boy—“I done everything that every son-of-a-bitch in the army ever done”—spoken in a Brooklyn accent the boy has picked up from his G.I. buddies. The characters, fully formed, leap off the page and onto the stage with full theatrical impact—a joy for the actor to play.
Simona Blat on *American Citizen* by Kay Boyle:

*American Citizen* was the first Kay Boyle work that I encountered, largely because it was placed in my hands. Published in 1944, it’s a long poem in sections, based on the experiences of Boyle’s third husband, an Austrian skier who trained for war action in Colorado. Written in long, tumbling lines, it combines the personal and political, which will become a staple for Boyle’s writing well into the ‘80s. Don’t let the title mislead you—the poem is not as nationalistic as it alludes, rather its American-ness is in the nods to Whitman and William Carlos Williams—poets Boyle highly regards. In a Colorado of snow, dance, and farewells, it is quite obviously verse written by a lover of prose, celebrating both the “waltz of the wives whose men are in khakis” and “the men we love [who] move from the wings and take their part in history.” A great place to start if you can’t decide whether to pick up the novels or the poetry first.

Maria Cruz on *Being Geniuses Together* by Kay Boyle & Robert McAlmon:

There’s a reason why the phrase “Paris in the twenties” is synonymous with romance. There’s a reason why when Woody Allen made a film about the temptations of nostalgia, he had a wistful writer travel back in time to visit that very place in that very decade. For the artistic set, few settings hold more magic. It was a time and place of upheaval, of experimentation, of innovation, of genius. *Being Geniuses Together*, which chronicles that decade, is haunted by the ghosts of many geniuses of the period. The big names (James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein), the lesser-known masters (Djuna Barnes, Wyndham Lewis, H. D., Jean Toomer), and the forgotten figures (Robert M. Coates, Abraham Lincoln Gillespie, Mary Butts, Mina Loy) all wander through the Paris of these pages. The book originated as a memoir by Robert McAlmon. After McAlmon’s death, his friend and literary confidant Kay Boyle interspersed the chapters of his memoir with chapters of her own. Because of the set-up of these tit-for-tat chapters, the book becomes a sort of double-vision of the period and place. If you don’t know much about Boyle, it’s really not a bad place to start. It gives you a sense of where her sensibility arose from, and I think after reading it you’ll be hungry to consume the novels of both of its writers—which is great, because McAlmon needs the rediscovery as much as Boyle does.
Whenever you walk into a restaurant, said Martin, look up and down to be sure, for Eve has no suspicion.

On the third day it happened that when Hannah walked into a restaurant, a simple one so it seemed to her, on the port, she saw Martin and Eve in the window’s bay, sitting there. The side of Martin’s face was turned to her and he did not see, and as Hannah stood for a moment at the door, she saw that he was talking and that a full warm smile was blooming on Eve’s mouth. There was even rouge on her lips for the occasion, and her head was cocked and her eyes smiling to the things that Martin said. Hannah saw then how greatly she had altered, and how different a woman Eve was now that Martin was a holiday and no longer a natural matter in her life. She had spent out her money for elegance: for the shape of a hat, and the shade of her finger nails. She had set aside the English taste for fancy trim and buttons, left off her ropes of amber and put a wave in her hair. And she was harking to Martin as though to a lover speaking, and he, with his tongue wagging in his head, was letting his untouched food go cold.

Before Hannah went out alone into the street she saw this: the Scotch aunt cocking her good ear to Martin’s voice and toying with the silver. There was even a flush on Eve’s face as if she were playing a gentle duel of love with someone new and captivating and an entire stranger to her.

For the first time Hannah saw that at moments in Eve’s youth she must have possessed a sort of beauty; for now the suspicion had gone from her face and she was quick with delight. At times when men said warm things to her in her youth, thought Hannah, she must have been a fair young girl.

Hannah walked out into the street and up under the palm trees, remembering Martin’s talk of Eve. His father had wanted her settled and safe, but there had never been any man that seemed good enough to her; and maybe the truth was that she had never known any man whose words could keep this beauty on her face. After her parents’ death, she had run out of the room from a bald Scotch barrister in fear, for however he put the matter, she knew he was after what her parents had left behind. Whatever any man said, she had no faith in it, and on her physiognomy lingered suspicion of this one, contempt for that. Only the Irish nephew, come from the States with honey on his tongue, only this one could wipe the dovetails of rancour from her face.

Now if I were a brave and a simple woman, thought Hannah as she walked away under the trees with her cap in her hand and her hair out in the sun, I would see sin and virtue and be able to distinguish between them. I only believe in sin when I see the fury on Eve’s face, and I must be the sinner. When I see the look she has now with him I know there can be no virtue in having come between these two.

Only the matter of love could not be explained. Hannah walked a long way under the palms, with the sea as blue as heaven murmuring on her right hand. It was not rightful, nor was it wrong, she had no name to give it. What can you do with love? she said. On which side does it lie? If love is an element, like weather or wind, then it

A Selection from

_Year Before Last_

...
must go unchallenged. The virtuous can go to shelter, for their strength is in themselves. It’s only the frail and the weak who need it; the strong have something else to do.

This sort of strength was Eve’s, she thought; for all of Eve’s unbearable delight in love she had taken it as foul weather always, and gone in the other direction. Only in the lingo and shape of Martin was it safe to her, like a shower falling in her own garden on her own soil: he was young, nephew, ill, and he could not come beyond. In her own heart Hannah grieved for this weakness in her own blood and Martin’s, that they must reach out in frenzy for every vestige of love that might go.

The thought of the three dogs waiting and biding their time in peace made her turn back to the hotel. It was the finest on the seaside walk, for Martin would have no other, and was built up in a garden of idle trees and tended beds. Whenever she walked up the driveway, she felt her clothes shabby and graceless on her, her shoes worn down at the heels, and her cap so inadequate that she swung it still in her hand. She ran up the stairs alone, with no wish to see her own face reflected whichever way she turned in the mirrors of the lift, and when she stepped into the great front room, the dogs jumped up from the soft carpet and flung themselves upon her, trying with their mouths to say her name.

She sat down on the bed with their paws upon her, and her thoughts went back to Martin. Her hands moved over the dogs’ dark shining brows. If he were a child and spoiled like a child, then she must have wisdom for him. But where does one find wisdom? She thought this suddenly in fright. How does wisdom come?

She looked in anger about the handsome room with its wide white bath, and its ante-room, impatient that she and the three stricken dogs should be sitting shabbily there. What was this hotel but another drop of honey from Martin’s tongue, a word of blarney because he in his life had seen too many smaller, simpler places? What were the servants in fancy dress but an affront to them, for they had never seen the dew hanging on the dogs’ coats in the morning in the north when they came home through the fields with their moustaches dripping. She looked down at her own feet on the carpet and wondered if these were the same bone and flesh that had gone through the grass and sunk into the deep pliant earth of spring, had traversed water, and had paused while the dogs stopped to flash their tongues through the icy stream. The bottom of its bed would now be laid with heavy short green mosses, and long early grasses would be bellied with jewels and swimming in the current. Even with the thick hirsute armour of the palm trunks showing in the window, Hannah felt nearer the far soaking earth in February and the swampy ground that sucked achingly at the feet in colder places.

She was sitting still, stroking back the dogs’ long hair when Martin came back in the late afternoon. He switched on the light quickly and said: What are you doing there in the dark? He had talked so long with Eve that his voice was dry in his throat and his eyes were hollow. What were you doing? Were you asleep? he said.

She went across the room to him and he kissed her. You must pack the bags quickly, he said. We are going away.

Where are we going? said Hannah. She kept her hands close together, and something inside her seemed shaking with the cold.

Back to Vence, said Martin. Back to Vence together, you and me.

Hannah hastened here and there in the room, picking
up this and that, smoothing his bathrobe over, laying things one on the other into the open cases.

Everything’s fixed up, said Martin. He was changing his shirt and whistling softly to himself. Everything’s just as it should be. We’ve talked out the entire next number. We’ve only a few contributions to decide on now. Eve’s strong for Lady Vanta’s work.

Everything’s fixed up, he said. He skipped across the room and pushed the bell button. She’s as keen about doing it as ever. Everything’s turned out as it should.

And if there be sin and virtue, thought Hannah as she laid his handsome neckties in, then it is sinful to greet him now with a sour grieving face when things have gone well for him.

Martin, I’m glad, she said, and he crossed the room to her and pressed his head close on her shoulder. His empty white cheeks betrayed him, but when she had him in her arms she closed her heart to the thought of the defence, denials and mitigation his mouth must have shaped for Eve.

Darling, we’ll be simple again, he whispered. In our house again, eating our meals together. We’ll be simple.

She put her arms about him, about his broad slim shoulders and his delicate hips. She held him close to her, pressing him gently to her, bearing him against her as if to give him strength.

You will make me strong, he said softly to Hannah. His breath sighed wearily from his open mouth. And yes, said Hannah, yes, yes, I will cherish you forever. She set to packing the bags again with one arm about his waist, hastening from one case to the next so that they might speedily leave the place.

When the porter came to the door she dropped her arm from Martin and ran for the last things in the bathroom: the toothbrushes and Martin’s yellow slippers by the tub. Martin himself sat down on the side of the bed and looked the bill over. In a moment he opened his pocket book and said:

It’s funny, I haven’t the money to pay the bill here.

Hannah came out of the bathroom with the things in her hands and looked at him.

It’s a very expensive hotel, Martin said. You can’t imagine how much they ask for this silly room, for instance.

Martin stood up and handed the bill back to the porter. Then he waved his hand at him: Go away, he said. I have to go out and get some money from the bank or the American Express or elsewhere.

The man took the bill and closed the door, and Martin put on his hat. He smoothed the side of his black hair back and looked at himself severely in the mirror.

It’s a great nuisance. It’s just what I didn’t want to do. I have to go borrow some money from Eve, he said.
Writing Is About Belief: A Conversation with Shawn Wong

Emerging from the authorial and personal mentorship of Kay Boyle, Shawn Wong is one of the preeminent voices in the Asian-American literary community. He is the author of two stylistically disparate novels, *Homebase* and *American Knees*, which chronicle the Chinese-American experience with compassion, humor, and a rich understanding of a historical narrative that is too often marginalized in our textbooks. Though each novel is different in terms of theme and cadence, Wong’s palpable connection to his ancestors complicates the distinction between fiction and history: memory, identity, language, and culture are in a constant state of flux, yet he manages to weave his tales into a lucid understanding of what it means to be Chinese-American. Despite the cruelty his characters endure, a reader finds love on every page.

In our discussion, Wong elaborates on what it was like to discover his literary voice under the direction of Boyle. Not only was she a mentor in terms of his writing; she also taught him how to live as a writer.

CH: You studied under Kay Boyle at San Francisco State. Did you know of Boyle’s work before you went there?

SW: I did not know of Kay’s work before I entered SFSU (SF State College then). I actually signed up for her one-on-one directed writing class because she was the first one on the list of faculty, her name beginning with a “B.” Before I met her for the first time, though, I read the 1962 volume of her *Collected Poems* and was so moved by the voice in those poems. I still read that book from time to time.

CH: In 1967, you started working as a poet under James Liddy at San Francisco State. When you started working one-on-one with Boyle, you became a novelist. How do you recount her influence on the conversion?

SW: Some clarification—I enrolled as a freshman at SFS in 1967, took poetry writing with Liddy, because, well, I had been writing poetry since June of that year so I thought I was a poet and I thought I wrote really, really good poetry. Hey, it was the “Summer of Love” in San Francisco. I remember reading a poem by one of the students in the class and I realized right away that I was the worst poet in the class. I remember the average of a student, at that time, at SFS was 28. I was 18. I was panicked and I knew I had better start writing some halfway decent poetry before it was my turn to share with the class. It was terrifying to stand on the precipice of total humiliation. Who better to teach you than an Irish poet? I learned. I started working with Kay in the next semester in 1968.

After S.I. Hayakawa turned SFS into a police state in 1969, I transferred to UC Berkeley, which was like jumping from the frying pan into the fire during those tumultuous years of protest. But, I stayed enrolled part-time at SFS so that I could continue to work with Kay. Tuition being about $50 a semester at SFS and $90 a quarter at Berkeley, it was perfectly doable.
CONOR HIGGINS

After I graduated from Berkeley in English in 1971, I entered the graduate Creative Writing program at SFS as a poet. I started writing longer and longer poems that really were masquerading as prose. At some point Kay and another professor, Herbert Wilner, suggested that I should be a fiction writer. They also encouraged me to stay three years in the program instead of two. I joked that I was being held back a year in school by my teachers.

CH: You ended up living with Boyle. How did that happen?

SW: About midway through grad school, I moved into Kay’s house at 419 Frederick Street. I had already spent a lot of time there. During the student strike at SFS, she would hold classes at her house and I was often a guest there, so it seemed natural that when a room became available, I would move in. The rent was $70 a month. Kay lived in a self-contained apartment on the top floor and there were four of us renting rooms and sharing the common living areas in the three-story Victorian. As a professor myself now, I can’t imagine one of my students living in my house!

CH: You’ve said that Boyle taught you not only how to be a writer, but also how to live one’s life as a writer. Could you elaborate on that?

SW: I not only learned my craft as a writer from Kay, but living with her, I was able to see and understand how to live my life as a writer. Her bedroom was just above my bedroom and I could hear her typing. She would sit in bed and type with the typewriter on her lap. I was living in a literary household. It was like a true old world master and apprentice relationship. When you live with your teacher, you have 24 hour access to her and conversely, she has 24 hour access to you. I lived in a household where we talked about writing and literature nearly everyday.

I remember one day coming home and checking and sorting the mail for everyone in the house. Kay came downstairs and picked up a letter, opened it and asked me to read to her since she didn’t have her glasses. I read the letter which had some unkind things to say about the American political system and President Nixon in particular and it was signed, “Love, Sam.” “Who is Sam,” I asked. “Sam Beckett,” she replied.

Another time she saw me reading The Dubliners and asked me, “I see you’re reading Jim’s book. How do you like it?” There were filing cabinets down in the basement with letters from Joyce, William Carlos Williams, Beckett, transcripts and files from when she testified in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

The stand where I usually left my house keys on had three ceramic hands jutting out from a ceramic tree branch was bought at a Paris flea market and given to her by Marcel Duchamp.

I spent many evenings with her up in her apartment drinking Dubonnet with lemon and ice while discussing my writing or what demonstration we were going to next or my exploits as a mountain climber and rock climber since she had done the same in her youth. She even gave me some of her old mountaineering gear that she had kept and I still have it today. She gave me some of her family silver if I promised to use it, rather than store it away. To this day, the forks and spoons sit in my kitchen drawer.

She once had in her will that I would be given her 1964 Chevrolet Malibu if she were to die or be unable to drive. Years later, she called me and asked if I minded if she gave the car to someone else who needed a car badly, which of course, I agreed.

Although I moved out of the house sometime in 1974 after I graduated from SFS with my Master’s, she...
continued to be my teacher until her death. She read everything I wrote. I visited her often. She called herself my surrogate mother, which was true.

CH: What novels or stories of hers are your favorite or the ones that continue to stay with you?

SW: She called me one day and told me that she was dedicating her last book, *Collected Poems of Kay Boyle* published by Copper Canyon in 1991, to me. It's, of course, my favorite Kay Boyle book. There are several poems in the book that are either written for me or I'm mentioned in the poems. The main character in her novel, *The Underground Woman*, thinks about me and my writing as she sits in jail.

She gave me signed copies of almost all of her books and in each book there would be an elaborate inscription. I don't think I have a favorite, but when I read these books, I hear her voice.

To have someone have that much faith in your ability as a writer, you better become a writer!

CH: Boyle said that your writing and her writing were linked in “spirit and substance.” Passages from *Homebase* have appeared in her poems, non-fiction, and the novel *The Underground Woman*. Expand on the “spirit” element. Would you describe the spirit as a thematic union?

SW: My narrative voice was invented through Kay’s mentorship and teaching. I think, at first, I wrote like her, imitated her as any apprentice might do. Then later, it became more my own.

CH: An earlier version of your master’s thesis became your first novel, *Homebase*. The nonlinear form of the text lends itself well to the nature of dreams, memory, fiction, identity, and history. Did your background as a poet influence the form? How much of an impact did Boyle have on the structural elements of the work?

SW: *Homebase* started as a twenty page poem when I was a grad student at SFS. Kay told me it should be a novel. As a novel, it reads like a poem. My second novel, *American Knees*, started as a twelve page poem. I think that’s how I write novels—I look for the narrative voice in poetry first and then find the story later.

CH: You mention how Boyle taught you that writing “was about belief.” As your work can, in part, be described as historical fiction, how does that advice factor into not only the writing process, but also the act of reading and interpretation? Do you think historical fiction has a special relationship with belief?

SW: Kay never gave me assignments that were traditional writing exercises. You know, write in the third person limited omniscient or something like that. She just said, “Writing is about belief.” It should be about what you believe in. I teach the same way she taught me. I tell students the same thing. I alter it a little these day by adding that they shouldn’t write what they already know, but what they’re trying to learn or understand.

When you read Kay’s work, you see almost the entire 20th century in her work and everything she believed in. Her writing is tied to every traumatic human event in the 20th century. Historical fiction is the life we’re living right now.

CH: In the introduction to a newer edition of *Homebase*, you mention an encounter with a PhD student who was writing her dissertation based upon the work. She claimed your work was “paternalistic and represented [your] efforts to legitimize the Asian American masculinist position.” How do you react to readings of your work that utilize lenses that you don’t
think apply or misrepresent/misread your work in some way?

SW: That student didn’t understand that when Homebase was published in 1979 there were fewer than a handful of Chinese American works of fiction published in America and, I think, mine might have been the only novel in-print at that time. In order to make a judgment about a book, you need to know the literary history of the moment, rather than to judge it by the range of literature that came after. Is it more important to know, for example, that African American publishers published my first three books, than to judge my book against a limited literary theoretical framework? Is it important to know that Homebase is set in a historical time when the Chinese population was almost entirely male? A literary scholar should know the historical context of the book before them.

CH: In the introduction to American Knees, there’s an anecdote about a reader who felt the need to absorb Homebase with a highlighter in hand. As I read a more digressive, nonlinear text, I often find myself underlining and scribbling more than with an undeviating narrative. Do you annotate as you read? Does annotation enter your own writing?

SW: I don’t really annotate my own writing—I just rewrite and edit. When I read, I sometimes write in the margins of the book, but I think that’s more for teaching purposes rather than me observing another writer at work.

CH: You said that when you started writing in college, you realized that you were the only Asian American writer that you knew—Asian and Asian American authors were (and still are) largely underrepresented in high school and college curricula. In light of the fact that Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority population in the US, why is this still the case and what can be done to remedy it?


These days when I teach Asian American literature, it’s not really Asian American at all—it’s more Pacific Rim literature written in English by authors from around the Pacific Rim. I was invited to a conference years ago at Hong Kong University. The organizers had asked every consulate in Hong Kong to send a fiction writer of Chinese ancestry who wrote in English to Hong Kong. The US choose me. I met writers from Malaysia, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, the UK, Canada, etc. It was eye-opening to have that conversation with other writers. I think that’s where our writing is going—the diaspora.

CH: You mention Michael Derrick Hudson, and there has been much talk surrounding his inclusion in the 2015 edition of Best American Poetry under the pseudonym Yi-Fen Chou. I’m curious if you’d be willing to talk about your thoughts on this whole odd story. What do you think about Hudson’s use of the pseudonym? About pseudonyms in general? About Sherman Alexie’s choice to keep it in the collection? And about the wider accusation implicit in Hudson’s use of the pseudonym that in the current climate it’s easier to get published as an Asian writer than as a Caucasian one?

SW: I think the biggest crime in all of this is Hudson’s borrowing the real name of a woman he had gone to school with. It’s not just a pseudonym, but identity theft when he spelled the name exactly the same, not understanding that the phonetic spelling of someone’s Chinese name is like a fingerprint. That theft is inexcusable and speaks to Hudson’s ignorance of Chinese identity, language, and ethnicity. The good thing about
Sherman Alexie’s choice to leave Hudson in the anthology is the international debate and exposure of Hudson’s fraud and, I would hope, the eventual collapse of his writing career. There’s nothing new about assuming an ethnic identity and a pseudonym, but willingly and knowingly taking a real person’s name with the intention of moving up in the slush pile of literary magazines is a crime. It also diminishes and may even cast suspicion on the work of Asian American poets in the same anthology.

CH: In 1975, you and Frank Chin co-edited an edition of *The Yardbird Reader*. You mentioned that African American publishers were the first to recognize the legitimacy of Asian American literature. Why do you think that was the case? And how do you see African American literature and Asian American literature in relation to one another because of that?

SW: My first three books were published by African American publishers: Howard University Press, Ishmael Reed Books, and Yardbird Publishing Co. They were the first to recognize the legitimacy of Asian American literature or more specifically Ishmael Reed was the first to recognize our work. He started using the term multicultural literature long before it became commonplace. I met Ishmael in 1969 and he said essentially there was a place at the table for all of us. Not only did I meet Kay Boyle in 1968, but shortly after that, Ishmael Reed, Al Young, Alex Haley, Lawson Inada, etc. I met Leslie Silko before either one of us had published a book. Now that was an education.

CH: I read that you’re hard at work on a third novel titled *The Ancient and Occupied Heart of Greg Li*. Can you tell me what it’s about?

SW: It’s a very complicated novel about language, about talk, ranging from the invention of writing to the language of the contemporary world of fashion and business. At the center of the novel is a Chinese American classics professor who is working against his own anonymity confined to an ancient world of dead languages. He leaves academia and enters the world of fashion, business, acquiring a new language and a new identity. It take place in Rome, in Paris, in Asia.
Bright Star

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—
   Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
   Like nature’s patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
   Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
   Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—
No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
   Pillow’d upon my fair love’s ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
   Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

Kay Boyle
Love
(13 Disambiguations)

1. When I was very young—nine, I think, as we’d only been in the United States for a few years but I was definitely old enough to remember the agony of sharing a room with my little brother, which I’d continue doing for another eight years, and my brother was definitely old enough to not be in a crib—I had my first of many struggles with the words I love you. I knew they were important in America. My brother, who was born on Valentine’s Day, was an affectionate child, unlike me, and had taken to saying it a lot, just like he’d always be hugging people—that was also something I did not do, always a bit afraid of my parents and expressing physical affection lest it appear awkward or be received unwanted. I was so troubled I had no room for any more rejection. But every night my mother, like the mother in a TV sitcom, would come in to “tuck us in” after we’d finished brushing our teeth and putting on our pajamas, often side by side. We’d lay under the covers in the dark in anticipation and she’d come, my mother, and she’d visit my younger brother’s twin bed first. I’d watch them: he’d grab onto her neck, as if he expected to be lifted, and would embrace her hard as if for the first time, and they’d tell each other they loved each other, his I love you, Mom for her I love you, A. My mother would finish by patting his covers—“tucking in,” I guess she thought—and then make her way across the room to my twin bed. I would lie there stiff, always a bit petrified, not only not able to hug her, but not even close to able to say those words. She’d say it to me, I love you, P, but more quietly, more carefully, with more restraint, because no doubt she knew I could never return it. Or something—who knew what she thought, standing before her silent older child, always in such a weird state at night. Sometimes I’d manage goodnight or if I was lucky goodnight, Mom. I’d try to smile. She’d do the bed-pat and be gone and many times, after she’d left and after I was sure my brother was asleep I’d burst into tears and for hours question why I could not manage a simple thing like that. What was wrong with me? It felt like an actual disability. But an unfair and rather false one, because I truly did love her. I loved them all. I just couldn’t express it.

It’s now nearly three decades since then and I still don’t think I’ve ever told my mother I love her.

2. The 1927 silent film Love was based on Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina. It starred Greta Garbo and John Gilbert, who just the year before had starred in the big hit Flesh and the Devil. It was originally titled Heat. There are two versions of the film: the European version, which like the Tolstoy novel, ends with the classic tragedy: Anna’s suicide in front of a train. The American version is a departure: the lovers are separated for three years and Vronsky by chance finds the widowed Anna and they reunite. I’ve never seen the European version, but against most people’s instincts, I imagine, I find the European one more realistic. Many months ago I found myself in a moment of suicidal ideation because of issues regarding love and infidelity, and my inability to handle them
properly—a sort of subject matter for suicidal ideation that I’d never thought I’d be capable of. But there I was, beyond distraught, months into dumping one guy because I suspected he would cheat on me and then dating another guy who seemed to love me but had a girlfriend, I was suddenly informed. I think of an email I sent him in the middle of it all, thinking I could be perhaps pregnant, but not wanting to say anything until I really knew, where I felt so sure that finally I was back in a thing I’d stayed away from for a few years, since my ex-fiancé and I had broken up: love. But it wasn’t real or at least not lasting. Still, it’s unlike me to be caught in any moment of suicidal ideation in my 30s and if I think about it, the root of the despair comes from a period just before my relationship with the guy before: the one I’d worried would cheat on me but didn’t. I dated this cheater-seeming non-cheater immediately after breaking up with my boyfriend of the year before, an artist who I’d met online. We had some nice months together but I decided I had to leave him for many reasons and then he tried to kill himself—because he loved me, he said. All I could think about was the first time he said it, nearly 10 months before, just beginning to seriously date really. We were outside a doctor’s office uptown, the closest place I could get my blood drawn. I was surprised he was there—he had promised, but then we’d had a fight, which I thought could have cancelled the promise. We had gone upstairs and I had asked how much it would cost without insurance and we both held our breaths, since we knew almost any answer would be the wrong one, and when we heard it and the cost was worse than we imagined, we both turned around and walked out silently. At the foot of the stairs I burst into tears, violent ones, and I tried to break out of his embrace over and over, and I got madder and madder the more he offered to pay, until he said it, enveloped in a simple “because,” a reason for why he was offering, and I pretended I didn’t hear it, afraid I hadn’t heard it right or that he didn’t really mean it or maybe because I didn’t want the first time to be like that, in that state, wrapped in that hopelessness that day. If I think about it clearly really, our whole story was so hopeless, beginning to end.

3. “Love” is a John Lennon song, first released in 1970 and then rereleased in 1982, originally from the *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* album. The picture on the sleeve for the 1982 release of “Love” was taken by Annie Leibovitz on December 8, 1980—the day John Lennon died.

Leibovitz had promised him he would make the *Rolling Stone* cover but he insisted Yoko Ono join him in the photo too. Leibovitz then tried to re-create something like the kissing scene from the couple’s *Double Fantasy* 1980 album cover. Yoko Ono would not take her pants off so she had John remove his clothes and curl up next to her on the floor. Leibovitz recalls, “What is interesting is she said she’d take her top off and I said, ‘Leave everything on’ — not really preconceiving the picture at all. Then he curled up next to her and it was very, very strong. You couldn’t help but feel that he was cold and he looked like he was clinging on to her. I think it was amazing to look at the first Polaroid and they were both very excited. John said, ‘You’ve captured our relationship exactly. Promise me it’ll be on the cover.’ I looked him in the eye and we shook on it.” Five hours later he was dead at The Dakota, an apartment building in relatively the same neighborhood as that artist ex of mine who tried to kill himself last year, the same age as him even, 40.
4.
Love was a rock band of the 60s and 70s. Robert Plant was a fan and he calls their *Forever Changes* one of his favorite albums ever. Jim Morrison also considered Love one of his favorite bands. Love group member Bryan MacLean (rhythm guitar, vocals, songwriter) died in Los Angeles of a heart attack at age 52 on December 25, 1998 while having dinner with a young fan who was working on a book about Love. Everyone in my family dies of heart attacks, including my beloved grandfather in Sweden who had six of them, but ultimately just died due to a fall in his 90s.

5.
“Luv” was the third single from Janet Jackson’s tenth album, *Discipline* (2008). It was described as a “feel-good clap-and-bounce track.” In it Jackson relates a car crash to falling in love. “He ran a red light / And hit me with his luv, luv, luv.”

6.

I can’t think of other novels with the title *Love* although there must be many. Perhaps *Eat Pray Love* can count. The 2006 memoir was Elizabeth Gilbert’s fourth book, which people often forget. I met and hung out with Elizabeth Gilbert several times, the first of which was last spring while on book tour in Australia, in the same period just before my suicidal ideation regarding love that I mentioned in Part 2. I think she was maybe even in the room when I met the man who had a girlfriend, the man who I briefly loved, whose child I thought I carried months later.

7.
In the story “Love” by Clarice Lispector, a homemaker has a major epiphany in her life, that leads to all sorts of contemplations on domestic life, empathy, relationships, and death, when she sees a blind man chewing gum on a train. I very much like this story and it occurs to me that it always reminds me of the several years I was engaged, the only time in my life where epiphanies like this seemed possible—otherwise the story can be completely incomprehensible to me if it isn’t for that key connection.

8.
*LOVE* is a bi-annual British style magazine founded in 2009. One of my oldest friends wrote for them and an email involving this magazine led to one of our many friend break-ups, in 2010. This friend was a high-class escort and now for many years has lived off being a mistress to a jetsetting public figure with five kids. She considers him the love of her life and considers being a mistress the perfect role for her. The magazine seems to be still around, Google reveals, though my friend and I are in one of our off-periods. Another email argument, this one taking place weeks after she joined a business partnership of dubious validity, I thought and I still think, with an ex-boyfriend of mine—a sort of cold love, but nonetheless a love of mine.

9.
Love is a ghost town in La Paz County, Arizona, United States. The town’s “Love Derailment” occurred in 1977, when a freight train traveling through went off its tracks, causing a tank car transporting butane to explode. The love of my life, the man I was in a relationship with for many years before my I met my now-ex-fiancé, had parents who lived in Arizona. We’d drive through the state
a lot, trying to get away from their suburb of Phoenix and Phoenix too, and we’d discover odd ghost towns. There was one mining town in the mountains near Flagstaff that we dreamed of moving to. I still think if we had done it, we’d still be together today.

11. 
There is only one sport I love and it is tennis, and in tennis the word “love” is used when a player hasn’t scored any points. In tennis—and almost all racket sports—love is synonymous with “zero.” The origin of “love” in racket sports is disputed. Some think it is from French origin, the most widely accepted theory being that it derives from the French word for an egg (l’œuf), because an egg looks like the number zero. “Love” might also derive from l’heure “the hour” in French, or come from the Dutch expression iets voor lof doen, meaning to do something for praise, and not for monetary benefit. Another theory on the origins of the use of love comes from the acceptance that, at the start of a match, when the scores are still zero, the players still have “love for each other” but this by far seems the flimsiest theory in my opinion, because I can’t think of a single tennis player who would think this way or tolerate this concept. Not the ones I love, like Roger Federer for example.

I love only watching but once upon a time I did play. I started playing tennis as a teenager but quit shortly after because I fell in love with my tennis coach and I could not tolerate the feeling, especially as an awkward, very unattractive, antisocial teenager. It was too much pressure. It wasn’t until I fell in love with Federer that I felt comfortable with tennis again, though never again on the courts.

12.
In the summer of 2014, I finally met an older actress I’d always liked, Ali MacGraw, after having seen her in Los Angeles and Santa Fe from a distance, both places I’ve lived. I was finally last summer introduced to her at an art party in a mansion back in Santa Fe and we
had a nice short conversation. I tried not to say I loved the movie *Love Story*, the 1970 film she is most known for her, because I’m sure everyone says that and I’m not even sure I’ve ever seen the whole thing. But I do love how she looked in it. And I do know “Love means never having to say you’re sorry” is a catchphrase from that move, originally of course from a line in the Erich Segal novel the movie is based on. The line is uttered twice in the film. The first time it’s in the middle of the film and said by MacGraw’s Jennifer, when Oliver (Ryan O’Neal’s character) is about to apologize to her for his anger. Then it occurs as the last line of the film, by Oliver, when his father says, “I’m sorry” after learning of Jennifer’s death due to terminal cancer. I’d have to say though that I’ve never said sorry more than in relation to love—in the context of love relationships, in other words, which to me feel like an endless volleying of *I’m sorrys* when things are not in their good or neutral states—so I’ve never quite understood that phrase, but I admit it’s catchy.

13.

Love is a Swedish version of the French name *Louis*. The name is somewhat uncommon: Wikipedia claims there are less than 200 men older than 30 in Sweden currently with the name, but several hundreds from every cohort born in the 1990s. In 2009 for example, there were 6,058 men in Sweden with the name Love/Lowe, of which 2,953 had it as first name, the rest as middle name. But in 2003, the number was only at 344. (There are fewer women in both sets of statistics, nearly half.) I’ve never heard this name in Sweden, even though I’ve gone there regularly since I was a child. My mother’s family always resided in Stockholm, pre-Revolution even. I was last there last December to visit my grandmother who was dying of Alzheimer’s. She died a month ago today. She was the wife of the grandfather I mention in section 4, whose death happened in 2011, which sparked my ex-fiancé to ask me to marry him, because he felt I needed something good to happen in my life at that moment. I loved my grandparents very much, but especially my grandmother—I think she was someone I actually told I loved. In many ways, I felt closer to her than my mother. In my head, I blame it on my mother fashionably going to work the week after giving birth to me and leaving me to her mother’s care, but really I think there was something in her nature that made me feel comfortable. For instance, in my teens, when I dyed my hair wild colors my mother would be very upset but my grandmother would be very sweet about it all. It wasn’t her thing, but since she loved me so much, she endured it, with affection even. I loved her very much and now just a month since she’s been gone, I still feel the pain of her loss very much. And I am gutted that a photo I took of her while sharing a bedroom with her in December sleeping—the only time she looked peaceful during my trip—got erased in an old iPhone. I had visited her while in Europe for the UK launch of my second novel, but also to see that middle boyfriend, who lived in London at the time, the non-cheating cheating-seeming boyfriend after the suicidal artist and before the guy who I loved had another woman, whose child I did not have. I came to Sweden for a few days and I remember my deep shame in arriving hungover, smelling of cigarettes, sleep-deprived and a bit manic from too many wild London nights. But she was too out of it then to understand. Occasionally she’d smile at me and it was clear she knew me. But often she was cranky or else sleeping or else being fed or washed by her nursing staff, like a small child. I knew I’d never see her again. She
was 91. It began well and ended well enough for us, for the both of us, that I can say. We loved each other while we could love each other—she loved me at infancy before I could understand that love and here I was loving her at the end of her life, just after she could understand that love. But as long as we could, I definitely loved her and she loved me—it was all very clear, for once—I’d say, I’d definitely say.
Cuts of Meat:  
You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine

Alexandra Kleeman has written a visceral, hyper-real, post-modern gothic of a novel that leaves a reader faintly queasy but strangely attached to the loosely intertwined lives of sequentially named characters A, B, and C. In much the same way that overhead fluorescent lighting highlights the harsh and unflattering, so too Kleeman’s novel casts a glare on the relationships between her characters. A and B live together as roommates. C is A’s boyfriend, more out of ease than love, yet there also exists a strange, Single White Female-esque relationship between A and B. A proves to be a perfect narrator for her nameless city, seeming to see the world through half-lidded eyes and disinterested boredom, unconcerned with her own quietly growing despair and B’s alarming neuroses. In language lazy and almost idyllic, A watches B dripping popsicle juice on ants: “The ants struggled for a bit…others came to feed minusculely on the orange slick. I shuffled over on my knees to see them more closely, the dying ones and the not yet dying, many trying to eat up the stuff that had killed the others.” While at times frustrating to keep pace with, her tone rarely shifts from a muted contentment with a rather dead-end life—it’s also almost too easy to step in tune with A’s willing and non-confrontational attitude, which makes for compelling tension.

B’s favorite pastime is to “channel seek,” letting the seek function on her remote control flip through the channels. She catches blips of shows and commercials. There is something helplessly pathetic about the idea of a young woman finding pleasure in trying to find something to watch on TV while also settling on being entertained by the very button on the remote control that is supposed to help her find what to watch on TV. The trio of characters rarely shows any great discontentment with their lives or choices, and when A reveals the nature of her relationship with C—she often finds herself anxious and stressed and desperate to convey her distress to someone—C placates her by being emotionally unavailable. They have a small disagreement while watching television, after which A neatly sums up their relationship: “For C, it was possible to get along with me even if I, for my part, was not getting along with him. It was lonely being the only one who knew how I was feeling, to not be stored in the mind of someone else who could remind you who you were.” Even when she feels like she might have a confrontation with C, she ignores it: “I knew then that we were going to have a fight. I wanted to excuse myself before it happened, leave my body behind to field it while I did something else, something completely else.” Later, she and C compete on a game show on television.

You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine takes an uncomfortably close look at the tenuous balance between the unknown and known, what is seen and unseen. What we do know is that A, B, and C are real people—perhaps too real. But the essence of their identities, the easy things that connect us (names, cities, passions, family) are absent. We are left without the surface of personhood and with instead only a terrifying interior. Kleeman opens
Kat—the mascot for the synthetic and saccharine-sweet Kandy Kakes snack food—perfectly throws the moldering body and soul of B into sharp relief. Kandy Kat constantly suffers for the product being advertised. No matter how hard he tries to eat the snack cakes, he never feels full. He is a ragged, skinny, desperate creature. Forever trying to find sustenance in his world of processed food, he wastes away to nothingness in most of his commercials. B, forever trying to give her own life meaning by having it mimic A’s, is doomed to waste away as well. The strangely anti-consumerist message in the novel is at times reminiscent of Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*, but is far less heavy-handed. After all, the tone of the novel is largely: do, or don’t, it really makes no difference. Which raises an important question: why write the book at all?

*You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* reminds us of our tenuous mortal presence and how easy it is to spend time watching commercials, how easy it is to be content. As much as we assert the notion that we will never settle, the truth is we can and we will.

Unnerving and strangely galvanizing, *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine* is riveting in the way touching a direct current might leave one paralyzed and immobile. It captures the aimlessness of contemporary life and love with frightening accuracy. A, B, and C’s complacency with their ambling, deteriorating lifestyles strikes at the heart of every young person’s fears: Is the future as bright as we’ve been promised? Or is it possible to be content with a life that has no ambition? Kleeman suggests work is a means to an end, and the ultimate end is spent in front of a TV. The increasingly desperate plight of Kandy Kat—a basement door we like to pretend does not exist and she leaves it wide open, exposing the stark truths and the bare bones of our interpersonal relationships, even how interchangeable a body really can be. A and B are practically identical in looks and mannerisms. C and A are only together because it is easy. The characters could be shuffled around and very little difference would be made to their lives or to the novel—which is not at all a bad thing. Rather, it’s a terrifying reminder that we are all different cuts of meat come from the same vague slab. Beneath the skin we are so much blood, organs, and blind nerves.

A asks: “Is it true that we are more or less the same on the inside? I don’t mean psychologically. I’m thinking of the vital organs, the stomach, heart, lungs, liver: of their placement and function...the heart from my body could be lifted and placed in yours, and this portion of myself that I had incubated would live on...in the right container, it might never know the difference.” Not to mention the struggles of womanhood A faces—standards of beauty, questions of eating well, relationships—are all so much background noise to the much more pressing issue: what’s on TV?
Billets-Doux Pt. 1

Katherine Mansfield to John Middleton Murry:
Do not imagine, because you find these lines in your private book that I have been trespassing. You know I have not—and where else shall I leave a love letter? For I long to write you a love letter tonight. You are all about me—I seem to breathe you—hear you—feel you in me and of me.

Frida Kahlo to Diego Rivera:
It’s not love, or tenderness, or affection, it’s life itself, my life, that I found what I saw it in your hands, in your mouth and in your breasts. I have the taste of almonds from your lips in my mouth. Our worlds have never gone outside. Only one mountain can know the core of another mountain.

John Keats to Fanny Brawne:
I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion—I have shudder’d at it—I shudder no more—I could be martyr’d for my Religion—Love is my religion—I could die for that—I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet—You have ravish’d me away by a Power I cannot resist: and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often “to reason against the reasons of my Love.” I can do that no more—the pain would be too great—My Love is selfish—I cannot breathe without you.

Paul Laurence Dunbar to Alice Ruth Moore:
You love me, Alice, you say; ah yes but could you know the intensity with which I worship you, you would realize that your strongest feelings are weak beside. You gave me no time to think or to resist had I willed to do so! You took my heart captive at once I yielded bravely, weak coward that I am, without a struggle. And how glad I am of my full surrender. I would rather be your captive than another woman’s king. You have made life a new thing to me—a precious and sacred trust.

Napoleon Bonaparte to Joséphine Bonaparte:
Ever since I left you, I have been sad. I am only happy when by your side. Ceaselessly I recall your kisses, your tears, your enchanting jealousy; and the charms of the incomparable Joséphine keep constantly alight a bright and burning flame in my heart and senses. When, free from every worry, from all business, shall I spend all my moments by your side, to have nothing to do but to love you, and to prove it to you? I shall send your horse, but I am hoping that you will soon be able to rejoin me. I thought I loved you some days ago; but, since I saw you, I feel that I love you even a thousand times more. Ever since I have known you, I worship you more every day; which proves how false is the maxim of La Bruyère that “Love comes all at once.” Everything in nature has a regular course, and different degrees of growth.

Martin Luther King Jr. to Coretta Scott:
Darling I miss you so much. In fact, much too much for my own good. I never realized that you were such an intimate part of my life. My life without you is like a year without a spring time which comes to give illumination and heat to the atmosphere which has been saturated.
by the dark cold breeze of winter. Can you imagine the frustration that a King without a throne would face? Such would be my frustration if I in my little kinghood could not reign at the throne of Coretta. O excuse my darling, I didn’t mean to go off on such a poetical and romantic flight. But how else can we express the deep emotions of life other than in poetry. Isn’t love too ineffable to be grasped by the cold calculating heads of intellect?

**Allen Ginsberg to Peter Orlovsky:**

I’m making it all right here, but I miss you, your arms & nakedness & holding each other — life seems emptier without you, the soulwarmth isn’t around, only lots of energy, I do a lot — as in England I read wildly & saw lots of people & did something to hop poesy there, it will have an effect I’m sure once they broadcast that BBC record, open the floodgates in London maybe, for new feeling in poetry there—it’s all so deadened now & insincere. But I feel alone without you Peter, I already daydream with tears of how sweet we’ll be, meeting again, in summer, it seems a short time off.

**Sullivan Ballou to Sarah Ballou:**

Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but omnipotence can break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly with all those chains to the battlefield. The memory of all the blissful moments I have enjoyed with you come crowding over me, and I feel most deeply grateful to God and you, that I have enjoyed them for so long. And how hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes and future years, when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together, and see our boys grown up to honorable manhood around us. If I do not return, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I loved you, nor that when my last breath escapes me on the battle field, it will whisper your name.

**Orson Welles to Rita Hayworth:**

I suppose most of us are lonely in this big world, but we must fall tremendously in love to find it out. The cure is the discovery of our need for company—I mean company in the very special sense we’ve come to understand since we happened to each other—you and I. The pleasures of human experience are emptied away without that companionship—now that I’ve known it; without it joy is just as unendurable as sorrow. You are my life—my very life.

**Juliette Drouet to Victor Hugo:**

I love you because I love you, because it would be impossible for me not to love you. I love you without question, without calculation, without reason good or bad, faithfully, with all my heart and soul, and every faculty. Believe it, for it is true. If you cannot believe, I being at your side, I will make a drastic effort to force you to do so.

**Anaïs Nin to Henry Miller:**

I want to feel again the violent thumping inside of me, the rushing, burning blood, the slow, caressing rhythm and the sudden violent pushing, the frenzy of pauses when I hear the raindrop sounds…how it leaps in my mouth, Henry. Oh, Henry, I can’t bear to be writing you—I want you desperately, I want to open my legs so wide, I’m melting and palpitating. I want to do things so wild with you that I don’t know how to say them.
**James Joyce to Nora Barnacle:**
Have I shocked you by the dirty things I wrote to you? You think perhaps that my love is a filthy thing. It is, darling, at some moments. I dream of you in filthy poses sometimes. I imagine things so very dirty that I will not write them until I see how you write yourself. The smallest things give me a great cockstand—a whorish movement of your mouth, a little brown stain on the seat of your white drawers, a sudden dirty word spluttered out by your wet lips, a sudden immodest noise made by you behind and then a bad smell slowly curling up out of your backside. At such moments I feel mad to do it in some filthy way, to feel your hot lecherous lips sucking away at me, to fuck between your two rosy-tipped bubbies, to come on your face and squirt it over your hot cheeks and eyes, to stick it between the cheeks of your rump and bugger you.

**Charles Bukowski to Linda King:**
I love you, your pussy hairs I felt with my fingers, the inside of your pussy, wet, hot, I felt with my fingers; you, up against the refrigerator, you have such a wonderful refrigerator, your hair dangling down, wild, you there, the wild bird of you the wild thing of you, hot, lewd, miraculous...twisting after your head, trying to grab your tongue with my mouth, with my tongue...we were in Burbank and I was in love, ultramarine love, my good god damned godess, my goad, my bitch, my my my my beating breathing hair-lined cunt of Paradise, I love you...and your refrigerator.

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**The Couple**
Flame-Heart

So much have I forgotten in ten years,
So much in ten brief years! I have forgot
What time the purple apples come to juice,
And what month brings the shy forget-me-not.
I have forgot the special, startling season
Of the pimento’s flowering and fruiting;
What time of year the ground doves brown the fields
And fill the noonday with their curious fluting.
I have forgotten much, but still remember
The poinsettia’s red, blood-red in warm December.

I still recall the honey-fever grass,
But cannot recollect the high days when
We rooted them out of the ping-wing path
To stop the mad bees in the rabbit pen.
I often try to think in what sweet month
The languid painted ladies used to dapple
The yellow by-road mazing from the main,
Sweet with the golden threads of the rose-apple.
I have forgotten—strange—but quite remember
The poinsettia’s red, blood-red in warm December.

What weeks, what months, what time of the mild year
We cheated school to have our fling at tops?
What days our wine-thrilled bodies pulsed with joy
Feasting upon blackberries in the copse?
Oh some I know! I have embalmed the days
Even the sacred moments when we played,
Uniting Aesthetic and Political Revolution in Love: A Conversation with Sandra Spanier

In May of 1981, Kay Boyle wrote to Sandra Spanier, “I think your thesis about my work is deeply right: that all human misery can be seen as the failure of love.” Spanier had mailed Boyle a complete draft of what would become *Kay Boyle, Artist and Activist*, the first critical examination of Boyle’s fiction and in-depth study of her biography. That book led to subsequent projects—including the collection *Life Being the Best and Other Stories* (1988), Boyle’s long-lost novel *Process* (2001), and *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century Life in Letters* (2015)—that established Spanier as the foremost expert on Boyle. Love is not only the most important thematic undercurrent Spanier sees in Boyle’s work, but Spanier’s commitment to publishing, studying, and teaching Boyle’s writing might also be understood as a profound form of love itself—love for the work of this underappreciated author.

Spanier spoke to me from her years of friendship with Boyle, and from her deep knowledge of Boyle’s decades-long career, introducing us to a writer who unites aesthetic and political revolution in love.

**BOM: Would you start by telling us how you came to study Kay Boyle’s writing?**

**SS:** I almost had a PhD in American literature and I had never heard of Kay Boyle, when I came upon her just by serendipity. I was a grad student at Penn State and I knew I wanted to work with Philip Young, the leading Hemingway authority at that time. He told me, “Don’t study Hemingway, he’s been done to death. You need to find something to explore where you can actually make a difference.” So I made a list of possible writers I might study, and I went to the library and was literally shopping on the library shelves, going from one to another and looking for something promising. I was in the B section heading for Djuna Barnes, and I just happened to see this long string of Kay Boyle’s books. I picked one up, read the author bio, saw that she was in Paris in the twenties, saw that she was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, saw that she had written more than 40 books, and I thought, “Who is this woman and why have I never heard of her?”

I went back excitedly to my professor’s office and said, “Have you ever heard of Kay Boyle?” He swiveled around in his chair, took the pipe out of his mouth and said, “It’s a gold mine!” I spent the next year or so reading everything she had written, even though a lot of it had gone out of print. I also traveled to the Southern Illinois University Library, where most of her papers are, and read vast numbers of her letters, because there wasn’t even much biographical information about her other than in a couple of early dissertations and a few encyclopedia write-ups.

**BOM: And then how did you get to know her personally?**

**SS:** After I had read all of her work, I got up the courage to write to Kay Boyle. I told her I wanted to write
about one of them by name. She seemed quite surprised and said, “You know the names of my children?” at which point I named all six. And she then became warm and friendly and invited me back to the house afterward, so that was the breaking of the ice in my friendship with her.

**BOM:** How would you describe the relationship that you had with Boyle? What reactions did she have to your interpretations of her writing?

**SS:** I went on to write my dissertation about her and sent her a copy of the finished work, asking permission to quote from her unpublished letters since I hoped to publish my study as a book. At that point I thought I would get a letter saying yes I could or no I could not. Instead I got a letter saying she was surprised someone had taken that much time to consider her work, and that she would be responding to me. For the next six months she responded to my dissertation page by page, paragraph by paragraph, sometimes line by line. She corrected errors, suggested different word choices, took issue with some of my interpretations, but she did say that overall my thesis was “deeply right.” Having that conversation by mail with her was an amazing experience. She also said that she was responding in such “excruciating detail” because she considered this her authorized biography and did not intend to do this again. Of course, I then had a wealth of new material, and it took me several more years to write what became the first book about Kay Boyle, a critical study with biographical framework.

Our relationship was never, even then, simple. When I asked her for formal permission to quote from her letters and notes to me in the book that by then I had a publisher for, she reconsidered some of her quotations, revised some of them, and never gave me blanket permission to quote her, wishing to approve each line individually. But she was
Absolutely respectful of my autonomy as a writer, and she did not try to censor my views. The only time she took issue with anything I said was to protect friends of hers she thought I might have said something harsh about. She did not hesitate to tell me I was right or wrong in any way. The way I handled this in the book was to say what I thought, and then to say, “I should note that Kay Boyle disagrees, or says such-and-such.” It was an interesting experience working with a living writer, and it’s not something that the study of literature generally prepares us for. We tend to think of these literary figures as icons, not as people who can talk back to us and do talk back to us. Getting to know Kay Boyle that well turned out to be a really challenging and fulfilling experience.

**BOM: Were there specific things you wrote that she took issue with?**

**SS:** Her first published novel, *Plagued by the Nightingale*, is deeply drawn from autobiography. It’s about a young American woman married to a French man who goes to live near his family in Brittany. He is adamant that he wants no children because he has a debilitating bone disease that he doesn’t want to pass on, but the family is pressuring the couple intently to have children. Another character comes in, a beautiful golden-haired doctor who is a close friend of the husband and is obviously attracted to the young wife. So I was interested in this title, and during that first meeting with her, fresh off the study of T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” I said something like, “Why did you choose that title, invoking the Nightingale, with its symbolism of incestuous and adulterous love?” She just looked at me incredulously and said, “Is it?” She had no idea what I was talking about. She said, “I invented that doctor character and dragged him in because my publisher said there had to be more of a love interest.” So she gave me this very pragmatic answer to what I thought was kind of a theoretical question, from studying symbolism as a graduate student. That gave me insight into how she was thinking about her work.

**BOM: Are there ways in which your friendship with Boyle influenced the direction your scholarship took after you published this first book about her?**

**SS:** I became passionate about wanting to have more of Boyle’s work available to the public to read, because so much of it was out of print. I suggested to her that we publish a volume of uncollected short stories from her early years. She had brought out the collection *Fifty Stories*, but I thought there were many wonderful stories that had been published in the late 1920s and early 1930s and weren’t generally available. Kay Boyle was such a major, if unrecognized figure, in what was happening in that development of American Modernism, even though she loved to debunk myths of the “Lost Generation,” and I really wanted those stories to be accessible to people. New Directions Publishing Company, founded by her friend James Laughlin, was very interested in publishing a book like this. Kay said, “I don’t think anyone would want to read that old stuff,” and that was one thing I found about her—Kay Boyle was not that interested in her own past. She said she was much more interested in things like the problems of her neighbors and contemporary social issues, but she said she would cooperate with this publication, and she did.

**BOM: You also discovered the unpublished manuscript of Boyle’s novel, *Process*, which she completed in 1924 but thought had been lost.**

**SS:** *Plagued by the Nightingale* came out in 1931, and that was her first published novel. However, Boyle wrote in her own memoirs, *Being Geniuses Together* (1968).
about having completed an early novel about her youth in Cincinnati that took place before she went to France in 1923, and she recalled that she had sent her only copy to Robert Sage, an editor of the Paris edition of the Chicago Tribune. She wrote that it got lost in the mail and has never been heard of since, and said that was probably just as well. So I knew that there was a novel Boyle had written but assumed that it had been lost. In 1991 Boyle had asked me if I would take on the project of publishing a book of her selected letters, and several years after I had begun that project I was in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library checking to make sure I had caught all of the letters there that I thought would be of interest. I was flipping through the card catalog, actually sort of the same way I was flipping through the books in the Penn State library when I first discovered her name, and there was a card that said “Process, carbon typescript, 119 pages.” The hair stood up on the back of my head. I knew from being steeped in her letters that this was a title of her first novel. I requested it, and the librarian brought out a manila envelope, and that was the novel. How it ever got to the New York Public Library is still a bit of a mystery.

The University of Illinois Press was going to bring out her volume of letters, and I told the director, Bill Regier, “I think I found a manuscript of Kay Boyle’s long-lost first novel.” He said, “Stop everything. The letters can wait. Let’s get that published.” So with the permission of her son and literary executor, Ian von Franckenstein, we did publish it. That was a tremendously exciting literary discovery, and it’s the kind of book that makes me wonder how it would have been received had it been published in her own time. It’s a high modernist book, it’s got a difficult style, but it’s difficult in the way that Faulkner is difficult or Joyce is difficult. There’s a lot of experimentation with stream of consciousness and narrative styles and extravagantly imaginative figures of speech. I think had Process come out in 1925 or 1926, maybe the trajectory of Boyle’s career would have been different. She was already being recognized for her short stories and poetry and was considered one of the rising stars of her generation in Paris. Her first published novel was about the experience of an American expatriate in France, but it came out in 1931, which was really bad timing because by 1931, in the midst of the Great Depression, people were not all that interested in the expatriate avant-garde experience. It’s intriguing to think about what would have happened if Process had come out closer to the time it was written.

BOM: Why do you think Process is so significant for our understanding of Kay Boyle and of literary modernism?

SS: I think it unsettles some of our assumptions about literary modernism. It’s a very political book, and there’s sort of a truism that the modernist experimentation was somehow incompatible with political activism, progressive politics, a concern with human rights. Boyle signed a manifesto in 1929 calling for “The Revolution of the Word,” that says things like “The writer expresses, he does not communicate” and “The plain reader be damned” that are at odds with the idea of a novel promoting social activism and justice that is supposed to reach the masses. But this book combines her interest in aesthetic experimentation with that social activism. The protagonist is deeply involved in radical labor politics, as were Kay Boyle and her mother. It may be unique in its blending of the belief in the revolution of language and the revolution in the social order at the same time.

The young woman in Process has conversations with laborers gathered at her parents’ home who criticize the
fact that there are reproductions of Brancusi on the walls while they’re meeting about workers’ rights. She tries to explain, “Don’t you see, you’re all of the same impulse.” That combination of aesthetic and political activism is a contribution this novel makes to a broader understanding of literary Modernism than what we’ve thought of traditionally.

BOM: Which other novels and stories do you think successfully unite these two goals?

SS: Her career moved away from this overt dedication to rendering experience in a new and surprising way, following the dictum of Ezra Pound to “Make it new,” as the world situation started to get more and more complex and impossible to ignore. The story “Black Boy,” written in the early 1930s and set in Atlantic City, has to do with the bonds that form between a young well-off white girl and a poor black boy, and the girl’s shock of discovering that her grandfather is deeply prejudiced. Kay Boyle said that was one of her favorite of her own stories because it was “completely moral without moralizing.” And I think that was where she was successful, in a story like that which presents a situation and doesn’t have to articulate that racial prejudice is wrong, but instead shocks the reader into an awareness of how horrific this situation is.

During the 1930s Boyle was living in Austria, seeing the Nazis come to power and seeing war brewing in Europe. All along she is watching what’s happening in the world and is very socially conscious. She wrote her novel Death of a Man in 1936, set in Austria, with a sympathetic protagonist who is a Nazi. That got her in a lot of trouble with critics, but she said later that she was trying to understand the attraction of this mystical fascism and she wasn’t advocating anything like that at all. Certainly the whole sum of her life shows that would have been the complete antithesis of anything she ever believed in. She wanted to get inside the mind of someone who could be so desperate because of his country’s situation that he would find this movement attractive.

Later on, her work was overtly political. Her last novel, The Underground Woman (1975), drew upon her arrest and imprisonment during anti-war protests in Oakland, when she and Joan Baez blocked the entrance to the induction center where people were being drafted to go to Vietnam.

BOM: Some readers (myself included) are tempted to look at Boyle’s writing from a feminist perspective. Would she agree with assessments of her work as “feminist”? Were the feminist movements of the twentieth century among the political revolutions to which she was committed?

SS: Perversely, I thought, Kay Boyle refused to be called a feminist. By any definition I can imagine, she was fundamentally a feminist. She told me once that she felt her mother’s generation had fought that battle and won the right to vote. Kay was deeply involved in and exposed to feminist activities as she was growing up, and everything in her work shows strong independent women making their way in the world. And yet, when it came to the sixties and seventies, that particular style of feminism didn’t appeal to her. She felt that the battle for women’s rights had been won and that she had equal rights, and it just wasn’t a cause she felt devoted to at that time. I think it damaged her career at a time when feminist critics in academe were resurrecting the reputations of a lot of women writers. Unfortunately, Kay was not very hospitable to that idea.

At San Francisco State she knew Tillie Olsen, who
wrote in her book *Silences* about how the demands of motherhood thwarted so many women and prevented them from expressing themselves as artists. And here you have Kay Boyle who raised six children and earned her living as a writer, including when husbands weren’t bringing in any income. I think she felt being a woman hadn’t hampered her at all. She said to me once, “I’m not a feminist. I like men,” or something like that. I think in her later years she had a narrow definition of what feminism was that did not endear her to feminists who were shining a light on neglected female writers.

She kind of fell through the cracks every way. Because she was an independent woman, dealing with women’s issues, writing women characters, she was dismissed by mainstream male critics early on. And yet, because she wouldn’t embrace the feminist cause during a very politically charged time in the sixties and seventies, she was not seen to be a friend of the feminist movement in that period. Her reputation suffered time after time from just bad timing.

**BOM:** Boyle’s critiques of second-wave feminism as a white, middle-class movement sound like some of the same critiques that came from feminist scholars and activists in the 1980s.

**SS:** She was always a little ahead of her time. She was writing about political issues at the height of New Criticism. In the 1930s she was starting to write stories like “Black Boy,” the novel *Death of a Man*, which was criticized for its supposed sympathy with Fascism, and then in the 1940s, after she escaped war-torn Europe, she felt passionately that Americans needed to know what was happening in Europe. She then wrote a lot of popular fiction about the political situation in Europe. Her only bestseller was the 1944 novel *Avalanche*, about the French Resistance. She felt that the American reader needed to know that the French had not laid down on the job, which was the prevailing opinion, but that there was in fact a vigorous resistance. That book got made into an Armed Services paperback edition, printed on thin paper and designed to fit into a serviceman’s uniform pocket. At the same time, that novel got completely panned by the very influential critic Edmund Wilson in *The New Yorker*, who thought she had sold out to commercial interests. What she was trying to do was write in a popular, accessible way about the political situation she felt strongly about. At that time, literary critics saw political writing more as propaganda, and high art as something pure and removed from political issues, or biographical issues concerning the author, and that was not the kind of literature they appreciated at that time.

She later said that she was proud of *Avalanche*. What made her proud was that she heard from airmen who had parachuted into occupied areas of Europe and told her that they understood the French Resistance from reading her novel. Of course, there’s a love story in there and it’s a little hokey at times, but she was nevertheless proud of the book. It served the purpose she wanted it to serve.

**BOM:** In *Kay Boyle: Artist and Activist*, you write, “a belief in the absolute essentiality of love—whether on a personal or a global scale” is one of the constant themes of Boyle’s career. How does this theme set her apart from the writers who were her contemporaries? As I ask that question, I’m realizing that she had such a long career that “her contemporaries” includes so many writers.

**SS:** That is another reason why it’s hard to get a handle on Kay Boyle and her work. She cannot be pigeonholed because every decade was like a whole different life, in
different places, with different husbands, with different commitments. She was writing in different kinds of venues. She got blacklisted during the 50s, which was terribly damaging to her career. To this day, no matter how much Boyle debunked it, I’m fascinated by Paris in the twenties, and that expatriate modernist scene. I understand that it wasn’t always glamorous and people didn’t just sit around in cafes. She liked to say that if anyone had talked about their work at a café others would have gotten up and left the table. The real writers were off in their rooms, doing their work.

I think there is a sincerity in her work, and a real belief that it’s tragic when people don’t connect. That’s the kind of moral earnestness that for a long time had been dismissed as sentimentalism. And there’s no dirtier word, even to this day, in a lot of people’s minds, than to call a piece of writing sentimental. But I think her work was sentimental in a positive sense. Suzanne Clark has written at length about this in a very important book called Sentimental Modernism. Kay Boyle was in rebellion against the 19th century tradition of what Hawthorne called “the damned mob of scribbling women”—people like Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin and inflamed readers’ passions against slavery. That kind of tugging on the heartstrings writing for political purposes was not valued by the high Modernists. Kay Boyle, seeing herself in the modernist avant-garde, didn’t want to be identified with what she saw as this old-fashioned sentimental tradition. She always resisted any identification of being a woman writer; she just wanted to be a writer.

But I think with the subject matter and the stances she takes in her work you see time and again characters who are desperate for a connection with others, whether that’s on the personal level, or on a broader scale across lines of race, or politics, or sexual orientation. I think she sees that the core human tragedy is a failure to connect. Most of her work explores the whole gamut of ways people fail to connect when they really need to.

There are a few stories here and there where the connection is made and there’s something close to a happy ending. I would put into that category her story “Astronomer’s Wife,” which very much disrupts gender binaries. In that story we have a meek, oppressed woman married to an astronomer, who is disdainful of her domestic concerns and is constantly looking up to the stars. This woman is intrigued by and attracted to a plumber who comes in and wants to talk about stopped drains. It’s actually a very comical story because she has a flash of passion looking at him over a puddle from a leaky toilet. She has this epiphany realizing that there are two kinds of men. There was “the mind of man” and “the meat of man”—the intellect versus the heart and the body—and Kay Boyle would always go for the heart over the head. That’s an interesting early story included in the collection Life Being the Best. Boyle’s not trying to write a feminist story, but she’s disrupting our ideas. The big revelation for the protagonist is that not all men are alike, and there are men who care about what she cares about. The plumber is nurturing to her and to animals, and in touch with the land. That’s an example of how disruptive she is in a very subtle way.

In her best work Boyle will never take us to the resolution of a story, and that can be frustrating, but that is completely in the model of modernist writing at that time. Hemingway writes about this, too, in Death in the Afternoon, in an imaginary conversation with a reader who complains that there is no “wow” at the end of his
stories, and he concurs. In reading much of Boyle’s work, you’re left there to figure out what just happened, and it’s challenging for the reader, and yet the themes that she takes on are very much matters of the heart whether on the personal scale or a global scale.

**BOM: Looking forward, thinking about people who want to teach or write about Kay Boyle’s writing in different contexts, what conversations does her writing really speaks to at this time?**

**SS:** People should look at what it is it about women of Boyle’s generation, which also includes Martha Gellhorn, who was a feminist in every way but bristled at being classified as a woman writer. Gellhorn—journalist, fiction writer, unfortunately tagged as Hemingway’s third wife—was born in 1908, and was also the daughter of someone very active in the votes for women movement. She, too, was not really interested in feminism but just went out and did what she wanted to do. Katherine Anne Porter was also part of that generation of women born around the turn of the 20th century who grew up when the vote had been secured. That is a very interesting generation that we should look at, something between first wave and second wave feminism.

Certainly their critical reputations did suffer because they were women and they wrote about female characters. One of the most egregious examples of this was Kay Boyle’s novel *My Next Bride*, which is about a young woman in Paris in the twenties who lives in a commune—again, directly drawn from Boyle’s experience. This woman goes through a psychological collapse, finds herself pregnant, has no idea who the father is, and has to arrange for an abortion. And the critics said, “Too bad Kay Boyle continues to spend herself on such trivial material.” I’m thinking we have James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and we see the adolescent Stephen Daedalus’ temptations and feelings, and that is treated as something very significant. In Kay Boyle’s novel you’ve got a woman going through these profound experiences, and that’s considered trivial material? I think there’s a long-standing prejudice against women’s experience as a legitimate topic of serious literature, and that’s a discussion her writing would enrich.

There’s huge interest in Modernism, and for so long Modernism has meant just a few canonical figures like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce. Her work speaks volumes to that conversation, and her work needs to be included there, because she opens up definitions of Modernism and makes it much richer.

The work Boyle did and the experiences she had during the Cold War, her blacklisting in the fifties, her passionate political stances, the social activism of the sixties, the literature of protest—people are becoming more interested in that kind of American literature. You could look at her writing starting with *Process*, which is protesting the status quo, and her writing for the whole rest of her career is dealing very openly with political topics. She needs to be part of that conversation also.

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The Visiting Writer

My phone rang but I couldn’t answer; I needed both hands to steer. I was attempting to pass an eighteen-wheeler that had fishtailed twice, its tires swerving onto the highway’s ribbed shoulder, producing that awful thrum intended to wake sleeping drivers. It was easy to imagine the truck veering into my lane, nudging me toward the concrete retaining wall. Sparks would fly. I’d be crushed, burned alive, a screeching corpse of hot cinders. The visiting writer—who I was scheduled to pick up at the Star City Airport—would, after compulsively checking her phone or her watch or a clock on the wall, slowly arrive at a realization: somebody, somewhere, had made a mistake.

Whether I wanted to pick up the visiting writer was beside the point: I had volunteered six months before and the day was now here. There was, I assured myself, no reason to feel intimidated; I’d picked up a number of visiting writers over the years and found the task to be pleasant and, at times, rewarding. Furthermore, if I remembered to submit the correct paperwork to a woman in my department (who wore two pairs of glasses at the same time and draped purple costume jewelry over her cable knit sweaters), I would be reimbursed for my trouble: a deposit of fifty bucks to my checking account, an amount that far exceeded the price of the gas I would burn.

More importantly, the return trip to the University Inn—a forty-minute commute through blue-tinted mountains—allowed me to acquaint myself with strangers who’d penned critically lauded literary work. A year before, I’d chauffeured a famously mustachioed Californian who’d revealed that his most frequently anthologized story—in which the main character was shot in the head—had been structured to represent the geography of a brain: the story’s single space-break symbolized both the trajectory of the bullet and the bisection of the organ’s right and left hemisphere. On another occasion, as a way of attempting conversation with a flamboyant writer who also happened to be the founding editor of a famous New York literary magazine, I’d mentioned that I’d once met a woman who’d claimed to have worked as his personal masseuse, an assertion that inspired the man to bellow, in an aristocratic brogue, “Why I’ve never had a massage in all my life, not even in a Thai bordello!”

Though most of our visiting writers had exhibited idiosyncrasies of one variety or another—one elder poet had unsnapped a leather valise in which his own personal scotch decanter had been securely strapped; another writer, who specialized in something she called “experimental hypertext,” had requested a two-day supply of organic carrot juice that was to be delivered to her hotel room—none of them had ever said anything offensive or exhibited disturbing behavior. They’d certainly never said or done anything to suggest I had anything to fear.

The writer I was now on my way to retrieve, however, was of a different ilk. Despite having been a finalist for the Pulitzer, the National Book Award, the National Critics Circle Award, and the PEN/Faulkner, it was safe to say that her name wouldn’t have rung the average American reader’s bell. Yet, among readers of so-called literary fiction, she was well known. Critics had used words like “dark” and “disturbing” and “morbid” to describe her
work, which revealed a preoccupation with violence and sexual deviance. Those familiar with the visiting writer’s biography would recall that she had worked in her youth as an exotic dancer and prostitute, and presume that these experiences had informed, to a degree, her fiction. I wish I could say that I had drawn no conclusions based on the facts of the visiting writer’s life, as I know quite well that people have good reasons for the seemingly inexplicable things they do, but the truth was that when I thought of the visiting writer or saw her blown-up author photo on the posters tacked to bulletin boards across campus—a portrait of a severe-looking woman whose wide-eyed stare suggested she might be unhinged, even deranged—I envisioned a person who had been nourished by forces I couldn’t help but imagine as malevolent.

Upon arriving at the Star City Airport, I struck a casual pose—driving with the underside of my wrist on the top of the steering wheel—and drifted slowly along the one-way road encircling the long- and short-term parking lots. Thick-bodied mountains—reduced to jagged blobs, now that the sun had sunk behind ridgelines—rose in the distance. Giant flags flapped in wind. A chunky police cruiser sat before a set of doors that led to TICKETING.

I swiped the screen of my phone. Thinking that perhaps my wife had called, I tapped Recent Calls. An unfamiliar number appeared. Because the caller had failed to leave a message—and because I am often at the mercy of my own curiosity—I thumbed the number. Three rings later, a voice greeted me. It was breathy and deep.
“My flight’s delayed,” she said.
“Oh no,” I said.
“I hate to inconvenience you,” she said.

“Then we have nothing to fear.”
“I suppose not,” I replied, and said I’d see her soon.

The visiting writer’s flight was delayed twice more. I circled the lots, trying to evade the kind of resentment that brought the very notion of a “visiting writer” into absurd relief. In other parts of the world, humans were abducting and torturing other humans. Melting ice caps were releasing greenhouse gases. Poachers were slaughtering endangered ruminants and harvesting their horns. And here, in Star City, a university representative was wondering when he should park his nondescript minivan—a vehicle he wouldn’t have been caught dead driving a decade before—at a ten-minute loading zone, to minimize the distance a visiting writer would need to traverse between modes of transportation. Because it wasn’t enough to hand the visiting writer a check for ten thousand dollars—an amount this representative might’ve used to purchase a new washer and dryer, and to install energy efficient windows, and to replace rotten siding on the southern side of his house—one had to treat her like royalty, had to ensure every whim was met, had to inquire about when and with whom she would take her meals, had to arrange transportation between the University Inn and wherever she was scheduled to present a talk on the craft of writing, returning her afterwards to the Inn so she could refresh herself before embarking upon the arduous job of reading her work—like a mother delivering a bedtime story to an audience of notebook-toting undergrads. A
The Course Approval Process committee had deemed specific and active—like “construct” or “demonstrate” or “prove”—would be permitted. Aside from the dozens of emails and recommendations and revised major check-sheets and minutes for meetings and annual reports, I hadn’t completed a draft of anything in more than a year. I’d spent the better part of a decade thinking of myself as a writer who was “emerging,” though what I was emerging from, exactly, it was impossible to say. Once upon a time, I’d published a novel—copies of which were available on eBay for a penny, plus shipping and handling—with a seemingly reputable independent press that, in the wake of the Great Recession, replaced the majority of its staff with interns, all of whom answered to a pathologically elusive editor who, whenever I called, was described by a cheerful receptionist named “Guy” as having just stepped outside for a cigarette, but would, I was promised, return my call as soon as possible. He never did.

Moreover—and perhaps most significantly—I had never been a visiting writer myself. Representatives from other universities and colleges made no inquires concerning my availability. No school had assigned my novel as an upcoming “common book,” to be read by an incoming freshmen class. I had not enjoyed an all-expenses paid trip to a city university or idyllic college town. I had not been wined nor dined, had claimed no honoraria. My work, though it had been described as “iconoclastic” on a blog that promoted so-called “experimental” literature, had earned a grand total of zero awards. I published a story here and there, in obscure journals edited by grad students desperate to fill their pages. My payment for these stories—manuscripts I’d labored over, in many cases, for years—would be two contributor’s copies of the issue in which my work
appeared (alongside authors whose names I didn’t recognize, but who also taught at second-tier universities), as well as a form allowing me to purchase “additional copies at a reduced rate,” a phrase that never failed to fill me with despair.

I checked my face in the mirror of an airport bathroom. Dark circles orbited my eyes. My forehead resembled clay that had dried and cracked. Flakes of skin peppered my nose. I was in no condition to meet anyone, much less an accomplished visiting writer who might immediately and correctly assume that I was her intellectual inferior. I rubbed my hands with berry-smelling soap. Faucet sensors refused to register my presence. I slung soapsuds onto the floor, ripped a towel from the stingy dispenser.

In the main lobby, arriving passengers descended an escalator: a goateed man in a football jersey; a crop-topped teenager, a hooded grandmother wearing pajama bottoms. Finally, the visiting writer appeared. Her hair—white, streaked with gray—framed her face like a set of curtains. She wore a white blouse, white slacks, and white cowboy boots. She might’ve just come from a small-town theater production where she’d played a benevolent, if slightly disoriented, ghost.

I shook the visiting writer’s hand, which was soft and cool. I stated my name. The visiting writer said it was nice to meet me. She stared at me with pursed lips, as if awaiting instruction. I asked about her flight; she said it was fine. “But I can’t stop thinking about that plane,” she said. “You know, the Malaysian one?”

She meant the Boeing 777, whose disappearance had been dominating American media. I didn’t say that one of my daughter’s friends—a Chinese girl who, thanks to her skills as a black belt in Tai Kwon Do, could chop an apple in half with her bare hand—knew an entire family who’d been onboard. Instead, I asked the visiting writer what she thought. She was, she admitted, no expert. But she suspected the pilots were to blame. I asked how she felt about flying and she said she was fine with it, though there’d been times in her life—an epic length of turbulence on a flight from San Francisco to New York, for instance—when air travel had proved distressing.

“Every time I board an airplane,” I said, “I think to myself, ‘This is the end.’”

The visiting writer chuckled.

I smiled, pleased to have made her laugh.

At the baggage carousel, I retrieved a steel-colored suitcase the visiting writer identified as hers. She squatted, unsnapped a lever, and raised the lid; she wanted to make sure she’d packed the manila envelope containing her manuscripts. At first, I stared directly into the case but then realized I was eyeballing the visiting writer’s clothes—and likely her intimates. A T-shirt emblazoned with a woman’s painted face sparkled with sequins. I averted my gaze.

The visiting writer located a bloated envelope, gave it a few squeezes, then stuffed it back inside. “Think we might be able to grab a bite to eat?” she asked, clicking the case closed.

“There’s not much around here,” I said, envisioning the chain restaurants that orbited the airport. “But the kitchen at the University Inn might be open.”

“Wonderful,” she said.

It was late, but the visiting writer needed to be fed. I asked if she was ready to go. Her mouth opened like a
gash, revealing every one of her teeth.

“Don’t be surprised if you never hear from me again,” I’d said to one of my colleagues, who’d wondered if I was apprehensive about chauffeuring this particular visiting writer. “It’s possible that she might mate with me,” I added, “and then devour my head.”

Comparing the visiting writer to a ruthless female insect was not, I’ll admit, the kindest of assessments; it wasn’t even that great a joke. I didn’t really think that the visiting writer—however bleak her insights about the human condition might be—posed any kind of predatory danger. Perhaps the hypothesis about forced copulation and subsequent head loss simply allowed me to safely express my own transgressive fantasy—one that I’d indulged as an adolescent, when the sumptuously-worded erotica of a writer of vampire novels had proved legitimately arousing—in which I was overpowered by an older, phantasmagoric woman. Maybe the part where the visiting writer killed me praying-mantis-style was nothing more than a manifestation of my own guilt for having made the joke—or entertained the thought—in the first place. Maybe—and this is the interpretation I find most convincing—the visiting writer represented the kind of person I fantasized about becoming: someone who, despite having passed through the valley of the shadow of very bad things, had emerged, if not unscathed, then undeniably formidable.

In the parking lot of the Inn, I extended the handle on the visiting writer’s suitcase, which, as I towed it, wobbled on its plastic wheels. Our reflections appeared in a pair of glass doors that parted when we approached. At the front desk, the visiting writer slid out a credit card and a driver’s license. The attendant entered information into a computer.

“You two together?” he asked.

“No,” I said. “I’m just escorting her.”

Blood rushed to my face. “No,” I wanted to say, not that kind of escort. Instead, I feigned obliviousness. If the word, which seemed to hover in the air above us, had suggested anything sordid, the visiting writer registered no reaction. She was clearly more interested in where she might find food. The attendant explained that the lounge was open until midnight, the kitchen for another hour. “Wonderful,” she said. She thanked me for the ride. Said that, from here on out, she should be fine.

Assuming that the visiting writer would politely decline, but feeling compelled, in my capacity as a university representative whose job it was to ensure his guest had everything she needed, I asked whether she might enjoy some company during dinner.

“Actually,” she said. “That’d be nice. Let me put up my things and I’ll be right down.” She disappeared down a hallway whose carpet was patterned with maroon and orange diamonds; I slid out my phone and texted my wife, who, at this hour, would no doubt be curled up in bed, binge-watching a show that followed the survivors of a zombie apocalypse.

“Don’t wait up,” I typed. “Writer’s requested my presence at dinner.”

Within seconds, a speech bubble—with three undulating dots—appeared.

Then, inside it: “Bon appétit.”

The lounge was mostly empty. A suited man and a woman wearing a trench coat sat at the bar. Above them, a television blazed with highlights from March Madness.
I wondered what this couple might assume about the visiting writer and me, sitting as we were at a candlelit table for two. Might they mistake us for mother and son, or even—despite our obvious age difference—for lovers? There was an age difference to be sure. Twenty years at the least. But really, what was twenty years in the grand scheme of things? By the time I’d been born, the visiting writer had moved to the Big Apple, where I imagine she’d fled, seeking adventure. By the time I was twenty, she’d turned forty. Forty, sixty. Had I been single on this night, who knows? I might have seen this occasion as an opportunity of sorts.

As my tablemate studied her menu—her eyes roving behind stylishly oversized, black-rimmed glasses—I imagined an alternate reality, one in which my wife and child were no longer with me, having perished in a tragic car accident, a scenario which I’d been using for years to torture myself with whenever they were late coming home. In this nightmarish realm, I was a man who, like the visiting writer, had known devastation and loss. Our shared agonies might, over the course of an evening, create around us an invisible membrane, under which the particulars of our suffering could intermix, a cosmic transfusion granting our mutual devastations the kind of energy we’d need once we left the table and went our separate ways, promising to meet again soon, maybe even five minutes after we’d paid the bill, in the darkness of the visiting writer’s room, where she would teach me how to appreciate the slender boundary separating pleasure from pain.

The waiter—a young man whose askew bow tie granted him a naïf-like charm—delivered our drinks: a glass of cabernet for the visiting writer, a scotch on the rocks for me. Were we ready to order? Not quite. The visiting writer wondered whether the tomato bisque was cream-based. The waiter confirmed that it was. The visiting writer said that sounded good. She then inquired about the duck confit: Any good? The waiter apologized; he hadn’t yet sampled that dish. The visiting writer agreed to try it anyway. Although I wasn’t hungry, having already eaten dinner with my family hours before, I ordered an entrée that I hoped might signify rationality and restraint: a spinach salad with tofu.

The visiting writer had no trouble making conversation. Ideas occurred to her and she articulated them. She mentioned that her next reading would be in Kansas City. And Kansas City would, she predicted, be a disaster.

“I have two brothers there,” the visiting writer explained. “Both excessively obese.”

“Wow,” I said.

“Three hundred pounds each,” she continued. “Perpetually chock full of pains. Doctors can’t figure them out. Could be fibromyalgia. Might have something to do with their diabetes.”

“They both have diabetes?”

“And swollen feet. Not to mention that the number of painkillers they take would most likely prove fatal for the average person.” The visiting writer supposed their afflictions were hereditary. She had no idea why she’d escaped such a fate.

The visiting writer made no inquiries about my family. She did not ask whether or not I was married—perhaps my wedding band provided all the information she needed—which meant I had no opportunity to brag about my wife, a scholar for our university’s elite MBA program, whose work on Decision Theory had been
Though I’d never much liked duck—the word summoned smiling beaks and orange flippers—resisting the writer’s generosity struck me as uncouth.

“Sure,” I said. “Assuming you have any to spare.”

I wondered whether she expected me to use my own fork to slice and retrieve a bite, but then she began to saw her knife-edge along the dish’s casing—a crepe that the chef had enfolded around the glistening meat. She was, I realized, carving me a bite. If she raised the fork to my face, and I ate—my lips touching the tines she’d been sliding into and out of her mouth—what might that mean? What kind of signal might I be sending? Before I could answer, the visiting writer tossed, with little fanfare, a heap onto my plate. I scooped it up and ate.

“Good?” the visiting writer asked.

“Very,” I replied. “Much better, actually, than I expected.”

She agreed.

The visiting writer did not ask me what I was working on, or whether I wrote poetry or prose. She made no inquiries about my teaching load or my station at the university. However, she did wonder if I had any thoughts about another famous writer, one who’d recently published a novel that unfolded in a series of text messages between a young man and woman, who, after meeting online, had begun trading descriptions of bizarre sexual fantasies, which they’d later perform in public places. In one instance, the woman, standing on a busy street corner in the middle of the day and wearing nothing but a hat, a pair of sunglasses and a trench coat, was approached from behind by the man, who, after lifting her coattails and unzipping himself, penetrated her, while the woman, turning pages of a newspaper, feigned utter disinterest.

“Care for some duck?” the visiting writer asked.
“Everyone seems to be talking about it,” the visiting writer said.
“Probably to the chagrin of what’s-her-name,” I added.
“The ex-girlfriend?”
“Right.”
A woman with the same first name as the woman in the novel had recently threatened to file a suit against the writer, saying that he hadn’t adequately disguised her and was “defaming her character” through his grotesquely exaggerated depiction of their relationship. The writer had countered by saying that what he had written was fiction, and that nobody would have believed the actual things she had requested he do to her. Their respective arguments had been leaked via social media and subsequently gone viral.
“It’s difficult to know who to believe,” the visiting writer said.
“Especially when you get the sense that they seem to enjoy hurting one another,” I added.
“Or themselves,” she replied. Holding her glass by its stem, she tipped back the last of her wine.
“Care for another?” I asked.
The visiting writer placed a hand upon her breast. “I’d better not,” she said. “If I have more than one, things tend to …” She wheeled her hand in the air. “Get out of control.”
I signaled the waiter.
The visiting writer hoisted her bag—gilded with buckles—onto the table and began to plow through its contents.
“This is on me,” I assured her.
“Oh, no,” she said.
“Oh, yes,” I replied.
“No,” she said. “It’s my wallet. Don’t tell me. Oh, God.”
“Can’t find it?”

The visiting writer shook her head. Her lips moved but her mouth emitted no sound. She dug with an increasing and clattering ferocity. Once this strategy proved ineffective, she began removing items and setting them on the table. A lipstick. A matchbook. A pink smart phone. A cylindrical hairbrush. A phone charger. A nail file. A ball point pen. A baggie of peanut M&Ms. A box of Parliament Lights 100’s. A pillbox with seven lids, each imprinted with the first letter of each day of the week.
“This is very bad,” the visiting writer said, shaking her upside-down purse. Unidentifiable confetti snowed onto the table. She stood, patted her pants pockets. Patted them again. She lifted her coat, wadded it up, shook it out. She appeared to be on the verge of losing her mind.

Just then, I remembered something: I had seen the visiting writer set her wallet—a fat, crimson pouch—on a counter at the front desk. I excused myself to check and found it there, unmolested, leaning against a vase of artificial lilies. If the attendant, who’d concealed himself behind a spread open newspaper, noticed my presence, he said nothing.

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“Can’t find it?”
“Most things,” I said.
“Ashtray?” the visiting writer said.
“Here.” I ground the butt against the sole of my shoe, flicked it behind a shrub.
“You’re probably ready to call it a night,” the visiting writer said, folding her arms against the cold. She rubbed her shoulders.

I glanced at my watch. Though no numbers registered, I knew that my wife and daughter were sound asleep, and that I’d have to be careful entering the house, slowly twisting the key so the aged deadbolt on our front door wouldn’t pop like a firecracker.

“I’ve got time,” I said.
“Good,” the visiting writer replied. “Because I just need one more favor. Then I’ll let you go.” She slid her hand into the crook of my arm, tottered forward and tugged.

As we passed through the lobby, the attendant nodded, as if granting us his approval. I wanted to explain, but settled for thought-beaming him a sentence: She just needs one more thing. He smiled, picked up a phone, and muttered something inaudible.

The visiting writer clung to my arm. My pulse beat against her fingers. Her shoes clacked purposefully against the floor. Elevator doors parted. We boarded. She pressed a button. The numeral five lit up. We began to rise.

“Any idea what you’ll read tomorrow?” I asked, remembering the envelope in her suitcase. Its plumpness had suggested a wealth of material.

“I haven’t decided,” she replied. The elevator was apparently the world’s slowest. A ding sounded. The

to cooperate. She handed me the matchbook and cigarette.
“Maybe you’ll have better luck,” she said.
I turned my back to the wind. Struck a match.
Inhaled. An ember brightened.
“Thank you,” she said, after I handed it back. She took an exultant drag. I expected that we might, like a couple of teenagers, share the indulgence. We didn’t.
“That,” she said, “was genuinely frightening.”
“I could tell.”
“Sorry you had to witness it.”
“I would’ve reacted the same way,” I said. “Losing a wallet, it’s like, I don’t know. Losing your identity.”
“You have experience in that regard?” She tapped the cigarette. Ash scattered.
“I lose my wallet all the time.”
“No,” she said, “I mean your identity.”
I cocked my head.
“It’s happening to a friend of mine,” the visiting writer said, gazing wistfully into the distance. “She loses everything. Enters rooms and can’t remember why. She called to wish me happy birthday, then called ten minutes later to tell me again. Anyway, she scheduled a brain scan. And they found a spot.”
I grimaced sympathetically. “A spot?”
“More like a dot,” she clarified. “They think she had a mini-stroke. Apparently you can have one and not even know.”
“That’s scary.”
“Terrifying,” she said. “She’s my exact age.”
“But you’re in good health.”
“Ha,” she said, waggling the cigarette.
“Everything in moderation,” I said.
“Everything?” She raised an eyebrow. Her eyes met mine.

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License into—and out of—a slot.
A light on the locking device turned green.
I followed her inside.

The visiting writer asked me to wait a moment. I wasn’t sure I had a choice. Watching her dig through her suitcase, I felt myself teetering on the brink of some preordained transgression, one composed by whatever Author was writing the script of my life, in which I was doomed, whether I wanted to or not, to make a tragic mistake. I had imagined, and thus it could be said, wished for an escape from normalcy, from the safety of my family—for whom, in a heartbeat, I would have given my life—and from the drudgery of my job, which was the exact job I’d always wanted, and which thousands of other people, many of them more qualified than I, were striving unceasingly to obtain. As idiotically self-destructive as it was, I couldn’t help wonder what it might be like to open up a hole in my life, to slip into a darker realm where I would be utterly—and no doubt deleteriously—transformed.

No, I told myself. I had to remain steadfast. I would, drawing upon reserves of faithfulness, stifle whatever fleeting curiosities might otherwise propel me forward. I would refuse advances. I would cover my eyes if the visiting writer began to disrobe. I would, if invited to participate in any indiscretion, politely decline.

But first—because part of me had become noticeably engorged—I needed to rearrange myself. I slid a hand into a pocket to make the shift, but stopped myself. Why conceal something over which I had no control? The visiting writer had brought me to her room; this was the result. Why be ashamed? Why not unabashedly inhabit...
recognized the importance of submitting the requisite paperwork, she said, especially if she ever wished to receive an honorarium. In the case of one recent visit—to a traditionally conservative institution, which, the visiting writer supposed, was enacting revenge for having endured the lewd particulars of the story she had read—she’d been paid not a dime.

I nodded. Rolled the paper into a tube. Knocked it numbly against my leg.

“I should get going,” I said.

“Yes,” she answered. She stared at me hard, then looked away. She seemed like she wanted to say something. Instead, she walked briskly to the door and opened it.

“Have a good night,” I said as I stepped out.

She looked at me briefly once more, from the entryway, her brow furrowed. Then the door clicked shut, followed by the rasp of a chain locking securely—and decisively—into place.

As I descended from the fifth floor to the first, I steadied myself on a handrail bolted to the elevator’s mirrored wall. My legs shook. I dared not view my reflection. Behind my closed eyes, the visiting writer’s face appeared, the troubled frown that suggested that she was ridding herself of an unwelcome guest. A sickening hollow bloomed within me.

In the lobby, the attendant wished me a good night. Doors parted and I walked outside. Chilled air enveloped me. Bright green leaves—spotlit by floodlights—fluttered in wind. Stars glinted above the stand of pines enclosing the parking lot. I un-tucked my shirt; the tails flapped.

On the Inn’s fifth floor, a single window was lit. Was it hers? I hoped for some sign of her presence. No woman’s silhouette, no trembling apparition appeared.

this moment? Wouldn’t the visiting writer do the same, supposing she found herself in my shoes?

The visiting writer turned to face me. Her glance fell to my crotch. She tilted her head, as if considering a question, and I thought, this is it: the moment when everything changes. I pushed out my bottom lip, lifted a shoulder, as if to say, Your move. It was then that I noticed she was holding a manila envelope, the one containing her manuscripts. The sight of that brown paper—the exact shade of the flimsy envelopes used by the university for Inter-Office mail—proved disorienting. Did she intend to read me a story? Or might she employ this packet in some kind of game? You’ve been a bad boy, I imagined her saying. And then the envelope—stuffed to the gills with her words—would strike my backside.

The visiting writer’s eyes—crystalline blue, incandescent—met my own. I throbbed with anticipation. Was one side of her mouth twisting slyly upward, as if everything was going as planned? She bent the fasteners on the envelope, lifted the flap, and tugged out a page. Then, in the awkward motion that results from a single sheet gathering air as it’s transferred from one party to another, she handed me the paper. I blinked at it hard, hoping it might provide further instruction. I read the words printed at the top of the page. I read them again. This was not a set of directions. Nor was it a work of art. It was—and there’s no other way to put this—an employment eligibility verification form.

A W-9.

I felt myself deflating.

The visiting writer began to speak in a slightly quavering voice, gradually gaining control. “I would appreciate it,” she said, “if you could make sure that form reaches the appropriate parties as soon as possible.” She
In the parking lot, I squinted. The minivan was nowhere in sight. I aimed my key in one direction then another, depressing the unlock button each time. No taillights glowed. No horn beeped. I turned to the Inn, to re-orient myself. The once-lit window had gone dark. I raised the key above my head and mashed the button, pressing it again and again, moving deeper into the lot, well past where I knew I had parked. I pledged not to panic. Any minute now, a horn would bleat. An interior light would brighten. Soon, I would be safe in my home. It was, I assured myself, only a matter of time.

Threat (Wild Garlic)
Sonnet 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth’s unknown, although his height be taken.
Love’s not Time’s fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle’s compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.
As they went upstairs in the house Wilt recognized it; he had not been here before but the act, the gloom, the quality of the silence was familiar. He remembered now without knowing when or in what country it had happened following someone else up through the dark of a place sepulchral and empty as a monument, mounting stairs no longer muted with carpet and single pieces of furniture shrouded in white because a great man had lived there once and now was absent. The butler went ahead but the lights he switched on illuminated always the floor above, the one they had not yet come to, so that they themselves moved continuously in semi-darkness, following him off the landings into the rooms and under the shadows cast by chimney-places, bookcases, and what may have been tall secretaries pillared and ancient underneath the cloths.

“Her money,” said the butler in a low voice from which respect and awe had never for a moment lapsed. “Everything here in this house hers, bought by her money. He never thinks of buying anything, not even a suit of clothes, but just of doing what he has to do.” Wilt stepped into the rooms as if he knew them well and raised a corner of the cover from a desk or table and casually rapped the wood and let the cover fall again, but Bernie waited in the doorway of each room they entered, a tall solitary figure with a straw hat swaying in silhouette against the glimmering light that drifted down the stairway from the floor above. “He’d have nothing but a chair and a table if it was left to him,” the butler said. “Like the place he has outside across the grounds there with the bottles and the experimenting things. That’s all he asks for, to be let alone while she’s giving her teas and her receptions. Sometimes he writes letters in here,” he said, opening a door beyond, but Bernie did not follow but waited swaying on the landing. Whether he thought of going down to the women in the kitchen again or whether it was he did not trust himself among the objects and furniture looming in the gloom within, still he did not come after them but remained outlined and featureless against the shallow wash of light. “This is the private study,” the butler went on. “He didn’t come in here every day but when his mind was feeling free he’d come here. He used to sit in this chair usually,” said the butler and he might have been speaking of someone already dead. He indicated the high-backed chair with just the proper degree of controlled and respectful grief, and he sighed in almost inaudible distress as he switched on the lamp that stood on the desk. It might have been that his master had come to a sudden and brutal death here only the day before, perhaps only a few hours earlier, and now it was the old retainer’s part to show the proper authorities and to tell them what he knew. The lamp had flung up to the ceiling a shaft of light golden as late afternoon and Wilt saw the butler’s gaunt tragic face bent over the shade illuminated by it, seen so even more angular, gaunter, even more profoundly hollowed by the tragedy of indigestion or merely by nameless tragedy. “Nothing’s been disturbed here,” the butler said. “No one sets foot in here unless it’s him or me. I never touch anything, I always leave everything the way it was. I never set a paper straight or close a drawer, just
in the doorway. “Listen to it, Bernie! Did you ever hear anything like it?”

But he looked at Bernie’s face under the straw hat’s brim and there was no alteration in it, nothing but the baffled numb look of a man who face to face with grandeur or with genius has seen nothing and because of some physical shortcoming will never see. Even as Bernie answered and shook his head Wilt heard the wondrous singing rise louder, as clear as crystal still but amplified.

“I can’t hear anything, Wilt,” Bernie said in complaint. He took a step into the room and then he halted beside Wilt, his face flushed, his mouth ready for tears or accusation, like a child suddenly made aware of his youth and ignorance by the presence of a closed door that adults will not open to him. “I don’t hear anything. What do you mean? What kind of thing?” he said.

And I too, I too, rose the marvelous music of the butler’s grief in that articulation which Bernie could not hear, I have been all the places Sylvestre has been, the heights, the depths, and I have survived mutilated as he is mutilated, the same malignant incurable sorrow, the same anguish of the spirit, because I not only witness but take part in the furious and unending contest waged between the will’s choice and the tyranny of his destiny.

I have stood underneath this room at night listening to him while he walks back and forth across the floor, my hands clasped in supplication as I knew his were clasped above me, but the words never coming in which to frame the prayer asking for some reprieve from God Almighty, for some commutation of the sentence condemning him eternally to the truth, for one night’s recess so that he might lie down and sleep.

I cannot tell you why I love him, the butler’s adoration sang high and clear, unless it is because every other human,
man or woman, has been another person to me while he has been myself, for nine years myself stabbed by the same weapon, struck down hour after hour by the same relentless hand. We have died the same unlicensed deaths together, those false deaths which do not for a moment exempt one from life, he in one room and I in another, gone sleepless night after night so that when I brought the coffee to him it might have been to my own self that I brought sustenance and succor and compassion. When he looked at me over the unread newspaper and untouched cup it might have been into his own face that he looked, seeing the whole history marked on it, the struggle, the exhaustion, and now the serenity as his was serene because the decision had been taken.

A Frenchman, the recital either of the butler’s love or of Wilt’s invention or perhaps of both hopelessly entangled went on; a Frenchman! How can anyone understand it? Not even the same countrymen between us or the same blood or the same speech, but once he finds out the truth that’s been buried in strangers’ entrails then that hell which opens wide for him opens as well for me. I have no choice but to enter it and I go down in silence and terror with him and eat of the same bread of damnation and drink the acid wine of self-abnegation which is too bitter for human consumption and which brings him to surrender in the end. I too have leapt drunk with it from my bed at night, knowing those men are in the room with me, their eyes and their hands raised asking the one thing he cannot give them, asking that I as his other self intervene for them, and that he deny what he found in the bodies of their dead; that he stand up before an invisible God and Court and Jury and by one lie save their lives for them because he cannot save their souls.

Every time, the analysis made and the remains showing poison, there follows this carnage of the mind and heart, this conflict between on the one side a man’s tenderness for children or for other men, and on the other a scientist’s incorruptibility, while the persistently wheedling, the hysterical and finally throttled voice of sentiment winds through the blood. It may get so far as to say, “They needed the money—they hadn’t been married long—there was a baby coming. The sister-in-law was nothing—it didn’t matter to anyone if she died. They needed the money,” it might say, “they love each other. They are young and starting out in life together—they needed the money—so let it be.” And then this other communication, as warm and moving and profound, would speak aloud in the high temples of the body’s arteries, saying: “Coutet killed his sister-in-law—he was pitiless, ruthless. No matter how desperate his needs were, there is this bottomless thing there is no answer for. He pumped her full of hyoscine. She died in prolonged excruciating spasms, in inconceivable agony—”

For five days and nights he walked the floor that time, first of the study downstairs and then of the room we’re in now, sang the sacred ardent music of this love; until I thought his reason must go or else that he’d collapse from the lack of food and drink and lack of sleep and lack of that other thing no one but the French woman he loved had ever been able to give him. What he finds in the remains of bodies is only the scientists’s truth; after that there is the man’s contest still before him to prove to himself it was the entire truth as long as the human portion of the story has not yet been told. But no one can help him prove it except her because for the others there is never the right word to say to him or the right sign to make. I come in and I set down the tray on the desk before him or else here on the table in this room, and he
looks at me, straight into my face as if here were looking into a mirror, and there is nothing for him to say to me or me to him anymore than there is anything to say to the sight of your own face before you. You cannot bring any judgement or comprehension to it, even though those two faces, the real one and its reflection, have seen the identical horror and disfigured by an identical maculation. All I can say to him is, Is there anything I can bring you, Monsieur? and he can only fumble a minute, perhaps wanting to fling his arms out towards understanding but not to me or not to anyone who might be free to come into this house and into his room and stand there watching him collapse. In a minute he says, No, thank you, Hamilton, that will do, and then I go. He never says the names of the men or women he has taken life or freedom from or protests against the burden of that power, or cries out that no one should accept it as he has been made to; he does not say that no one, merely because of the work he has undertaken, should be enabled by one act to remove man from life or life from man, to wipe men quickly and utterly into oblivion as casually as a teacher’s hand moves over the blackboard and wipes the words and pictures and the problems quietly away.

Those two walk with him wherever he walks, not because they are the only ones but because they have been accepted as symbol for all the others, said the butler’s sorrow to Wilt, but Bernie heard nothing but the silence as he stood swaying just inside the door. Coutet and André Roux, said this articulation which might have been neither the butler’s nor Wilt’s but the capacity for it which lay fecund between them; they go up the stairs with him at night and walk the floor with him as if chained to him like penitentiary mates, they go up and down the study floor and then come up the stairs with him to this room here and follow him across the rug and persistently, methodically undress while he undresses, and follow him to the bed and sit down at the side to watch, cold-eyed and unconvinced and sleepless, while he tosses all night in the dark.

Coutet and André Roux, first Coutet and then, not in actual time but in importance to him, next André Roux; young men attaining the things he had relinquished when he married, and the names of those things he wanted of life and no longer could hope to have; young men, and the first sentenced to hard labor until he dies and the second dead, executed already, yet both of them endowed with this grotesque of life, with this everlasting and violent freedom to which no man can ever put an end. They are neither dead nor imprisoned as long as he remembers like this the quality of their voices and the pigmentation of their skins, or the consanguinity of the look their faces had, shrunk small and timorous as old men’s faces when they knew. Remembering he starts awake in the morning and sees them still sitting there, halted in passionless and sterile youth forever because he stopped them, condemned them young to cease, and remembering them he screams in abomination at his wife the names he has sought to call himself and dares not. I have seen him when I bring the coffee to him early in the morning, before he has had the time to cover over, to conceal with something else the accumulated deposit of the hours alone with them, and I see him as I see myself, scarred, pitted, revoltingly defaced by a misanthropy too savage to be repudiated.

For the first time now, seeming to interrupt the tenor of it, Wilt spoke. The butler was moving still from one place to another in the room, shaking the velvet hangings straight, or breathing on the unblemished surface of the full-length mirror, or drawing the monogrammed silver-
thought them while I was saying them is of no importance. Outside there is an element or matter or a vacuum that is escape; there is a cork for talk, a sponge for memory, an absolute silence to stop the telling and re-telling of stories which have become a brain’s incurable disease; not here, not in this house, perhaps not in this existence even, but outside, somewhere where he has not been yet, some place fresh and uncorrupted that will not be retrogression for him but advance.

“Perhaps death,” Wilt said but the butler gave no sign of having hear him. Because of him, the theme played on, and because I am condemned as he is condemned I cover the enclosure inch by inch, seeking all day and night the chink to get a finger in and widen, a possible foothold, a loose bar or stone, seeking some way to get him out. Out into what? Into the simple mediocrity of what there is outside, like the mediocrity of your life or anybody else’s life. “Yeah,” said Wilt. “Sure, yeah, mediocre, I know.”

Last spring, the story was told and re-told until Wilt could see the hot glare of fire through the dormer windows of the young doctor’s house, last spring his testimony convicted a young Jewish doctor and sentenced him to death; last spring, because of what was found, because of what science, through the medium of Sylvestre, divulged, a young man with two children and a wife was given the death penalty and was executed a week ago. Last spring the blaze of fire was seen late at night at the dormer windows and the gendarme on duty ran up the steps and rang the young doctor’s bell. The door was opened by the young man himself, wearing his dressing-gown, his hair uncombed, his eyes startled in his face. He said an instant earlier he had been aroused by his two children calling him, and he had left his bed and found the hallway filled with smoke. His wife had gone to Dijon.
to spend a fortnight with her mother, so that left him and the two children and the servant in the house. He said he had called upstairs to where the girl slept but there was no answer. The gendarme and the doctor went up to the top floor together and choking with smoke forced their way into the servant’s room. The mattress was almost completely devoured by the flames and the girl lay peacefully upon it exactly as she must have lain down in sleep. The two men quickly beat out the fire, but the girl was dead. The face and arms and legs were charred to substance no longer resembling flesh, but by some miracle the trunk, except for the shoulders, had scarcely been touched by the flame. The remains of the book she had been reading were found, and it was decided she had fallen asleep by candle-light and the bed-clothes had ignited while she slept. But after she had been buried and her people come and gone, the rumors began spreading and the young doctor indignantly sued one paper for its insinuations, and later the servant’s body was exhumed. Sylvestre and two professors made the autopsy. The three men testified that the girl was pregnant when she died and that death was caused by asphyxia. Sylvestre, who was charged with the analysis of organs, testified to the presence of aconite. In the case of aconite poisoning, Sylvestre pointed out, death occurs from syncope or asphyxia and frequently the victim lapses into a stupor. This would explain the passive aspect of the girl in death, pregnancy provide the motive, aconite in the young doctor’s possession prove him the father of the unborn child as well as the servant’s assassin. And the fire, the prosecution convinced the jury, had been lighted by the guilty doctor’s hand.

The day they sentenced him Sylvestre came in and went upstairs sleepless at eleven o’clock, and sleepless walked the floor, the hall, walked in agony one room after another, and at three in the morning when he rang I brought a mint infusion to him, I brought it on a tray to this room here and put it down before him on this table, and for the first time and the only time in the nine years he spoke to me as one man might speak out to another, leaning back in this chair here and looking out of his torment into the reflected torment....

“What did he say to you?” Wilt asked and the butler started at the sound of a voice speaking in the room.

“Who? What?” he said, turning sharply towards the door. He looked narrowly at Wilt, the long lean arms dangling naked from the rolled-up sleeves.

“Monsieur Sylvestre. What did Monsieur Sylvestre say to you that night, that time?” Wilt said again.

“What time?” said the butler. He came towards the doorway, stooping a little, his eye violent, almost menacing. “I haven’t opened my mouth, I haven’t said a thing,” he said. He came close to Wilt and stood looking down at him, his eyes and his mouth now vicious, evil

“What are you trying to make me say?” he said.
To Joseph Franckenstein
20 November 1940

eight o’clock

My love—a month ago you were dashing up the hill to the glacier—and, darling, I have been talking all night to you, asking you to forgive me for last night. I mean, not for what happened but because of my selfishness and my insensitiveness about your feelings. Joseph, I have so much to learn from you and I will learn it—I promise you I will—so much patience and faith and decision. Please don’t be completely discouraged with me or disappointed yet. Please believe that I am trying to find patience, because since I’ve known you I know how great and strong patience is: patience to see you go away without the feeling that each time you do that it is the last time I am to see you ever, and patience to write a really good book just once, and patience to think as unconfusedly as you do.

You called me hard-boiled, but I don’t think it was that. I have the female and perhaps ignoble convictions that all actions can be transformed by the words in one’s mouth and the feeling in one’s heart—and you have the only true conviction: that acts are complete and unalterable in themselves. Joseph, I am sorry, I am sorry. All the sweet strong things you said to me and that I refused to listen to, have burned in my ears all night. You asking me to have faith in you, and asking me to meet you halfway, and your face looking like that—I’ve been so childish, Joseph, and now you have every right to think it’s only that I want of you. You must, on the way home, have disbelieved everything. Because I couldn’t just eat with you and look at you and walk with you—I had to scream and stamp my feet until you put your convictions and your integrity and all the things I told you I loved in you aside. Oh, Joseph, please let me show you how different I can be. I feel I’ve harmed you somehow and I’ve got to repair you inside and out again.

Now you must dream of me as contemptibly small and humble, and of yourself as the lovely tall laurel-wreathed god. That is the consolation I can have—that you can see me now as a nasty, hysterical, little dictator shouting stridently for this and that, and see yourself forever as heaven’s sweet unshaken alabaster pillar on which rest the moon and sun. It’s no excuse to say I love you too much or to say that I never believed there could be anyone like you or to tell you that this is what you have done: you have been a sort of magnet drawing out of the past (out of my past, I mean) all the good things and the strong things and they make a lovely curve of longing towards you, and everything else that had nothing to do with you has never existed at all. Perhaps when I write the books for you, you’ll believe the things I’m trying to say to you even when I’m merely kissing you or merely saying “Joseph, I love you” or merely asking you to sleep with me. I know you can’t work it out because I must seem so discouragingly inconsistent, and yet I will prove it to you, my marvellous snow-covered tree.

Yes, patience, patience, darling, patience, patience. I shall really learn it at last. I get so angry thinking of all the wasted emotion and all the wasted despair because I couldn’t believe in anyone like you actually living and I want to be twenty years old and very beautiful and
probably Austrian and spend fifty years adoring you and
making you little Josephs—and everything is so different
from that. Please make another life, my Joseph, a quite
deserted heaven where we can begin together all over
again.

Your

F Q
KAY UNHAPPY
DIC EVER
TATOR EVER
Y N

A Lover’s Quarrel
Plagued by the Nightingale: Notes from a Reading Diary

13 June

Planned to visit Gould’s Books in Newtown but got lost up in writing at the library and forgot about it. In the evening, I met up with my partner and her cousin and went by Gould’s anyway. Hurried to the B aisle and loosened the Boyles from the shelf as if there could be no other way. Took a sun-yellowed Plagued by the Nightingale to the counter; woman behind it had the radio on at a volume that is more for comfort than listening and said the book was a good price and slipped a paper business card under its front cover.

Watched a football match at the pub down the road. At halftime, we got ice cream and brought it back. Security guard asked us to leave—because of the ice cream—and I asked why and he said we could fight about it. Almost lost Plagued in the confusion.

On the train home I read the note on the book’s first page about Boyle’s life. Plagued by the Nightingale was her first novel, published in 1930. She knew Pound, Joyce, Stein, Williams. The biographical note is written in the present tense—“She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters”—and for a moment to be dead and to be alive is the same thing. Marianne Moore epigraph that jabs at the gut. Printed in Hong Kong, I started to read Boyle’s Preface and, after a paragraph, knew that I must stop there.

14 June

The pages are brown. The first twenty are water-damaged. Aristocratic French family, idyllic homestead. The problem of language. But it’s Boyle’s precision. The precision of Papa, “his brow was gathered up under the smooth white elegant cap of his hair”—gathered in like a sheet, or the hair at the neck of a loved one.

The back cover of my Virago Modern Classics edition of Plagued has, at the top, the quote, “Papa says we should have a child,” he said. “A dear little child to run around and call us mama and papa. I can give it paralysis, what can you give it, my dear?”

Apart from a look at the cover—a detail from the glorious yet somehow brutal “Portrait of a Young Woman” by Meredith Frampton—this quote was all I read of the text when I first picked it up in Gould’s. I wondered what this meant—was it a comment on what parents leave their children, to grapple with in adulthood? Was it a cruel joke?

I reach this quote, on my page 22, while sitting in the midday winter sun. Nicolas says this to Bridget after a morning spent in his father’s study. This is Bridget’s story, but my eyes are already following Nicolas through the text. I wince when he falls over a croquet wicket left by the children in the yard. I wait for him to reappear, worried of what news he will bring.

Today, I am unwell. I sit in the sun in the hope it will heal me. I feel nauseous, unsteady on my feet. I listen out for aches and pains. It seems easier to move than to sit still,
but then it’s not. I fear what has gotten hold of me and watch Nicolas’s debilitating illness from the corner of my eye.

“Here was the family wholly restored, relaxed in Charlotte’s salon and awaiting the call to lunch.”

I close the book to think about going to buy fruits and vegetables.

16 June

A story of contrasts: the male with the female; the well with the sick; the natural with the human; the old with the young. The story is a series of contrasts as life is a series of contrasts: From her first day in the house, Bridget tip-toes through what is a tangibly feminine space that, as she comes to see, Nicolas’s mother and, to a lesser extent, Charlotte and his other sisters actively cultivate. Papa appears grumpy and unemployed yet ultimately powerless against it as he is prodded and shushed by a literal and figurative matriarch, Maman. Nicolas’s sisters flitter under Maman’s watchful gaze, all except for Charlotte, who holds the family together thanks to an inherent competence combined with unwavering enthusiasm. It’s a feminine space—something Bridget is sensitive to precisely because she is unused to it—but despite the men of the text appearing as flailing, sickly creatures alongside the women, the power of the feminine is fragile, in a perpetual state of renewal, asserting itself only long enough for it to have to reassert itself.

Nicolas and Bridget’s idyll is interrupted by a fire. Sudden, as these things can only be. The water takes lazy slaps at the pier where I sit and read while the houses burn. It is the women who work to extinguish it, and the women who save the village. It is Maman who collects the onlookers into two single file lines—one to pass the buckets of water on from the well, the other to pass the empty buckets back. This system is tested when one well runs dry, and then another. Bridget and Charlotte and Maman work while their husbands stay at home.

Reading *Plagued*, again, in the sun, but this time I am by the water. Seagulls caw like restless children. The pier reverberates as midday runners pass. The lapping of the sea is contrasted with the sound of construction behind me, and the general din of a moving city. At one point, I look up from reading and a seagull is staring at me like it knows me.

“So quiet was the air, so tranquil. Bridget felt they were secured on a safe sweet island, nodding, browsing softly upon a quiet sea. So safe they were, so safe.”

This passage comes after the fire; the women have reinstated order and peace while the men, at best, clamoured with their canes.

But Bridget cannot have peace while she knows Nicolas suffers. “She thought of him, and she was numb with terror.” This, she is beginning to know, will be the shape her life takes with him. The shadow their marriage casts.

And maybe he is beginning to know, and resent, this. The story begins in media res. The reader knows Nicolas, and Bridget, and the other characters, in so far as this setting allows us to know them. Was Nicolas, maybe, stronger and more confident in America? Is this side that the reader is seeing of him new, too, to Bridget? So often in family settings are we required to assume the roles we were given or, indeed, took up—the quiet one, the outgoing one, the funny one. Nicolas, when pressed upon his family in this way, is forced to confront who he is—literally who he is and will become, which is, like his...
cousin and brother-in-law Jean, a cripple, weak, forced to stay inside while Bridget works into the night to save the village.

As if in direct reply to this, the next day Nicolas doesn’t come home. “A fury and anger was growing in Bridget’s heart, and a terrible fear, as if the family had done away with him.” Bridget moves from room to room to look for him only to be left in tears.

A curious exchange: Papa, upon seeing Bridget’s tears, proposes two solutions to Nicolas’s disappearance: he has run off with another woman or he has met with foul play. “If he is lying in the bottom of some ditch, we can but rejoice the day we find his dear body and put it to rest among those of his own flesh and blood.”

Maman, as if to rebuke Papa, or in a simple act of revenge, then tells the story of his brother, Robert. Maman, Charlotte and Bridget hurry off to look for Nicolas and it is during their search and the telling of this story that Bridget has an epiphany—she recognises for the first time that Nicolas is a being wholly separate from her. Till that point, she had thought of herself and Nicolas as “one sign and signal of purpose and youth, one figure-head carved against the surf of the world, one spirited high will. Now she knew they were not.”

The noontime sun is warm to near-burning across the shoulders of my jacket. I worry, without reason or sense, that I will lose grip of the book and it will drop into the harbour. What, then, will this become?

When I leave them, Nicolas is still missing.

17 June

Nicolas is out standing in the dark—this is where the three women find him. I am reading standing on the train. The morning sun passes through the carriage. School boys chuckle at their secret jokes and play fight while the rest of us are work-solemn.

Nicolas is out standing in the dark, his anger keeping him planted there, patient.

“Where have you been?” Maman asks him, and Bridget’s anger and fear and longing is wedged down further. That she has been coupled with them by Nicolas is a secret she must hide away. “Bridget watched them in sorrow and concern, thinking that if she were a woman this is the way she must be.”

Though I watch out for Nicolas—watching out as if, the train having pulled up at the station, I can see him on the next platform, unsteady on his legs—it is clear that Bridget also deserves—and even desires—my attention.

Luc visits. Perfect Luc, the object of the young women’s affection. Marthe makes an advance, giving him her hair-initialled handkerchiefs—an inexcusable thing, according to Papa. But, again, Maman makes the day OK. The book’s reader, like Luc, like Bridget, is visiting this family. Moving among them, bearing witness to their dynamic as they all but ignore us. But Luc is not here to empathise; Nicolas’s three unmarried sisters are Luc’s playthings, in competition as they try to win his affection.

This interplay acts as a backdrop to the story of Bridget and Nicolas and their young, troubled union, and in turn cast against the unhappy marriage of Maman and Papa, and the incestuous union of Charlotte and Jean—cousin Jean the invalid and Charlotte the fertile, ever-smiling matriarch.

There is an emerging everyday cruelty in Nicolas, with Bridget, his wife, and not his family, as its victim. The hate of long-married couples who can barely stand the sight of each other. Nicolas is obsessed with the idea of having
a child—or, rather, not having a child—and the 50,000 pounds Papa has put in his way as an incentive to procreate. It consumes him—he brings it up on a family visit to Oncle Robert, and later with Bridget at a family picnic. “You’re just as criminal as the rest of them,” he says to her.

This obsession is positioned against Luc and his youth, his health, his virility. His choice of women. It is only when Charlotte asks Bridget what she thinks of Luc that Luc and Bridget finally meet eye to eye.

22 June

I’ve been absent from the book due to being unwell, but it’s been in my thoughts (Nicolas’s fate seems set and so I worry about Bridget, where she will end up). As if in acknowledgement of this, Life Being the Best & Other Stories—“A Revived Modern Classic” published by New Directions—arrived this morning. The fresh cut pages clip clip clip when they part in my hands. The cover uses a painting by Duchamp: two men gaze at a chessboard while two women sit apart and think.

I read Plagued after I have read “Astronomer’s Wife”. I read at home. It’s night and the lights are low. A cup of tea steams on the rickety old Ikea coffee table which our green bird used to like to hide under, the fear that it would topple over at a knock and crush him to death ever-present.

The astronomer’s wife lives in the shadow of her husband, her life bound to his whims and mood. The inevitable consequence of this is that these whims and moods must remain hidden. This dynamic is put on show as a plumber visits to unclog an overflowing drain. The astronomer’s wife and the plumber must move slowly and talk quietly so as not to disturb, and upset, the dozing astronomer.

“I’ll kill myself,” Nicolas says, “and leave you here with them.”

Nicolas’s bitterness begins to manifest itself more fully, with Bridget almost exclusively on its receiving end, even going so far as to shame her in front of the family at dinner.

“As long as you want a baby so badly, Bridget,” he said, “why don’t you have it with somebody else.”

Bridget begins to worry that she will hit him, though of course she never will.

Luc is due to leave and Marthe begs Bridget to say something about her love to him. When Bridget takes up this opportunity, Luc tells her he’d already have proposed to one of the unmarried girls if it wasn’t for her. “You know you can do whatever you want with me, Bridget,” he said. Scandalous!

As I read, I shift in my seat, sinking down and onto my side, around onto my back. Pull the blanket up, hold the book above me, forget about the cup of tea. Bridget neither seems moved by this knowledge but nor does she make it public. And, yet, on another picnic in which he is aloof and quiet, Nicolas sort of tries to kill himself, walking out into the rising tide. Bridget has to all but pull him from the water herself to save him.

Later, Charlotte offers Nicolas a job on one of Jean’s estates in Africa. Nicolas, needless to say, becomes emotional as he is again reminded of the fate that awaits him (Plagued, I realise here, could, in many respects, be read as a story about the shaming of one man by his family and his inability to cope with it). Bridget affirms that she will drop everything if it means Nicolas will be happy, but then, when her thoughts turn to the great land mass that is the African continent, begins to question her place in the world.
“To go so far away from what?” she asked herself.
The night is getting late.

23 June

Charlotte—pregnant again—is unwell. Charlotte—the energetic and lively and optimistic one among them who both in her actions and in her words makes everything OK. Bridget buys a nightingale as a gift to give Charlotte, but it only sits silent and watches.

I read this at the desk in my study; next to me, in a cage, is an ice blue bird. He is nervous, watchful. When he eats, he ducks his head into the food container for seed then looks up, fearful of what birds fear. So fearful, at times, that he attempts to eat from the seed box from the perch. His every emotion passes across his eyes. When in fear or in the brief moments of pleasure he indulges in before he remembers, once again, that the world is to be feared, his pupils dilate. In opposition to this, on the occasions I can lull him into comfort, his pupils stay wide and black and he blinks long, purposeful blinks. I whistle between my teeth. He barely looks at me, preferring instead to keep a wide view of the room. As the sun comes through the window, he stays where he is, watching.

Charlotte’s health worsens and Nicolas’s bitterness continues to simmer ("Everything we touch vanishes into thin air," etc.). Bridget is forced to examine her place among the family, and how she could have set her time here with them on a different course: “I should have liked... to have heroes behind me with which to have shamed them.” Bridget realises that because she wasn’t combative from the outset, as Nicolas was, he has interpreted this as a switching of allegiances. If she hadn’t played the role of the docile, pleasant wife as was expected, Nicolas would at least still be on her side. Despite these thoughts, Nicolas asks her to talk to his sister about his prospects of a job on one of Jean’s African estates. In the darkened room, Charlotte shivers and gurgles and it is clear that any hope of relief for (and from) Nicolas is about to be read its last rites.

I stand out of my chair because I’m worried about muscle atrophication and that all this sitting is going to kill me. I stretch my back, my thighs. While standing, I turn back to Boyle’s 1980 preface. She mentions the pain of reading over something she wrote in her youth; what kind of lunatic isn’t embarrassed by what they did when young? How does one operate without believing, rightly or wrongly, that their present self is their best self?

Something happens with Charlotte’s death. The force that connected them all has suddenly dropped. “Gradually, gradually, thought Bridget, were they all making their escape.” It is as if the removal of Charlotte’s presence has broken the family into pieces. But rather than crippling them, the break up of the family has revealed the units that made it. They, as individuals, now have freedom.

The pages the preface is printed on are coming loose, like this part of the text alone was made to be removed. Boyle, in these fragile pages, points a finger at Bridget. “Is it not possible—no, more than that—is it not probable that Bridget is the victimizer?” In her depiction of Bridget and her encounter with the “dullness of bourgeois life”, Boyle has explored the idea of the individual. For Bridget’s experience in Plagued is truly the experience of the outsider, the visitor, the new hire—and the ebbs and flows of being accepted by the group. But is true acceptance possible? The ending of Plagued would suggest not. In the same way that Bridget neither makes communion with these people nor falls out completely, this is the one true
outcome. It’s a rare occasion when we are truly in, and
when we are truly out. It seems pointless to write, because
it’s something we all know and try to erode despite
ourselves, but life is spent as an individual.

24 June

Yesterday, I wrote “ebbs and flows”.

To be loved by Susan would be to be impaled by a
bird’s sharp beak, to be nailed to a barnyard door. Yet
there are moments when I could wish to be speared by a
beak, to be nailed to a barnyard door, positively, once and
for all.
—Virginia Woolf, The Waves

Get out of bed early and pull linty trackpants
on—I’ve had an idea. In the study, I take The Waves from
the shelf and sit at my desk. The first thing I do is trace
the markings I’ve made in the text during my previous
readings, following them like the lines on a palm.
“Light almost pierced the thin swift waves as they raced
fan-shaped over the beach.”

It only occurred to me later, years after my first
reading of The Waves, how it—the story, the concept, the
title—captures and holds the essence of what it is to be
alive. Emotions, interest, attention—everything mimics
the motion of the wave. Love, hate, pleasure, pain: they
can arrive at us only in waves. The patterns the beating
heart makes on a heart monitor are very nearly cartoon
waves.

And, like the arrival of the wave, there is also the
feeling of these things being beyond our control, their
source external to us—why do I wake up feeling happy
and enthusiastic today but melancholy and gruff
tomorrow? This is a quintessential part of being human—
to think otherwise is to be mistaken. For these things to
be a constant would mean that these things would cease to
exist—they would either be unbearable, forcing us to leap
off a cliff like lemmings, or pummel us into numbness.
And the gap between the arrival of the waves is what
creates the tension of being alive.

I have been abbreviating the title of Plagued by the
Nightingale since the first day of buying it. Plagued, I keep
writing. Plagued. Plagued. “Plagued by the nightingale
/in the new leaves,” goes the Marianne Moore epigraph.
“It poisons Charlotte like the plague,” Oncle Robert says.
And within this, I realise now, is the true magic of the
book. On the opposite side to these waves arriving external
to us is what we know to be within us. Another element
of being alive is to be plagued. This is different to an
obsession, and to a haunting. To be plagued is to be trailed
by something like an opaque shadow, to be troubled by
it as it were a demon, or a bird in a distant tree. Plagued
by the Nightingale is a catalogue of these private conflicts
and the ways in which these conflicts knock against the
conflicts of others, like boats in a crowded harbour. To be
plagued is to be in private and protracted conflict—and to
be in private and protracted conflict, too, is to be alive.
Ode to a Nightingale

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
   My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
   One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
’Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
   But being too happy in thine happiness,—
   That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
   Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
   Cool’d a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
   Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
   Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
   And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
   And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
   What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
   Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
   Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
   Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
   Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
   And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays;
   But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
   Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
   Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
   Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicker, and the fruit-tree wild;
   White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover’d up in leaves;
   And mid-May’s eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
   The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
   I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call’d him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
   To take into the air my quiet breath;
   Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now ’tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music;—Do I wake or sleep?
Love Songs

We hear them in clubs, on the radio, in cocktail lounges, and they spin, too, in our heads as we go about our daily lives. They can inspire yearning, intoxication, dolefulness, and heartbreak, sometimes all at once. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that love—something fundamental to our condition—forms the basis for so many of our greatest songs.

Whether it’s an original tune or from deep within the Great American Songbook, the music I perform day in and day out with the band is fundamentally about (and an act of) love. The most heart wrenching songs in the set are always the ones that I most enjoy playing. While there are plenty of upbeat and jubilant songs that we perform, I really connect to a song that connects me to something deeper. There are bubblegum pop tunes that have been around forever and there are serious tunes that exist for those of us who contemplate a limitless notion of a greater being. To me, they both serve a similar purpose: to glorify and celebrate the concept of love.

In 1945, Carl Fischer published the music for the song “We’ll Be Together Again.” Though the end of WWII was near, many couples remained separated, unsure if they would be reunited. Lyricist Frankie Laine writes, “No tears, no fears, remember there’s always tomorrow, so what if we have to part, we’ll be together again.” It has the perfect mixture of harmony and lyricism to invoke the authentic feeling of true love. His heart is aching for the person he adores, yet his hope shines through, though they are not together. The love song, with its perfect marriage of music and lyrics, remains the ideal form to deliver this intensely relatable emotion.

This example permeates the way I approach music. I strive to understand these songs from the perspective of the songwriter, channeling the emotion I imagine went into their creation. I try to draw from my own life experiences in the way an actor does to pull off an authentic and nuanced character.

Music today can be so uninspiring, something overly saccharin in which lyrics are an afterthought within the neon glitz and slick studio production. That is why it is so important to me to absolutely grasp what I am singing and writing in a way that is accessible and understandable to any person listening no matter their background or particular taste. Of course, there are hours of work, patience and practice beforehand, but if you sing or perform a song with awareness and certitude there is no stopping you.

These days I am very much in love with my wife (and soon to be mother of my child), but there have been times in my life when I was out of love, seemingly lost in New York with no prospects and nowhere to turn. During these times, it was the music that pulled me out of my desperation and led me to a more fulfilling existence. Singing songs like Leonello Casucci and Julius Brammer’s “Just a Gigolo” or Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields’ “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love” helped me reconnect to what I was doing in this great city and taught me not to forget what I came here to accomplish. These times taught me to draw on my past. To this day I use all of my experiences—whether it be pain, passion, lust or love—to perform music as honestly and sincerely as I can.

Now that I am contented with my life and my family,
I still draw upon the feelings I discovered as a developing musician to further my knowledge of the music and the love songs I hold so dear to my heart. Being in love the way I am now enables me to soar to previously unreachable heights—not only to identify ever more deeply with the music, but also to better understand the depths of sorrow: I am so much more aware of how much there is to lose when it is true love at stake.

The songs I am discussing here are a musical art form cultivated in America by a melting pot of composers from all walks of life. Whether it be a frightened husband and wife separated by war, a jilted gigolo roaming the streets in search of companionship, or the story of two young lovers in the midst of a blossoming romance, love songs will forever drive my heart.

*Ill-Matched Lovers*
The Garden

Bountiful Givers,
I look along the years
And see the flowers you threw…
Anemones
And sprigs of gray
Sparse heather of the rocks,
Or a wild violet
Or daisy of a daisied field…
But each your best.

I might have worn them on my breast
To wilt in the long day…
I might have stemmed them in a narrow vase
And watched each petal sallowing…
I might have held them so—mechanically—
Till the wind winnowed all the leaves
And left upon my hands
A little smear of dust.

Instead
I hid them in the soft warm loam
Of a dim shadowed place…
Deep
In a still cool grotto,
Lit only by the memories of stars
And the wide and luminous eyes
Of dead poets
That love me and that I love…
Deep… deep…
Where none may see—not even ye who gave—
About my soul your garden beautiful.

Reclining Nude

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“Kay Boyle and the Affect of Human Rights” from *Cosmopolitan Minds*

Although she was, in her way, part of the modernist “Lost Generation” from the outset, Boyle’s experiences were very different from most of her compatriots. While she shared the general spatio-temporal location and the discontent with American realities that we associate with the Lost Generation, she had no war experience—as had Hemingway, Dos Passos, cummings, Stein, and many others, as volunteers for the ambulance corps in World War I—and she did not choose Paris as her destination.1 Having fallen in love with the French exchange student Richard Brault in her hometown of Cincinnati, Boyle became a French citizen through marriage in 1923 and spent the first years of her expatriation in a shabby flat in Le Havre and elsewhere in France and England, moving to Paris only in the late twenties. “These two facts,” she later wrote in *Being Geniuses Together* (1968), “would seem to disqualify me as a member of the lost generation or as an expatriate” (Boyle in McAlmon, 11), and indeed, her engagement with her various host cultures was quite different in nature. In a 1924 letter to her friend Lola Ridge, Boyle expresses her impatience with the attitudes of her fellow American expatriates, who she writes seemed “mortally afraid of getting away from the center of action, from their cliques” (quoted in Spanier, 16).2 Boyle certainly did not have that fear. Instead of clinging to the modernist cliques in Paris, she spent most of her years abroad trying to find a sense of belonging within complicated love relationships and even more complicated marriages. When her marital union with Brault began to crumble in 1925, she left him for the terminally ill Irish-American expatriate Ernest Walsh, with whom she spent an exciting, exhausting, and devastating six months in the south of France. After Walsh’s death, she gave birth to their daughter and then moved to Paris, to London, and back to Paris again. In 1932, upon her official divorce from Brault, she married the French-born American Laurence Vail, whom she later left for the Austrian-turned-stateless-turned-American Joseph von Franckenstein, who became her third and last husband. Over the course of twenty years, she lived with her ever-growing family—Boyle had eight children with her various partners—first in France, then in England, in France again, Austria, England, France, the United States, Germany, and, finally, the United States again.

Boyle’s multiple displacements and what Thomas Austenfeld has called her “deep expatriatism” (American Women, 44)—the fact that she became intensely involved with her host cultures at a cultural, social, political, and personal level—had lasting effects on her outlook and self-understanding.3 Unlike many members of the Lost Generation, she developed over the years the critical and reflexive style of cosmopolitanism that Gavin Kendall, Ian Woodward, and Zlatko Skrbis single out as the most genuine mode of world citizenship.4 In *The Sociology of Cosmopolitanism* (2009), the authors differentiate among three “fundamental types” of cosmopolitan engagement: the “sampling style of cosmopolitanism” (115), the
“immersive style of cosmopolitanism” (119), and the “reflexive style of cosmopolitanism” (121). The first type involves only superficial engagement with cultural otherness, usually “on the terms of the user, frequently as consumer” (116). It is the vantage point of many tourists and class-conscious “frequent travelers,” who, as Craig Calhoun so succinctly puts it, are “easily entering and exiting polities and social relations around the world, armed with visa-friendly passports and credit cards” (90). Engagement of the second type is, according to Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis, “deeper, more strategic and desiring,” involving a cosmopolitan who actively seeks immersion in foreign cultures (119). In Boyle’s time, this was the vantage point of many members of the Lost Generation, who spent several years or even decades in foreign cultures. Such cultural “immersion” can be quite limited, which becomes clear when we take seriously Caren Kaplan’s observation that because of their lack of commitment to and engagement with their host societies, the modernist “exiles” in Paris were really nothing more than “bands of permanently displaced tourists” (47). The third, reflexive type of cosmopolitan, finally, “shows a genuine commitment to living and thinking beyond the local or nation and is more likely to act in cosmopolitan ways that are ethically directed” (Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis, 121). It is the mode of cosmopolitanism that was embraced by the writers whom I consider in this study, and the fact that Boyle tended to chronicle her own development in her fiction makes her texts a suitable starting point for the exploration of the emplotment of such reflexive modes of cosmopolitanism in literary texts.

Cosmopolitan literature, according to Martha Nussbaum, features “people who, by virtue of their outsider status, can tell truths about the political community, its justice and injustice, its embraces and its failures to embrace” (For Love, 140). The overwhelming majority of Boyle’s fiction does take such an outsider’s perspective on the achievements and failures of specific political communities. This particular combination of outsider perspective and empathetic engagement was also of crucial importance for Boyle’s own cosmopolitan development, and it perhaps also explains her often uneasy shifting between a more experimental, modernist style and a more realist, sometimes even sentimental, style that valued the easy conveyance of story over formal experiments. Over time, Boyle went from publicly demanding that “the plain reader be damned” to embracing a style that was deliberately targeted at the (female) masses. Although this can partially be explained by material needs (Boyle had to feed her eight children after all), her stylistic ambivalence was also the result of her increasing concern about political developments in Europe and her desire to make American readers care about the related dangers to human rights.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Boyle had already begun to concern herself with the problem of physical and emotional displacement. With their concentration on the painful existence of the rootless, indeed homeless, cosmopolitan, her highly autobiographical early novels are an example of Nussbaum’s claim that “Becoming a citizen of the world is often a lonely business” (For Love, 15). While Boyle’s first novel Process (1928/2001) is set in the United States and retrospectively concerned with the social and personal situation that drives its heroine out of the country and into the world to “start a new life,” most of her other novels of the time—Plagued by the Nightingale (1931), Year before Last (1932), and My Next Bride (1934)—concentrate on the experiences and problems of an
American abroad. These narratives may be read as a sort of fugue on psychic homelessness, offering irregular but progressive repetitions on a pattern. Presenting heroines who are drifting, wandering, and utterly displaced, Boyle asks her readers to empathize with these women’s pain and fears and to understand and feel the emotional price the cosmopolitan woman, especially, pays for her abandonment of the comforts of family and nation.

Over time, however, Boyle’s concern increasingly moved toward what we could loosely consider a more Stoic brand of cosmopolitanism, one that emphasizes a multiplicity of connections. Roughly speaking, the development we observe when considering Boyle’s first four novels contextually and consecutively is that of (1) disillusionment with home country and family, (2) disillusionment with host country, (3) recognition of the futility or impossibility of return, (4) a resulting spiritual and emotional homelessness, (5) an emerging desire for a new attachment, and (6) the attempt to develop a new rootedness outside of nation and family—often through the almost desperate attachment to another individual. This attachment, the attachment to and passionate sexual desire for another person, is nearly always the attempted remedy in Boyle’s early fiction, but alone it never cures the emotional ailment. The only remedy for spiritual homelessness, as it emerges in Boyle’s early fiction and then becomes a dominant feature in her later work, is not just interpersonal love and connectedness, but love on a greater scale: a more universal love that reaches out and goes beyond, embracing humankind as such.

I have chronicled this development elsewhere and will therefore not engage with Boyle’s early novels in more detail here.\(^8\) What should be clear, however, is that already in this first stage of her artistic career, Boyle relied on a romantic emplotment of cosmopolitanism, taking advantage, consciously or unconsciously, of what Hogan calls the prototype’s “anti-divisive or incorporative tendency that tends to repeat itself with increasingly large groups all the way up to humanity as a whole” (Understanding, 20–21). Whether her novelistic celebration of love and connectedness necessarily equals the “rooted cosmopolitanism” that Kwame Anthony Appiah and others have embraced—which would be firmly rooted in (and patriotically inclined toward) one’s original culture—is questionable. Boyle seems to advocate in these novels a more fluctuating and multifaceted practice, relying on intersubjective understanding and on planting and transplanting one’s roots as one goes along. In addition, she reminds readers that unchanging rootedness in a single community and naïve forms of patriotism can be a dangerous illusion in a world that is changing swiftly. Thoroughly informed by her firsthand experiences with the growing impact of National Socialism in Austria, her novel Death of a Man (1936) confronts readers not only with yet another deracinated American heroine, but also with an Austrian doctor who, as a result of his misguided and blind enthusiasm for the emerging National Socialist movement, loses his lover, his community, and his home.\(^9\)

Boyle’s increasing politicization during this period is also mirrored in other literary projects of the time, most prominently in the remarkable anthology 365 Days (1936) and in “The White Horses of Vienna,” a short story about Austrian anti-Semitism, which won her the O. Henry Award in 1935.\(^10\)

From the late 1930s on, Boyle continued to concern herself in her fiction with problems of roots and of rootlessness; however, she did so now in the context of human rights in a Europe torn apart by World War
II, focusing on the emotional, physical, and moral consequences of forced displacement and on the victims of the Nazi politics of expansion. The year 1939 was, as I pointed out earlier, a particularly important year for Boyle, as later evidenced by the title of one of her most intriguing novels. Via a detour to England, she and Vail had moved their family back to France in 1937, and it was there, in the Haute-Savoie, that she met Baron Joseph von Franckenstein. Von Franckenstein had been an Austrian citizen, but he had left his country only days before the so-called Anschluss, the German annexation of Austria in March 1938. Since his Austrian citizenship had become nonexistent with the Anschluss, and since he refused to become a German citizen, von Franckenstein lived as a stateless refugee in the French mountains, teaching classical languages in a boarding school there. The French declaration of war on Germany on September 3, 1939, made his position even more precarious, since it automatically made him an “enemy alien” in France because he belonged formally to a country to which he, in fact, refused to belong. As a result, the French authorities offered him two options: either he could join the French Foreign Legion or he would be incarcerated in an internment camp. His own preferred choice—to join the French army and fight against the Nazis—was out of the question, and so he eventually chose internment.

Boyle was deeply affected by von Franckenstein’s dilemma. “Long before we fell in love,” she later explained to her biographer Sandra Spanier, “he was a metaphor to me for all the European persecuted millions” (quoted in Spanier, 147). She began drafting a novel that featured an Austrian protagonist who was in the same situation as von Franckenstein, naming it after the year in which everything changed: 1939. However, the ever more unstable situation in France soon forced her to interrupt her work on the book, as her priority shifted toward saving her family as well as her lover. Only after everybody—including von Franckenstein—had been safely moved to the United States, was she able to return to writing.11 The next years remained tumultuous, with Boyle trying to arrange a new life for herself and her children in a country that she had left sixteen years before while at the same time seeking a divorce from Vail so that she could marry von Franckenstein. In addition, she could not forget those “persecuted millions” for whom von Franckenstein had become a metaphor, and so she made up her mind “to raise money for the French cause by writing ‘day and night’ and giving lectures” (Spanier, 149). As part of that effort, she wrote three other novels—one of them Primer for Combat, to which I will turn in the final section of this chapter—and so it would take almost a decade until she finally completed and published 1939 in 1948.

Despite the belatedness, Boyle could not have chosen a better and more befitting publication year for the novel. Not only was 1948 the year in which Garry Davis decided to become voluntarily stateless in protest against the inhumane aggression of World War II, but the place Davis chose for his protest—the Palais de Chaillot in Paris—is also where the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on December 10, 1948.12 Like Davis’s act of protest and Boyle’s fiction, the Declaration arose directly from the experience of the war, representing the first global expression of rights to which all human beings are inherently entitled regardless of their national citizenship or other aspects of identity or status. Like the earlier League of Nations, the United Nations itself, and the Declaration of Human Rights that it had adopted,
were deeply indebted to Immanuel Kant’s seminal essay “Toward Perpetual Peace” (1795), in which he discusses the importance of republicanism and the “right to universal hospitality” (*Gastrecht*), or what he calls “cosmopolitan right” (*Weltbürgerrecht*), for a world in which all human beings live in lawful association with one another and participate in a global civil order. Contemporary scholars of cosmopolitanism have criticized Kant’s cosmopolitan project for its inherent Eurocentrism. Nevertheless, he remains one of the most important thinkers in the field of political cosmopolitanism. After the humanitarian catastrophes of World Wars I and II, his moral universalism and the concept of a global civic order were particularly attractive not only for war veterans such as Garry Davis, but also for leading world politicians and for intellectuals such as Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, who both had personal experience of what it meant to be*(come)* racialized and stateless individuals. The “cosmopolitan intellectual” championed by Jaspers and Arendt in their postwar writings is, as Ned Curthoys points out, “a persona fashioned in response to their experience of the horrors of nationalism, racism, and totalitarianism.” Arendt and Jaspers’s understanding of the world citizen, Curthoys explains, “shares in a moment of cosmopolitan idealism that shaped legal vocabularies in and after the Second World War.” Given these historical factors, it is hardly surprising that Boyle’s imaginative work of the 1940s shares many concerns with that of Arendt and Jaspers. As I will show in the next section, Boyle’s trenchant critique in 1939 powerfully resonates with Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in particular, even as it engages the reader in totally different ways, namely, in the form of a love story. By inviting contemporary readers to empathize with the situation of a decent and innocent man who has been stripped of his rights, 1939 allowed them to understand and to care about one of the most important humanitarian and political problems of their times.

1. Malcolm Cowley famously described the modernist expatriate generation (which included himself) as “cosmopolitan” in *Exile’s Return* (1934). Many among this group, though, fell more than a little short of the sort of critical intercultural solidarities that make cosmopolitanism more than just a pretty, empty title.

2. Such cliquishness did not come without a certain disdain for nonmembers, even if those nonmembers happened to be the sought-out hosts themselves. F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, one of the most prominent members of the Lost Generation, tended to display questionable intercultural (in)sensibilities, as we learn from Ernest Hemingway’s famous chronicle of the Parisian 1920s, *A Moveable Feast* (1964).

3. Austenfeld refers to Boyle’s style of expatriation as “deep expatriation” because “her emotional involvement with Europe is deeper than that of any other expatriate author I am familiar with, and her political observations about Europe between the wars show unparalleled perspicacity, especially to readers reared in a European background” (*American Women*, 45). While I agree with Austenfeld’s assessment, I disagree that the depth of Boyle’s emotional involvement was unparalleled. Smith, Buck, and Bowles had similarly deep relationships with the various worlds in which they lived, and the
list presumably is much longer. Austenfeld in fact mentions Bowles as a possible candidate for “deep expatriatism” in a footnote.

4. Used synonymously with terms like “well-traveled,” “sophisticated,” “knowledgeable,” and “refined,” modernist cosmopolitanism evokes images of a bohemian life in foreign metropolises. However, the majority of the modernist American expatriates in Paris preferred to remain among themselves and generally did little to understand or engage with their host culture, let alone allow their own understanding of the world to be dramatically questioned or changed.


6. In her introduction to the 2001 edition, Sandra Spanier explains that the manuscript for Process got lost in 1928, when Boyle gave her only copy away to a publishing house and never saw it again. Spanier found the manuscript when conducting research in the New York Public Library. Spanier emphasizes the importance of Process for Boyle scholars, as its modernist style corresponds to Boyle’s highly acclaimed poetry of the time. For a detailed discussion of the stylistic elements of Process, see Anne Reynes-Delobel, “Calculating the Leap from Void to Absence: Abstraction in the Writing of Kay Boyle” (2008).


8. For a detailed discussion of these issues in Boyle’s early novels, see my essay “The Wandering Woman: The Challenges of Cosmopolitanism in Kay Boyle’s Early Novels” (2008).


10. 365 Days has remarkable structure and intent. Composed of 365 stories, each of three hundred words or less, and written by 116 different authors (among them Nancy Cunard, Robert McAlmon, Emanuel Carnevali, Hilaire Hiler, Charles Henry Ford, Langston Hughes, and Henry Miller), it was intended as a fictional record of recent events and of individual lives all over the world on each day in the year 1934. While most of the contributors wrote only one piece for the collection, Boyle herself wrote 96, many of which are concerned with social injustice and racial discrimination.

11. Boyle herself was heavily involved in her lover’s rescue, but it was her husband and his mother who pulled most of the strings to get the ex-Austrian out of the internment camp and eventually into a plane to America (see Spanier, 149).

12. Davis had selected the place not only because it had been declared international territory—which was helpful, since he no longer was in possession of a French visa—but also because it allowed him to voice his concerns in an international forum. On November 19, 1948, Davis interrupted a session of the UN General Assembly at the Palais de Chaillot,
calling for “One government for one world” (Davis, 62). Under-standing the needs of the nation-state, he later resorted to creating his own “world passport” and—in a story almost too good to be true—has managed in the past fifty years to get this world passport recognized in 150 countries “on a de facto basis” (he has, however, also been imprisoned thirty-four times for not having appropriate papers). He also founded the International Registry of World Citizens in Paris in January 1949, which—according to his own record—has registered over 750,000 individuals. See Davis’s website: http://www.garrydavis.org/index.html.

13. Walter Mignolo criticizes Kant’s Eurocentrism in “The Many Faces of Cosmopolis” (2000). David Harvey notes, in “Cosmopolitanism and the Banality of Geographical Evils” (2000), that Kant’s vision of world citizenship is compromised by his Geography (1802), a text that, in Harvey’s view, “is nothing short of an intellectual and political embarrassment” (532). While acknowledging that the text was compiled from notes of Kant’s students, leaving certain doubts as to its accuracy, Harvey argues that the sometimes rampant racism expressed in Geography nevertheless has serious implications for Kant’s cosmopolitan project. In “Kant’s Second Thoughts on Race” (2007), philosopher Pauline Kleingeld agrees with Harvey that “probably until at least 1792, [Kant’s] disturbing views on race contradicted his own moral universalism” (592). In her analysis, however, Kant was able to resolve this contradiction “during the mid-1790s, at the latest during the writing of the manuscript for Toward Perpetual Peace,” a change of mind she finds expressed not only “in his explicit strengthening . . . of the status of non-Europeans,” but also in his “harsh criticism of the injustice perpetrated by the European colonial powers” (592). For a critical assessment of Kant’s Geography, see also Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta’s Reading Kant’s Geography (2011).


15. Arendt had herself been a Jewish refugee during the war, and Jaspers had lost his university post in Nazi Germany on grounds of his wife’s Jewish identity.
Love and a Question

A Stranger came to the door at eve,
    And he spoke the bridegroom fair.
He bore a green-white stick in his hand,
    And, for all burden, care.
He asked with the eyes more than the lips
    For a shelter for the night,
And he turned and looked at the road afar
    Without a window light.

The bridegroom came forth into the porch
    With, 'Let us look at the sky,
And question what of the night to be,
    Stranger, you and I.'
The woodbine leaves littered the yard,
    The woodbine berries were blue,
Autumn, yes, winter was in the wind;
    'Stranger, I wish I knew.'

Within, the bride in the dusk alone
    Bent over the open fire,
Her face rose-red with the glowing coal
    And the thought of the heart’s desire.
The bridegroom looked at the weary road,
    Yet saw but her within,
And wished her heart in a case of gold
    And pinned with a silver pin.

The bridegroom thought it little to give
    A dole of bread, a purse,
A heartfelt prayer for the poor of God,
    Or for the rich a curse;
But whether or not a man was asked
    To mar the love of two
By harboring woe in the bridal house,
    The bridegroom wished he knew.
Never Two Without Three: A Conversation with Paul Holdengräber

At the end of our second conversation, in the summer of 2014, the New York Public Library’s “Curator of Public Curiosity,” Paul Holdengräber, generous as ever, told me we would have to meet again for another conversation. “Jamais deux sans trois,” he said. Never two without three.

A few months ago, I met up with him again, though this time with a change in venue. While our first two conversations took place in his office in the library, this time we left those shelves of books and protective stone lions behind, and met on a bench in Central Park. Miniature boats zigzagged across the water of a pond nearby, couples canoodled on adjacent benches, and children screamed their delight as they ran down pathways and stumbled on the grassy hills, reminding us adults of our primate nature as they swung from tree branches and climbed an enormous Alice in Wonderland statue.

With the beautiful chaos of life swirling around us, we ventured down the rabbit hole of conversation.

TM: In one of our previous conversations we spoke of the Rainer Maria Rilke line, “Love consists in this: that two solitudes meet, protect, and greet each other.” Our second issue of The Scofield is centered around love, so I’m wondering if you agree with Rilke’s definition of love, or what your definition of that seemingly indefinable concept would be.

PH: Well, my definition would be partly just that—it is indefinable. I think that when we love someone, we share their adjectives. There’s a common language in love, and I think the most profound thing one can share is a sense of humor.

Two solitudes meeting—yes, I think so. Essentially, in the Platonic context, we are two pieces that come together and fit together. That is somewhere in the dialogue on love in Plato. In love, we are two solitudes that come together, that probably, in one moment or another, fulfill each other but remain alone. I have very strong models in my life. My parents were married for over seventy years. How do you manage that? How do you manage to keep the thrill for so long? How do you manage to keep the connection?

TM: Is part of it in that allowance for solitude? Must love give everything, including space? Must love admit everything, including its failure to ever truly overcome solitude?

PH: Perhaps. This is why I’m so interested in the connection between your first and second issues: from solitude to love, it’s a nice trajectory. That relationship between solitude and love is so deep. I love quoting the line of psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, one I’ve probably already quoted in one of our previous conversations, that says, “The goal is for the child to be alone in the presence of the mother.” That to me has always been such a deep definition of reading, in some form or fashion, but it also in some way gets to a definition of love: that one is alone but nurtured. As a parent, and also as a lover, one doesn’t want to hover. It’s about being present, but also giving the other room to breathe.

There’s a wonderful quote from Roland Barthes where
he’s talking about reading next to a lover. He says, “To be with the other and to think of something else.” To my mind, that is perfect, that is love: to be comfortable enough being with someone to be able to think of other things while you’re with them.

TM: When I first met you, you recommended *Atmosphere for Lovers and Thieves*, an album by Ben Webster, which has become a big part of my listening life. It’s a phenomenal album with a great title. I wanted to hear you talk about that album and particularly that title. What kind of atmosphere would be both for lovers and thieves? Or what is the connection between lovers and thieves?

PH: It is a fascinating title, precisely because I don’t know. It has the impression of someone lurking around and escaping in the dark after some lovemaking. You have the sense of Brassaï at night. I don’t know the history of that title, but it is a title that fits. Doesn’t it just make sense when you listen to the album?

TM: Yes, definitely, but it’s sort of difficult to pinpoint the reason.

PH: It’s one of the most breathtaking albums, partly because you hear Ben Webster, as never before, breathing into his instrument. There’s something about it that takes your breath away. Lovers take your breath away too, of course, which perhaps is a sort of thievery. I’m only inventing here, but I’m sure I could think more directly about the connection between lovers and thieves. I mean, there’s the obvious connection of a lover being someone who “steals your heart.” So there must be something there. I’d have to give it more thought to give you anything beyond that.

TM: I was rereading *Hamlet* recently for another project I’m working on, and a friend said to me something that stuck with me. He said, “To be or not to be” is a great question, but that the real devastating question of *Hamlet* is not “To be or not to be,” but the first words, ‘Who’s there?’” That sort of colored my rereading, that idea that the main problem underpinning everything in *Hamlet* is that act of reaching out in the darkness for connection, for love, for something, anything. I’m not sure if I have a question here, but...

PH: Well, then I’ll make a question for you, just because I’m feeling very kind and generous. I think your question pertains to me because that is what I do: I put someone in front of me, when we’re speaking at the New York Public Library, and I ask them, in a sense, “Who’s there?” Is someone there? And who is that someone who is there? And can you be there when you’re there with me? And when you’re there with me what kind of a someone are you? Because it’s a very different someone with me in front of an audience of five hundred people than the someone at home alone or at home with your lover.

TM: That’s the Joyce line a professor of mine spent hours discussing with a class: “Who’s he when he’s at home?”

PH: I don’t know that line. Another very good one. So that’s two great quotes you’ve brought fresh to me now, and you know that I am a man who loves his quotations. But yes, from *Hamlet* and from *Ulysses*, those are the questions that pertain to what I do: “Who’s there?” And you can be the someone you are when you’re at home? Can there be this forgetfulness of the presence of others? Can you be alone in the presence of others? Can you be alone in front of my gaze while I’m asking you “Who’s there?”

TM: You mentioned that line from Winnicott that you take as a great definition of reading, “Being alone
in the presence of the mother.” Last conversation we spoke for the majority of the time about “the art of conversation,” so this time I wanted to focus more on your other great love: “the art of reading.” How is reading similar to but also different from conversation?

PH: In a sense, they both demand interiority; they both demand a receptivity, as well. When you are reading, you are alone and not alone. In some deep way, if you’re reading things that inspire you—I was going to say “if you’re reading great literature,” but that might be problematic—you are conversing with the best minds. One of the pleasures of reading is that you get the best of conversation without having to actually deal with someone being there, living.

TM: The physicality of another.

PH: Exactly. One of the pleasures of reading is that you can take whatever material you have on your journeys without having the idiosyncrasies of having human beings around you. So there’s a distillation of greatness in reading. You’re close to the greatest minds. Reading is one moment of the dialectic. I try through the art of conversation to take people back into that chamber of reading.

In reference to this, something you must read, if you haven’t already, is Proust’s essay on reading. Just before writing *Remembrance of Things Past*, he translated—though it wasn’t really him translating—a text by Ruskin called *Sesame and Lilies*. The introduction of that Ruskin text was called “On Reading.” Proust writes an essay on reading “On Reading”—so it’s already kind of a meta project. The first line of the essay is something like this: “There are perhaps no days of our childhood we lived so fully as those we believe we left without having lived them, those we spent with a favorite book.” He talked about the fact that what we remember now as adults of our readings as children aren’t necessarily the books themselves but where we were, what interrupted the pleasure, how the physicality of our body became a part of the experience, etc.

TM: I’m curious why you didn’t want to use the words “great literature.” You thought saying that might be “problematic.”

PH: I said “problematic,” but I hate that word. I guess I don’t think it’s problematic at all. I definitely think we need to be discerning, but our judgment is marred by our feeling that perhaps what we’re defining as good...

Oh, I don’t know, I can already see five hundred problems with what I’m trying to say. You’ve put me in front of a bomb.

TM: Isn’t that the job of the interviewer?

PH: In some ways. But yes, I suppose there is something that is “imaginative literature,” something that provides us “with a tingle in our spine,” as Nabokov says about great literature, but it may not be as universal a concept as I once upon a time thought (and maybe still think). Still I would say that I do think of good work as work that is recalcitrant and difficult. When you read, there should be effort involved.

TM: You’re maybe already answering this a bit, but I’m curious in your personal definition: What makes a great book a great book? Or it doesn’t even have to be about books: What makes great art great art?

PH: I suppose it has to do with something that is endless, something that is not finite. One of my obsessions over time is our relationship between aging and taste. I just can’t get over thinking about what would happen if I revisited works that I loved once upon a time. Would they still inspire me in the same way? What do we remain faithful to?

I have a feeling if I reread Rilke’s *Letters to a Young
Poet, it would still hold a lot of the power it once held for me, but if I reread some other things which had a spell on me in my youth, would I feel the kind of kindness and affinity and power I once did? Is good art something that is endlessly fascinating? Is good art, like Werner Herzog says, something that brings you into contact with some sort of “ecstatic truth”? There’s something of the order of the sublime—something that takes you out of yourself, something that is much larger.

TM: I find more and more these days that I run into really intelligent people who can’t like art that they don’t politically agree with, and it boggles my mind. Even as political a person as I am, I don’t go to art for politics. I don’t want a stump speech spoken into a megaphone on a soapbox, whether I agree with it or not. I want ambiguity, nuance, dialogue—that ecstatic truth, that sublime, that tingle in the spine. So I’ll put the question to you: Can you like art that you don’t politically agree with?

PH: I think the world would be very impoverished if I read in order to find myself in what I read. In some way, the whole point of the enterprise of thinking is to be confronted by something that is not you. I mean, the whole point of speaking to people is to be upset by them, in some way—upset in the sense of being challenged.

I went to university at a time when identity politics was at its height—though maybe it is at another height now, I don’t know—but I think that way of thinking is a disaster. To read who you are is not the point of reading for me, nor is it the point of conversing.

TM: You would never have a conversation with Mike Tyson if it were.

PH: No, I wouldn’t, and let me remind you, of course, there were people who objected to my bringing Mike Tyson to the library. This brings us to another point though. Looking at it from the other side, if you were to ask would there be people I disagree with so strongly that I wouldn’t feature them, I would have to say yes.

TM: And who would fit into that category?

PH: I would have real trouble giving the platform of the New York Public Library, or any platform honestly, to a revisionist historian, because it’s no longer a question of opinion. The holocaust either happened or didn’t happen, for example. If the debate becomes a debate over those kinds of facts, it would really be highly problematic. But certainly people whose views I don’t share, I would bring, and I do bring, to sit on that stage and talk with me. It’s very important to bring people there who do not share your “worldview,” as you say, which may be too lofty of a word, a little pie-in-the-sky.

For example, I’ve had these conversations with my children about hiphop. When you listen to some of it carefully, it can be very challenging.

PH: On the other hand, does one want to shield them from it? I’m not sure. I think the best thing you can do is provide them with the best tools to analyze it. I think Oscar Wilde is deeply right about this, as he often was. There’s no moral or immoral art, only good or bad art.

TM: I only ask about what makes great art because what you do seems tied up in this tension, for as a “curator of public curiosity,” you curate things you love, that you deem of a certain quality, but you also make sure it goes beyond just your own personal tastes.

PH: Yes. It has to. It really has to. I always say: “It’s an informed subjectivity.” That’s at the core of what I do. I
and said, “Well, how interesting! Ask him for me, if you will, what it feels like to be hit so strongly on the head.” I asked him, and I remember his response, which was brilliant, as indeed he is. His response was: “What I did for a living is what you’ve tried to avoid your whole life.”

Here you have a man who has maimed so many people, and in so many different ways, yet remains so vulnerable at the same time. So this was an intense conversation, and it was not only out of my usual taste range, but also out of what might normally be considered “the canon.” I can’t quite imagine Harold Bloom speaking to Mike Tyson. I don’t think that will happen, and yet I also love speaking to Harold Bloom.

TM: I was there that day, and it too was one of your best.

PH: I would love some day to invite him back. I hope he’ll be healthy enough for it.

TM: Me too. We’ve talked previously about how you were not an early reader. You weren’t quite as late as Flaubert, you said, but you discussed how your father gave you Dostoevsky’s The Idiot when you were bedridden. You said that The Idiot opened up the world of literature for you. Was it something particular about that book? Or did it just hit you at the right time and in the right place? Does Dostoevsky still loom large for you?

PH: He looms large, and yet, what a bad boy I’ve been because I probably haven’t read him in years. The last time I read him was probably when I taught Notes from the Underground, which is a tiny little book, which certainly doesn’t have the kind of vision and vigor of The Idiot or Karamazov or The Demons or any of the larger-scope books. The question you ask is really just another question about love, in a way. It’s about who we meet and
when—everything is a question of timing. It’s the right book at the right time in the right circumstances. Our love is dependent on so many external circumstances.

I was bedridden. I had an illness which could have provoked idiocy, so my father proved himself at that moment, and retrospectively, to be particularly humorous in giving me *The Idiot* because I had meningitis. He gave me this book about someone who could have been perceived as traumatically injured in his brain. Dostoevsky at that point transformed the playing field for me. I would imagine, once again to come back to one of your earlier questions, the power of Dostoevsky wouldn’t be diminished or tarnished at all. I mean *Crime and Punishment* or *The Gambler*—I imagine those books would remain powerful for me.

**TM:** What other writers loom large for you? I know Rilke and Benjamin and Proust we’ve talked about extensively in previous conversations, and Dostoevsky we just mentioned, but who else is in your personal pantheon?

**PH:** Why not talk about someone current rather than speaking about my old passions?

**TM:** That works. Instead of your old loves, let’s go to your new loves.

**PH:** I’ve been stunned recently by Ben Lerner, who I think is such an extraordinary writer. He is someone who I hope people start to read. I find him, among the younger writers, someone who doesn’t suffer from the kind of cynicism that many others in that world do. I think his two novels, *Leaving the Atocha Station* and *10:04*, are particularly effective when seen as a diptych.

Someone else who matters to me, an older passion, is Thomas Bernhard. There is one book that I highly recommend called *Concrete*. The title is perfect because the text is one huge block. It’s the story of a man who is about to sit down and write the definitive study of Mendelssohn, the composer. Every time he sits down and is about to begin, he is interrupted. It’s great. Highly recommended.

**TM:** How do you choose what you read? (Besides what you read for work.)

**PH:** Serendipity. The only way we celebrate Shabbat in our home is to go to a bookstore every weekend. I happen upon things. This year, I must say, my life has become particularly complex. I accepted an invitation to be a judge of the National Book Award for Non-Fiction, so I have at home at the present moment four hundred books. So when you ask me what I choose to read, you’re very kind to assume that I have a choice. For the moment, I have no choice but to be buried. It is true that I spend a lot of time—more time than I care to perhaps—reading non-fiction instead of fiction.

**TM:** Besides the National Book thing, is there a reason for that? Is that part of getting older?

**PH:** I think it might be. Do you find that to be true with you?

**TM:** I haven’t yet.

**PH:** You’re a lucky man. You’re, of course, much younger though.

**TM:** David Markson, who we did our first issue on, famously said that towards the end of his life he couldn’t read fiction anymore, even books he was once so passionate about like *The Recognitions* and *Under the Volcano*, he couldn’t stomach returning to. *Ulysses* was his only exception.

**PH:** *Under the Volcano*? Lowry?

**TM:** Yes, Malcolm Lowry was Markson’s mentor, more or less.
PH: Now that was a book that I loved, but God, how has that aged?

TM: Yeah, when’s the last time you read it?

PH: Well, the last time was the first time too.

TM: Which happens with lovers as well.

PH: Sometimes the best love affairs are the ones that only last one night. But I know in our conversations you’ve brought up Markson a number of times, and I’ve still never read him. I’ll have to.

TM: You should, but I bring him up not to pester you about reading him, but just to say that though I haven’t felt that move away from fiction, I have heard that some writers as they get older do move more towards non-fiction. Markson was someone who did and was very open about it. Other big writers, who will remain nameless, I’ve heard similar things about, but it embarrasses some that the thing they love, the thing they do, has lost its luster for them as a reader.

PH: Maybe as you get older, you are less interested in plot? When Don DeLillo was at the library, he talked about being so uninterested in the plot and being so interested in the sentence.

TM: Those are the writers I love. That’s Joyce. That’s Woolf.

PH: Of course, and to come back to an earlier question, maybe those are the works that matter more, because they have, in a way, exploded a form.

TM: To me, if you’re reading for plot and only plot, then what would be the point of rereading? Once you know the end, and have seen all the moves that get you there, then what’s the reason to go back and do it all again? But if it’s about these other things, aesthetically beautiful sentences and thematic heft and ambiguity and all that, then it becomes more interesting to come back to because those more nuanced things change with you in a way that I don’t think it’s easy for plot to change over time.

PH: You know, I’m not sure that’s true. I’m not saying I disagree, but that I’m just not sure. I had a conversation with Carlo Ginzburg a number of years ago and he said that when he first read *The Charterhouse of Parma* at age fifteen, he was younger than all the heroes, but now rereading it he was suddenly older, even though they haven’t changed at all. So for him something in the plot changed as well, just in relation to his aging.

TM: For me, that seems like it still has to do more with what’s going on underneath the plot than just with the actual plot itself. The same things still happen, but the same themes aren’t necessarily always there. You can go back to a book years later, and suddenly you think thematically or philosophically it’s about something completely different than you thought when you first read it.

PH: It may be a cliche, but I think it’s true that great readers are always rereaders. The other day I took my two young boys to see *The Third Man* at Film Forum, and I thought immediately that the best thing we could have done when the end credits began to roll would be to sit and wait for it to start again. Of course, I didn’t, because I couldn’t submit my children to that, but it just proves what you’re saying, I think. I don’t read for the plot; I read for those extraordinary images and ideas and I take them in. I’m obsessive about retracing, I try out again and again and again the very same quotations to see how people react differently to them. They are tests; they are signposts. A quotation comes off completely differently based on who it is you enunciate it to. Sometimes people think—I know they do—*Oh, there goes Holdengraber*
again, using the same old sentences. But for me they’re really not about namedropping, they’re about the various moments that have captured and stayed with me, that have formed and shaped me. I can’t live without certain sentences in the same way I can’t live without breathing. They are really everything to me. To speak the language of love, quotations can be seductive tools. They are an invitation.
A Selection from

Phaedrus

Socrates: That was a dreadful speech which you brought with you, and you made me utter one as bad.

Phaedrus: How so?

Socrates: It was foolish, I say,—to a certain extent, impious; can anything be more dreadful?

Phaedrus: Nothing, if the speech was really such as you describe.

Socrates: Well, and is not Eros the son of Aphrodite, and a god?

Phaedrus: So men say.

Socrates: But that was not acknowledged by Lysias in his speech, nor by you in that other speech which you by a charm drew from my lips. For if love be, as he surely is, a divinity, he cannot be evil. Yet this was the error of both the speeches. There was also a simplicity about them which was refreshing; having no truth or honesty in them, nevertheless they pretended to be something, hoping to succeed in deceiving the manikins of earth and gain celebrity among them. Wherefore I must have a purgation. And I bethink me of an ancient purgation of mythological error which was devised, not by Homer, for he never had the wit to discover why he was blind, but by Stesichorus, who was a philosopher and knew the reason why; and therefore, when he lost his eyes, for that was the penalty which was inflicted upon him for reviling the lovely Helen, he at once purged himself. And the purgation was a recantation, which began thus,—

False is that word of mine—the truth is that thou didst not embark in ships, nor ever go to the walls of Troy; and when he had completed his poem, which is called “the recantation,” immediately his sight returned to him. Now I will be wiser than either Stesichorus or Homer, in that I am going to make my recantation for reviling love before I suffer; and this I will attempt, not as before, veiled and ashamed, but with forehead bold and bare.

Phaedrus: Nothing could be more agreeable to me than to hear you say so.

Socrates: Only think, my good Phaedrus, what an utter want of delicacy was shown in the two discourses; I mean, in my own and in that which you recited out of the book. Would not any one who was himself of a noble and gentle nature, and who loved or ever had loved a nature like his own, when we tell of the petty causes of lovers’ jealousies, and of their exceeding animosities, and of the injuries which they do to their beloved, have imagined that our ideas of love were taken from some haunt of sailors to which good manners were unknown—he would certainly never have admitted the justice of our censure?

Phaedrus: I dare say not, Socrates.

Socrates: Therefore, because I blush at the thought of
this person, and also because I am afraid of Love himself, I desire to wash the brine out of my ears with water from the spring; and I would counsel Lysias not to delay, but to write another discourse, which shall prove that ceteris paribus the lover ought to be accepted rather than the non-lover.

_Phaedrus_: Be assured that he shall. You shall speak the praises of the lover, and Lysias shall be compelled by me to write another discourse on the same theme.

_Socrates_: You will be true to your nature in that, and therefore I believe you.

_Phaedrus_: Speak, and fear not.

_Socrates_: But where is the fair youth whom I was addressing before, and who ought to listen now; lest, if he hear me not, he should accept a non-lover before he knows what he is doing?

_Phaedrus_: He is close at hand, and always at your service.

_Socrates_: Know then, fair youth, that the former discourse was the word of Phaedrus, the son of Vain Man, who dwells in the city of Myrrha (Myrrhinusius). And this which I am about to utter is the recantation of Stesichorus the son of Godly Man (Euphemus), who comes from the town of Desire (Himera), and is to the following effect: “I told a lie when I said” that the beloved ought to accept the non-lover when he might have the lover, because the one is sane, and the other mad. It might be so if madness were simply an evil; but there is also a madness which is a divine gift, and the source of the chiefest blessings granted to men. For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and private life, but when in their senses few or none. And I might also tell you how the Sibyl and other inspired persons have given to many an one many an intimation of the future which has saved them from falling. But it would be tedious to speak of what every one knows.

There will be more reason in appealing to the ancient inventors of names, who would never have connected prophecy (mantike) which foretells the future and is the noblest of arts, with madness (manike), or called them both by the same name, if they had deemed madness to be a disgrace or dishonour;—they must have thought that there was an inspired madness which was a noble thing; for the two words, mantike and manike, are really the same, and the letter t is only a modern and tasteless insertion. And this is confirmed by the name which was given by them to the rational investigation of futurity, whether made by the help of birds or of other signs—this, for as much as it is an art which supplies from the reasoning faculty mind (nous) and information (istoria) to human thought (oiesis) they originally termed oionoistike, but the word has been lately altered and made sonorous by the modern introduction of the letter Omega (oionoistike and oionistike), and in proportion prophecy (mantike) is more perfect and august than augury, both in name and fact, in the same proportion, as the ancients testify, is madness superior to a sane mind (sophrosune) for the one is only of human, but the other of divine origin. Again, where plagues and mightiest woes have bred in certain families, owing to some ancient blood-guiltiness, there
The soul through all her being is immortal, for that which is ever in motion is immortal; but that which moves another and is moved by another, in ceasing to move ceases also to live. Only the self-moving, never leaving self, never ceases to move, and is the fountain and beginning of motion to all that moves besides. Now, the beginning is unbegotten, for that which is begotten has a beginning; but the beginning is begotten of nothing, for if it were begotten of something, then the begotten would not come from a beginning. But if unbegotten, it must also be indestructible; for if beginning were destroyed, there could be no beginning out of anything, nor anything out of a beginning; and all things must have a beginning. And therefore the self-moving is the beginning of motion; and this can neither be destroyed nor begotten, else the whole heavens and all creation would collapse and stand still, and never again have motion or birth. But if the self-moving is proved to be immortal, he who affirms that self-motion is the very idea and essence of the soul will not be put to confusion. For the body which is moved from without is soulless; but that which is moved from within has a soul, for such is the nature of the soul. But if this be true, must not the soul be the self-moving, and therefore of necessity unbegotten and immortal? Enough of the soul’s immortality.

Of the nature of the soul, though her true form be ever a theme of large and more than mortal discourse, let me speak briefly, and in a figure. And let the figure be composite—a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now the winged horses and the charioteers of the gods are all of them noble and of noble descent, but those of other races are mixed; the human charioteer drives his in a pair; and one of them is noble and of noble breed, and the other is ignoble and of ignoble breed; and the driving of them of necessity gives a great deal of trouble to him. But if he has no touch of the Muses’ madness in his soul, he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman.

I might tell of many other noble deeds which have sprung from inspired madness. And therefore, let no one frighten or flutter us by saying that the temperate friend is to be chosen rather than the inspired, but let him further show that love is not sent by the gods for any good to lover or beloved; if he can do so we will allow him to carry off the palm. And we, on our part, will prove in answer to him that the madness of love is the greatest of heaven’s blessings, and the proof shall be one which the wise will receive, and the witling disbelieve. But first of all, let us view the affections and actions of the soul divine and human, and try to ascertain the truth about them. The beginning of our proof is as follows:—

The soul through all her being is immortal, for that which is ever in motion is immortal; and by inspired utterances found a way of deliverance for those who are in need; and he who has part in this gift, and is truly possessed and duly out of his mind, is by the use of purifications and mysteries made whole and except from evil, future as well as present, and has a release from the calamity which was afflicting him. The third kind is the madness of those who are possessed by the Muses; which taking hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, having no touch of the Muses’ madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman.

I might tell of many other noble deeds which have sprung from inspired madness. And therefore, let no one frighten or flutter us by saying that the temperate friend is to be chosen rather than the inspired, but let him further show that love is not sent by the gods for any good to lover or beloved; if he can do so we will allow him to carry off the palm. And we, on our part, will prove in answer to him that the madness of love is the greatest of heaven’s blessings, and the proof shall be one which the wise will receive, and the witling disbelieve. But first of all, let us view the affections and actions of the soul divine and human, and try to ascertain the truth about them. The beginning of our proof is as follows:—
PLATO

chariots of the gods in even poise, obeying the rein, glide rapidly; but the others labour, for the vicious steed goes heavily, weighing down the charioteer to the earth when his steed has not been thoroughly trained:—and this is the hour of agony and extremest conflict for the soul. For the immortals, when they are at the end of their course, go forth and stand upon the outside of heaven, and the revolution of the spheres carries them round, and they behold the things beyond. But of the heaven which is above the heavens, what earthly poet ever did or ever will sing worthily? It is such as I will describe; for I must dare to speak the truth, when truth is my theme. There abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul. The divine intelligence, being nurtured upon mind and pure knowledge, and the intelligence of every soul which is capable of receiving the food proper to it, rejoices at beholding reality, and once more gazing upon truth, is replenished and made glad, until the revolution of the worlds brings her round again to the same place. In the revolution she beholds justice, and temperance, and knowledge absolute, not in the form of generation or of relation, which men call existence, but knowledge absolute in existence absolute; and beholding the other true existences in like manner, and feasting upon them, she passes down into the interior of the heavens and returns home; and there the charioteer putting up his horses at the stall, gives them ambrosia to eat and nectar to drink.

Such is the life of the gods; but of other souls, that which follows God best and is likest to him lifts the head of the charioteer into the outer world, and is carried round in the revolution, troubled indeed by the steeds, and with difficulty beholding true being; while another only rises

the whole heaven in divers forms appearing—when perfect and fully winged she soars upward, and orders the whole world; whereas the imperfect soul, losing her wings and drooping in her flight at last settles on the solid ground—there, finding a home, she receives an earthly frame which appears to be self-moved, but is really moved by her power; and this composition of soul and body is called a living and mortal creature. For immortal no such union can be reasonably believed to be; although fancy, not having seen nor surely known the nature of God, may imagine an immortal creature having both a body and also a soul which are united throughout all time. Let that, however, be as God wills, and be spoken of acceptably to him. And now let us ask the reason why the soul loses her wings!

The wing is the corporeal element which is most akin to the divine, and which by nature tends to soar aloft and carry that which gravitates downwards into the upper region, which is the habitation of the gods. The divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness, and the like; and by these the wing of the soul is nourished, and grows apace; but when fed upon evil and fohness and the opposite of good, wastes and falls away. Zeus, the mighty lord, holding the reins of a winged chariot, leads the way in heaven, ordering all and taking care of all; and there follows him the array of gods and demigods, marshalled in eleven bands; Hestia alone abides at home in the house of heaven; of the rest they who are reckoned among the princely twelve march in their appointed order. They see many blessed sights in the inner heaven, and there are many ways to and fro, along which the blessed gods are passing, every one doing his own work; he may follow who will and can, for jealousy has no place in the celestial choir. But when they go to banquet and festival, then they move up the steep to the top of the vault of heaven.

Such is the life of the gods; but of other souls, that which follows God best and is likest to him lifts the head of the charioteer into the outer world, and is carried round in the revolution, troubled indeed by the steeds, and with difficulty beholding true being; while another only rises
and falls, and sees, and again fails to see by reason of the unruliness of the steeds. The rest of the souls are also longing after the upper world and they all follow, but not being strong enough they are carried round below the surface, plunging, treading on one another, each striving to be first; and there is confusion and perspiration and the extremity of effort; and many of them are lamed or have their wings broken through the ill-driving of the charioteers; and all of them after a fruitless toil, not having attained to the mysteries of true being, go away, and feed upon opinion. The reason why the souls exhibit this exceeding eagerness to behold the plain of truth is that pasturage is found there, which is suited to the highest part of the soul; and the wing on which the soul soars is nourished with this. And there is a law of Destiny, that the soul which attains any vision of truth in company with a god is preserved from harm until the next period, and if attaining always is always unharmed. But when she is unable to follow, and fails to behold the truth, and through some ill-hap sinks beneath the double load of forgetfulness and vice, and her wings fall from her and she drops to the ground, then the law ordains that this soul shall at her first birth pass, not into any other animal, but only into man; and the soul which has seen most of truth shall come to the birth as a philosopher, or artist, or some musical and loving nature; that which has seen truth in the second degree shall be some righteous king or warrior chief; the soul which is of the third class shall be a politician, or economist, or trader; the fourth shall be lover of gymnastic toils, or a physician; the fifth shall lead the life of a prophet or hierophant; to the sixth the character of poet or some other imitative artist will be assigned; to the seventh the life of an artisan or husbandman; to the eighth that of a sophist or demagogue; to the ninth that of a tyrant—all these are states of probation, in which he who does righteously improves, and he who does unrighteously, improves, and he who does unrighteously, deteriorates his lot.

Ten thousand years must elapse before the soul of each one can return to the place from whence she came, for she cannot grow her wings in less; only the soul of a philosopher, guileless and true, or the soul of a lover, who is not devoid of philosophy, may acquire wings in the third of the recurring periods of a thousand years; he is distinguished from the ordinary good man who gains wings in three thousand years:—and they who choose this life three times in succession have wings given them, and go away at the end of three thousand years. But the others receive judgment when they have completed their first life, and after the judgment they go, some of them to the houses of correction which are under the earth, and are punished; others to some place in heaven whither they are lightly borne by justice, and there they live in a manner worthy of the life which they led here when in the form of men. And at the end of the first thousand years the good souls and also the evil souls both come to draw lots and choose their second life, and they may take any which they please. The soul of a man may pass into the life of a beast, or from the beast return again into the man. But the soul which has never seen the truth will not pass into the human form. For a man must have intelligence of universals, and be able to proceed from the many particulars of sense to one conception of reason:—this is the recollection of those things which our soul once saw while following God—when regardless of that which we now call being she raised her head up towards the true being. And therefore the mind of the philosopher alone has wings; and this is just, for he is always, according
to the measure of his abilities, clinging in recollection to those things in which God abides, and in beholding which He is what He is. And he who employs aright these memories is ever being initiated into perfect mysteries and alone becomes truly perfect. But, as he forgets earthly interests and is rapt in the divine, the vulgar deem him mad, and rebuke him; they do not see that he is inspired.

Thus far I have been speaking of the fourth and last kind of madness, which is imputed to him who, when he sees the beauty of earth, is transported with the recollection of the true beauty; he would like to fly away, but he cannot; he is like a bird fluttering and looking upward and careless of the world below; and he is therefore thought to be mad. And I have shown this of all inspirations to be the noblest and highest and the offspring of the highest to him who has or shares in it, and that he who loves the beautiful is called a lover because he partakes of it. For, as has been already said, every soul of man has in the way of nature beheld true being; this was the condition of her passing into the form of man. But all souls do not easily recall the things of the other world; they may have seen them for a short time only, or they may have been unfortunate in their earthly lot, and, having had their hearts turned to unrighteousness through some corrupting influence, they may have lost the memory of the holy things which once they saw. Few only retain an adequate remembrance of them; and they, when they behold here any image of that other world, are rapt in amazement; but they are ignorant of what this rapture means, because they do not clearly perceive. For there is no light of justice or temperance or any of the higher ideas which are precious to souls in the earthly copies of them: they are seen through a glass dimly; and there are few who, going to the images, behold in them the realities, and these only with difficulty. There was a time when with the rest of the happy band they saw beauty shining in brightness—we philosophers following in the train of Zeus, others in company with other gods; and then we beheld the beatific vision and were initiated into a mystery which may be truly called most blessed, celebrated by us in our state of innocence, before we had any experience of evils to come, when we were admitted to the sight of apparitions innocent and simple and calm and happy, which we beheld shining impure light, pure ourselves and not yet enshrined in that living tomb which we carry about, now that we are imprisoned in the body, like an oyster in his shell. Let me linger over the memory of scenes which have passed away.

But of beauty, I repeat again that we saw her there shining in company with the celestial forms; and coming to earth we find her here too, shining in clearness through the clearest aperture of sense. For sight is the most piercing of our bodily senses; though not by that is wisdom seen; her loveliness would have been transporting if there had been a visible image of her, and the other ideas, if they had visible counterparts, would be equally lovely. But this is the privilege of beauty, that being the loveliest she is also the most palpable to sight. Now he who is not newly initiated or who has become corrupted, does not easily rise out of this world to the sight of true beauty in the other; he looks only at her earthly namesake, and instead of being awed at the sight of her, he is given over to pleasure, and like a brutish beast he rushes on to enjoy and beget; he consorts with wantonness, and is not afraid or ashamed of pursuing pleasure in violation of nature. But he whose initiation is recent, and who has been the spectator of many glories in the other world, is amazed when he sees any one having a godlike face or form, which
is the expression of divine beauty; and at first a shudder runs through him, and again the old awe steals over him; then looking upon the face of his beloved as of a god he reverences him, and if he were not afraid of being thought a downright madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a god; then while he gazes on him there is a sort of reaction, and the shudder passes into an unusual heat and perspiration; for, as he receives the effluence of beauty through the eyes, the wing moistens and he warms. And as he warms, the parts out of which the wing grew, and which had been hitherto closed and rigid, and had prevented the wing from shooting forth, are melted, and as nourishment streams upon him, the lower end of the wings begins to swell and grow from the root upwards; and the growth extends under the whole soul—for once the whole was winged.

During this process the whole soul is all in a state of ebullition and effervescence,—which may be compared to the irritation and uneasiness in the gums at the time of cutting teeth,—bubbles up, and has a feeling of uneasiness and tickling; but when in like manner the soul is beginning to grow wings, the beauty of the beloved meets her eye and she receives the sensible warm motion of particles which flow towards her, therefore called emotion (imeros), and is refreshed and warmed by them, and then she ceases from her pain with joy. But when she is parted from her beloved and her moisture fails, then the orifices of the passage out of which the wing shoots dry up and close, and intercept the germ of the wing; which, being shut up with the emotion, throbbing as with the pulsations of an artery, pricks the aperture which is nearest, until at length the entire soul is pierced and maddened and pained, and at the recollection of beauty is again delighted. And from both of them together the soul is oppressed at the strangeness of her condition, and is in a great strait and excitement, and in her madness can neither sleep by night nor abide in her place by day. And wherever she thinks that she will behold the beautiful one, thither in her desire she runs. And when she has seen him, and bathed herself in the waters of beauty, her constraint is loosened, and she is refreshed, and has no more pangs and pains; and this is the sweetest of all pleasures at the time, and is the reason why the soul of the lover will never forsake his beautiful one, whom he esteems above all; he has forgotten mother and brethren and companions, and he thinks nothing of the neglect and loss of his property; the rules and proprieties of life, on which he formerly prided himself, he now despises, and is ready to sleep like a servant, wherever he is allowed, as near as he can to his desired one, who is the object of his worship, and the physician who can alone assuage the greatness of his pain. And this state, my dear imaginary youth to whom I am talking, is by men called love, and among the gods has a name at which you, in your simplicity, may be inclined to mock; there are two lines in the apocryphal writings of Homer in which the name occurs. One of them is rather outrageous, and not altogether metrical. They are as follows:

Mortals call him fluttering love,
But the immortals call him winged one,
Because the growing of wings is a necessity to him.

You may believe this, but not unless you like. At any rate the loves of lovers and their causes are such as I have described.

Now the lover who is taken to be the attendant of Zeus is better able to bear the winged god, and can endure a heavier burden; but the attendants and companions of Ares, when under the influence of love, if they fancy that...
they have been at all wronged, are ready to kill and put an end to themselves and their beloved. And he who follows in the train of any other god, while he is unspoiled and the impression lasts, honours and imitates him, as far as he is able; and after the manner of his god he behaves in his intercourse with his beloved and with the rest of the world during the first period of his earthly existence. Every one chooses his love from the ranks of beauty according to his character, and this he makes his god, and fashions and adorns as a sort of image which he is to fall down and worship. The followers of Zeus desire that their beloved should have a soul like him; and therefore they seek out some one of a philosophical and imperial nature, and when they have found him and loved him, they do all they can to confirm such a nature in him, and if they have no experience of such a disposition hitherto, they learn of any one who can teach them, and themselves follow in the same way. And they have the less difficulty in finding the nature of their own god in themselves, because they have been compelled to gaze intensely on him; their recollection clings to him, and they become possessed of him, and receive from him their character and disposition, so far as man can participate in God. The qualities of their god they attribute to the beloved, wherefore they love him all the more, and if, like the Bacchic Nymphs, they draw inspiration from Zeus, they pour out their own fountain upon him, wanting to make him as like as possible to their own god. But those who are the followers of Here seek a royal love, and when they have found him they do just the same with him; and in like manner the followers of Apollo, and of every other god walking in the ways of their god, seek a love who is to be made like him whom they serve, and when they have found him, they themselves imitate their god, and persuade their love to do the same, and educate him into the manner and nature of the god as far as they each can; for no feelings of envy or jealousy are entertained by them towards their beloved, but they do their utmost to create in him the greatest likeness of themselves and of the god whom they honour. Thus fair and blissful to the beloved is the desire of the inspired lover, and the initiation of which I speak into the mysteries of true love, if he be captured by the lover and their purpose is effected. Now the beloved is taken captive in the following manner:—

As I said at the beginning of this tale, I divided each soul into three—two horses and a charioteer; and one of the horses was good and the other bad: the division may remain, but I have not yet explained in what the goodness or badness of either consists, and to that I will proceed. The right-hand horse is upright and cleanly made; he has a lofty neck and an aquiline nose; his colour is white, and his eyes dark; he is a lover of honour and modesty and temperance, and the follower of true glory; he needs no touch of the whip, but is guided by word and admonition only. The other is a crooked lumbering animal, put together anyhow; he has a short thick neck; he is flat-faced and of a dark colour, with grey eyes and blood-red complexion; the mate of insolence and pride, shag-eared and deaf, hardly yielding to whip and spur. Now when the charioteer beholds the vision of love, and has his whole soul warmed through sense, and is full of the prickings and ticklings of desire, the obedient steed, then as always under the government of shame, refrains from leaping on the beloved; but the other, heedless of the pricks and of the blows of the whip, plunges and runs away, giving all manner of trouble to his companion and the charioteer, whom he forces to approach the beloved and to remember the joys of love. They at first indignantly oppose him and
tamed and humbled, and follows the will of the charioteer, and when he sees the beautiful one he is ready to die of fear. And from that time forward the soul of the lover follows the beloved in modesty and holy fear.

And so the beloved who, like a god, has received every true and loyal service from his lover, not in pretence but in reality, being also himself of a nature friendly to his admirer, if in former days he has blushed to own his passion and turned away his lover, because his youthful companions or others slanderously told him that he would be disgraced, now as years advance, at the appointed age and time, is led to receive him into communion. For fate which has ordained that there shall be no friendship among the evil has also ordained that there shall ever be friendship among the good. And the beloved when he has received him into communion and intimacy, is quite amazed at the goodwill of the lover; he recognises that the inspired friend is worth all other friends or kinsmen; they have nothing of friendship in them worthy to be compared with his. And when his feeling continues and he is nearer to him and embraces him, in gymnastic exercises and at other times of meeting, then the fountain of that stream, which Zeus when he was in love with Ganymede named Desire, overflows upon the lover, and some enters into his soul, and some when he is filled flows out again; and as a breeze or an echo rebounds from the smooth rocks and returns whence it came, so does the stream of beauty, passing through the eyes which are the windows of the soul, come back to the beautiful one; there arriving and quickening the passages of the wings, watering, them and inclining them to grow, and filling the soul of the beloved also with love. And thus he loves, but he knows not what; he does not understand and cannot explain his own state; he appears to have caught the infection of

will not be urged on to do terrible and unlawful deeds; but at last, when he persists in plaguing them, they yield and agree to do as he bids them.

And now they are at the spot and behold the flashing beauty of the beloved; which when the charioteer sees, his memory is carried to the true beauty, whom he beholds in company with Modesty like an image placed upon a holy pedestal. He sees her, but he is afraid and falls backwards in adoration, and by his fall is compelled to pull back the reins with such violence as to bring both the steeds on their haunches, the one willing and unresisting, the unruly one very unwilling; and when they have gone back a little, the one is overcome with shame and wonder, and his whole soul is bathed in perspiration; the other, when the pain is over which the bridle and the fall had given him, having with difficulty taken breath, is full of wrath and reproaches, which he heaps upon the charioteer and his fellow-steed, for want of courage and manhood, declaring that they have been false to their agreement and guilty of desertion. Again they refuse, and again he urges them on, and will scarce yield to their prayer that he would wait until another time. When the appointed hour comes, they make as if they had forgotten, and he reminds them, fighting and neighing and dragging them on, until at length he, on the same thoughts intent, forces them to draw near again. And when they are near he stoops his head and puts up his tail, and takes the bit in his teeth, and pulls shamelessly. Then the charioteer is worse off than ever; he falls back like a racer at the barrier, and with a still more violent wrench drags the bit out of the teeth of the wild steed and covers his abusive tongue and jaws with blood, and forces his legs and haunches to the ground and punishes him sorely. And when this has happened several times and the villain has ceased from his wanton way, he is
having once enjoyed they continue to enjoy, yet rarely because they have not the approval of the whole soul. They too are dear, but not so dear to one another as the others, either at the time of their love or afterwards. They consider that they have given and taken from each other the most sacred pledges, and they may not break them and fall into enmity. At last they pass out of the body, unwinged, but eager to soar, and thus obtain no mean reward of love and madness. For those who have once begun the heavenward pilgrimage may not go down again to darkness and the journey beneath the earth, but they live in light always; happy companions in their pilgrimage, and when the time comes at which they receive their wings they have the same plumage because of their love.

Thus great are the heavenly blessings which the friendship of a lover will confer upon you, my youth. Whereas the attachment of the non-lover, which is alloyed with a worldly prudence and has worldly and niggardly ways of doling out benefits, will breed in your soul those vulgar qualities which the populace applaud, will send you bowling round the earth during a period of nine thousand years, and leave you a fool in the world below.

And thus, dear Eros, I have made and paid my recantation, as well and as fairly as I could; more especially in the matter of the poetical figures which I was compelled to use, because Phaedrus would have them. And now forgive the past and accept the present, and be gracious and merciful to me, and do not in thine anger deprive me of sight, or take from me the art of love which thou hast given me, but grant that I may be yet more esteemed in the eyes of the fair. And if Phaedrus or I myself said anything rude in our first speeches, blame Lysias, who is the father of the brat, and let us have no more of his progeny; bid him study philosophy, like his brother.
Polemarchus; and then his lover Phaedrus will no longer halt between two opinions, but will dedicate himself wholly to love and to philosophical discourses.

Phaedrus: I join in the prayer, Socrates, and say with you, if this be for my good, may your words come to pass.

—

Translated by Benjamin Jowett

Peacockery
Three Poems

The Legend of Big and Fine

Long ago, we used two words for the worth of a house, a car,
A woman—all the same to men who claimed them:
things
To be entered, each to experience wear and tear with time,

But greater than the love for these was the strong little grin
One man offered another saying, You lucky. You got you a big,
Fine __________. Hard to imagine—so many men waiting

On each other to be recognized, every crooked tooth in our
Naming mouths ready like the syllables of a very short Sentence, so many of us crying mine, like infants who grab

For what must be beautiful since someone else saw it.

Heart Condition

I don't want to hurt a man, but I like to hear one beg.
Two people touch twice a month in ten hotels, and
We call it long distance. He holds down one coast.
I wander the other like any African American, Africa
With its condition and America with its condition
And black folk born in this nation content to carry
Half of each. I shoulder my share. My man flies
To touch me. Sky on our side. Sky above his world
I wish to write. Which is where I go wrong. Words
Are a sense of sound. I get smart. My mother shakes Her head. My grandmother sighs: He ain't got no Sense. My grandmother is dead. She lives with me. I hear my mother shake her head over the phone. Somebody cut the cord. We have a long distance Relationship. I lost half of her to a stroke. God gives To each a body. God gives every body its pains.
When pain mounts in my body, I try thinking Of my white forefathers who hurt their black bastards Quite legally. I hate to say it, but one pain can ease Another. Doctors rather I take pills. My man wants me To see a doctor. What are you when you leave your man Wanting? What am I now that I think so fondly Of airplanes? What's my name, whose is it, while we Make love. My lover leaves me with words I wish To write. Flies from one side of a nation to the outside Of our world. I don't want the world. I only want African sense of American sound. Him. Touching. This body. Aware of its pains. Greetings, Earthlings. My name is Slow And Stumbling. I come from planet Trouble. I am here to love you uncomfortable.
Atlantis

What I stole I took with ease
Though the sun is the eye
Of regret that burns on women

Who bend for wages they make.
What I lost holding my breath
While those women wallowed

In the name of Jesus underwater,
I watched from this new land
Of waxed legs, where God’s good

Eye beams, all our teeth white, all
Our canyons right, sand and sea
Shimmering like some evening

Gown of a wealthy woman with
No noticed want, no reason
To believe the work a grudge

And good distance can do once
You leave a dangerous city
Of women below sea level alone.

What I remember about New Orleans
I never touched—the women,
Even the youngest call you baby.

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A Young Girl Defending Herself Against Eros

DIGITAL IMAGE COURTESY OF THE GETTY’S OPEN CONTENT PROGRAM WWW.GETTY.EDU
The Emotional Thing: Kay Boyle’s *Death of a Man*

In a dramatic scene halfway through Kay Boyle’s puzzling *Death of a Man* (1936), a young American woman, Pendennis, accompanies her lover, an Austrian doctor named Prochaska, high into the Tyrolese Alps on a dangerous mission to light a signal fire. It is a cold winter night in 1934:

> The light from the fire was shining now on her face and she stood settling the straps of the rucksack with her thumbs. Across the valley other fires were lighted, the great flaming crosses set obliquely and at intervals upon the dark, but here by their own supremely shining cross they stood just outside the radius of refulgence, just without the honeycomb of dark and light, suddenly stilled and wondering at the beauty of this thing. They stood like children staring, their eyes fixed raptly on it, their lips parted, watching the separate living worms of flame moving tenderly, vulnerably in the balloons that cupped and magnified their light.

Pendennis and Prochaska’s rapture is reflected in the ecstatic prose with its abundant alliteration (“supremely shining”, “radius of refulgence”), adverbs (“suddenly”, “raptly,” “vulnerably”), and images of light emerging from darkness. Indeed, the combination of imagery and prose make it hard for readers not to join with the characters in being enraptured by this scene on the hillside, with the “beauty of this thing.”

Enraptured, that is, until we remember that the glowing crosses are swastikas, that Prochaska is a Nazi, and that his mission is clandestine because the Nazi party was outlawed under the nationalist dictatorship of Englebert Dollfuss. “This thing” is no longer so beautiful when we remember the context.

How are we to understand our response to this passage? How are we to understand a novel that seems so taken by the symbolism of an ideology we now find repugnant?

*Death of a Man* considers the intersection of the emotional and the political. It asks what it means to be seduced by fascism. It begins when Prochaska, hiking in the mountains high above the diphtheria clinic he oversees, meets Pendennis and her husband, a mild-mannered Englishman. Prochaska is immediately drawn to the daringly modern Pendennis.

Soon the husband has been dispatched home and the two embark on a doomed love affair. The local Nazi organizer in the fictional town of Feldbruck—modeled on Kitzbühel, where Boyle lived in 1934–5—warns Prochaska against Pendennis, accusing her of “assaulting him, destroying him.” Pendennis, in turn, infuriated by her lover’s deference to the party boss, leaves for Vienna. When a few weeks later Dollfuss is assassinated, government forces crack down on the Nazis, forcing Prochaska to escape to Germany and inspiring Pendennis to return to him. In the novel’s final scene, Prochaska’s train idles on a siding while the express train carrying
Pendennis flashes by. Neither sees the other.

Pendennis is imagining a reunion that never happens, but Prochaska is mourning the country he is leaving behind. The surprising thing is that the novel seems to sympathize here, and elsewhere, more with the doctor than with the American. We might expect Pendennis to be Boyle’s surrogate, yet we see many of the most important events through his eyes. Valuing Prochaska is just one way the novel demonstrates its sympathy for the Austrian people amid the desperate economic conditions of the mid-1930s, when hunger and unemployment were ubiquitous.

For many, the solution to these problems lay across the border, where the National Socialists promised an end to economic insecurity. But Germany is mostly a mirage in the novel, Hitler only a staticky voice on the radio and a perverse matinee idol whose picture the diphtheria patients slip under their pillows. But although the novel focuses on Austria it cares much more for the landscape and culture of the Tyrol than for the specifics of the political situation. The most surprising thing Boyle does is to connect that landscape to fascism, as if the latter were the logical recourse for those who loved the former.

And yet we can’t simply call the novel fascist. Returning to that scene of the burning swastika, we can see the novel subtly distancing itself from what seems a dramatic moment of resistance and defiance. (The crosses are lit to inspire the Tyrolese but also to express solidarity with those only a few miles away in Germany.) Remember the long middle sentence of the passage:

Across the valley other fires were lighted, the great flaming crosses set obliquely and at intervals upon the dark, but here by their own supremely shining cross they stood just outside the radius of refulgence, just without the honeycomb of dark

and light, suddenly stilled and wondering at the beauty of this thing.

We can take the narration to be favoring Pendennis’s point of view, meaning that we can attribute the adjectives “great” and “supremely” to her naivety rather than the third-person narrator’s approval, though the argument would be stronger if the pronoun “they” were replaced with something like “she and Prochaska.” Similarly, we might read the next sentence—“They stood like children staring, their eyes fixed raptly on [the swastika], their lips parted, watching the separate living worms of flame moving tenderly, vulnerably in the balloons that cupped and magnified their light”—as a criticism suggesting that the childish lovers are in over their heads. The tender and vulnerable movement of the “living worms of flame” would thus be ironically contrasted to the hateful authoritarianism of the ideology the flames have been lit to support.

But right after this passage we learn that the lovers are so synchronized that Pendennis knows without him having to say anything the hymn to the irrational Prochaska is thinking: “Believe me it is not necessary to think, only to follow and to believe. It is not necessary to reason, only to feel the blood moving and to know.” Perhaps this submission to fascist rhetoric explains why Pendennis—who earlier had explained her desire to take part in the mission in terms of her self-loathing and her love of spectacle (“I’m sick of the sight of my own face in the mirror… I’m like any other vulgar member of a crowd at an accident”)—now shouts invectives against the government forces sent to put out the fires and arrest the men who set them.

Pendennis’s outburst endangers the lovers. They escape their pursuers only by begging admittance to a mountain
hut. Here Pendennis has a moment of enlightenment that makes us question whether fascism has any hold over her. Looking at herself in “a square of fly-specked glass” she sees herself “as if for the first time”: “Because if he were a miner I’d be squatting underground with a pickax, hacking. Because if he were a prize-fighter I’d be screaming at the ropes. I’m nothing, nobody… I am whichever way he’s going. I’m not even me.” This moment lends credence to the scholar Burlton Hatlen’s theory that *Death of a Man* “elucidates what might be called the sexual politics of Nazism,” namely that fascism is simply an extreme version of patriarchal domination.

Yet Prochaska isn’t only a domineering force. True, his virility and competence have been evident from the start—his “hot-eyed resolution” and “the unconfused male understanding in his dark quick eyes” are part of what make him so beloved of his patients—but he himself is oppressed by authoritarian father figures, particularly the Nazi boss Praxlman. In this way the dominator is also dominated. Praxlman has the same role in the doctor’s life as Pendennis’s father does in hers, Praxlman’s “obscenely sharp penetration of eye” is echoed in the father’s “violence and strength.”

Boyle’s desire to humanize Prochaska—so that the Nazi and his lover suffer together under a similarly disfiguring patriarchal oppression—is even more overt when late in the novel the doctor makes one of his regular runs to the border to pick up papers and money from the German National Socialists. The young courier extols Hitler’s latest speech, but Prochaska is suddenly disillusioned, even disgusted:

> Like all of them, thought the doctor, he was drunk, stupefied, on the thought of death and the rapture of his own fearlessness to meet it. Like me, going with open arms, in a delirium of faith, reeling completely drunk towards death.

It’s no accident that right after this outburst Prochaska decides to go after Pendennis. Yet even as he seems to repudiate fascism and choose love, Prochaska is really thinking about mountains: “what will we come back to but this quiet, this absolute stillness of the mountains in the end.” The novel’s love for the landscape is Boyle’s. She wrote to a friend of her “gorgeous trip through a blizzard in the open car” from Vienna to the “deep, snowy place” of the Tyrol, a place were she could never be happier “than I am now with nothing but the sound of sleighs passing, the bells very deep-mouthed and regular, like breathing, not excitable the way sleigh-bells are thought to be.” In another letter, Boyle rhapsodizes over Austria as a “walking country”: “There must be some other reason at heart for their getting up at four in the morning and crossing fields and passes and glaciers and snows. They aren’t looking for anything, not even for work, for there is none. It’s just that in doing this they are getting something from life that makes it good to live.”

This is almost condescending, but only almost, I think, because the affection is genuine. The most straightforwardly beautiful parts of *Death of a Man* involve landscape, like the descriptions of the birds that live in the grounds of the clinic: “They fly in through the diphtheria ward in summer and the warm air quivers with their passage”; “early in the day the butterflies rise up from [the garden] and the hundreds of birds swoop out of the trees, crying aloud, and clear the air with their hunger.” The birds satisfy their hunger in a way the people can’t; similarly, the mountains are stark and strong and isolated in a way the country cannot be.

Which is another way of saying that there is no such
thing as “pure” or “mere” nature in the novel; every
derivation reflects the political situation. That might
explain why Boyle emphasized “human” when she wrote,
many years later, that in Death of a Man she “was seeking
to find out, on a human level, what the almost inexplicable
fascination of Hitler was.”

The key word here is “inexplicable”—just how accurate
is this retrospective description? Has it been revised in a
self-serving way? Boyle’s biography would suggest no. Any
claim that the novel sympathizes with fascism must take
into account Boyle’s lifelong involvement with progressive
causes, as well as the suffering she and her third husband,
Joseph von Franckenstein, an Austrian anti-fascist who
did dangerous undercover work for the US during the war,
trusted when they were blacklisted in the 1950s.

But Boyle’s contemporaries, who did not know her
as the champion of leftist causes she would later become,
were less convinced. Mark van Doren disparaged “the
tempting by Miss Boyle to elucidate mystical fascism” while
the New Republic noted that “those who plot in the wine
cells and keep the swastikas burning on the mountains
at night are the outstanding characters; the author’s
sympathy and understanding are theirs.” Joan Mellen,
one of Boyle’s biographers, agrees with those criticisms,
even suggesting that Boyle “had come to participate in
the feelings that drove so many Austrians to National
Socialism.”

Boyle’s most compelling champion, Sandra Spanier,
author of the best study of Boyle’s works and editor of a
splendid new collection of Boyle’s lively letters, offers a
more nuanced take. Spanier reminds us of what Boyle
says herself in the afterword to the novel’s reissue—that
she and her family lived in “the only anti-Nazi hotel
in Kitzbühel,” that they always used the greeting Grüß

Gott rather than Heil Hitler, and that they delighted in
informing their anti-Semitic nanny that she had several
times had dinner with Jews in the family’s company.

Tellingly, Jews are barely mentioned in Death of a
Man, implausibly never factoring into any of its depiction
of Nazi ideology. The most sympathetic reading of
this omission is, surprisingly, Mellon’s, who suggests
anti-Semitism was so endemic in Austria at this time it
didn’t even bear mentioning. The only time Jews appear
directly is when Pendennis and Prochaska attend a skiing
competition. Amidst the sportsmen are two women:

They were not quite alike but still they might be
sisters, both with the rich Oriental mouths and
noses of another people, both with the heavy flesh
and slow sulky eyes of creatures of another species
among these quickly moving and hollow-cheeked
athletic women and men.

Only the phrase “they might be sisters” even hints that
this description comes from the lovers (the two women
are in fact sisters); otherwise, the casually anti-Semitic
typology here belongs to the narrative itself. The women
describe the intolerance they experience whenever they
leave Vienna, but any sense that the novel sympathizes
with them is undermined by references to their “gaudy”
appearance and “cannily guarded look of grievance.”

Even Spanier is discomfited by the novel, concluding
defensively: “it does appear that Kay Boyle, whose life-
long dedication to human rights and the dedication of the
individual is indisputable, might have been momentarily
moved by the passionate intensity and promise of the
early Nazis.” Her unproblematic use of “promise” chimes
with Boyle’s description, in a letter from 1935, of secretly
listening to Hitler on the radio exhorting the people in the
Saarland to vote to return to Germany:
It was strangely thrilling to hear the officials… and the really moving appeal of Hitler to them to return to the Fatherland. The French speeches were disgusting… I prefer the emotional thing, and the Germans have got it in Hitler anyway.

This letter is not included in Spanier’s new 750-page selection.

Boyle would hardly be the first person to have felt ambivalent about fascism in the 30s and later to have denounced it without repudiating or even recognizing the earlier ambivalence. And no one could have foreseen 1942 in 1935. *Death of a Man* is valuable precisely as a beautiful document of ambivalence about fascism’s “emotional thing.” Its inability or unwillingness to be open about that ambivalence is the very reason I am at once so drawn to it and so repelled by it.
At Night

I step into her bedroom late at night...so softly she breathes, so softly I move.

And always like a burning candle a lamp lit by her head, a butterscotch yellow shade sweetly shrouded by a scarf whose fibers fill one thousand days, one thousand nights from a past long ago that now casts a pale, pale glow.

“There,” I whisper to the shadows, “there lies a figure of Time...Time once spent

Prancing lie a long-legged colt down Montparnasse, always radiant to men and to

Children too. Nights of laughter, late night talks, of endless walks, tears, and

Song, love-making ‘til dawn.”

Blue veins like small rivers cross her sunken temple.

“And now?” asks the voice from that soft light....there is only silence.

I reach out, touch her white hair softly, so softly she stirs her lips open slightly as if to speak but there is only stillness.

I lean over that still frail form curled, a baby white bird in egg shell sheets.

Softly, so softly my lips touch her ancient brow.

1. Note from Ian von Franckenstein on the impetus of this poem: I wrote this poem some five years after my mother, Kay Boyle, died. She had been living in Oakland at that time of her late life, her mid-80s. I would spend part of each week during those few years that she lived there. It was a small Victorian house on Yosemite Avenue, and I, who was living across the bridge in Marin County, would stay with her, keeping her company both on short walks and at meals. I took a part time job nearby and when I closed the business up around 10 pm, I’d walk back to the house, enter quietly and check in on her while she slept. These frequent brief visits late at night became the genesis for this poem.
Great Thinkers on Love

“We are most alive when we’re in love.” Thought John Updike.

Malcolm Lowry wrote much the same, in a different language: “No se puede vivir sin amar.” Which translates to: “You can’t live without love.”

“Love, having no geography, knows no boundaries.” Mapped Truman Capote.

Kay Boyle pondered: “If love is an element, like weather or wind, then it must go unchallenged.”

“Love makes your soul crawl out from its hiding place.” Felt Zora Neale Hurston.

William Carlos Williams poeticized: “It is at the edge of the petal that love waits.”

“Keep love in your heart.” Stressed Oscar Wilde. “A life without it is like a sunless garden when the flowers are dead.”

Ablaze, Clementine von Radics proclaimed: “Darlings, sometimes love will come to you like a fire to a forest.”

“Love is a battle, love is a war; love is a growing up.” —James Baldwin.

“Love involves a peculiar unfathomable combination of understanding and misunderstanding.” Understood Diane Arbus.

Though Leo Tolstoy had a different understanding: “All, everything I understand, I understand only because I love.”

While Blaise Pascal believed understanding beside the point: “Love has reasons which reason cannot understand.”

Pablo Neruda lamented: “Love is so short. Forgetting so long.”

And Louise Glück eulogized: “Intense love always leads to mourning.”

And Ernest Hemingway deplored: “If two people love each other there can be no happy end to it.”

And Charles Bukowski complained: “Love is a fog that burns with the first daylight of reality.”

And Sylvia Plath bemoaned: “Love is a shadow. How you lie and cry after it.”

“Love is a trap.” According to Paulo Coelho. “When it appears, we see only its light, not its shadow.”

“Be of love a little more careful than of anything.” Advised E. E. Cummings.
“Love is merely a madness.” This from William Shakespeare.

Jorge Luis Borges believed: “To fall in love is to create a religion that has a fallible god.”

Whereas Robert Frost asserted: “We love the things we love for what they are.”

Anais Nin similarly suggested: “What is love but the acceptance of the other, whatever he is.”

But there’s a violence in that acceptance in Marguerite Porete’s view: “One must crush oneself, hacking and hewing away at oneself to widen the place in which love will want to be.”

For Diego Rivera, the violence in love wasn’t to the self: “If I ever loved a woman, the more I loved her, the more I wanted to hurt her.”

While for Rainer Maria Rilke, love wasn’t a violence but a protection from violence: “Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy to a friend.”

“Love is the power to see similarity in the dissimilar.” —Theodor Adorno.

“When the poet is in love, he is incapable of writing poetry on love. He has to write when he remembers that he was in love.” Remembered Italo Calvino.

“The things that we love tell us what we are.” Professed Thomas Aquinas.

Ayn Rand said: “Love is our response to our highest values—and can be nothing else.”

“Love is or it ain’t. Thin love ain’t love at all.” According to Toni Morrison.

Katharine Hepburn knew: “Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get—only with what you are expecting to give—which is everything.”

Tom Robbins saw it thusly: “Love is the ultimate outlaw. It just won’t adhere to any rules. The most any of us can do is sign on as its accomplice.”

Alfred Lord Tennyson remarked briefly: “Who is wise in love, love most, say least.”

“It ought to make us feel ashamed when we talk like we know what we talk about when we talk about love.” The talk of one Raymond Carver.

“In love there are two things—bodies and words.” Divided Joyce Carol Oates.

Whereas Woody Allen saw a different dichotomy: “The difference between sex and love is that sex relieves tension and love causes it.”

Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote: “For love and beauty and delight, there is no death nor change.”
“Love is not just as strong as death—it is stronger.”
—Simon Critchley

“If a thing loves, it is infinite.” Acknowledged William Blake, who loved a great many things.

Sylvia Plath, too, acknowledged this endlessness: “Unable are the loved to die, for love is immortality.”
Nourishment for Real Moral Inquiry:  
*The Book of Aron*

The emotional power of Jim Shepard’s astonishingly moving *The Book of Aron*, set in the Warsaw Ghetto, builds as we head inexorably toward the conclusion we know is coming but we also wish could be avoided. We know the book won’t break its own rules; it’s too scrupulously honest to devolve into an exercise in kitsch. There is no escape for anyone here, only the temporary balm of illusions, hard-won for a group of orphans headed to Treblinka by the extraordinarily self-sacrificing Janus Korczak, famed educator and orphanage director and the most convincing hero to come along in a novel in recent memory. But even that temporary balm fails; an epilogue explains that the bodies were piled so high at the destination that no pretense could be kept up on approach. Shepard delivers no false consolations, and yet Korczak’s speech at the end is so profound, so true, so moving, that despite its scarifying honesty the book stirs the reader to something like hope in its argument for the dignity of individuals against the inhumanity of people in the aggregate.

Part of the bedeviling complexity and ambiguity of this book is the way we respond to Korczak. I called him a hero, and he is a hero, deeply so; and yet what if he’d gotten free and gotten the word out? How many lives could have been spared? He cares deeply for the individual orphans under his stewardship, and his moral position is unalloyed; and yet could a bit of varnish on those principles have led to far greater good? Was sparing a few kids’ psyches for a while worth giving up the possibility of rescuing untold people from the gas? Is his altruism actually a kind of egoism? Shepard asks the toughest questions in this book, insoluble, ancient questions. One of the book’s many triumphs is the way it engages a sophisticated moral framework in the subtlest of ways, so that it always feels more work of art than work of morality, though it is profoundly the latter as well.

The way the character of Boris, one of the Jewish boys at the heart of the narrative, evolves over the course of the book can’t fail to captivate the reader. Boris, who survives by running smuggling schemes, goes from being an operator, slightly cynical, certainly street-wise, to being the clearest-eyed person in the room, the most adult. At the end, with his access to privileged information about what kind of monstrosity is afoot here, he grows about a decade before our eyes. His methods are mysterious but remarkably effective; he’s crafty as Odysseus, but reminds us more of Cassandra as he tries to warn the titular Aron that this is about to get very bad and there is no time to lose. The truth of what they’re all facing lies plain before him, and he has a farseeing plan. And we see both that his plan would have worked, probably, had Aron gone along, and that he was doomed to fail from the start. (And then the last time we see him, as Aron passes by, Boris is standing outside, looking helpless, his plan come to nothing, and our hearts break for him. He’s just a kid; it’s never been more plain. And yet he’s a hero, nothing less, whose efforts are lost to history.)
The Aron of the title, Boris’s companion in black marketeering, is fated to resist his old partner’s efforts to get Korczak to act boldly in resistance, and he reduces the reader to frenzied questioning. Why not? Why? Perhaps the new home Aron has found among the orphans, and under Korczak’s eye, provides too powerful an emotional relief for him to see clearly, or perhaps he’s afraid to be decisive and brave. The ambiguity is thick, and Aron’s regret at his own inaction will no doubt prove enormous. But then speaking of regret in this context is an injustice, because Korczak makes the point himself at the end: none of this is the fault of any of these kids. Nothing they’ve done or will do is their fault. The Nazis have driven them to this. Anything they do—anything—falls under the guilt of their oppressors. Even Aron, the locus of our disappointment at the end, isn’t to blame. They are kids put in an untenable position, though they navigate the world like adults.

But even here Shepard gives us rich ambiguity, because as he suggests (“Those of us who were here, if we ever met up after this…How could we look each other in the eye without asking, ‘How is it that you happened to survive?’”), and as we’ve heard articulated in Survival in Auschwitz, Night and other Holocaust narratives: those who survive this kind of terror—what unfathomable things did they have to do? Can we say a person is still a kid when he goes through trials like this? Can we say he doesn’t share part of the blame? Can we not be angry at Aron at the end? These questions are a thick soup, nourishment for real moral inquiry.

The comprehensiveness of the research here inspires awe, but what’s even more impressive is how lightly Shepard wears that research. This book gives the miraculous impression of having been simultaneously researched down to the tiniest grain of sand and written entirely out of whole cloth and the free play of the imagination. Much like Adam Johnson’s The Orphan Master’s Son, The Book of Aron feels completely authoritative while also being freely invented. One knows that everything is exhaustively proved, earned, and compiled, and also that an artist has arrogated to himself, marvelously and with an even greater reassurance than fact can provide, the right to make the whole damn thing up.
A Selection from

*De Profundis*

While in reading the Gospels—particularly that of St. John himself, or whatever early Gnostic took his name and mantle—I see the continual assertion of the imagination as the basis of all spiritual and material life, I see also that to Christ imagination was simply a form of love, and that to him love was lord in the fullest meaning of the phrase. Some six weeks ago I was allowed by the doctor to have white bread to eat instead of the coarse black or brown bread of ordinary prison fare. It is a great delicacy. It will sound strange that dry bread could possibly be a delicacy to any one. To me it is so much so that at the close of each meal I carefully eat whatever crumbs may be left on my tin plate, or have fallen on the rough towel that one uses as a cloth so as not to soil one’s table; and I do so not from hunger—I get now quite sufficient food—but simply in order that nothing should be wasted of what is given to me. So one should look on love.

Christ, like all fascinating personalities, had the power of not merely saying beautiful things himself, but of making other people say beautiful things to him; and I love the story St. Mark tells us about the Greek woman, who, when as a trial of her faith he said to her that he could not give her the bread of the children of Israel, answered him that the little dogs—(κυναρία, ‘little dogs’ it should be rendered)—who are under the table eat of the crumbs that the children let fall. Most people live for love and admiration. But it is by love and admiration that we should live. If any love is shown us we should recognise that we are quite unworthy of it. Nobody is worthy to be loved. The fact that God loves man shows us that in the divine order of ideal things it is written that eternal love is to be given to what is eternally unworthy. Or if that phrase seems to be a bitter one to bear, let us say that every one is worthy of love, except him who thinks that he is. Love is a sacrament that should be taken kneeling, and *Domine, non sum dignus* should be on the lips and in the hearts of those who receive it.

If ever I write again, in the sense of producing artistic work, there are just two subjects on which and through which I desire to express myself: one is ‘Christ as the precursor of the romantic movement in life’: the other is ‘The artistic life considered in its relation to conduct.’ The first is, of course, intensely fascinating, for I see in Christ not merely the essentials of the supreme romantic type, but all the accidents, the wilfulnesses even, of the romantic temperament also. He was the first person who ever said to people that they should live ‘flower-like lives.’ He fixed the phrase. He took children as the type of what people should try to become. He held them up as examples to their elders, which I myself have always thought the chief use of children, if what is perfect should have a use. Dante describes the soul of a man as coming from the hand of God ‘weeping and laughing like a little child,’ and Christ also saw that the soul of each one should be *a guisa di fanciulla che piangendo e ridendo pargoleggia*. He felt that life was changeful, fluid, active, and that to allow it to be stereotyped into any form was death. He saw that people should not be too serious over material, common interests: that to be unpractical was to be a great thing: that one should not bother too much over affairs. The birds didn’t,
why should man? He is charming when he says, ‘Take no thought for the morrow; is not the soul more than meat? is not the body more than raiment?’ A Greek might have used the latter phrase. It is full of Greek feeling. But only Christ could have said both, and so summed up life perfectly for us.

His morality is all sympathy, just what morality should be. If the only thing that he ever said had been, ‘Her sins are forgiven her because she loved much,’ it would have been worth while dying to have said it. His justice is all poetical justice, exactly what justice should be. The beggar goes to heaven because he has been unhappy. I cannot conceive a better reason for his being sent there. The people who work for an hour in the vineyard in the cool of the evening receive just as much reward as those who have toiled there all day long in the hot sun. Why shouldn’t they? Probably no one deserved anything. Or perhaps they were a different kind of people. Christ had no patience with the dull lifeless mechanical systems that treat people as if they were things, and so treat everybody alike: for him there were no laws: there were exceptions merely, as if anybody, or anything, for that matter, was like aught else in the world!

That which is the very keynote of romantic art was to him the proper basis of natural life. He saw no other basis. And when they brought him one, taken in the very act of sin and showed him her sentence written in the law, and asked him what was to be done, he wrote with his finger on the ground as though he did not hear them, and finally, when they pressed him again, looked up and said, ‘Let him of you who has never sinned be the first to throw the stone at her.’ It was worth while living to have said that.

Like all poetical natures he loved ignorant people. He knew that in the soul of one who is ignorant there is always room for a great idea. But he could not stand stupid people, especially those who are made stupid by education: people who are full of opinions not one of which they even understand, a peculiarly modern type, summed up by Christ when he describes it as the type of one who has the key of knowledge, cannot use it himself, and does not allow other people to use it, though it may be made to open the gate of God’s Kingdom. His chief war was against the Philistines. That is the war every child of light has to wage. Philistinism was the note of the age and community in which he lived. In their heavy inaccessibility to ideas, their dull respectability, their tedious orthodoxy, their worship of vulgar success, their entire preoccupation with the gross materialistic side of life, and their ridiculous estimate of themselves and their importance, the Jews of Jerusalem in Christ’s day were the exact counterpart of the British Philistine of our own. Christ mocked at the ‘whited sepulchre’ of respectability, and fixed that phrase for ever. He treated worldly success as a thing absolutely to be despised. He saw nothing in it at all. He looked on wealth as an encumbrance to a man. He would not hear of life being sacrificed to any system of thought or morals. He pointed out that forms and ceremonies were made for man, not man for forms and ceremonies. To us, what is termed orthodoxy is merely a facile unintelligent acquiescence; but to them, and in their hands, it was a terrible and paralysing tyranny. Christ swept it aside. He showed that the spirit alone was of value. He took a keen pleasure in pointing out to them that though they were always reading the law and the prophets,
they had not really the smallest idea of what either of them meant. In opposition to their tithing of each separate day into the fixed routine of prescribed duties, as they tithe mint and rue, he preached the enormous importance of living completely for the moment.

Those whom he saved from their sins are saved simply for beautiful moments in their lives. Mary Magdalen, when she sees Christ, breaks the rich vase of alabaster that one of her seven lovers had given her, and spills the odorous spices over his tired dusty feet, and for that one moment’s sake sits for ever with Ruth and Beatrice in the tresses of the snow-white rose of Paradise. All that Christ says to us by the way of a little warning is that every moment should be beautiful, that the soul should always be ready for the coming of the bridegroom, always waiting for the voice of the lover, Philistinism being simply that side of man’s nature that is not illumined by the imagination. He sees all the lovely influences of life as modes of light: the imagination itself is the world of light. The world is made by it, and yet the world cannot understand it: that is because the imagination is simply a manifestation of love, and it is love and the capacity for it that distinguishes one human being from another.

But it is when he deals with a sinner that Christ is most romantic, in the sense of most real. The world had always loved the saint as being the nearest possible approach to the perfection of God. Christ, through some divine instinct in him, seems to have always loved the sinner as being the nearest possible approach to the perfection of man. His primary desire was not to reform people, any more than his primary desire was to relieve suffering. To turn an interesting thief into a tedious honest man was not his aim. He would have thought little of the Prisoners’ Aid Society and other modern movements of the kind. The conversion of a publican into a Pharisee would not have seemed to him a great achievement. But in a manner not yet understood of the world he regarded sin and suffering as being in themselves beautiful holy things and modes of perfection.

It seems a very dangerous idea. It is—all great ideas are dangerous. That it was Christ’s creed admits of no doubt. That it is the true creed I don’t doubt myself.

Of course the sinner must repent. But why? Simply because otherwise he would be unable to realise what he had done. The moment of repentance is the moment of initiation. More than that: it is the means by which one alters one’s past. The Greeks thought that impossible. They often say in their Gnomic aphorisms, ‘Even the Gods cannot alter the past.’ Christ showed that the commonest sinner could do it, that it was the one thing he could do. Christ, had he been asked, would have said—I feel quite certain about it—that the moment the prodigal son fell on his knees and wept, he made his having wasted his substance with harlots, his swine-herding and hungering for the husks they ate, beautiful and holy moments in his life. It is difficult for most people to grasp the idea. I dare say one has to go to prison to understand it. If so, it may be worth while going to prison.
The Writer and the Spy

Last winter, I spent a weekend with my aunt and uncle in Charlottesville, Virginia. Auntie Carol is in her mid-eighties and Uncle Donald is ninety-three, but they both seem several decades younger than their ages would suggest. (I have often wondered, particularly during my last twenty-odd years as a parent, if this is because they have no children.) This was the first time in my life that I ever spent time alone with Carol and Donald—only seeing them infrequently as a child and only slightly more as an adult—and it was a real pleasure to finally converse more than we would at the occasional Thanksgiving dinner. To me, they have always been the “cool” relatives, the aunt and uncle that dressed with style, who were early-adopters of Apple products, and who had a travel schedule that I longed for and could only read about in the Sunday Times.

For a little over two days, we talked and got to know each other a little better. Carol, my father’s younger sister, married Donald in 1971, a second marriage for both. Hired by the CIA in the early 1950s, they met through colleagues and then remained with the CIA for some years after they married. As a result of that, perhaps, their lives have always been somewhat murky to me. One of my only childhood memories of Carol is her arrival at our staid suburban home in New Jersey late one night. In my recollection, she is wearing a houndstooth mini-skirt and knee-high black boots, climbing out of a rented, red convertible. Her hair is teased and pinned up in an elaborate French twist. She gives me a gift from far-off lands: a tiny gold Vietnamese boat for my charm bracelet. By the time I come home from school the next day, she is gone.

Donald was both more elusive and less elusive. A large-hearted, gregarious man, he has a big laugh and a voice to match. When Carol and Donald visited, which happened more after they retired and I was an adult, he filled up the often-quiet room. He and my father shared a name, sharp intellects, and wonderful senses of humor. I remember them having in-depth conversations about Henry James, but also exchanging cringe-worthy jokes and puns, particularly when my grandfather was around. What they did not discuss, at least not in front of me, was World War II, even though they had both served in Europe. Donald flirted with my mother and made her laugh; she threw her head back in such a way that for the first time I saw what she must have looked like before she became my mother.

When I was young I didn’t know what Carol and Donald did for a living. At some point, my parents began referring to “The Agency,” and it took me quite a while to realize they were speaking of the CIA. Gradually, after retirement and the passing of time, we began to hear more. When my children were in elementary school, we met Carol and Donald at the Spy Museum in Washington, D.C. “That device never worked,” Donald boomed as we walked into a room filled with tricks of the trade. In the makeup room, Carol said quietly, “These people were so talented. I would have been able to walk right by you on the street, and you would never have known it was me.”

About ten years ago, Donald began to write his memoirs, and he continues to edit and revise his manuscript today. His is a life that deserves a memoir. His
Eugene and Maria Jolas, the publishers of *transition*, the experimental literary journal that famously published sections of *Finnegans Wake*, among other modernist works. Kay was also good friends with *The New Yorker*’s Paris correspondent, Janet Flanner, known as Genêt, with whom she shared political beliefs. Later, back in the States, Donald kept in touch with his friends, traveling up to New York from D.C. to visit with them when he could. When Kay and Joe got caught up in McCarthyism, Donald wrote a testimonial for Joe; both Kay and Joe lost their jobs and struggled to make ends meet. Given Joe’s aristocratic family and lineage, he refused to go into business; he even spent time working as a short-order cook. Joe died in 1963, less than a year after being rehired by the State Department, and Kay and Donald drifted apart after Joe’s death.

Donald enjoyed Kay’s company and her strong personality, particularly appreciating the way “she was always ready to spring into action to defend victims of injustice.” He also described her as “a feisty character, given to excess.” She did whatever she wanted to do, and they all joked “that she was always one child ahead of her marriage.” Her education was modest but Donald greatly admired her writing: “She could write like hell. To her, writing was like breathing.” And her writing practice showed that to be true. “Each morning, regardless of whether the dinner guests had left at midnight or 2am, Kay would be pounding the typewriter by 5am, continuing until she had completed her daily quota,” he told me. But Donald quickly learned that to be her friend also meant that you might end up in her fiction. Several years later, after he had returned from Germany and was studying at Columbia University, he was in the library and picked up the most recent copy of *Harper’s Magazine*.

parents were killed in a car accident when he was still in high school, and he and his sister had to forge their own way after that. He intentionally created a life for himself far removed from the Iowa plains where he grew up. He became a bomber pilot in World War II, did a stint in Germany after the war, and then joined the CIA. The agency career meant time spent in many countries, including Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam, leaving the latter country only months before the fall of Saigon.

My siblings (and my mother, before she died) had already read Donald’s memoir, but somehow I never had. I was anxious to read it, though, to learn more about him and the life that he led. During my visit, Donald gave me a copy of the bound manuscript with instructions not to share it with anyone and to send it back quickly and safely; he is understandably concerned about leaking any confidential bits about his life with the Agency.

He also told me about Kay Boyle, pulling a few of her books off his shelf in order to read excerpts. He had known Kay and her husband, Joe von Franckenstein, in Germany after the war when they had all lived in Marburg. Kay was writing novels and short stories as well as acting as the German correspondent for *The New Yorker*; Joe was a colleague of Donald’s in the military government that existed after the war. Joe and Donald met when they first arrived in Marburg. Both men were waiting for housing, so they lived, wifeless, in officer’s billets. They enjoyed each other’s company immensely and spent long evenings together playing chess and drinking scotch.

After the wives arrived, the two couples lived just up the hill from one another in Marburg and saw each other frequently. Later, when Joe and Kay moved to Frankfurt, Kay held a literary salon of sorts that Donald and his wife were flattered to attend. Other guests included
belief that every interpretation always contains a piece of historical truth and that this ‘kernel of truth’ as he called it, is what makes the interpretation effective.” My father believed that an analyst needed to pay close attention to the narrative truth, to reflect on the way that the story was being told.

After I returned home from my visit, I read Donald’s memoir. When I finally turned to Kay Boyle, I did so knowing Donald’s narrative truth. Understanding that the events in “Aufwiedersehen Abend” were true, I looked forward to learning more about him, to have the opportunity to see him through a different lens. In the story, we are introduced to Rod Murray in the second paragraph. The narrator mentions that Rod Murray (always called by his first and last names) “had been a bomber pilot once, and now his name, and his title as Information Services’ Officer, were stenciled on an office door in a building designated as American Military Government in an ancient university town.” The focus here is on the present; the war and the past are dismissed at the start and end of the sentence with those simple words “once” and “ancient.”

We follow Rod Murray as he joins a community gathering, attempts to hire dancers for a colleague’s going-away party, and attends the trial of a pro-Nazi journalist. Then, at the precise halfway mark of the story, we’re with him as he eats lunch alone in the Special Services’ Club. It is here that he thinks back to his days as a bomber pilot:

And in a month like this one, Rod Murray thought as he leaned on the balustrade in the chill, gray light of afternoon, he had flown with the others before dawn up this valley, bypassing the university town, and the others before it, the steel hearts of the engines throbbing
northward as they crossed these hills toward Kassel, moving in formation toward what they had come out to do... Kassel, he thought, hearing again the pulse of the bombers as they bore such annihilation to that one town that the dust and debris, and the broken galleries and pilasters of where it once had stood, had no more relation to the present than the hushed, volcanic twilight of Pompeii.

Rod Murray is repeating the echoes of the past established in the opening paragraphs. But his reflections enable him to gain a foothold in a present inexorably connected to that past.

The second half of the story is all about "the going-away party": the final preparations, the arrival of the dancers and the musicians, and, finally, the guests. Structurally, we can feel the story descend from that midway mark. The dancers and musicians are thin and hungry, the dancers having just come from Berlin, and the musicians, medical students at the university in town. The violinist keeps one side of his face averted, but Rod Murray finally sees that the man's face is horribly scarred. The violinist tells Rod Murray about his father, an army surgeon, who performed plastic surgery on many who were wounded, but learned that "a man's face will change back again to what he is like himself, inside." Murray reacts as follows:

"That is fantasy," Rod Murray said, but he felt this knowledge chilling his blood.

"No, it is the truth," said the violinist, and he put down his glass so that Rod Murray could fill it with white wine again. "If you do not believe this is true, then there is nothing left to believe."

The violinist did not have surgery because his face, he goes on to say, "would look like a musician's face, or a poet's face. It would have the old mark of loneliness on it, and this they could not have." The party continues, with Rod Murray finding it difficult to look at the dancers, given their painful thinness and his increasing awareness. Finally, he asks the violinist where he was fighting when he was wounded, and the story ends as follows:

"Oh, nowhere. I wasn't on any front," the violinist said, and he dropped his head, as if in apology, upon the violin's wood. "I lived in a town farther up toward the north, a place called Kassel. I didn't have time to get to an air-raid shelter. I was home on furlough. That's all there is to it," he said.

"Kassel," Rod Murray repeated. He set the cut-glass goblet down on the top of the grand piano, and he stood there, stunned for a moment, at the sound of the town's name.

"Kassel. My God," he said. "You were in Kassel."

Before they began to play he picked up the goblet again, and he finished drinking the punch that was in it. And it seemed to him then that if the others, the Germans and the Americans alike, were to go away and leave them together for a little while, something quite simple and quite comprehensible might still be said.
photo; it made us smile, too. It represented the vibrancy that we knew as Uncle Donald.

In light of that, it seems fitting to me that “Aufwiedersehen Abend” ends with a party scene. But now, through reading Boyle’s story that was written about my uncle without his knowledge, I have learned a truth about him that I didn’t know before. In our gut we feel Rod Murray’s distress increase as he realizes the impact that his actions may have had, and we understand his desire to try and make it right. I don’t know if Donald felt these emotions but I’m reminded once again of Tim O’Brien’s binary of story-truth vs. happening-truth. Whether this happened or not, the story-truth is there.

The Dream of the Shepherd

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Eight Possible Essays on Kay Boyle’s Monday Night


Herein, the writer will explore Boyle’s playful subsumption and artful regurgitation of the popular mystery genre in a novel that revolves around and reinvents a rather stock setup: two men search for a third man, whom they increasingly believe to be someone more menacing than he claims to be. Here are the facts: Wilt, a young writer, and Bernie, a young doctor, comb the streets of Paris in search of Monsieur Sylvestre, a world famous toxicologist responsible for overturning several cases, some of which resulted in state executions. Bernie’s reason: he’s Sylvestre’s biggest fan and, fresh from American medical school, he’s now on a pilgrimage, hoping to find, meet, and pay homage to the great Sylvestre and his city. Wilt’s reason for searching out Sylvestre is more puzzling, as he seems automatically and spasmodically compelled to help Bernie realize this dream. I should also mention they are both tremendously drunk, all day long—the action takes place within approximately twenty-four hours—and they are wasted from the very first page until the last. And so they go looking for the famous doctor, and their search makes for a long and winding maze. They go to a pharmacy he owns, they wander the streets, they go to a neighborhood tavern he’s visited, and from there they call his home phone. They even go to his estate and knock on the front door and fumblingly charm their way inside, where, over drinks, and a rather sudden game of Monopoly, they interview Sylvestre’s servants only to find the doctor is no longer in Paris, but instead in Lyon—after which they next head to the apartment of one Madame Coutet, wife of one of the men Sylvestre has long sent to prison... They ring her bell at two in the morning. Now awake, Madame Coutet lets them inside and gets the men a drink while she tries to make sense of why these two apparently blotto strangers are there, and why so late? Why are they looking for Sylvestre? At this hour? How could she be of any help? And why do they want to talk about her husband? Is there news?

“Are you a detective?” she asks Wilt.

Wilt tells her he’s a writer, and he must find Sylvestre, as soon as possible, as he now believes he has stumbled upon “the story of the century.”

Is your husband innocent? Wilt asks.

Of course he is, she answers.

Wilt now reveals (to her, to Bernie, and to us) a brand new suspicion, that Sylvestre is in fact the guilty party and has manufactured evidence in order to catapult his career—making Sylvestre a murderer. Bernie is horrified. His idol! Madame Coutet, however, is curious to know more... What evidence does Wilt have? Not a stitch, it turns out, but for his restless imagination and the insightful mind of “a great writer.” He then drunkenly offers the following: “I’m a writer... An outstanding writer. Only the trouble is I’ve never got around to writing. You’ve probably seen my books in the show-windows... The only
drawback is I’ve never written any books. Otherwise I’m one of America’s outstanding literary men.” The three of them go to a bar for yet another round of drinks and further discuss strategies for securing Coutet a lawyer, releasing her husband, and finally finding Sylvestre so they might turn him over to the authorities. The mystery will be solved tomorrow, or soon, anyway. Bernie balks at the notion, and yet Wilt believes. So we believe, too. In fact, we are absolutely sure the goose chase will lead us somewhere satisfactory. The search will mean something. The search must mean something… The writer will then make a passing allusion to Elvis Costello in order to justify the title of the essay, and then make humorous comparisons to the television show Columbo, citing particular episodes and the show’s famously inverted detective format in which we know the suspect we are looking for from the very beginning of each viewing experience, as we similarly know of Sylvestre from the start of Monday Night, emphasizing not the mystery, or the solution, but the search itself; not to mention Wilt, too, like Detective Columbo, is slovenly, and crumpled, but confident. He also happens to be totally plastered, hallucinating, and possibly insane.

2. “…And Then The Drink Takes You: Flawed Espial and Tipsy Tale-Telling in Kay Boyle’s Monday Night”

First, the writer will focus on the awesome amounts of booze ingested by Wilt and Bernie throughout the day—beer, wine, Pernod, etc.—inevitably causing the slow-wilt of Wilt’s flowering imagination. Regardless, the man constantly, brilliantly makes shit up. The writer will give textual examples of Boyle’s ability to render both the blur and luster of intoxication. For example, Boyle on Wilt’s drunken state, of late:

Since a long time, since years maybe, intoxication had ceased to be a matter of drunkenness just as sobriety had ceased being the normal either for the spirit or flesh. So that now soberness had become that forlorn, defeated, despairing interval before that first drink was taken and this other thing that had no name brought the intensity of the young or the enamored to the faculties not only of the mind but of the corporality, bringing what for hours, even for days at a stretch passed from invention to creation to accomplishment; once started there was no longer the need to distinguish fact from vision or delirium from sanity, only to keep drinking and to pursue.

Boyle on Bernie falling asleep at the bar and then suddenly waking up:

It moved from the mists of wakening toward him, the figure that had walked through Bernie’s dream; and now the rings of light were laid quickly and with increasing speed one upon the other as if racing the sound of speech or the answer even before the question had been asked of him…

Bernie cried out, “The truth!”

The sound of it made his lift his head from the café table and he looked around, bewildered, the straw hat off his forehead, the white lashes batting slowly at the shining globe above he bar.

Boyle on Wilt’s innate abilities as a drunken monologist:

His own temper and eloquence were strange to him… like a new drink taken, and he emptied his glass again and put it down, waiting quietly,
without question, for more. There was still more to say, more to spring from the clear deep fount, the articulation to come in tears or anger until those who heard him speak might too become humble enough to accept the austere simple faith.

The writer will then make note of how Boyle based the character of Wilt on Harold Edmund Stearns, essayist, critic, editor at *The Dial*, and fellow traveler and American expatriate of Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and Kay Boyle. Stearns was also an infamous and much beloved drunk, not to mention the model for Hemingway’s penniless Harvey Stone in *The Sun Also Rises*. Boyle adored the man. Here she is on their first meeting:

Once he began to speak that night, and on through all the nights and years that we talked (or I listened)... I never questioned the truth of every word he said. I knew that if the thing she had described had not happened in this lifetime, they had happened sometime, somewhere else, or they should have happened; and if they had not happened to him, he believed by this time they had, and one had no right by any word, or look, or gesture, to take this desperately accumulated fortune of belief away. I wrote a book about this man [*Monday Night*] and it is to me the most satisfying book I ever wrote.

Boyle goes on to talk of the time Stearns smuggled a wounded racehorse away from the track in order to stop the owner from shooting it. He cared for the horse in the courtyard of his apartment building, and spent what little money he had on feeding the enormous animal. Boyle does not reveal what happened to the horse.

The writer will then discuss how critics widely misunderstood Boyle’s stylistic choice and purpose, saying of *Monday Night*: “It paces slowly, cruelly, drunkenly”; “It is not a pleasant book”; “Prose Stylist-Author Never Uses Single Word Where Ten Will Do.” Although one critic did call *Monday Night* “fascinating as a cobra, breath-taking as danger itself.”

(I love that.)

The writer will then not make it personal.

He will not make a list of the barroom philosophers he has loved and seen ruined or passed on. He will not name the old friend who flailed through genius Guinness-fueled sermons, perfectly quoting and riffing exegetically on the lyrics of NWA and Public Enemy, but was eventually crippled at forty because of bicycling and hitting a car while drunk. Nor will he mention the bald bricklayer who seemed to never sleep and was forever telling all around why life was miraculous and that he did not want to miss any of it, as he poured cocaine from a stamp-sized plastic bag into his lager, but eventually one day had an explosive heart attack and died at 5 AM while playing Trivial Pursuit on a covered porch, somewhere outside Atlanta.

The writer will simply say that *Monday Night* reads like a loving, visionary, often disastrously, but rightfully hazy portrait of a friend both drunk and dazzling.

3. “I Don’t Like Mondays: The Pop Song and Aesthetic Influence in Kay Boyle’s *Monday Night*”

An impressionistic dive into the history of pop songs inspired by the temporal anaphora that is Monday—every Monday, back to work, back to school, etcetera. Discussion will include: “Blue Monday,” by New Order; “New Moon on Monday,” by Duran Duran; “Monday, Monday,” by The Mamas and the Papas; and “I Don’t Like Mondays,” by The Boomtown Rats; there will be a brief
overview of the Happy Mondays’ modest Brit-pop canon; consideration of apocryphal anecdotes claiming Billie Holiday’s jazz standards “Good Morning, Heartache” and “Gloomy Sunday Night,” as well Morrissey’s new wave classic “Every Day is Like Sunday,” were all technically and ironically recorded on very early Monday mornings; and, finally, speculation regarding Boyle’s choice of setting the bulk of the novel (Part One) on a Monday evening, and closing the novel with another section (Part Two) called “Tuesday,” followed by the realization that this line of thought leads nowhere especially illuminating or fruitful.


Approximately halfway through the novel, Wilt and Bernie find themselves, in the middle of the night, at Sylvestre’s estate playing a game of Monopoly (as previously mentioned). The housemaid suggests they play as a way to pass the time. All agree. Drinks are served. And after the hazy, sodden, inebriated meander the book has unapologetically been thus far, punctuated by an ever more claustrophobic sense of place, and feeling lost in the fog of those places, and after several obsessive, ugly ruminations on Wilt’s grotesque face (more on that later), Boyle delivers a joke. The joke is perfectly timed, and like all great comedy it is both melancholy and hilarious at once.

Wilt draws a card from Community Chest, and announces to the room: “I have won a beauty contest.”

This will be a very short essay.


The writer will have met at least three people he or she greatly admires—make that past tense—adored, a writer, a musician, and a painter, all of whom turned out to be complete assholes. Monday Night is explicitly about that type of experience, the perils of heroizing and romanticization. The greatness of Boyle’s book lies in its two-hit delivery. The first punch is right to the face, and you see it coming a mile away. Bernie dreamily insists on the greatness of Sylvestre. According to him, most of us are not even fit to say the man’s name. Wilt eagerly (and suspiciously) agrees with every claim Bernie makes, and yet Wilt also seems the only one listening as Sylvestre’s reputation is progressively tarnished. A barmaid says Sylvestre is “certainly not popular around her. Married money and never a sou for the fête of the place. Not one of the tradespeople has a good word either for him or her. Not even the servants of his house—”

“Oh of course he’s hated!” Bernie screams, because we all hate greatness.

The servants, it turns out, are not in agreement at all. The butler loves him, truly, and speaks of the doctor in practically messianic terms. The housemaid on the other hand thinks the doctor is worthless. We soon find out he left a wife and a child for another woman’s money, and is both manipulative and vengeful.

Bernie turns a deaf ear.

But Wilt clearly gets Bernie’s devotion:

Just like a writer who hasn’t made his mark yet will try to get around where he can look at other writers, listen to them talking; just he way you've
come over here after this man Sylvestre.
In the end, though, unlikely as it seems, Wilt’s boozy revelation is right. He decides Sylvestre is not only unlikeable, but the doctor is evil, a murderer. And why? Well, because it would make the best ending to the story. He tells this story to Madame Coutet, to Bernie, and to strangers. They all laugh. But the Tuesday morning paper (and the final pages of the novel) reveals otherwise. Sylvestre has been arrested for murder, toppling the doctor hero and granting Wilt a last inning win along with special (perhaps prescient) insight into the human character. Maybe there’s a book in him after all.
The second hit is a sucker punch to the belly. It’s surprising, sneaky, and hurts a lot more later on. The other “hero” being Wilt, himself, the broken, romantic version of a writer self-destructive and misunderstood. Wilt sees himself this way. Here he is soliloquizing about himself:
One man among them all was still alarmed with wakefulness, still battling single against the forces he could not put a name to but which insidiously and unceasingly deprived of word and action every man who would not kiss the rod, who would not bite the dust, who could not, because of his violent and profoundly inspired soul, submit…
You don’t have to give in. You don’t have to be what they say, you can just keep going the way you are. And in the end it’ll happen. At the very end they’ll see.
Moments like this make the writer cringe, partly because they are embarrassing to Wilt and partly because the writer has surely thought similar things in the past while high on bourbon and jukebox synchronicity.


The writer is suddenly tiring of the joke, of the pseudo-academic tone he’s adopted, but he will press on…He will honor his commitments (because he wrote the essay titles first). He will face the music, as it were, a terrible double-pun that conjoins both a previous essay focus (music) and the focus of the present essay, which claims that Monday Night is totally obsessed with faces. Most of all, Boyle is consumed with Wilt’s weathered and weary mug.
Boyle on Wilt’s body:
He might have been fashioned of almost any other substance except flesh, a great scoop of what might have been wax or even lard slapped into human shape and crammed, while still malleable, into a suit of clothes somebody else had worn and stained.
Boyle on Wilt’s face:
When he lifted his hat to her before leaving she saw the fresh scar of brilliant red its pressure had left on his forehead but only when he turned away did she see the other thing, the mangled, sore, and shapeless remains of what must have been once the ear, and she felt an instant faintness and revulsion in her. It did not seem a wound but the manifestation of destruction, the terrible and savage mark a wild beast might have left, like spoor, and then continued deeper to a more subtle and final devouring of the substance and identity of what civilization could not even save.
Boyle spends dozens of sentences, paragraphs, and pages throughout the novel trying to capture the essence
of Wilt’s battle-worn face, until he resembles more a golem than a man. Brute and alive, vital, but not dumb, and yet Wilt seems almost entirely without self-awareness. But he does get close, very close. “How would you say I looked, Doctor?” he asks Bernie. “What would your diagnosis be on the face?” By now, he has a black eye and a fat lip, too, boot, from a bar fight. Bernie insists he looks fine.

Near the novel’s final pages, Wilt spots himself in the mirror behind a bar and is shocked by what he sees:

“...the darkness stretched before him as he walked, facsimile of that obliteration unpunctuated by mood or time that life itself and action had become. He followed the pale shimmering of Wilt’s battle-worn face, until he resembles more a golem than a man. Brute and alive, vital, but not dumb, and yet Wilt seems almost entirely without self-awareness. But he does get close, very close. “How would you say I looked, Doctor?” he asks Bernie. “What would your diagnosis be on the face?” By now, he has a black eye and a fat lip, too, boot, from a bar fight. Bernie insists he looks fine.

Near the novel’s final pages, Wilt spots himself in the mirror behind a bar and is shocked by what he sees:

“But the universe seems bent on sending him down one dark path after another on some ridiculous mission in the deep night, leaving him powerless, and killing any romance he has for what might have been a mysterious downtown fling.

“It’s like that,” I told my friend. “Sort of. Except it’s about two men, not one, and they aren’t trying to go home, but instead they’re trying to solve some vague mystery and they’re not entirely sure of their own reasons, save for, maybe, a need to drive on and fight against the void of death.” To which he said, “So it’s like Gombrowicz’s novel Cosmos.” (The friend is also a book nut.)

Yes, I said. I think so. Yes. I think he was right.

Kay Boyle’s Monday Night is Witold Gombrowicz’s Cosmos meets Martin Scorsese’s After Hours. That said if I’m going to write such an essay I should read the novel again and watch the film again, and I don’t really have the time.


Here are two of my favorite passages in the book, wherein Boyle very subtly reveals to the perceptive reader her design. The first comes from Wilt:

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We look like a fever chart but we aren’t... If you’d make a graph of it, it might look like a fluctuating day on the Bourse, but it ain’t. It’s just two guys going straight for what they’re after.

The second describes Wilt walking alone in the night:

The darkness stretched before him as he walked, facsimile of that obliteration unpunctuated by mood or time that life itself and action had become. He followed the pale shimmering...
substance of the drive, deliberate, purposeful, or perhaps only with the memory of purpose now, actuated by motive he could scarcely recall, no less impelling even though obscure.

This is also the design of Monday Night. I have never read a novel that so demanded trust in the writer, that so defied clear analysis, and that so depended on “drive,” a reader’s need for meaning. (Except for maybe Cosmos.) Wilt is an absolute mess who says things like “I was in jail last week, Bernie. I don’t know if I mentioned it to you before.” And this not long before we finally learn that Wilt and Bernie only just met that morning at a bar. Wilt is the last man to follow. But Bernie does. And so do we—unless we don’t, and some of us won’t, but if you do, you’ll happen onto his occasionally powerful and tragic observations, like this one, on love:

It is something you haven’t had a taste of yet. You carry it, what you still think its essence is, like a flask on your hip and when you meet a skirt you pour what’s left of the bottle into her mouth. It’s like giving someone an injection so they’ll stop crying out, so their eyes will go wide and black with dope and they’ll start dreaming the same thing you’re dreaming. That’s not love, Bernie… It’s got to be something else, maybe something that was stamped there a long time ago, before you came into the picture and will be still stamped there when you go out, something you can’t get away from, like history.

What does it all mean? This is the question. It is also the answer.
Second Row

Joey was the tallest person I’d ever seen, even without the added height of the stage where I first saw him. I was 17, he was college-aged, but not in college, he was the singer of a band I never got tired of. He played guitar, too, but that was secondary to his voice, which was a kind of summoning. The first time I entered Modified, the punk venue in the middle of the worst part of downtown Phoenix, I felt like I’d finally found one good place. Everything was a strip mall or about to be a strip mall, and worse—there was some law about exterior paint resembling the mountains, so every building was painted beige. Phoenix looked terrible, the heat was terrible, my parents were terribly worried about me going downtown every week, but they let me go anyway, and that’s where Joey sang.

He did this thing with his legs—a spastic motion that didn’t align with the drums, it seemed to come from another song inside him. He closed his eyes when he sang, and I was glad for that, because then I didn’t have to worry about him looking at me. It was embarrassing the way I kept going to Modified, paying five bucks at the door and milling around, waiting for someone to talk to me. Eventually Anna did—she was like an older, cooler version of me, and we looked so alike that people asked if we were sisters. She liked that I was a few years younger than her, she wanted to be idolized and I perpetuated that, made it real for her. It felt like the entire city was asleep except for the fifty or so people inside Modified, and it was up to us to make something beautiful inside the ugliest city in the world. I didn’t dare talk to Joey, but one night, he talked to me.

*Come to this party on 5th and Hardy,* he said, holding my hand, *You can remember that cuz it rhymes. The house with a big saguaro in front.* He was drunk and I think he must have invited everyone and held everyone’s hands, but I felt like this was it, tonight our lives would merge. He got in the passenger’s side of his friend’s car and waved goodbye to me, or maybe the guy next to me, and I jumped in my dad’s car, a boxy 1987 Isuzu Trooper my friends called the “safari mobile.” I put the key into the ignition and the stereo clock lit up: 11:15. The party was twenty minutes away, my curfew was midnight, so I floored it down the I-10, thinking any punishment my parents enforced later would be worth it.

When I got there, I didn’t see anything except dark houses—the worlds I’d correctly assumed were sleeping while everyone at Modified stayed up falling in love. *Where is it,* I muttered to myself, determined to find that stupid cactus in the yard. I drove down every related side street, thinking maybe I was just early, the house must be right around here. But I drove and drove for a half hour until I gave up and went home and my parents didn’t wake up when I unlocked the door ten minutes late and that was the night Joey fell in love with Anna.

I nearly died the next week at Modified when I saw him leaning down to say something in her ear. *Happy birthday!* I said to Anna between bands. *Aw thanks, pal!* she said, *You know Joey, right? We smiled at each other and I said, I don’t think we’ve ever officially met,* and then we touched hands for the second time. Joey left to go set up for his band’s set, and I started interrogating Anna. She was a little drunk so she was happy to talk and didn’t
people we didn’t know—blonde girls wearing heels and eating chips in the kitchen, guys wearing baseball caps and playing beer pong by the pool. Anna and Joey had somehow known to wear their swimsuits and they got in the hot tub. Tyler and I walked around the house counting the bathrooms (nine), and then we encountered a glass door that led to a stairwell to the basement. Don’t! I said as Tyler reached for the door handle. But he opened it, and a blast of cold air washed over us. We walked down the stairs and into the wine cellar. There must have been 500 bottles arranged in neat rows, kept at the perfect temperature. Do you want some? Tyler asked me, holding a red one. I don’t drink, I said, and he said, Oh, right.

One day, Anna came over to Tyler’s parents’ house and we all laid on the bed, spooning each other, and eventually we fell asleep in the middle of the day. Where was Joey? He felt so far away, and yet we had touched him once. I want to say Joey ruined us, but that’s not right—he taught us the meaning of longing, which means we didn’t know the difference between loving him and wanting to love him, not yet. In 120 degree heat, it was hard to tell what was what. But if we couldn’t be the songs he sang, at least we could be in the front row, or the second.

Tyler and I sat in my driveway one night talking about what would happen when he went back to college. He said he wanted to write a great novel by the time he graduated. When I asked him what he’d written so far, he said he was still in the absorbing phase of his life.
Bow & Eros

“Eros has degenerated; he began by introducing order and harmony, and now he brings back chaos.” — George Eliot

She was folded over in the bathtub, her head between her knees, and I remember thinking her body looked vaguely inhuman: too much skin, too many limbs, the knobs and latches of her bones gathered in a helpless clutch. “Amy?” I said, hoping she’d turn to me as she usually did: bright-eyed, a smile forming; but when I pulled her back by the shoulders, it was like touching slick, chilled wax. I had begun to scream then, hoarse and ragged; by the time I realized it, I was astonished at the sound. Her lips were blue and the hair of her mound floated lazily in the cold water like a river flower. I tried to unbend her arms, which were crossed over her chest as if she had thought to cover her nakedness at the last moment, but the stiffness of death had set in some time during the early morning. Someone called the paramedics but I never found out who; I could think of nothing but to lay down in the yard.

“Eros aimed one of his arrows at Medea, and drove it into her heart, up to the feathers.” — Robert Graves

For our first date I told my work I needed a biopsy and we went swimming in a rooftop pool in downtown San Diego after Amy charmed the security guard at the elevator. We ate french fries and drank greyhounds in white deck chairs, and talked books and music and David Lynch. We were young and felt as if we’d cheated the day somehow, caught it unawares. We had agreed upon something neither of us could quite explain and spoke in code like conspirators. She swam awkwardly, like a poodle, and when she came out of the water, smiling to her feet, my heart pounded out some pure sweet rhythm, and I looked around at things, dazed and half wild. It had begun gathering, then, whatever it was we made. Something shimmered at the bottom of the pool and in my teeth, a raw luster, and her eyes glowed darkly when I spoke to her. Later, when we kissed at her door, I felt myself burning and burning away, and time became mere rumor, an outright falsehood, when I touched her hand.

“Eros is everywhere. It is what binds.” — John Updike

In my dreams, I never realize she’s dead; I know only that she’s been missing, wandering. But she is here now. I watch her approach me through dream-forests and dream-fields. Where her feet press the dew-washed grass, flowers grow in red and blue clusters. She shrugs off my questions impatiently as if I’m wasting time. The grass breathes around us, a violet breath, purple-sweet. I ask her “Where have you been?” and she smiles, bashful, and kisses me, again and again; I could die of happiness. She lives in these dreams so naturally; they pulse and unspool, glowing, from her body. Once I dreamt of her in a garden. She wore a robe with long, flowing sleeves that moved of their own accord though there was no breeze. We walked down a road in an immense field latticed with gold spinning light. Children ran around us and she sang to them, songs I had never heard, and the children smiled. When the road led into the dark mouth of a forest, I knew
she was leaving again. I tried to say something but she just laughed and touched my face—and then she was gone. Sometimes I close my eyes and place my own hand on my cheek, gently, just so, and pretend to be there once more, wrapped in the tall fragrant grasses; I pretend I am with her and try to dream the world away; but I never succeed. The world is tenacious. I open my eyes and I am alone.

“There is no art without Eros.”—Max Frisch

We made things together and apart: stories and films, photographs, paintings and songs, dioramas, poems, clothes, collages. She dived beneath the deep, dark water where I couldn’t follow; but I saw her, in silver-white glimpses, and my heart would dip and sing. I look into the underlit water now and see little, sometimes nothing. In her absence, art is lessened and made somehow desperate: a lean, writhing hunger. I write about her—it is all I can do to keep her near, to clothe her death in some dim raiment—but the words fall away or fail to reach what I mean to say. There are things one can’t write about adequately. I stammer beneath her death and language skulks through my brain like a dog whose ribs press against its coat. I can’t help but feel that if I had gone first, out and over into that unthinkable black, she would have made something gorgeous of the passing. She never realized that as she was making objects—Radiguet’s purple pour, a cellophane donkey, Lowry in a wash of blues, the perfect navy jumpsuit—she was really making me; pulling life and love out of the air like a conjurer’s trick, spinning gold out of some elemental machine only she could see. When I write something now, and it has lain cold for a night, I return to it the next day with nervous energy. Whether I believe it to be good or not, there is always just the one question: What would she think of this?

“I think Eros should be dirty.”—Stephen Fry

Her white flesh beneath a lifted dress. My finger in her mouth and the warmth rising from her. She would call at work and speak filth, only when others were present, only when she knew my need to mask the flushing fire, to take the smut running from her mouth and save it, secret and shameful. And later I would bring her close so that she could taste it; and then stop, aloof, unmove; her wet begging, a quivering need; animal, the ache of it, animal, the arch of her back. I speak of it now and can hardly believe it happened. After she was gone, I knew the desolation of the body: a different kind of grief. I longed for a ghost so that, half-mad, I asked her to return most nights. I stood in showers expending myself without sense or sigh, dead seed spilled silently. I wanted to feel something, anything; but mostly I wanted to feel her.

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as she had that last drink (one of so many), and climbed into that hot bath, not knowing she would soon take her leave of this world, whether I was woven into that dizzy dream of patchwork thought; if, as she was falling forward, unconscious from the drink and the heat, there was a picture of me imprinted somewhere deep within that darkening window; if, maybe, she saw us at the pool that day, circling each other with roman candle eyes, falling into the infinite mystery of—what? Of love. I wonder if she saw it. Somewhere before the dark, I hope she did.

“May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.”
—W.H. Auden

I lay on the grass now above her grave and the sky opens before me like water thrown across white rock. I lay for a time and life seems crass and deceitful, cruel, false, and costly, a horror; and I know these things are true. But then, in a moment, in a seething white hush, she returns to me; and I see our years held fixed and trembling and run through with golden wire; and she smiles. It is radiant, impossibly so, and I can only look into it briefly; but it is enough, and Eros strikes, the arrow bent but true. I no longer know if it is shot from under the ground or out of the sky but it strikes me and it strikes me and it strikes me and the pain, grown strange and sweet, turns to laughter in my mouth.

Moonlight Night

Tonight
in this same moonlight

my wife is alone at her window
in Fuzhou

I can hardly bear
to think of my children

too young to understand
why I can’t come to them

her hair
must be damp from the mist

her arms
cold jade in the moonlight

when will we stand together
by those slack curtains

while the moonlight dries
the tear-streaks on our faces?

Translated by David Young.
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The Limits of Mythology in Kay Boyle’s *The Underground Woman*

*Oh, reality, hold me close, hold me close*

These are the last thoughts of Athena Gregory, the semi-autobiographical protagonist of Kay Boyle’s last novel *The Underground Woman* (Doubleday, 1975). Imprisoned for a second time for participating in an anti-Vietnam war demonstration, Athena is joined by the same group of women from her first incarceration and whose story she narrates for the majority of the novel. Athena’s paean to “reality” is a sharp break from her commitment to ancient Greek mythology throughout the earlier narrative of her life. At the beginning of the novel, as a Classics professor and teacher of mythology, Athena muses on her own mythical name while playfully creating mythic identities for her fellow prisoners (e.g. Calliope, Callisto) and even a prison guard (the Grecian deputy / Dryope). These singular analogies operate against a full-scale mythical backdrop as Athena ends up repeating (with a tragic twist) the Demeter and Persephone myth as her daughter Melanie (the fictional counterpart to Boyle’s daughter Faith) is lost to her through her involvement in a Manson-like cult.

The tension between the main character’s concluding paean to “reality” after a life and its story enmeshed in Greek mythology exemplifies a major theme running through criticism of *The Underground Woman*. Gail Harlow, in her 1975 review for *Library Journal*, complained how the novel “toys...with myth and reality and the truth that lies between them,” yet does “not project the reality that is its primary goal.” In later readings, it is the more explicitly allegorical nature of the mythical framing that undermines the work’s status among Boyle’s earlier works. Sandra Whipple Spanier, in her 1986 book *Kay Boyle: Artists and Activist*, offers the verdict that: “It is not a successful work of literature. In sharp contrast to the subtle and complex fiction she had written earlier, this novel is baldly allegorical.” While Joan Mellen, in her 1994 *Kay Boyle: Author of Herself*, is explicit in targeting the Greek mythological framework for the novel’s failings:

> Often, however, her language is static and rhetorical with a tedious overlay of mythological parallels; the only one which works, and then only partially, is the story of Demeter and Persephone, an obvious analogue to Kay’s relationship with Faith.

Even in more positive responses, such as Blanche H. Gelfant, writing for *The Hudson Review* in 1975, there is a dichotomy between complaining about the novel’s “obvious mythical trappings” as “obtrusive” and “outdated machinery,” and praising it for “the courage it extols.” These reviewers and critics create the polarized duality of reality and myth, complexity and simplicity, political message and allegorical form, yet in doing so they fail to do justice to the subtlety and complexity of Boyle’s use of mythology and its limits in the novel and
written to her father when she had left home, and never gone back, and never laid eyes on him again. “I've known since the moment I was born, drank it in with my mother's milk,” she had written, “that you named me Athena in the expectation of shaping me into the answer to some question you were asking of life. And I couldn’t be the answer. I was not the protectress of cities, for I do not like cities, and I was also the wrong one to be designated as the goddess of war.”

Later when talking to Ann, a character with her own, very real father-issues and saved from Athena's mythical-naming, Athena recalls:

My father gave me my absurd name, but I never reproached him for the impossible burden it put on me. I felt it my duty to justify that name, and I went cringing and crawling back to the Greek myths, and because of the image of that other woman, I wasn’t entitled to one false move.

Athena struggles as the goddess of war and of peace “and the more I learned about the daughter of Zeus, the more fiercely was I split in two. I was a model daughter, trying to re-enact all that had taken place at least a thousand years before the coming of Christ.” Then she concludes:

And while I became a part of that ancient unreality, I was also another woman—a girl like you, first of all—and I wanted to take part in contemporary acts of fortitude, and gallantry, and tragedy...I dared not reject my classical role. I was always two women, one visible and understandable, and the other one functioning underground.

The story of Athena’s misnaming brings with it the beyond. As we shall see, The Underground Woman offers a subtle meditation on the limits of mythology that not only manipulates the names of characters borrowed from specific Greek myths, but also expands to the whole subject of mythology. Furthermore, Boyle’s choice of mythology (through the character of Athena), is carefully considered as a means of discussing the political realities of her own activism, as explored in poetry written before, but revised after the publication of the novel.

I.

Early in The Underground Woman, while sitting in the patrol wagon on their way to the Rehabilitation Center, Athena starts to give names to her fellow imprisoned activists, with some of the women singled out as mythological figures (e.g. Calliope, Callisto) seemingly echoing her own mythical name. Yet Boyle marks an important distinction between their “exact” mythical names and that of Athena, which “suited her so badly.” The tension between Athena’s exact mythical naming and her own misnaming could be simply explained away by pointing to the fact that the myth of Demeter seemed to be the main source for the story of a mother’s search for her abducted daughter, and thus our protagonist has been named after the wrong deity. However, this may only be half of the story. Athena locates her misnaming precisely in her father’s misplaced ambitions for his daughter and how this patriarchal imposition becomes synonymous with mythological thinking as whole in a theme that runs throughout The Underground Woman. The theme first appears here:

And now Athena, forty-two years old and the mother of three looked at the young people in the van and remembered the exact words she had
Dryope, seemingly embracing Athena’s mythological framework, this framework is immediately abandoned, as Athena confesses a “burning need to know now about the lives of these two women” and the “chasm between them.” This chasm will not be bridged by them adopting mythical names of Calliope or Dryope. However, does mythology really have to operate in stark opposition to the reality of Athena’s burning need at this point? Does mythology need to be completely abandoned for us to appreciate “contemporary acts of fortitude, and gallantry, and tragedy”?

An escape to this dilemma presents itself if we return to the original moment at which Athena suggests the name Dryope for the Grecian deputy. We encounter Athena in the middle of a moment of self-reflection as she is preparing breakfast for her fellow inmates. She finds herself wanting to “function out of her own experience, her own history, and to speak with a vocabulary that was her own,” to seek “the end of quotations from other people’s books, and other people’s speech, and even to the end of mythology.” Yet she confesses that she still cannot help herself making mythic analogies as “this could not be done so quickly, that it might take her the rest of her life to free herself of all she had borrowed.” At this precise moment in the narrative, the Grecian deputy is: transformed into Dryope, that woman of myth whose prison sentence was to become a tree.

Boyle neatly locates both Athena’s impassioned whole “ancient unreality”—that is, the mythical allusions, borne of Athena’s myth-obsessed mind. In this way, Athena’s naming of others must be seen as both operating within, but also an attempt to break free, of the imposition of patriarchal authority of mythological machinery.

II.

One way in which Athena manages to escape both her own mythical naming and its patriarchal mythology is by creating a sense of camaraderie and resistance out of that same “ancient unreality,” that is, the world of mythology. When Athena is joined by Calliope in poking fun at the “Grecian deputy,” she does so by embracing her in the role of the woodland nymph Dryope. When the deputy finding Athena’s book on Greek mythology in the Rehabilitation Center’s library, Athena secretly “wanted to ask her urgently if she had read the story of Dryope,” but the deputy implicitly rejects her with the snide remark that: “The Center is given books that the public libraries clear out.” Calliope comes to Athena’s aid by jokingly reminding the deputy that “Athena invented the flute, you know,” to which Athena, playing along, adds: “She gave up playing the flute almost immediately after inventing it,” then back to Calliope: “She probably wanted to give more time to the bridle she was working on.” Then, in an important twist, the deputy betrays the fact that she had indeed read some of the book, by saying: “Your account of her says she also developed legal ideas.” Boyle immediately highlights this moment of recognition and intimacy by turning the deputy into Dryope “and now the bark appeared to drop from her lower legs, and from her thighs, falling away before it could reach the vital organs contained in her flesh.” Yet at the very moment the deputy becomes
call for “the end of mythology” and the uncontrollable naming of Dryope amid a mundane scene of prison-life. The absurdity of Athena’s incessant mythical analogies is made clear by how they appear not only amid some general conceptions of mythology as a whole (“the end of mythology”), but also during the realities of prison life (“strips of bacon”). It is moments like this that seem to bridge two conceptions of mythology that Athena presents later in the novel. On the one hand, she resists how “Greek myths were no more than the biased history of the elite of another time,” but on the other hand, embraces how the myths are “the life stories of all emotional, non-intellectual, tender, belligerent, doomed, poetic, grasping, rebellious, and quite ordinary humanity.” These conceptions dramatically transform the idea of mythology as an “ancient unreality” into the very real positions of the oppressor and the oppressed. Furthermore, it is the latter conception of mythology as the life stories of an ordinary humanity that Athena (and by extension Boyle) have been grasping at throughout the novel and which the tale of Dryope exemplifies and which the telling of her particular story demands. As Athena will define the Greek word mythologia to her class of students (and later to the lawyer who has just evicted members of the cult to which she had lost her daughter): it refers to “‘stories,’ of course, but also to their ‘telling.’”

III.

The dynamic between life and narrative in the single acts of naming and the question of mythology as a whole does nothing short of disturbing our conception of reality in The Underground Woman. This exploration of the limits of reality and mythology is further supported by looking at two poems that Boyle wrote in response to key moments of activism in the early 1970s, poems that were revised following the publication of the novel: “A Poem for the Students of Greece” and “A Poem for February First 1975” (both published in the 1985 collection This is Not a Letter and Other Poems). In “A Poem for the Students of Greece,” Boyle responds to the Athens polytechnic uprising against the generals in November 1973. The poem was originally dated “SOLONIKA and Athens, 1973” but was then revised in November 20, 1975, months after the publication of The Underground Woman. Before the uprising, Boyle had played a key role in supporting the Greek resistance to the military regime, taking part in a City Lights reading at Fugazi Hall along with Greek poets as well as Diane Di Prima and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. In the poem, Boyle challenges the “customary places” of Athenians and tourist alike and questions the authority of “the wise” who “read deeply, deeply in books” and who “said poetry explores the landscape of the self,” but who are basically oblivious to the life of activism, the “world of natural fury, passion, action, drama, madness, dreams.” In many ways this impassioned description of the life of activism reflects the way mythical life stories are employed in The Underground Woman at the expense of a more academic approach to understanding the enveloping ancient mythological framework.

In “A Poem for February First 1975,” Boyle returns to the Attica prison riot of September 1971, which was also the subject of her essay “The Crime of Attica.” Boyle makes an explicit contrast throughout the poem between the prison in New York State and “that other Attica / Leafed delicately with quivering olive trees, washed on two sides by the Aegean Sea / A triangle of ancient Greece.” The contrast between these Atticas is
made clear: the gassed prisoners, “our maggots” versus the “Torch-light processions descended from Athens, rejoicing”; the blackened pavings of D-yard “after the fires were done” versus the pristine “marble astonishingly white” of ancient Attica. These comparisons, while favoring the ancient Greek region, do not however detract from the significance of the events in the homonymous New York State prison. In fact, Boyle’s poem acts as a memorial to the event of the riot and its ruthless suppression in terms that transform it into an epic, mythical narrative:

Hear the far clanc of the syllables: Attica. Do not let them
Slip through the crevices of history, geography, be effaced from
The miraculous ledger of the stars. Say that a civilization was lost here.

Just as Boyle’s prose account of the events of The Underground Woman (“Report from Lock-up”) does not incorporate mythological names, narratives or frameworks, neither does her journalistic account of the Attica riots. It is as if Boyle has responded to Gail Harlow’s review of her novel by showing in her poetry about other moments of activism that the important thing is not the myth or the reality, but “the truth that lies between them.”

The Underground Woman is not a simplistic, naive allegory, nor a work of nostalgic Classicism. Like the paintings of Cy Twombly or Nancy Spero or the poetry of Charles Olson and Anne Carson, Boyle has activated the “negative capability” of Classical Mythology to speak to and also reframe the crushing realities of the present.

The Good-Morrow

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then? But sucked on country pleasures, childishly? Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers’ den? ‘Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be. If ever any beauty I did see, Which I desired, and got, ‘twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls, Which watch not one another out of fear; For love, all love of other sights controls, And makes one little room an everywhere. Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone, Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown, Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears, And true plain hearts do in the faces rest; Where can we find two better hemispheres, Without sharp north, without declining west? Whatever dies, was not mixed equally; If our two loves be one, or, thou and I Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.
Auntie-Matter:  
Notes on a Trip to the Bay Area to Visit My Aunt Nancy

I’m driving up to the Bay Area and I’m getting off at a stop on the 5 after I see a sign for “Buttonwillow.” I remember my Aunt Nancy telling me as a young boy interested in writing that when you write you should pull whatever you want from your surroundings to use in your work. We were driving from the Bay Area down to Southern California; she was driving me home. She said, pointing to the sign, as we passed this very exit, “Like Buttonwillow, what a great character name that would be.”

This was not the beginning of it or anywhere near the beginning.  
—Kay Boyle’s The Crazy Hunter.

The sky is the periwinkle blue of an old vintage dress. The moth-eaten fabric would tear apart if you tugged too hard at it. I fill up the car with gas.

There were few people I looked up to as much as my Aunt Nancy when I was a kid. I took my first solo flight up to see her. Because I wasn’t even ten, the flight attendant paid special attention to me. She told me if I needed anything she would be at my disposal the whole flight. Her lipstick was a messy smear of berries around her mouth. I imagined her kissing me, but like a mother, on my forehead or on my cheek. The kind of kiss I’d have to wipe off. She fastened a pin to my breast and I was wrecked with anxiety as she did it, worried she’d prick me and I’d say ouch and I wouldn’t seem grownup. The pin featured two feathered wings and the words “Solo Flyer.” It seemed to me some sort of proof that I was special or cool or an adult or something, but really it just denoted to the crew that I was a child without a family aboard. I wore it like a badge of honor.

I don’t fly anymore, so this time I’m driving up to see her. No one is here to pin something on my chest. I wear nothing as a badge of honor.

The bony, mysteriously limbed and soft-mouthed beast who is stumbling in silent panic from darkness to darkness.  
—Kay Boyle’s The Crazy Hunter.

In the McDonald’s at the Buttonwillow exit, I eat Chicken McNuggets, and the pool of ketchup I’ve squirted onto my tray for dipping looks like congealing blood. I bring in with me the copy of Kay Boyle’s The Crazy Hunter I’ve been rereading, but I don’t read any of it there. As soon as I finish my McNuggets, I have to get out. Back on the road.

A detour to visit the spot where James Dean last filled his car up with gas followed by the spot where James
Dean died in a crash followed by the spot where they’ve built a little memorial to the actor around a tree—an actor, mind you, with only three credited film roles, and yet such a part of American culture because he represented something.

We saw in him ourselves.

_The small helpless lone island of the self:_
—Kay Boyle’s _The Crazy Hunter._

I saw myself in my Aunt Nancy as a kid—or I saw the self I wanted to be. The woman who refused to dye her graying hair, which annoyed my grandma to no end; who wore strange clothes that looked like nothing anyone else I knew wore; who didn’t seem to care what she was supposed to do; who didn’t have any children; who refused a date with O. J. Simpson, back when they were both going to USC; who had lived in New York City; who read and read and read and shared her opinions on every author I mentioned; who could tell me which Norse god battles which Norse god at Ragnarok; who explained that not all American Indians lived in teepees, and in fact, only a small portion of the tribes of North America would have used that type of dwelling; who gave me a dream catcher for Christmas; who taught English and Mythology at Diablo Valley College, and when she invited me to sit in on her class that first time I flew up by myself, I didn’t once read the comic book I brought because the real superhero was alive and in front of me, getting people to care about thesis statements or some such thing.

Off to the side of the highway: trees in rows like lines of soldiers marching but with no movement, no goosestepping down the strasse—still, except for a slight sway in a warm breeze. They’re all placed in a pattern, geometric, all exactly equidistant from one another—until I see one askew. There is one out of place, alone—not far away but not in a row.

I can’t remember the last time I saw her, which means it was probably at someone’s funeral.

The turning Ford Tudor that James Dean slammed into. Its driver, Donald Turnupseed, escaped with only minor injuries. Dean died immediately, body so maimed his funeral had to be closed casket.

My aunt ran a Storytelling Festival at Diablo Valley College. That was what I flew up for. I did so three or four years in a row. Men and women of various cultures came and told the stories of their peoples. How many origin stories of the earth did I hear? How many explanations for the rain, the snow, the seasons?

She loved these stories—she loved stories—which is why it should have dawned on me earlier that she is a storyteller herself. Somehow it hadn’t.

I’m back on the 5 and I’m driving next to a truck carrying a horse. I swear the horse, whose bulging muscles are knotted like a tree, a giant black burnt oak, is looking at me. What do horses think of man, of a man, of me?

I think of Aunt Nancy and her blind horse. I think of Nan, the protagonist of _The Crazy Hunter_, and her blind horse. Such a strange coincidence. Nancys and their blind horses that they refuse to put down.
That horse, that crazy hunter is standing out there in the stable, stone-blind, incurable, bat-blind.
—Kay Boyle’s The Crazy Hunter.

My Aunt Nancy studied under Kay Boyle at San Francisco State, I knew that. She had told me that back when I was in college, back when I began my obsession with Paris in the twenties and modernism and The Dial, back when I was reading a book called Being Geniuses Together—a memoir of the Lost Generation written by Robert McAlmon and Kay Boyle.

“You know she was my thesis advisor, right?”
I was wowed. Here I was reading this book and the author was someone my aunt had known, had studied under, had received tender notes from.

The smell of garlic as I pass a truck carrying countless cloves. White petals floating in the air behind it—as though someone were sitting in the back of the truck playing she-loves-me-she-loves-me-not with the innumerable bulbs.

She studied under Boyle long after the author had written The Crazy Hunter, of course, so Boyle hadn’t mined my aunt’s life for plot points in her fiction. Instead, my aunt just grew to fulfill the prophesy of The Crazy Hunter—to have a blind horse, to refuse to put it down, to become that compassionate caretaker, that independent voice, that advocate for love.

When I was young I used to ask my parents, “Why doesn’t Aunt Nancy want to visit us?”
I thought she didn’t care about us. It’s tempting to sometimes still think it, to give easy answer to the distance, to the silence.

You can’t do more than what nature allows for.
—Kay Boyle’s The Crazy Hunter.

A mirage makes it look like there’s water in the road, but this is California, why would there be water in the road? It takes a great memory or imagination to conjure up that smell of rain on concrete and wet palm fronds.
A rain comes rarely.

Years later, when I picked Kay Boyle as our spotlighted author for issue two of The Scofield, I decided to find out exactly when it was that my aunt went to San Francisco State. Though I used to see her every six months or so when I was young, it had now been years since we had last laid eyes on one another—and it’s not like there was much talking going on either. She’s notoriously hard to get ahold of, so it seemed easier to type “Nancy Malone” and “San Francisco State” into the Google search box than it did to call her. Google alerted me to the fact that her thesis was a novel titled A Bird on the Sill.

A novel? Of course! If she got her masters, and if Kay Boyle was her thesis advisor, her thesis would naturally have been a novel, but until that moment it never dawned on me that she had written one. I thought I would be the first in the family to attempt that crazy feat. But, of course, I was once again just following in my Aunt Nancy’s footsteps, as I had when I went to San Francisco State myself, for a year in undergrad, before transferring.

When you’re driving, your mind wanders and suddenly the everyday stuff you take for granted seems uncanny. That we’re all made of matter, for instance. I
Another dog trots up to me and smells my hand. I ask her what this one's name is and she says it doesn't matter what I call him because he's completely deaf.

The third dog is in the other room. “The other one has issues,” she says. She kisses me on the cheek. We talk awkwardly about my drive up.

I don't mention the horse looking at me or the truck of garlic or the geometric trees with one awry. I don't even mention James Dean. I just say the drive was fine and that I'm sorry I didn't get here until late. She shows me to my room. There are racks and racks of clothes everywhere. She's preparing for a vintage show. She's retired now from teaching. She sells beautiful, old dresses.

Luckily, it's not long before the conversation becomes easy. We stay up past one o'clock talking about writers, talking about family, talking about teaching, talking about New York.

She tells me about a building she lived in in Brooklyn in the seventies, where dead bodies would often lay in bags outside. She'd have to step over them on her way home.

—Nancy Malone’s *A Bird on the Sill*.

Eventually, Linda learned that once a month someone from the hotel would check through the rooms to see if any of the lonely, old tenants or any of the vagrants who wandered into the building had died there. In most cases, there was no one to contact, so they simply bagged the bodies in sacks provided for that purpose and called the city to pick them up.

—Nancy Malone's *A Bird on the Sill*.

After, as I lie in bed, surrounded by countless dresses suddenly start thinking about it and the idea becomes unreal. Everything is matter, composed of atoms bonded together in molecules, electrons orbiting nuclei. The horse and the car and the garlic and I are all the same stuff. My aunt too. And the Boyle book I'm rereading.

Dusk then dark before I get to her house. I pass her driveway. There's nothing familiar about it, even though it's been the same since I was a boy.

*If I know this place in the dark without being able to see it any more than you can, you can believe in it too, you can reconstruct the picture out of chaos and memory's ruins.*  
—Kay Boyle’s *The Crazy Hunter*.

Her house was covered in masks, that I remember. They stared at you from their hollowed-out eyesockets.

James Dean as Jim Stark in *Rebel Without a Cause*: “Once you’ve been up there you know you’ve been someplace.”

When I walk up to the door, I hear dogs barking. Three rescued poodles that my father had reminded me that she owned before I left.

“What are their names?” I asked him. He didn’t remember. They don’t see each other as much as he’d like either.

The door opens. She’s holding one dog close on a leash and telling me the dog has bitten two people so she’s being cautious.

“It’s okay, Faith,” she says. “It’s just Tyler, and we love Tyler.” The answer a thousand garlic petals couldn’t give you with any certainty.
which cluster around my bedside like family members in a hospital room, I listen to a couple outside arguing loudly about everything and nothing. The conversation runs in circles, a dog chasing its tail. Apparently the house across the street has become a meth house. I imagine the bodies of this couple looking like those sacked corpses in Brooklyn, only moving and disagreeing and maybe getting a little physical. I think of getting up to look at them through the blinds like a character in a film noir, looking down on the street and witnessing a crime from the safety of the shadows of a room. I don’t, I stay still in bed and keep listening to their squabbles.

Gazing out at them through the waves of heat and the smoke, Anait thought they did look ethereal, shimmering and insubstantial enough to disappear if she blinked. —Nancy Malone’s A Bird on the Sill.

It takes a while, but once I fall asleep I sleep soundly. When I wake up in the morning, I notice next to the bed, a framed picture of my grandpa, young, in his Air Force uniform. His smile is slight but ebullient. Next to it, another framed picture, this one of my grandma, young too, and looking like a Golden Age Hollywood starlet, like she’d be co-starring in a film with Cary Grant or Jimmy Stewart. On the picture, my grandma had written the words: “All the love in the world to my soldier boy. — Alladelle.” She sent this glamour shot to her soldier boy when he was overseas in the Far East. We’re not sure if she has a glass eye in this photo or not.

I walk down the stairs and my aunt has Faith on a leash. She says she doesn’t think the dog would bite, but she just wanted to make sure the dog remembered that someone is staying in the house. Faith comes up and licks my fingers. Wet warmth like the inside of a beating heart.

Biscuits are in the oven and she offers me the New York Times. We talk. We eat. I wonder if she notices how much butter I put on my biscuit. I’m embarrassed by this for some reason even though I’m an adult and needn’t be self-conscious about how much butter I put on my biscuits. But it’s a lot, I know it’s a lot—a child’s amount of butter.

And I remember one time when I was a kid and we went to Lyons for breakfast down the hill from her house. They had some special where you could pick any three items off a list to make the ultimate breakfast. A person is supposed to pick something like waffles, scrambled eggs, and bacon. Maybe pancakes, hash browns, and sausage. Or french toast, a bowl of cereal, and a muffin. I asked for waffles, pancakes, and french toast. My aunt laughed awkwardly, and the silver bangles on her wrist, which I remember clearly were encrusted with polyps of turquoise, jingled a song as she asked sweetly, “Are you sure you don’t want to reconsider one of those choices, Ty?”

The deaf dog trots up like a goat and drinks water from his bowl. He stretches his neck and points his nose to the ceiling—letting the water trickle down his throat, drinking as a goat drinks. He lived the first years of his life as a goat, my aunt tells me. When the Poodle Rescue found him, his fur was matted. People had seen him out with the goats and thought he was one of them. He had been passing, grazing on the grass with the rest of them. When they shaved his coat, he looked like a bag of bones with warm eyes. Now he is plump and when he looks at you with those warm eyes, you want to ask, “Aren’t you happier to be living as a dog than a goat?” But he can’t
The only other atheist in my family actually believe in psychics? “I don’t believe in it, but I’m open to the possibility. There’s so much we don’t know about how our brains work and what we can tap into.” On the one hand, I’m sort of off-put by her concession toward the real possibility of something as absurd as psychics, but I also love how her explanation fits into my life philosophy: “Anything is possible, but not everything is likely.”

Charlotte helped out the police as a psychic in some cases apparently. This was after her own daughter was murdered. A mentally ill man she was taking care of killed her and then rolled up her body in a rug and brought it back to her apartment and let it sit there and fester.

She thought it would feel wonderful to dissolve into tears, have someone come to take her home.
—Nancy Malone’s A Bird on the Sill.

She tells me about her blind horse Handy: “He was sensible about air currents. He knew which side the drop was on.”

I realize in the late afternoon that I don’t think my aunt eats lunch, but I don’t want to be rude, so I just tell her I’m going to drive into town to run some errands. Starved, I shove my face with orange chicken from Panda Express.

When I get back, we move dresses around the racks more, we talk more, and then, much later, we go to a Mexican food restaurant for dinner. I drink margaritas and get a headache from the sweetness, from the alcohol,
or from both.

“At that point Kay Boyle was working with very few students because of the fact that she was very elderly,” my aunt says of her time with Boyle, as we sit in her living room.

“She was just a really lovely person, and she told me really lovely stories—though now, it’s been so long, and I can’t, in my mind, tell which stories are ones she told me personally and which ones I read in Being Geniuses Together. For instance, there’s a story about James Joyce and her first book. She was friends with James Joyce’s daughter, I think, you’d have to look that up, but she was often over at their home for dinners. On the night that her first book came out, she was there for dinner. I don’t remember if it was before dinner or after dinner, but James Joyce rose, and he had a copy of her book, and he came over and asked her, ‘Would you please sign this for me?’”

“I like that story,” I say. “It makes me think maybe Joyce wasn’t an asshole. I’m always worried my favorite artists are assholes.”

She talks about Kay Boyle’s advocacy for writers: “She was always an advocate of writing from underrepresented communities. I remember specifically, the last time I saw her, which was at some kind of conference. She spoke, and I went up and talked to her after. At that time, Louise Erdrich had just come out with her first book, and I remember her extolling Louise Erdrich as someone whose voice was representative of a group who were rarely heard from. That was very important to her.”

You can tell Kay Boyle is one of my aunt’s heroes.

I embarrass my aunt by telling her how she is a hero of mine.

I say, “There’s one thing in particular that you did for me, that you probably don’t know or remember. As you grow up, key moments happen that might not seem very important to everyone else, but for a kid, they completely change the way you look at the world—suddenly you see, oh it doesn’t have to be this way, it can be that way, or whatever way you want.”

She interrupts me with a cackle and a comment: “I think I know where this is going. Is this about Hemingway?”

“It is about Hemingway. I love that you remember this too. You told me you hated his writing and it completely shocked me. Because here I was, reading The Sun Also Rises for my high school English class, and thinking, oh, my teacher tells me this is an important book so it must be, and then the person I know who is the most well-read says nope. And I thought, oh wow, you can disagree with the conventional wisdom of which artists are great and still be literate, still have ‘good taste.’ It was a big moment for me.”

“Yeah, I just don’t think he can write women,” she says. “I get that. I mean, I like him. He’s not my favorite, but I like him, especially The Sun Also Rises and a number of the stories, but I totally understand that criticism.”

“I do appreciate the spare prose, but you know, he just couldn’t write women. And most of his main characters are assholes. I read them and I think, ‘What a fucker! I can’t empathize with this person!’ And the women, they’re all paper dolls. Whereas, when I read a man who can really write a woman, or when I read a woman who can write great men, I’m in awe.”

“That’s my love for Markson or Joyce,” I say. “Kate from Wittgenstein’s Mistress and Molly from Ulysses are women so perfectly drawn that I know them better than I
know most of the women in my life.”

As I lay in bed and I stare up at the ceiling, I imagine somewhere in some alternative universe is a boy named Tyler Buttonwillow whose unorthodox auntie is driving him home and passing an exit sign that says “Malone.”

She tells him it would make a great character name.

The bed is matter. My skin is matter. My bones matter.

She touched the bones in bed with her, the bones of the shoulder, the arm, the hand, and the thigh’s bones lying tenacious in her flesh, and the skull’s inexorability underneath the hair. If there is any strength it is in these, it is here, not in running fast to Candy for help or in writing Dear Mr. Sheehan.

—Kay Boyle’s The Crazy Hunter.

I ask her about her favorite films at breakfast the next morning and she mentions a Fred Zinnemann film called Behold a Pale Horse, which stars Gregory Peck, Anthony Quinn, and Omar Sharif.

Others are mentioned as well, but the horse motif sticks, keeps popping up. Of course, the universe is random and this constant horsing around is what happens in a chaotic system, but there’s something that happens when she mentions Behold a Pale Horse, some order I’m creating between one thing and the other thing and the blind horse of hers and the other blind horse of the book and the horse on the freeway that was staring at me not blind and horse riding itself, which we talk about at length.

“It is something I want to do before I die,” I say. “But I haven’t yet, for fear of it. And it’s not a fear of the horses, I think I’m scared of myself on the horse, of me doing something stupid.”

“It’s true, you can really get hurt,” she admits. “We all take falls. I was talking about this with a few ladies out at the stables recently. We can remember every fall—the why, the where, the what.”

I excuse myself when I get a call.

“Your name’s Malone? Like in the Beckett book?” Kay Boyle’s son asks me over the phone. We’re discussing the issue I plan to publish on his mother.

“I’m just so happy you’re keeping her flame alive,” he tells me, and it seems sweet, but it also seems sad. Her flame is but a few glistening embers on charred remains, giving way to the darkness of the night. How is it that a great writer can be forgotten? How is it that their work can wink out of existence?

If I’m not mistaken, The Crazy Hunter is the only Kay Boyle novel currently in print.

“Was it Ian?” my aunt asks. I nod. “I remember him. He wouldn’t remember me. I was just another of her students that dropped by the house sometimes, but at that time he was living with her. I remember. Does he still live in the Haight?”

“I’m not sure, but he does live somewhere in the Bay Area.”

“It was this big, green, Victorian home in the Haight.”

All we can see in the world is matter. And yet what of it matters?

We sit on the floor and open a suitcase full of family photos. There’s my dad who looks exactly like me as a
Antimatter is made up of antiparticles. These antiparticles have the same mass as particles of ordinary matter but opposite charges. Like James Dean, who played antiestablishment, rebellious youths in two of his three films. Charged in their own direction. Rebels without cause.

“The way you see people is important,” said Mama. “There is still people I imagine, things that happen, not at all the way they were. Dreams I like better sometimes.”

—Nancy Malone’s A Bird on the Sill.

My grandma and my aunt were the two family members outside of my parents and brother whom I was closest to, but they couldn’t be more different in every way but one: they were strong, independent women, who wouldn’t let their flaws or their failures, their disabilities or their situations, affect their world or worldview.

Look at me, I am another woman sitting here on the grass, only not established, not recognized yet, but I am a woman sitting here watching you refuse the stream its current by your will.

—Kay Boyle’s The Crazy Hunter.

I drive into Oakland to Jack London Square. I walk along the water and eat my second day secret lunch and look for the thing I came to this promenade for: Jack London’s Yukon cabin.

It’s a small shack with a plaque out front. I imagine London living alone and looking for gold and writing words that will one day be forgotten but luckily are not yet forgotten.
A nearby plaque repeats his words: “I would rather be ashes than dust!”

I drive across the Bay Bridge toward San Francisco State. Boats in the bay seem still as buoys.

_How big, clumsy, and absolutely powerless the ship seemed. She had wanted it to suddenly break away, speed about in reckless figure eights, but knew it couldn’t possibly—never would._

—Nancy Malone’s _A Bird on the Sill._

I haven’t been back to the campus since I went here a decade and a half ago. I remember walking onto this campus on the morning of September 11th, 2001. It was my first month of college. There was a girl with a knee on the ground at the corner of 19th and Holloway, looking up, as though she were a suitor proposing, but she was crying, staring at the sky, perhaps searching for planes.

It is odd to be back here, remembering that girl on this corner, remembering the thought that I had that day that today is the day the world changes and it did and it didn’t. I climb the stairs at the library and find my aunt’s thesis, _A Bird on the Sill_, in the stacks. I take photos of all three hundred of its pages so I can read it later.

One morning, when I was a toddler at church with my parents during some Sunday service, I broke free from the pew and ran into the center aisle, no longer a prisoner of any hands that could grab me and shush me. I pointed to the giant stained glass mosaic of Jesus Christ that stood behind the priest, glowing from the light of the late morning sun. The savior’s glass robe looked like a dress and his hair flowed in lady-like locks down his dove-white neck. I shouted for the entire church to hear: “That looks like Aunt Nancy!”

On the final night, we talk about ghosts and gods and whether or not she believes. She tells a story about a horse who died in her and her friend’s arms, how they both felt something. Her friend claims to have seen its spirit, and my aunt doesn’t exactly go that far, but she does say she felt something unexplainable, something potentially supernatural.

I tell her with a tinge of sadness that I just don’t have a spiritual bone in my body, that I can’t believe in things that can’t be proven, and that I think maybe this is to my detriment, but that maybe that’s why I’m a writer, because in art there is the belief and the hope and the meaning and the order that I can’t find in the real world.

“What’s your definition of art?” I ask her boldly, knowing its either tonight or who knows when.

She says, “For me, to be great, it’s got to get me to understand something in a way that maybe I didn’t before or more deeply than I did before. What about you?”

“I mean I want there to be some aesthetic brilliance on a sentence-to-sentence basis and I want there to be some depth of thought and some thematic heft, but most importantly I want there to be some ambiguity, some nuance, some negative capability. I like uncertainty, mystery, doubt—questions.”

The word sits there in the air and I remember that my Aunt Nancy let me borrow a book of E. E. Cummings’ poems when I was a teenager and I still have it. I wonder if she misses it or if she wants it back. I think of the line that ends his introduction: “Always the beautiful answer who
The forty-three or forty-four years (he couldn’t or didn’t want to remember which) must for a long time now have been these fragments, discarded over some vague period of space or time; vestiges of a thing as irreplacable as life that had been given him entire and that he had let fall, the separate pieces lost in separate countries, before knowing there was any value to the thing or even that he carried anything at all.

—Kay Boyle’s *The Crazy Hunter*.

We hug and we say I love you. She kisses me on the cheek.

“Why can’t you just relax and take for granted that I love you?”

—Nancy Malone’s *A Bird on the Sill*.

It’s a love of compatriots, of conspirators, as though we share a secret that we don’t even know, whose whispered words are voiceless, and yet so full of voice—for we are the storytellers, the writers, the fillers of the blank page, the ones for whom words mean more than words, the godless Malones who create worlds and don’t even think to rest on the seventh day.

I promise to visit again soon, but there’s a melancholy in the promise, an acknowledgement that it’ll probably be another year, another lifetime, before we make that happen. It’s too easy for us to drown ourselves in our books and our jobs and our passions and let the months turn into years.

But at the very center of it was something else—a strain, Anait thought, like a cry, piercing and brittle.

—Nancy Malone’s *A Bird on the Sill*. 
Do we remember every fall? The why, the where, the what?

Always the beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question?

I pull out of the driveway, wondering if next time I’ll struggle to remember what it looks like. Will I pass it by in the dark again? Will I still remember the masks?

But at night the stable door moved back and the latch of the stall gate was lifted and he moved out in blindness and wonder with her into the slowly reconstituted, slowly redeemed and infinite world.  
—Kay Boyle’s *The Crazy Hunter.*

One freeway leads to another and to another.  
I contemplate driving out to Carmel by the Sea to see the Lone Cypress, which sits like a bird on a sill, edging off a cliff, about to dive into the Pacific or take flight and head west towards the Far East. Instead, I stay huddled with the other people in cars on the freeway, going eighty, and heading home.

I have no Life but this—  
To lead it here—  
Nor any Death—but lest Dispelled from there—

Nor tie to Earths to come—  
Nor Action new—  
Except through this extent—  
The Realm of you—
Briefer Mentions from the Pages of *The Dial*: 
*Mr. Antiphilos, Satyr* 
& *An Outline of Wells*

*Mr. Antiphilos, Satyr* by Remy de Gourmont: 
Antiphilos, Satyr, cries that beauty is a rarity, adding that “even the immortal nymphs are sometimes a little flat-nosed.” The words of a connoisseur of women voiced by an experimenter with civilization who hides his hoofs in provincial shoes and secretly polishes his horns. In this brilliant satire Gourmont is distinctly of the Symbolists who have cause Anatole France to wring his hands and to cry, in effect, “But I wish I could like them, for I do believe they’re sincere.”

*An Outline of Wells* by Sidney Dark: 
A defence of Wells, the artist, from the thrusts of adverse criticism. Mr. Dark has written the book with an evident chip on his shoulder. He begins by resenting the idiosyncrasies of genius, from which H. G. Wells as the short, stocky, and democratic Britisher has apparently escaped. He objects to the intellectual who “stands at the street corners and thanks God that he is not as other men.” Wells does not. But Mr. Dark’s chief quarrel is with H. L. Mencken whom he quotes not infrequently. These quotations, incidentally, form the only vital bits of critical analysis in the entire work. The author is not spiteful, however, and his comparisons are interesting.
Lola gave a party and nearly everyone in the city interested in the magazine came in late or early. The two rooms in the basement were jammed with writers, painters, musicians, dilettanti, and old copies of the magazine. Joseph Stella turned up, as well as Maxwell Bodenheim, whose work, up to till then, had not been accepted. I did not know many of the faces. Eyes shining above her scimitar nose, Kay Boyle helped Lola make the guests welcome...

This is Harold Loeb, in 1922 the publisher of the very hot Broom magazine. Lola Ridge was his American editor and nineteen-year-old Kay Boyle had just become her third assistant. “I naively took some of my poems to the Broom office, found Lola Ridge alone there trying to handle all the work, and we loved each other instantly,” Boyle recalled. Ridge wrote at once to Loeb to give her a salary of $18 a week. Eating slices of Ridge’s cake and drinking whatever Prohibition would allow (and not), William Carlos Williams and Robert McAlmon hatched plans for their magazine Contact at her parties, 20-year-old Hart Crane flirted with everyone in sight, Marianne Moore read early drafts of her own work, and Mayakovsky stomped on her coffee table. Boyle had hit her element. “I sometimes feel that I am too pleasant to be great,” she later gushed in a letter to Ridge. But she would be pleasant to Ridge’s guests: John Dos Passos, Marianne Moore, Elinor Wylie, Jean Toomer, Waldo Frank, Babette Deutsch, Edward Arlington Robinson, Glenway Wescott. After selling Brooms in the lobby of a theater, “some forty-eight dollars’ worth during a Saturday matinee and evening showing,” Boyle would cut the cake that Ridge scraped up the money to buy, wash all the cups and glasses in the apartment, spread a tablecloth, all the while asking Ridge who was coming and why, and would she introduce her?

Boyle described Lola Ridge as “fragile enough to be blown away like a leaf whenever a gust of wind came through the door.” Perhaps her thinness was what caused people to describe her as “tall” when in photographs beside her husband or Edna St. Vincent Millay, both known to be barely five foot tall, she matches them in height. A master of duplicity, Ridge was born in Dublin, averred that she was Australian, totally disavowed twenty-four years of her dirt-poor gold mining past in New Zealand, and insisted to her death she was at least ten years younger. After she arrived in New York in 1908, she probably worked in the sweatshops on the Lower East Side, judging from how knowledgeable she is in The Ghetto and Other Poems (her smash hit of a first book, Louis Untermeyer named it one of the best of 1918) although later she denied ever living in the neighborhood. Like many immigrants, she felt free to re-invent herself, and upheld an ideology to support her decisions—anarchy, a political stance very popular among artists in those days—with Eugene O’Neill, James Joyce, and George Bernard Shaw among her cohorts. Her belief in freedom was, however, honed on New Zealand’s extremely progressive politics, with such achievements as giving women the vote 37 years before the U.S., and setting a minimum wage. She also worked for Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger.

Sex was a favorite Ridge topic, alongside labor. Her
poem, “In Harness,” conflates the two, celebrating sweatshop workers having orgasms at their sewing machines, a common nuisance from the point-of-view of employers. “Brooklyn Bridge,” a poem that so influenced Hart Crane that his copy of her book falls open to that page, is a paean to S&M.

Brooklyn Bridge
Pythoness body—arching
Over the night like an ecstasy—
I feel your coils tightening...
And the world’s lessening breath.

Ridge is most shocking in the “bad girl” poems of her second book, *Sun-up and Other Poems*. She presents a complicated child who defaces, beats and then drowns her doll, and pulls the wings off flies to contemplate how a much-hated boy would look with his limbs ripped off. “I wonder/will he buzz/when I take him out to look at his body...” After the boy next door exposes himself, the speaker decides that God has ruined him. “You wouldn’t believe Jimmie was different...till he showed you.” She writes: “I like the picture of the Flood/and the little babies getting drowned.” She responds to her mother’s depression with:

> You scream at her face, that is white as a stone on a grave
> and pull it around to the light,
> till the night draws backward...the night that walks alone
> and goes away without end.

“Nice is the one adjective in the world that is laughable applied to any single thing I have ever written,” Ridge writes when she’s fifty and people were still trying to tame her. By then she was drug-addled and prone to arcane sonnets but still fierce in her dedication to poetry.

Her friend William Carlos Williams called her a “Vestal of the Arts.” When critic and fellow Yaddo resident Emmanuel Eisenberg cast her horoscope, he wrote: “Yours is a nature of intense idealism. It is almost completely uninterested in the literal substance of human beings or in the constructional aspect of individuals.” Kay Boyle commented years earlier: “She is made for everyone to worship—and she doesn’t really give herself to or actually NEED anyone.”

Boyle worshipped Ridge for the three months they worked together. “She is always for me one of the rarest and most beautiful persons alive,” writes Boyle. “I cherished and protected her as tenderly if she were a small, bright flame I held cupped in my hand.” Boyle claimed Ridge as a mother figure—a very positive association, since Boyle was very close to her mother: “I had the more satisfactory of childhoods because Mother, small, delicate-boned, witty, and articulate, turned out to be exactly my age.” Although uneducated, Boyle’s mother managed to give her a taste for the avant-garde and an appreciation for the proletariat, but “it was Lola who spoke the vocabulary I wanted to hear,” writes Boyle. Ridge “expressed a fiery awareness of social injustice” in “a woman’s savage voice.” Ridge gave her money for her first abortion and, according to Boyle, the two of them sometimes danced together at the parties, with Boyle as the lead.

Literary soirées had flourished in lower Manhattan since the 1910’s. They were used to solicit money to publish magazines, to celebrate a writer’s publication, and, most often, to talk over new ideas in politics and literature and art. In his *Autobiography*, Williams writes: “It doesn’t sound exciting, but it was. Our parties were cheap—a few drinks, a sandwich or so, coffee—but the yeast of new work in the realm of the poem was tremendously stirring.”
Kreymborg quickly tired of all the effort required to produce the magazine. According to him:

[Ridge] kept the movement going by giving a party nearly every time she sold a poem or an article, though editors sent her sums hardly ample enough to be converted into the refreshments gracing her dark room on Fifteenth Street…Some of the older members hobnobbed about Lola's room with some of the newer: Evelyn Scott, a green-eyed person with a satiric languor, Emanuel Carnevali, a young Italian with a tempestuous vocabulary that promised to usher new cadences into American poetry…Waldo Frank, one of the moving spirits of the now defunct Seven Arts…and entering the room late in the evening, Scofield Thayer, who had recently bought out The Dial from Martyn Johnson.

This particular night was sometime after Thayer’s purchase of The Dial in 1919 and sometime before April 1920 when he began publishing Marianne Moore’s work. She would give a command performance that night, reading her poem “England” at 2 a.m. “Even Stevens was inspired to try something,” remembers Kreymborg, but Wallace waited for conversation to reach a fairly confused height before he drew forth a paper that looked like a poem but sounded like a tête-à-tête with himself. Orrick Johns, Krimmie, [Kreymborg], Williams and the rest took their turn and finally Marianne Moore joined them…A beautiful poem few of the guests could hear distinctly, but which the mystery man from The Dial [Scofield Thayer] heard so well, he stole over to her and, after a whispered consultation, induced her to part with it.
Thayer had previously rejected the poem. He invited Moore to tea at his office, and walked her home. Heir to a New England wool fortune, he had an uncle who wrote “Casey at the Bat,” but his taste ran more to “The Waste Land,” which he published a few months after running Moore’s poem. Moore wrote the angry, conflicted poem “Marriage” after he proposed to her a year later. Just prior to his resignation from The Dial in 1926 as a result of mental instability, Moore replaced him as managing editor.

Broom, the magazine Ridge was then editing, eclipsed The Dial in beauty. Published in Europe, it came oversized, 11 by 13 inches, and was printed on handmade paper with its artwork tipped in, featuring prints by Picasso, Leger, and Modigliani alongside the writing of the best of the American avant-garde. After recommending Boyle’s work to Moore and the novelist Evelyn Scott, Ridge accepted Boyle’s first poem for Broom but then resigned before it ran, after an argument with Loeb over the inclusion of Gertrude Stein in its American number. As Ridge put it:

Ten years ago, when Kay Boyle was a child of ten, Gertrude Stein was quite the rage in her mother’s literary set in Cincinnati…I mention the fact to show the incongruity of the inclusion of Stein—a woman who reached the height of her notoriety [sic] a decade ago—

Loeb, with upstart Matthew Josephson working behind the scenes to gain control of the magazine, insisted on Stein’s inclusion. Ridge and Boyle worked on the magazine for no compensation for another month, and then Ridge resigned again, this time offering to buy the magazine from Loeb. He agreed, and then backed out, handing it over to Josephson who promptly ran it into the ground in four issues.

Twenty-year-old Boyle took it upon herself to confront Loeb in person on behalf of Ridge. In Europe with her new French husband, she roused Loeb in Paris, in bed with his mistress. She “told him with heat and bitterness what I thought he had made of Broom, and he apologized for almost everything in it.” Loeb said he had no idea they worked for no pay through March, but Boyle had in her possession his letter thanking her for just that sacrifice. While she may have condemned him, she didn’t hesitate to submit another poem to Josephson for one of the final issues of Broom.

But Boyle still needed Ridge, even if she was no longer an important editor. She persuaded her to help procure a grant from the Garland Fund, an organization that funded liberal and radical causes. Her sample poems were Whitmanic like Ridge’s, and touched on labor. Ridge didn’t succeed in securing the grant despite being friendly enough with the young millionaire Charles Garland that he had helped send off an issue of Broom. He had also been part of the committee that funded the expansion of Ridge’s groundbreaking speech, “Woman and Creative Will,” on the androgyny of creativity that she delivered in 1919, ten years before Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own.” Boyle had spent only a few days dropping off Eugene Debs leaflets in Chicago, which did not convince the fund of her radical stance, nor did they see how her poetry would further the cause of the working class. She was much disappointed. Ridge’s response was to send $100 to Boyle’s mother, who had sold her carpets in order to join her daughter in Europe. Boyle asked for further loans in nearly every letter, although eventually she admitted that Richard had “had a fine raise.” Boyle was also thinking of starting her own magazine. “You are not strong, [and] that prevents me from suggesting any sort of cooperation,” but then she asked Ridge to send anything
“People felt the necessity of either defending or abusing [Ridge] whenever her name came up,” writes Kay Boyle decades later. The abuse seems to have won. When McCarthyism asserted itself in the 50’s, it made even the mention of Ridge’s third book, *Red Flag*, a red flag. Those few who have heard of Ridge now think of her as a writer of bad propaganda poems. But in Ridge’s belief of individual freedom, she embraced all subjects and admonished other writers with: “Let anything that burns you come out whether it be propaganda or not.” Taking Shelley as her model, Ridge burned fiercely.

But you do not yet see me,
Who am a torch blown along the wind,
Flickering to a spark
But never out.

She found and Boyle would publish it. Eventually she wrote that she would consider listing Ridge as associate editor, with herself as publisher. As soon as she finished the novel she was working on, she insisted that Ridge read it. “I want you to see it and write me all you think of it.” Then she suggested that Ridge take her (unread) novel to her publisher. By 1925, Boyle was demanding that Ridge re-read her novel after she had given her comments—and to send the name of an agent.

Two years later, Boyle still wanted Ridge’s publishing connections. She had abandoned her husband for the poet Ernest Walsh, who had his own magazine, *This Quarter*, and tuberculosis. She casually mentioned his hemorrhaging in a letter to Ridge, but since she was now running *This Quarter*, to please send the subscription lists for *The Dial* and *Broom*. Their correspondence ended that year. In Boyle’s last letter, having returned to her husband with Ernest’s baby and *This Quarter*, she writes: “I wish you were near by so that you could edit and stimulate me.”

Ridge must have found Boyle’s constant neediness unattractive. She did not visit her in Europe in 1931 when she traveled, patron by patron, all the way to Baghdad. By that time Boyle had moved herself and her child out of the Paris digs of Princess of Sarawak, wife of the last white Rajah of Borneo, and into a marriage with Lawrence Vail and his two children by Peggy Guggenheim. Maybe all the domestic chaos put Ridge off. She introduced Boyle to the novelist Evelyn Scott, whose chaos was similar: she lived in a ménages à trois with the father of Thomas Merton who acted as unwilling brother to Scott’s son. Scott and Boyle had much else in common: both began as poets, lived abroad for very long stretches, praised Faulkner and Joyce, and wrote experimental prose. Their relationship proved more enduring.
Boylesque

If you've read Kay Boyle, and you're looking for books by other authors who write in a similar style to Boyle, here are some recommendations for you from readers of Boyle and the Boylesque.

Jonathan Morton on The Wave by Evelyn Scott:
Boyle and Scott were fans of each others’ work, and corresponded regularly until Scott’s deepening psychological problems caused an irreparable rift between them. Scott is unjustly neglected now, though in the ‘30s she was considered one of the most important of American writers. The Wave is arguably the greatest novel of The Civil War, and an astonishing modernist text which is, in a sense, composed of hundreds of short flashes of experience—we move from mind to mind, in place and time—including newspaper reports, letters, the thoughts of Brazilian cotton magnates, prostitutes, slaves, and Lincoln himself—all at a point the wave of war hits. One could almost see them as interlinked short stories, though the connective tissue and the structure of the whole text makes clear we are reading a cohesive whole. Her work was an important influence on Boyle’s writing and, as such, should definitely appeal to any fans of her work.

Donna K. Hollenberg on Paint It Today by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle):
If you liked the dramatization of the link between problematic maternity and the development of authentic, cohesive self-hood in Kay Boyle’s first four novels, then you’d also like H.D.’s early novel Paint It Today. Here H.D. divorces mothering from heterosexual subordination, replacing it with a lesbian love that enhances the heroine’s sense of integrity by enabling her to mother herself. This relationship leads to the heroine’s rededication to writing and it culminates in a veiled allusion to the welcoming of a child, described as an embryonic being, part self, part other, that suggests a desire for personal integration and ownership of her (pro)creativity. Also Boylesque is the tension between home and abroad in H.D.’s novel, neither of which satisfies. In Paint It Today this tension echoes and intensifies the heroine’s sense of self-division. Both writers offer a view of the stifling effects of rigidly defined sex roles in the 1920s.

Beth Widmaier Capo on The Girl by Meridel Le Sueur:
If you are a fan of Kay Boyle’s modernist style and focus on female characters, especially in her first novel Process, I recommend Meridel Le Sueur’s The Girl. Like Process, which Boyle wrote in France in the 1920s but which didn’t find a publisher until 1999, Le Sueur’s novel also had a belated publication: it was written in the 1930s, with pieces published as sketches in the 1940s, and was published as The Girl in 1978. Both novels can be read as bildungsroman of female characters coming into their sexuality in small Midwestern cities during the first decades of the twentieth century. Both writers were interested in how labor relations and radical politics impact the personal lives of women. Boyle’s prose style is more fluidly modernist, but both writers pack powerful and interesting writing into short narratives. And if you are interested in literary history and biography, Boyle
and Le Sueur lived fascinating lives and enjoyed long and productive writing careers.

Andrew Mason on Stories by Katherine Mansfield:
Like a cross between a Kay Boyle and a Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield has the ability, that both Boyle and Woolf possessed, to make the tiny ripples on the surface of our lives develop into the great waves that roughen the seas of our interior. They all understood that the accumulation of seemingly “minor” moments and feelings and connections can amass to mean more to our lives than the more prominent and supposedly more meaningful “major” moments. Not a lot happens in a Mansfield story, true, and yet much is going on. Woolf once claimed that Mansfield lacked “the ability to plot larger structures.” While that may be true, plot seems a secondary or tertiary concern for Mansfield, who is more interested in exploring people: who we are, what goes on inside of us, why we do what we do, and how we will react when others do what they do. Boyle’s critique of Mansfield was along the same lines, writing that she had a “constricted gaze.” But the world can be found in the small, and both Boyle and Woolf knew that, so it’s surprising they were so critical of their contemporary, who may be one of the best short story writers of the twentieth century, and certainly is an equal to them both.

Maria Cruz on Post-Adolescence: A Selection of Short Fiction by Robert McAlmon:
Kay Boyle said, “If Robert McAlmon had written only ‘A Boy’s Discovery’ and ‘A Vacation’s Job’ he would be more than worth remembering.” Sadly, McAlmon—like Boyle—is largely forgotten and almost entirely out of print. This volume includes fifteen stories, including the two Boyle mentioned, as well as the titular novella, Post-Adolescence. In the story “A Vacation’s Job,” McAlmon writes, “The only ambition I have is to understand, to be able to accept reality instead of trying to re-create the universe.” That is precisely what McAlmon does: his writing is not an attempt to create new worlds, but to wrestle with the one we have—to catalogue it, to explore it, to attempt an understanding of it. He sees the world as it is; he doesn’t glamorize it or gussy it up. His frank portrayal of sexuality and brutality often got him into trouble, but that is par for the course of a writer who refuses to avert his eyes or his pen. This honesty is what Ezra Pound saw in him and praised. Pound noted, “America is now teeming with printed books written by imitators of McAlmon, inferior to the original.” Still today, America teems with printed books written by faux-McAlmons, most of whom don’t even know the work of the man they imitate.

Amy Bauer on Men Without Women by Ernest Hemingway:
Kay Boyle’s skills as a short story writer are comparable to only a select few of the greatest in the medium. One of the most frequent mentioned in comparison is some guy named Ernest Hemingway. Edmund Wilson, a famous book critic for The New Yorker, called Kay Boyle’s style “feminized Hemingway.” Critic Mary Colum referred to her as “Hemingway’s successor.” (Wilson, of course, meant it as a diss; Colum as a compliment.) It should be noted that Boyle herself once wrote to a reviewer, “I always refused to meet Hemingway for personal reasons, and was never at any time influenced by his work.” In fact, in a letter to Sandra Spanier in 1981, Boyle wrote, “Maybe Hemingway was
influenced by me!” So I thought it’d be appropriate, when thinking about books that seem Boylesque, to recommend Hemingway’s famous short story collection *Men Without Women*. It’s rare to find a person who hasn’t read at least one story from this stellar collection. After all, “Hills Like White Elephants,” “The Killers,” and “In Another Country” all appear here. But maybe it’s time to see them from a different angle? Maybe we should start looking at Hemingway’s writing as masculinized Boyle? Just a thought.

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**Monody to the Sound of Zithers**

I have wanted other things more than lovers…
I have desired peace, intimately to know
The secret curves of deep-bosomed contentment,
To learn by heart things beautiful and slow.

Cities at night, and cloudful skies, I’ve wanted;
And open cottage doors, old colors and smells a part;
All dim things, layers of river-mist on river—
To capture Beauty’s hands and lay them on my heart.

I have wanted clean rain to kiss my eyelids,
Sea-spray and silver foam to kiss my mouth.
I have wanted strong winds to flay me with passion;
And, to soothe me, tired winds from the south.

These things have I wanted more than lovers…
Jewels in my hands, and dew on morning grass—
Familiar things, while lovers have been strangers.
Friended thus, I have let nothing pass.
There’s No Plot to a Life:
A Conversation with Kelley Baker

There’s no plot to a life, but in order to tell a compelling story that focuses on the life of a single subject, a filmmaker or writer, must infuse that life with plot. Kelley Baker is a filmmaker and author currently working on a documentary on the life of our featured author, Kay Boyle. He has written and directed three full-length features, eight short films, and quite a few documentaries. In addition to his own films, he was the sound designer on Todd Haynes’ film *Far from Heaven*, and six of Gus Van Sant’s feature films including, *My Own Private Idaho*, *Good Will Hunting*, and *Finding Forrester*. Against all odds, after working on it for thirty years, he is currently finishing up his feature length documentary, titled *Dangerous: Kay Boyle*. I sat down and spoke with Kelley Baker about his film and the writer it focuses on.

**MD:** How did you first hear about Kay Boyle and how was it that you got to know her?

**KB:** Back in the eighties, you know Reagan was our President—

**MD:** I was there, I remember.

**KB:** And I wasn’t real happy with the way things were going, and I wanted to do a film on American expatriates because I know people who live abroad and they were abroad for a reason. I thought, if I do that, I should probably have a historical thing in it. So I started doing research on Paris in the twenties, and Kay’s name kept popping up. And I like to think that I’m a well-read individual, but I didn’t know who she was. When I started in on this research I realized: *my god, this woman is amazing.* I was telling a friend about it, and I asked, “Have you ever heard of this writer, Kay Boyle?” My friend said, “Oh yeah, she lives about 100 miles from here [in Oregon]. I can get her address and her phone number for you if you want.” So I wrote her a letter and told her I would call her at such and such a day and time. When I called, the phone had been disconnected.

I thought, I’m too late. Because I knew she was elderly. I’m too late. But when I went down to my post office box there was a letter from her, saying she’d received mine and was very interested in talking, but that she’d moved back to California. So she said, if you’re ever in the Bay Area, drop by. Three weeks later I told her I was coming for whatever reason; I think I made it up. We went out for coffee and had a wonderful time, but she could only talk to me for a few minutes because she had to work on a review of a book. I was thinking: *she’s in her eighties and she’s keeping a schedule and writing? Cool.*

Over the next year or so I would call her, I’d go down, and I told her the whole focus of the movie had shifted, because I wanted to do a movie about her. Over lunch one day she said to me, “Surely you could find someone else more interesting to do a film about?”

I said, “No.” But she wouldn’t say yes. So we went back and forth on this for maybe a year, and every chance I could, I’d go to the Bay Area. Finally, she called me in the winter of 1985. “Amnesty International is throwing me a birthday party, and I’d love it if you could come
KB: One of the interesting Hollywood filmmaking facts is that no one gets fired for saying “no.” You get fired for saying “yes.” Verna Fields rejected a script for Star Wars. Her rationale years later was: “If you’d seen the version I saw, you would have rejected it too.” So with the government, it’s easy to say, “I’m going to do it,” but if it backfires, you’re done.

MD: This is the name of the game. It’s a game called bureaucracy—where we’ll all stand in a circle and the first one to do something loses.

KB: Yes. I’m co-producing a film now about Min Yasui, who was a Japanese-American lawyer. When the order came down to send the Japanese to concentration camps, he fought it and took it to the Supreme Court, and lost. I went to school with his daughter, Holly. It’s his centennial next year and she invited me to work on this doc about him. Japanese-Americans at that time were vilified. They were Americans!

MD: I’m curious what is it about American expatriates and that experience that made Kay Boyle the person to talk to about these political issues you were thinking about?

KB: We have a problem in this country—we’re always right. If you just go along with everything and agree, then you’re “a patriot.” But this country was founded on dissent, and it’s important to speak out and get uncomfortable, to hold people accountable.

MD: This is my interest in Kay Boyle, in the period of time when she was writing political work. If I was in my grandparents’ shoes, I ask myself, what would I have done? Would I not do everything in my power to have helped Europe’s Jews, for example?

KB: I think you would, because it was your family.

MD: I’d want my government to have done something.
MD: You’re speaking to someone who’s a third culture kid. My dad worked for the State Department. I grew up overseas. America for someone like me or Kay Boyle starts to be viewed through a cracked mirror.

KB: I don’t think that that’s wrong! I think to get better and to be better you have to look and see where you’ve fucked up. Maybe that can make us better. Kay saw things she thought needed to be changed and was very outspoken, and she suffered for those views, especially in the fifties when she was brought up on communist charges. Yet, I’m not sure she ever lost faith in her belief in America.

MD: In the “project” that is America?

KB: Yes. You know, the FBI tried to take her passport away, showed up at her door, and she threw them out. She protested war. She spent time in jail. She thought it was an interesting experience. “You should try it sometime,” were her words to me. She never lost the faith. Part of that had to do with her greater worldview. We need those views now more than ever. Churchill said something like, “If we’re not fighting for art, what is it we’re fighting for?” Kay tried to expose people through art to those values.

Regarding the expatriate thing, I think everyone should have to live as a minority at some point. It’s not a comfortable feeling—and that’s humbling. You’ll learn about yourself and others. Kay got that. She understood that. I have learned so much from her even since she’s been gone. I’ll remember talks we had—and I have this realization of “Oh, that’s what she was trying to tell me.” Part of it was that I was too young to understand what she wanted me to know. I was 25 when we first met! I just turned 59. I wish I knew now as much as I was convinced I knew when I was 15 or 20.

MD: As do I!

KB: There’s so much we can learn from Kay and people like her. I submitted this documentary about her to The American Experience or American Masters. I’ve submitted it to both, actually. But I talked to one of the commissioning people there, and his comment on my work on Kay was “Oh, we’ve done the twenties.”

MD: Yeah, that’s not it.

KB: It’s not the twenties. It’s about an American figure who witnessed and wrote about every major event of the 20th century. But she’s been written off. I will tell you honestly: not all her books are aesthetically great, but she was trying to get a point across, and I forgive her for that, whether she cares or not. I don’t know why people don’t know about her. Once you tell people about her, they’re blown away. There are amazing artists who did it for the right reasons, like her. Up until the end, until she could no longer write because of her eyes and arthritis, she was writing. And when she couldn’t any longer, I think that’s when she decided to check out.

MD: Tell me about her family. She was married a number of times, several kids.

KB: Unfortunately, some of her kids have passed away now, too. I was able to film twice in Paris, with her eldest daughter, Sharon, who was a hoot. Her father was the poet, Ernest Walsh. She would say her mother was a huge influence on her, as well as Kay’s second husband, Laurence Vail. He taught her to appreciate opera. All the kids I met are well-read, and well-spoken, and worldly, as in knowledgeable. Aware, political.

MD: Canny people. Like Kay.

KB: You know, you could never ask Kay a question. If you asked her a direct question, she’d say, “Well, I already covered that in such and such a book.” So you’d have to say something like “Did you see what Reagan did today?” and then work your way around to what you wanted to
Some unpleasant things happened to me that Kay never knew about, and I'd never have told her. Stuff that turned out to be good for her, but I got hosed. I'm happy great things happened for her, and it was all part of my education. One of the reasons I got into this is because her story is a great story, but also because I want people ultimately to pick up one of her books. This film will reintroduce her into schools, universities, I hope.

But there are lots of great stories in it. Ian has a wonderful story about how one night Kay, Laurence Vail, and Marcel Duchamp are sitting around having drinks maybe in the Algonquin. This is right after Kay left Laurence for Joseph von Franckenstein. Kay excuses herself to leave to meet him, and Laurence flies into a jealous rage and picks up the marble coffee table top and chases Kay with it! Duchamp has to get between them and starts shouting at Kay: “Run, RUN!” So she escapes into the night. Marcel finds her later, and then accompanies her to where she’s meeting Joseph. How many couples do you know where Marcel Duchamp had to break up their fight? Is that a good story? I don’t know. Laurence was a crazy man, a jealous man. Some of these stories you have to include. I want to be as faithful to my subject, to Kay, as I can be. I also have to make an interesting film. Because otherwise no one will watch it or pick up her books.

Mary Duffy: I remember hearing that the problem with a film like this, a biopic or a single-subject documentary, is that there’s no plot to a life.

Kay Boyle: Correct.

Mary Duffy: Sorry.

Kay Boyle: No, it’s a great question, because it’s hard to answer. One of the interesting things about this documentary about Kay is that so many things have happened during the filming, around the filming, just hanging out with her, I feel like it’s become more than a movie. My rough cut is four and a half hours long! Who is going to sit through that?

Mary Duffy: My favorite movie is Reds, so I’ll watch it.

Kay Boyle: Oh, we’re good there, then. There will be a four hour version, but I’ll also cut it down to ninety minutes or whatever. I’m also writing a book about her and about the film and all the stuff that happened that can’t go in the movie, encounters I had with various people throughout the process of making it. Some unpleasant things happened to me that Kay never knew about, and I’d never have told her. Stuff that turned out to be good for her, but I got hosed. I’m happy great things happened for her, and it was all part of my education. One of the reasons I got into this is because her story is a great story, but also because I want people ultimately to pick up one of her books.
KB: But with Kay’s life I couldn’t have planned, couldn’t have concocted some of the things that happened. She had to leave occupied France through Spain and Portugal to get back to the United States. She goes through a divorce with Laurence, marries this Austrian baron, Joseph von Franckenstein, and then goes back over to write from Europe. Joseph is a war hero, is captured by the Germans, tortured. Then in the fifties they’re back over here, and accused of being communists. She’s in disgrace, loses everything, and has to start all over again. She keeps fighting the U.S. government and eventually she wins out! Joseph worked for the State Department but had been ousted over these accusations, and eventually their friends (Edward R. Murrow and William Shirer) get the Kennedy administration to rehire him. Then Joseph is sent to Tehran, and eighteen months later he has lung cancer and he’s dying. About that time, Kay gets an offer from SFSU to teach in their creative writing department—which leads to the student protests there, which leads to Kay getting arrested, which leads to the public face-off with S.I. Hayakawa, the president of SFSU, where he calls her “the most dangerous woman in America.” In response, of course, she called him “Hayakawa Eichmann.”

But you’re right. With most single-subject documentaries, where do you introduce the plot? This has it all over the place. Her life would make a great movie. There are times I think, when this is finished, someone in Hollywood might see it and you know, call up Meryl Streep or whoever. I would not be surprised to see a dramatic version.

Some of the stuff that happened to Kay was horrible, but she kept writing. She kept doing what she did, moving forward. And if that’s not a message to pass on to others, that’s an amazing story, to me.
knew this was a story I had to tell.

In a way, the filmmaker who started making this movie was not good enough to finish it. He didn’t have the professional experience, but he also didn’t have the life experience. I couldn’t relate to things Kay told me. And now, I get it. That’s what has kept me going. A commitment to Kay, that I’ll keep going, but I have to do it right. There’s something about Kay and my memories of her and what I’ve learned since she passed away that drives this; this is stuff that didn’t really even click for me until about four years ago.

Why did she say I could do it and nobody else? Why me? It took 20 years for me to answer that, because I’m still working on it and I’m not going to let it go. I’ve had chances to bring on people with money to produce it and finish it over the years, but they had specific ideas about the movie and I didn’t agree with those. So instead of taking the money, I kept pounding my fists against the walls, and I think I’m doing it for the right reasons.

You’ll find the reasons to finish your book. And the next one!

MD: One idea I like is Nicholson Baker’s concept of a “closed book examination.” When he was writing about Updike, he didn’t go back and reread all of Updike; instead, he decided to just fish through the detritus of his memory of Updike, the things he’s internalized. I think about that because Kay Boyle is, well, dead. A dead person is sort of the physical embodiment of the closed book. Yes, we can read what they’ve written, but what we remember and internalize about the person, what shifts about them in your internal imagination, as you grow older, especially since you’ve known Kay while she was alive and now you’ve changed because of her.

KB: I hope the filmmaker that is finishing the movie can pull off the young guy’s mistakes. My experience now—it goes to what we talked about. I hadn’t lived life yet. Now I can look at decisions Kay made, and far from being critical of them, I get it. I can’t say that from just a few years ago. Sharon said in one of her interviews that when Kay left Laurence for Joseph everyone was a bit up in arms, but she said something like, “Now that I’m a mother, and I’ve been divorced, I understand it.” I think everything we do as artists is personal. So I hope there is “me” in here. Whatever you write, there will be you in it. We need that. That’s how we bring others into our vision.

If my film was just “Kay did this and Kay did that” then—fuck, I don’t want to sit through that, let alone make it—but by picking and choosing, I find things about her that are common to all of us.

MD: I’m fascinated by the conflict in her life—if she’d been less political, she’d have been less true to herself, but perhaps more successful.

KB: The thing we have to come back to is to find success: if you define that as fortune and fame, then Kay didn’t have any success, maybe. But I think she was a success. We have to redefine success. If more people knew her story, then perhaps more people would stand up and do the things they want to do—to have courage to do them. If you stand up for what you believe in, will you be “successful” in the conventional sense? Probably not.

Will you be able to sleep at night? Believe you had a life that’s worth living? At the end, Kay didn’t have much money, but I really do think she was successful, and I hope she thought so, too. The people who knew her, for the most part, thought the world of her. I hope we measure success through friendship, family, relationships, love.

MD: How much of what you’re doing is to evoke
for the audience a world that has been lost or a world
that now isn’t peopled with the same kind of people
anymore? That’s something I struggle with in writing
about the mid-20th century.

KB: You and I are minorities in that way. The world
is not what I thought it would be growing up. I wanted to
think that the twenties in Paris was a magical time. Kay
did her best to pop my balloon on that one. They were all
broke and just getting by. The only one in that whole scene
who was getting regularly published was Hemingway!
Everyone else became famous later!

MD: And it was a DIY proposition. You had
Scofield Thayer, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, H.D.
doing The Dial and other similar journals—they’re all
just publishing their friends. Beach helping Joyce, etc.

KB: Right! And we’re still there. Artists, for them, it
always has to be that way. I self-publish and self-distribute.
Well, I still like to think it was a great time to be a part of
a scene, as Kay was, but we all want something like that.
To be in a time when exciting things are going on. But
Kay says, “All the people who did great things were not
in the cafes drinking. They were doing their work in little
rooms.” We want to hang out with a bunch of people!

MD: It was less glamorous than we think.

KB: She saw the horrors of war and the effect it had
on people. Not just WWII, the Spanish Civil War. So
many of her short stories end up in death. It’s one of those
things that hit me when I reread them last year: damn you,
Kay, I wish you were here so I could ask about all this.

K.B.

Rivering out of yourself

lip-spread

finger-spread

flooding

into shallows

into great

depths

snow and city-water

well-water

connate, fossiline

connecting land

and land

staining soil grown

brittle with drought

Until I, here,

with my ear to the page

feel something unexpected

pooling

on my tongue
If Written, It Must Be True: Remembering Kay Boyle

“For I can recall now only your faces: Woody Haut, Shawn Wong, Rebhun, Turks, Alvarado
And how many more. Or I catch now and then the sound of a voice
From a long way away, saying something like: ‘Poetry is for the people.
And it should represent the people.’(You can say that again, Woody,)”

— Kay Boyle, Testament for My Students

Did I really say those words? I guess I must have, though I’ve no memory of having done so. But, then, what is written always carries a degree of certitude, if not finality, particularly if the person doing the writing is someone whose words bear witness to the highs and lows of much of the twentieth century. That is certainly the case with Kay Boyle, a writer as well as an activist—traits apparently inherited from her mother, who read Joyce’s Ulysses and Gertrude Stein’s Tender Buttons as a Farmer-Labor candidate in Ohio—who briefly entered my life, before politely retreating to a dimly lit corner of my memory, where she remains part of that enticing rubric labeled San Francisco, late 1960s.

It has always been flattering, if not slightly embarrassing, that she would cite me in her poetry book Testament for My Students, though these days it causes me to wonder who that person might be whom she quotes. Or, for that matter, if I really was her student? Because I can’t remember her having actually taught me anything. Nor could it be said that she influenced my writing. But, then, perhaps that’s as it should be. After all, even though she taught creative writing at San Francisco State from the early 1960s to the late 1970s, she always harboured a realistic attitude regarding her job, publishing, during that time, an essay in which she argued, tongue perhaps only partly in cheek, that “all creative writing programs ought to be abolished by law.” And even though she was my graduate supervisor, it wasn’t like we had the usual teacher-student relationship. We would simply meet, first in her office on campus, and then, once the 1968–69 student strike was under way, at her home on Frederick Street in the Haight. I remember our first conversation concerned a short essay I had written about discovering the work of writer Jorge Luis Borges. It wasn’t about Borges’s writing so much as about the pleasures of discovery, and how that particular discovery came about. In fact, the essay, in retrospect, was not dissimilar from the type of retrospective prose Kay would produce in a book like Being Geniuses Together, which she had co-authored with Robert McAlmon. That discussion aside, our conversations mostly focused on more immediate matters, namely the strike and the politics surrounding it.

Since I have no memory of having said the words she attributed to me, it not only makes me wonder who that person was who said or wrote such things, but the
My fondest memory of Kay relates to an event that occurred during the student strike, later corroborated by Joan Didion in *The White Album*. I’m referring to the afternoon when the newly appointed college president, S.I. Hayakawa, climbed onto the Speakers’ Platform during a strike rally to pull the plug on the P.A. and, to demonstrate his recently acquired authority, began to harangue not only students but members of the striking American Federation of Teachers, of which Kay was an active member, who had come out on strike in support of the students. As Hayakawa continued to berate the crowd, Kay, angry and fed-up, shouted “Eichmann-Hayakawa,” which prompted a nearly apoplectic Hayakawa to point in direction and declare, “Kay Boyle, you are fired.” Fortunately, it wasn’t something the future senator, Reagan factotum, semanticist, and jazz “expert” (to help quell the strike he personally invited Duke Ellington to perform, and whose profundity extended to stating that jazz is based on improvisation and improvisation is based on boredom), could easily affect; consequently, Kay, ever the agitator, would continue teaching at State right through the 1970s.

During the strike, my principal role, other than that of a faithful picketer, was to act as a go-between, carrying messages between certain student organizations and the teachers’ union. Of course, I’d known about Kay Boyle long before I met her. How could I not, with her well-publicized reputation as an anti-war and civil rights activist. And even though I had an inkling about her past, I hadn’t read all that much of her writing. Though I do remember her reading a story at the Poetry Center, which I couldn’t quite get to grips with it, set, as it was, in another time and place, inhabited by people who didn’t interest me. But, then, I was strictly into poetry, mainly the sort that came out of the Donald Allen Anthology of American Poets, and found Kay’s writing dated, belonging, no matter how revolutionary it might have once been, to a pre-war Paris past.
the fact that she had grown up in the heady atmosphere of mid-western populism, the politics of which had long been of interest to me.

Although Kay would prove an advocate for young writers like Sonia Sanchez, she appeared slightly hesitant when confronted with unfamiliar strands of contemporary writing, clinging, as she would do, to the fractious rise of Modernism, what she would describe as the revolution of the word, which had played such an important role in her life. I remember, not long after our first meeting, she asked me to have a look at the galleys of a book of poems by Joe Ceravolo, Spring in This World of Poor Mutts, which had just won the first Frank O’Hara award. She’d been asked to blurb the book, and wanted me to offer an opinion as to whether the poems were worth commenting upon. I don’t know why she would have felt insecure about passing judgment on such an excellent poet, particularly when one considers the influence of Kay’s old friend and mentor William Carlos Williams on Ceravolo’s work. So, on the one hand, Kay, who was already in her mid-sixties when I met her, was willing to accept what was on offer, but, on the other hand, she was sometimes baffled by it. I suppose there was a similar contradiction when it came to her politics and her writing style. Or, for that matter, in her somewhat dated sartorial style—dark grey suits, perhaps the very same tailleurs grises, which her in-laws deemed the correct attire for a young married woman on their first sighting of her in France in the early 1920s—and liberal amounts of make-up, as though paying tribute to the past while living in the present.

Reading Kay’s stories and essays these days, I’m impressed by their elegance, politics, humour, their ability to conjure up a particular time and place, as well as her exactitude when placing herself in the situations she describes. However, it was only in the late 1980s that I began to reassess her work, prompted by a remark made by my late friend, the poet and cultural critic Edward Dorn who mentioned that, in his estimation, Kay was a better writer than Hemingway. At the time I thought it was an unusual, if disparate, comparison—stylistically they seem so different albeit sharing a particular era. But I was reminded that the critic Edmund Wilson, whether complimentary or otherwise, once called Kay a “feminized Hemingway,” while Gertrude Stein compared the two writers as well, but only in terms of social class, offering the opinion that Kay Boyle was every bit as middle class as Hemingway. Or it could be that Dorn meant that Kay was a more interesting chronicler of those earlier decades than Hemingway, which, judging by essays in her Some Things that Need to be Spoken, might well have been the case.

Did Kay Boyle exert an influence on my future interest in noir fiction and film? I seriously doubt it. This even though I had already begun what would be a life-long obsession with Dashiell Hammett. Too bad that it never occurred to me to ask her about Hammett and Lillian Hellman, both of whom she surely must have known. After all, were there any writers of that era Kay hadn’t met or corresponded with? And in a sense I guess there was something noir-like when it came to the subject matter of our discussions, at least as far as Borges’s literary mysteries or Rimbaud’s disappearance were concerned. And maybe, if I had only been able, during those meetings with Kay, to cast my mind forward, into the future, I might even have been able to catch a glimpse of the person I would become. A decidedly trickier feat to accomplish than looking back on that younger version of myself, the one who knew Kay Boyle in an era when everything was, for a brief moment, up for discussion and ideas seemed capable of threatening
the social order. Not unlike those earlier decades that Kay liked to write about. Though partial to the past, Kay made more than the best of the present. Writing about those years when I knew her, Kay, in *The Long Walk at San Francisco State*, would put it like this: “I had lived on mountaintops, carried my babies in a rucksack on my back when I skied, believed in poets more than any other men, honoured French Resistance fights and Italian partisans, crossed into Spain with letters from the exiled to the brave and the defiant and the imprisoned there, and brought illicit messages out. And now, through force of circumstance, I was, of all unlikely and unsuitable things, a college professor. I was a college professor, who spoke of her institution as if it were a possession of the heart.”

**Love Song**

Little father,
Little mother,
Little sister,
Little brother,
Little lover,
How can I go on living
With you away from me?

How can I get up in the morning
And go to bed at night,
And you not here?
How can I bear the sunrise and the sunset,
And the moonrise and the moonset,
And the flowers in the garden?

How can I bear them,
You,
My little father,
Little mother,
Little sister,
Little brother,
Little lover?
Act II Scene II from

*Romeo & Juliet*

SCENE II. Capulet’s orchard.

*Enter ROMEO*

ROMEO
He jests at scars that never felt a wound.

*JULIET appears above at a window*

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?  
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.  
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,  
Who is already sick and pale with grief,  
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:  
Be not her maid, since she is envious;  
Her vestal livery is but sick and green  
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.  
It is my lady, O, it is my love!  
O, that she knew she were!  
She speaks yet she says nothing: what of that?  
Her eye discourses; I will answer it.  
I am too bold, ‘tis not to me she speaks:  
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,  
Having some business, do entreat her eyes  
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.  
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?

The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars,  
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven  
Would through the airy region stream so bright  
That birds would sing and think it were not night.  
See, how she leans her cheek upon her hand!  
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,  
That I might touch that cheek!

JULIET
Ay me!

ROMEO
She speaks:  
O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art  
As glorious to this night, being o’er my head  
As is a winged messenger of heaven  
Unto the white-upturned wondering eyes  
Of mortals that fall back to gaze on him  
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds  
And sails upon the bosom of the air.

JULIET
O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?  
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;  
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,  
And I’ll no longer be a Capulet.

ROMEO
[Aside] Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?

JULIET
’Tis but thy name that is my enemy;  
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.  
What’s Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What’s in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

ROMEO
I take thee at thy word:
Call me but love, and I’ll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

JULIET
What man art thou that thus bescreen’d in night
So stumblest on my counsel?

ROMEO
By a name
I know not how to tell thee who I am:
My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself,
Because it is an enemy to thee;
Had I it written, I would tear the word.

JULIET
My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of that tongue’s utterance, yet I know the sound:
Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?

ROMEO
Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.

JULIET
How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
And the place death, considering who thou art,
If any of my kinsmen find thee here.

ROMEO
With love’s light wings did I o’er-perch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do that dares love attempt;
Therefore thy kinsmen are no let to me.

JULIET
If they do see thee, they will murder thee.

ROMEO
Alack, there lies more peril in thine eye
Than twenty of their swords: look thou but sweet,
And I am proof against their enmity.

JULIET
I would not for the world they saw thee here.

ROMEO
I have night’s cloak to hide me from their sight;
And but thou love me, let them find me here:
My life were better ended by their hate,
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love.

JULIET
By whose direction found’st thou out this place?

ROMEO
By love, who first did prompt me to inquire;
Juliet

O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon,
That monthly changes in her circled orb,
Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.

Romeo

What shall I swear by?

Juliet

Do not swear at all;
Or, if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,
Which is the god of my idolatry,
And I’ll believe thee.

Romeo

If my heart’s dear love—

Juliet

Well, do not swear: although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
Ere one can say ‘It lightens.’ Sweet, good night!
This bud of love, by summer’s ripening breath,
May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet.
Good night, good night! as sweet repose and rest
Come to thy heart as that within my breast!

Romeo

O, wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

Juliet

What satisfaction canst thou have to-night?
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

ROMEO
The exchange of thy love’s faithful vow for mine.

JULIET
I gave thee mine before thou didst request it:
And yet I would it were to give again.

ROMEO
Wouldst thou withdraw it? for what purpose, love?

JULIET
But to be frank, and give it thee again.
And yet I wish but for the thing I have:
My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
My love as deep; the more I give to thee,
The more I have, for both are infinite.

Nurse calls within

I hear some noise within; dear love, adieu!
Anon, good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true.
Stay but a little, I will come again.

Exit, above

ROMEO
O blessed, blessed night! I am afeard.
Being in night, all this is but a dream,
Too flattering-sweet to be substantial.

Re-enter JULIET, above

JULIET
Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.

If that thy bent of love be honourable,
Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow,
By one that I’ll procure to come to thee,
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite;
And all my fortunes at thy foot I’ll lay
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.

NURSE
[Within] Madam!

JULIET
I come, anon.—But if thou mean’st not well,
I do beseech thee—

NURSE
[Within] Madam!

JULIET
By and by, I come:—
To cease thy suit, and leave me to my grief:
To-morrow will I send.

ROMEO
So thrive my soul—

JULIET
A thousand times good night!

Exit, above

ROMEO
A thousand times the worse, to want thy light.
Love goes toward love, as schoolboys from their books,
But love from love, toward school with heavy looks.

Retiring

Re-enter JULIET, above

JULIET
Hist! Romeo, hist! O, for a falconer’s voice,
To lure this tassel-gentle back again!
Bondage is hoarse, and may not speak aloud;
Else would I tear the cave where Echo lies,
And make her airy tongue more hoarse than mine,
With repetition of my Romeo’s name.

ROMEO
It is my soul that calls upon my name:
How silver-sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears!

JULIET
Romeo!

ROMEO
My dear?

JULIET
At what o’clock to-morrow
Shall I send to thee?

ROMEO
At the hour of nine.

JULIET
I will not fail: ’tis twenty years till then.

I have forgot why I did call thee back.

ROMEO
Let me stand here till thou remember it.

JULIET
I shall forget, to have thee still stand there,
Remembering how I love thy company.

ROMEO
And I’ll still stay, to have thee still forget,
Forgetting any other home but this.

JULIET
’Tis almost morning; I would have thee gone:
And yet no further than a wanton’s bird;
Who lets it hop a little from her hand,
Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
And with a silk thread plucks it back again,
So loving-jealous of his liberty.

ROMEO
I would I were thy bird.

JULIET
Sweet, so would I:
Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing.
Good night, good night! parting is such
sweet sorrow,
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.

Exit above
ROMEO
Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!
Hence will I to my ghostly father’s cell,
His help to crave, and my dear hap to tell.

Exit

A Selection from the Obergefell v. Hodges Ruling

No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization’s oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right.

The judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit is reversed.

*It is so ordered.*
On Our Nightstand

If you’re looking for interesting books to read, here are some recommendations for you from writers, artists, and intellectuals that we know and trust.

Jonathan Lethem on Submission by Michel Houellebecq:
Houellebecq’s latest, Submission, brings his project to its most accessible realization yet. What’s the project? Jerking your chain at the highest possible level, which a lot of people can sense from the vibe around Houellebecq, and therefore preemptively avoid. You shouldn’t. The free and wild play of his hatred for modernity and its usual self-flattering reassurances is a tonic to be relished. Houellebecq’s respect for his avowed models—Lovecraft, and here, Huysmans, reveals a sturdy commitment to older narrative forms, even genres—he’s a horror writer, here updating the “Deal-with-the-devil” tale. Lorin Stein’s relaxed translation catches how Houellebecq’s insouciant revulsion for propriety, and his congenital self-loathing, trickles down into a vernacular full of tiny slippages in and out of bourgeois formality, somewhat akin to Inspector Clouseau trying to recapture his authoritativeness after a pratfall. In the past these have read as errors of tone, but in Submission, they’re as funny as I think Houellebecq intends.

Jonathan Lethem on I Hate the Internet by Jarett Kobek:
Could we have an American Houellebecq? Jarett Kobek might come close, in the fervor of his assault on sacred cows of our own secretly-Victorian era, even if some of his implicit politics may be the exact reverse of the Frenchman’s. I just got an early copy of his newest, I Hate the Internet and devoured it—he’s as riotous as Houellebecq, and you don’t need a translator, only fireproof gloves for turning the pages.

Tom LeClair on The Pale King by David Foster Wallace:
Taking “On Our Nightstand” literally, I can report David Foster Wallace’s uncompleted novel The Pale King is on mine. I scanned it quickly when it first came out to see if it should have been published. I decided that it had the potential, had DFW finished it, to be a better, more mature work than Infinite Jest, the possible apogee of the systems novel that I’ve been following since Gravity’s Rainbow. After I saw the terrible movie about Wallace, the title of which I won’t mention, I put The Pale King next to my bed. Carefully chosen, a few pages of this work about the IRS and boredom can be an excellent soporific. Usually, I just open the book at random and read an episode to be reminded of this writer’s courage, virtuosity, and wit, all largely absent from the movie with no name. With my method, I’ll probably never finish this unfinished novel, but I think I can count on it being on my nightstand for quite a while.

Alex Gilvarry on Pushkin Hills by Sergei Dovlatov:
Sergei Dovlatov emigrated from the Soviet Union to Queens, New York because he was practically thrown out for bad behavior (our equivalent of drunk and disorderly). In New York he rejoined his family, his wife and daughter, Katya. This journey is the basis for many of Dovlatov’s
greatest works, among them The Suitcase and Ours: A Russian Family Album. The special thing about Dovlatov’s move to Queens is that within six months or so he was publishing his stories in the New Yorker and continued to do so throughout the 1980s. Mention Dovlatov to a native Russian and they’ll tell you he’s one of their most famous writers, on the level of Chekov. Everyone’s read him. His fiction, always autobiographical, might even be called memoir today. But even though he wrote close to his life, rarely changing the names of his family members, it’s still fiction, and some of the greatest ever written. Full of ribald characters, Russian wit, drunks, hijinx, love and beauty. He might be Russia’s Bukowski, only he can be read well beyond one’s formative years. Pushkin Hills is his latest to be translated into English (by his daughter Katherine Dovlatov with an afterword by James Wood) and it tracks our hero, Boris Alikhanov, an unsuccessful writer and invertebrate alcoholic as he takes a job as a tour guide at Pushkin Hills Preserve, a shrine to Alexander Pushkin.

Grace Bello on America: From Eisenhower to Reagan by Jules Feiffer:

Ask old-school New Yorkers who Jules Feiffer is, and they’ll know—unless they’re narcs. A Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist, his weekly comic strip for The Village Voice, featuring illustrated observations on modern day politics and mores, helped define the landmark alt-weekly’s ethos. Jules Feiffer’s America: From Eisenhower to Reagan is a compendium of these weekly comic strips, which span roughly three decades and seven presidential administrations. Here, he exposes the ironies and hypocrisies of American culture and the counterculture alike: the doublespeak of politicians and pundits, the racism of white liberals, the misogyny of utopists, and the empty bluster of moderates who called themselves radicals. As strong an artist as he is a cultural critic (he was an apprentice for the legendary Will Eisner), he captures his fellow Americans’ idealism and cowardice with deft draftsmanship and graceful lines. I can’t think of another comics artist who matches Feiffer’s creative range, his incisiveness, and, frankly, his productivity (his graphic novel Kill My Mother came out in paperback this year). As we approach an election year, his America feels urgent, necessary, and invigorating. It’s worth tracking down an elusive copy of Feiffer’s classic; his satirical strips are as funny as they are—even now—so painfully true.

Shane Boyle on That Winter the Wolf Came by Juliana Spahr:

If you called That Winter the Wolf Came a book of love poems, you would be half right and wholly wrong. This is also a book about hating things. Jostling to top Juliana Spahr’s hate list are cops, oil drilling, and capitalism. But in these poems, you cannot separate hatred from love. The two flow out of and back into one another ceaselessly. That Winter the Wolf Came takes stock of what there is to love—birds, friends, hiking, pop music, riots, etc.—even though there is so much for us to hate. The poems insist we have to love because there is so much we have to hate. Spahr’s collection is the third release from Commune Editions, a new press out of Oakland billing itself as “purveyors of poetry and other antagonisms.” And like the other two books Commune Editions has published so far (Red Epic by Joshua Clover and We Are Nothing And So Can You by Jasper Bernes), Spahr’s does not shy from these “other” antagonisms. Instead her poems shuttle us between lonely scenes of writing and crowded marches that shift swiftly into scraps with police. It is in the latter that Spahr makes
us long to be most, where we can be with what we love: “But not just any old sort of with, but with each other in the hatred of capitalism. And if I was a poet of many centuries previous, I’d call that the sweetest wine of the beloved.”

**Ryan Healy on The Suicide of Claire Bishop by Carmiel Banasky:**

An ominous painting acts as a portal through time for the two main characters in Carmiel Banasky’s debut novel *The Suicide of Claire Bishop*. The title refers to the painting itself, a portrait of Claire, commissioned from a mysterious woman named Nicolette by Claire’s soon-to-be ex-husband Freddie in 1959. In 2004, West Butler, a schizophrenic young man, sees the painting in a gallery, which sets him on a self-perpetuating quest to find the artist whom he believes is his former girlfriend. The narrative follows the stories of both characters through parallel windows of time. In less capable hands the conflicting tones of the dual narrative might have grown tiresome or gimmicky, but Carmiel crafts an organic synergy of personal science and historical fiction, both of which operate at their finest when the conceit is dealt with and then abandoned to focus on the personal, the small, and the intimate—much like Murakami at his most vulnerable, i.e. *Norwegian Wood*, and William Kennedy at his most poetic, a la *Ironweed*. *The Suicide of Claire Bishop* tells of art’s power to haunt us, and thus, the painting’s recurrence throughout the novel is poltergeistic; it disrupts and alters the lives of the characters bound to it. Banasky seems to possess an inherent balance between heart and mind, one needed to pull off a novel so intricate, personal, complex, and moving as this.

**Tyler Malone on Memory Theater by Simon Critchley:**

“I was dying. That much was certain. The rest is fiction.” So begins one of the strangest little stories I’ve ever read—something that borrows from Tom McCarthy and Adolfo Bioy Casares and Jorge Luis Borges, and yet remains entirely its own thing, a truly idiosyncratic text. The “fiction” that follows is a funny meditation on madness and memory, through the eyes of a Simon Critchley that resembles the Simon Critchley I’ve had the pleasure of interviewing a number of times (and yet also doesn’t resemble him). The most recent time I interviewed him, he told me, “I don’t approve of philosophers writing fiction in general. It’s a bit lame.” As a rule, he’s right. Rarely can philosophers write decent fiction. Sartre and Camus are two rare exceptions to the rule. This book proves Critchley is another exception. That is if this is “fiction” at all. While reading, one is never quite sure if this is a novella, an essay, a memoir of sorts, or something else, something hybrid, something ambiguous? Whatever it is, it’s a sort of sequel to or sibling of his hilarious *The Book of Dead Philosophers*. That book ends with an entry on Critchley himself, where he writes the famous Shakespeare line, “Exit pursued by bear.” I see *Memory Theater* as a fleshing out of his final entry. Instead of exit pursued by bear, it’s exit pursing tidal charts, perhaps.
Swimming Nan

Pour all ingredients into a shaker. Do a dry shake (no ice), then add ice quickly after and shake vigorously for 30 seconds. Strain into a tumbler glass and pour prosecco around the rim, turning the glass as you pour. Garnish with a candied maraschino cherry and strikes of creme de violet bitters.

“The woman and the girl began undressing in the bushes near the water, modestly taking their garments off at a little distance from each other and with their backs turned so as not to surprise each other’s abashed flesh.” So begins Kay Boyle’s novella The Crazy Hunter. The story takes place in England—hence British gin as the base spirit. I then wanted to consider the drink’s viscosity, as the story starts out with the girl, Nan, recently returned home, swimming in a lake with her mother. “She let the current turn and draw her down-stream towards the blue rubber cap, past the water-beaded floating head with its face turned upward in repose to the sun’s light hanging palely on the meadows and trees.” Swimming could be considered symbolic of a freedom of thought, the proto-feminism of a strong-willed protagonist drawing lines in the sand between what was expected of her and what she wanted for herself. “Mother, I know my bones, I live in this flesh, I know I have stopped growing. Look at me, I am another woman sitting up here on the grass, only not established, not recognized yet, but I am a woman sitting here watching you refuse the stream its current by your will.” The micro measurements of lemon, chartreuse, and cream can be taken as an ode to her burgeoning freedom and her particularism. I topped the drink with prosecco because it is my staunchly feminist girlfriend’s favorite drink—and this novella, to me, represented the fortitude, tenacity, and love that she possesses. Sandra Spanier, in discussing The Crazy Hunter in her book Kay Boyle: Artist and Activist wrote, “Kay Boyle allows love a small victory.” Even small victories deserve to be celebrated with a drink.
Panel of Dead Authors

What are your thoughts on Don Delillo receiving the National Book Foundation’s prestigious “Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters”?

SAUL BELLOW:
"It’s a high honor I now proudly share with him, though I’m not sure either of us can live up to the impressive literary contributions of the other great recipients of this award, such as Oprah Winfrey and Stephen King."

DAVID MARKSON:
"If this award had margins, I’d write ‘Bullshit’ in them."

ANNE RICE:
"I have two things to say about the fiction of Mr. Don DeLillo: NO VAMPIRES. NO GOOD."

SAUL BELLOW:
"Wait...why is Anne Rice even on this ‘Panel of Dead Authors’? She’s not a dead author. She’s...she’s...undead."
Billets-Doux Pt. 2

George H. W. Bush to Barbara Pierce:
This should be a fairly easy letter to write—words should come easily and in short it should be simple for me to tell you how desperately happy I was to open the paper and see the announcement of our engagement, but somehow I can’t possibly say all in a letter I should like to. I love you, precious; with all my heart and to know that you love me means my life. How often I have thought about the immeasurable joy that will be ours some day.

Ernest Hemingway to Marlene Dietrich:
I don’t know anything about the theater but I don’t think it would occur to me, even, to have you introduced even to me with strains of La Vie En Rose. Poor peoples. If I were staging it would probably have something novel like having you shot onto the stage, drunk, from a self-propelled minnenwerfer which would advance in from the street rolling over the customers. We would be playing “Land of Hope and Glory.” As you landed on the stage drunk and naked I would advance from the rear, or from your rear wearing evening clothes and would hurriedly strip off my evening clothes to cover you revealing the physique of Burt Lancaster Strongfort and announce that we were sorry that we did not know the lady was loaded.

Franz Kafka to Felice Bauer:
The exact information you want about me, dearest F., I cannot give you; I can give it you, if at all, only when running along behind you in the Tiergarten, you always on the point of vanishing altogether, and I on the point of prostrating myself; only when thus humiliated, more deeply than any dog, am I able to do it. When you pose that question now I can only say: I love you, F., to the limits of my strength, in this respect you can trust me entirely. But for the rest, F., I do not know myself completely. Surprises and disappointments about myself follow each other in endless succession. What I hope is that these surprises and disappointments will be mine alone; I shall use all my strength to see that none but the pleasant, the pleasantest of surprises of my nature will touch you; I can vouch for this, but what I cannot vouch for is that I shall always succeed.

Søren Kierkegaard to Regine Olsen:
Even at this very moment I am thinking of you, and if at times it seems to you that I am avoiding you, this is not because I love you less, but because it has become a necessity for me to be alone at certain moments. But you are by no means excluded from my thoughts and forgotten; on the contrary, you are present in a most vivid way. And when I think of your faithful heart, I become happy once more; then you are hovering about me, then everything else vanishes from my horizon, which expands infinitely and knows only one limitation.

Kay Boyle to Joseph Von Franckenstein:
Darling Joseph, I’m writing all these silly things because I don’t want to write other things to you—I don’t want to write to you in very big letters Joseph I can’t go on I can’t go on I can’t go on I can’t go on living like this, and yet I’ve written it to you just the same. I can’t go on Joseph I can’t I can’t—and yet everybody does go on. It
simply means being harder and harder all the time—not with other people but with oneself—so that everything doesn’t become destruction and at least the shape of something good and enduring remains. You will have to forgive me all this, Joseph, it may be impossible for you to forgive me unburdening all this on you—because you don’t know me, you’ve known me such a short time that you perhaps really don’t know me at all. You love me in spite of everything, and I want you to love me because of things too.

Charlie Parker to Chan Woods:
Beautiful is the world, slow is one to take advantage. Wind up the world the other way. And at the start of the turning of the earth, lie my feelings for thou.

Vladimir Nabokov to Vera Slonim:
Yes, I need you, my fairy-tale. Because you are the only person I can talk with about the shade of a cloud, about the song of a thought—and about how, when I went out to work today and looked a tall sunflower in the face, it smiled at me with all of its seeds.

Gustave Flaubert to Louise Colet:
But no, I should like to make of you something entirely apart—neither friend nor mistress. Each of those categories is too restricted, too exclusive—one doesn’t sufficiently love a friend, and one is too idiotic with a mistress. It is the intermediate term I seek, the essence of those two sentiments combined. What I want, in short, is that, like a new kind of hermaphrodite, you give with your body all the joys of the flesh and with your mind all those of the soul. Will you understand that? I fear it isn’t clear. It’s strange how bad my writing is, in these letters to you; I put no literary vanity into it. One thing conflicts with another. It’s as though I wanted to say three words at a time.

Pablo Neruda to Matilde Neruda:
When I set this task for myself, I knew very well that down the right sides of sonnets, with elegant discriminating taste, poets of all times have arranged rhymes that sound like silver or crystal or cannonfire. But—with great humility—I made these sonnets out of wood; I gave them the sound of that opaque pure substance, and that is how they should reach your ears. Walking in forests or on beaches, along hidden lakes, in latitudes sprinkled with ashes, you and I have picked up pieces of pure bark; pieces of wood subject to the comings and goings of water and the weather. Out of such softened relics, then with hatchet and machete and pocketknife, I built little houses, so that your eyes, which I adore and sing to, might live in them. Now that I have declared the foundations of my love, I surrender this century to you: wooden sonnets that rise only because you gave them life.

Oscar Wilde to Lord Alfred Douglas:
Your sonnet is quite lovely, and it is a marvel that those red rose-leaf lips of yours should be made no less for the madness of music and song than for the madness of kissing. Your slim gilt soul walks between passion and poetry. I know Hyacinthus, whom Apollo loved so madly, was you in Greek days.

Leo Tolstoy to Valeria Arsenev:
I already love in you your beauty, but I am only beginning to love in you that which is eternal and ever precious—your heart, your soul. Beauty one could get to
know and fall in love with in one hour and cease to love it as speedily; but the soul one must learn to know. Believe me, nothing on earth is given without labour, even love, the most beautiful and natural of feelings.

**Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf:**
I am reduced to a thing that wants Virginia. I composed a beautiful letter to you in the sleepless nightmare hours of the night, and it has all gone: I just miss you, in a quite simple desperate human way. You, with all your un-dumb letters, would never write so elementary a phrase as that; perhaps you wouldn’t even feel it. And yet I believe you’ll be sensible of a little gap. But you’d clothe it in so exquisite a phrase that it would lose a little of its reality. Whereas with me it is quite stark: I miss you even more than I could have believed; and I was prepared to miss you a good deal. So this letter is just really a squeal of pain.

**Virginia Woolf to Leonard Woolf:**
What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and incredibly good. I want to say that—everybody knows it. If anybody could have saved me it would have been you. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness. I can’t go on spoiling your life any longer. I don’t think two people could have been happier than we have been.
“The Politics of Love”
from *The Faith of the Faithless*

I have my doubts about the politics of abstraction that haunts groups like the Invisible Committee. But if we reject such political experiments, what then follows from this? Are we to conclude that the utopian impulse in political thinking is simply the residue of a dangerous political theology that we are much better off without? Is the upshot of the critique of mystical anarchism that we should be resigned in the face of the world’s violent inequality and update a belief in original sin with a reassuringly miserabilistic Darwinism? Should we reconcile ourselves to the options of political realism, authoritarianism, or liberalism, John Gray, Carl Schmitt, or Barack Obama? Should we simply renounce the utopian impulse in our personal and political thinking?

If so, then the consequence is clear: we are stuck with the way things are, or possibly with something even worse than the way things are. To abandon the utopian impulse in thinking and acting is to imprison ourselves within the world as it is and to give up once and for all the prospect that another world is possible, however small, fleeting, and compromised such a world might be. In the political circumstances that presently surround us in the West, to abandon the utopian impulse in political thinking is to resign ourselves to liberal democracy. As we showed above, liberal democracy is the rule of the rule, the reign of law that renders impotent anything that would break with law: the miraculous, the moment of the event, the break with the situation in the name of the common. It is a political deism governed by the hidden and divine hand of the market.

Let me return to mystical anarchism and to the question of self-deification or auto-theism. Defending the idea of becoming God might understandably be seen as going a little far, I agree. To embrace such mysticism would be to fall prey to what Badiou calls in his book on Paul the obscurantist discourse of glorification. In terms of the schema of the four discourses that Badiou borrows from Lacan (master, university, hysterics, analyst), the mystic is identified with the discourse of the hysterics and contrasted with the anti-obscurantist Christian position that Badiou identifies with the discourse of the analyst. Badiou draws a line between Paul’s declaration of the Christ-event, what he calls “an ethical dimension of anti-obscurantism,” and the mystical discourse of identity with the divine, the ravished subjectivity of someone like Porete.

Yet to acquiesce in such a conclusion would be to miss something vital about mystical anarchism, what I want to call its *politics of love*. What I find most compelling in Porete is the idea of love as an act of absolute spiritual daring that eviscerates the old self in order that something new can come into being. In Anne Carson’s words, cited above, love dares the self to leave itself behind, to enter into poverty and engage with its own annihilation: to hew and hack away at oneself in order to make a space that is large enough for love to enter. What is being attempted by Porete—and perhaps it is only the attempt which matters...
here, not some theophanic outcome—is an act of absolute
daring that opens onto what might be called the immortal
dimension of the subject.

The only proof of immortality is the act of love,
the daring that attempts to extend beyond oneself by
annihilating oneself, to project onto something that
exceeds one’s powers of projection. To love is to give what
one does not have to receive that over which one has no
power. As we saw in Landauer, the point is not to kill
others, but to kill oneself in order that a transformed
relation to others becomes possible, some new way of
conceiving the common and being with others. Anarchism
can only begin with an act of inward colonization, the act
of love that demands a transformation of the self. Finally—
and very simply—anarchism is not a question for the
future, it is a matter of how ones lives now. The question
is: how are we to behave?

—

1 Alain Badiou, Saint Paul: The Foundation of
Universalism, trans. R. Brassier (Stanford University Press,
2 Ibid., p. 52.
Masthead:

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Matthew Vollmer
Ian Von Franckenstein
David Foster Wallace
Alexa Weik Von Mossner

Orson Welles
Kirsty Whiten
Oscar Wilde
Virginia Woolf
Shawn Wong
Author Portraits for Issue 1.2 by Scott Brandos

Thomas Austenfeld studied, lived, and taught in Virginia, Missouri, and Georgia before becoming Professor of American Literature in Fribourg, Switzerland. He has written on expatriate American women writers, co-authored an Oxford Online Bibliography of Kay Boyle, and enjoys American poetry. In this issue, he recommends Kay Boyle’s novel Generation without Farewell for our Ports of Entry section.

Kelley Baker is an author and independent film maker. His films have aired on PBS, Canadian and Australian television, and have been shown at Film Festivals including London, Sydney, Annecy, Sao Paulo, Sundance, Chicago, Aspen, Mill Valley and Edinburgh. Mary Duffy interviewed him for this issue.

Sullivan Ballou was an officer in the Union Army during the American Civil War. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.
Amy Bauer is a writer and translator. In this issue, she recommends the short story collection *Men Without Women* by Ernest Hemingway for our Boylesque section.

Carmiel Banasky is a writer, teacher, and editor from Portland, OR. Her first novel, *The Suicide of Claire Bishop*, is forthcoming from Dzanc Books (Sept 2015). She is now an active member of the cult of Los Angeles. In this issue, Ryan Healy recommends her novel *The Suicide of Claire Bishop* for our On Our Nightstand section.

Grace Bello is an Interviews Editor at Guernica, an online magazine of art and politics. She is working on a book of interviews with contemporary comics artists. In this issue, she recommends the book *America: From Eisenhower to Reagan* by Jules Feiffer for our On Our Nightstand section.

Simona Blat is studying poetry at Columbia University where she is writing her first book. She works at Brazenhead Books hosting a weekly poetry salon and lives in Brooklyn. In this issue, she recommends Kay Boyle’s poem *American Citizen* for our Ports of Entry section.

Napoleon Bonaparte was a French leader revered as a masterful soldier and tactician. Notoriously portrayed as dwarf-like, he was actually 5’6”. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

William Adolphe Bouguereau was French academic painter and traditionalist, heavily focusing on mythological elements and the female form. His painting *A Young Girl Defending Herself Against Eros* appears in this issue.
Kay Boyle was an American writer and political activist. She published more than 40 books, including 14 novels, eight volumes of poetry, 11 collections of short fiction, and three children’s books. Our second issue is based around her work. She is the subject of most of the content. Excerpts from two of her novels, Year Before Last and Monday Night, are featured in this issue. Her poem “Monody to the Sound of Zithers” and two of her unsigned reviews from The Dial appear in this issue as well. Additionally, one of her love letters appears in full in this issue and an excerpt from another of her love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Shane Boyle lives in London where he teaches in the Drama Department at Queen Mary University of London. He is currently working on his first book The New Spirit of Performance. In this issue, he recommends the book That Winter the Wolf Came by Juliana Spahr for our On Our Nightstand section.

Scott Brandos is an education administrator, artist, and musician. His band Northern Labour Party is rooted in the analog sounds of the early 80’s post-punk and new wave movements, paying homage to the musical framework developed by Magazine, Gary Numan, Joy Division, New Order, and Peter Murphy. He drew the Dramatis Personae portraits for this issue.

Jericho Brown is the recipient of a Whiting Writers Award and fellowships from the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University and the National Endowment for the Arts. His poems have appeared in the New Republic, the New Yorker, and The Best American Poetry. His first book, Please, won the American Book Award, and his second book, The New Testament, won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award. He is an associate professor in English and creative writing at Emory University in Atlanta. Three of his poems are featured in this issue.

Charles Bukowski was a German-born American poet, novelist, and short story writer. His writing was mostly influenced by the social, cultural, and economic ambience of his home city of Los Angeles. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.
George H. W. Bush is an American politician. He was the 43rd Vice President of the United States and the 41st President of the United States. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Beth Widmaier Capo is Professor of English at Illinois College in Jacksonville, Illinois, where she focuses on 20th and 21st century American writers and gender & women's studies. In this issue, she recommends The Girl by Meridel Le Sueur for our Boylesque section.

Scott Cheshire is the author of the novel High as the Horses’ Bridles. His work has been published in AGNI, Electric Literature, Guernica, Harper’s, One Story, and the Picador Book of Men. He is a Managing Editor of The Scofield. This issue features his essay “Eight Possible Essays on Kay Boyle’s Monday Night.”

Simon Critchley is an English philosopher and teacher, who writes primarily on the history of philosophy, political theory, religion, ethics, and aesthetics. An excerpt from his book The Faith of the Faithless appears in this issue. Additionally, Tyler Malone recommends his novel Memory Theatre for our On Our Nightstand section.

Tandy Cronyn is an American actress. She has been developing a solo show, The Tall Boy, based on Kay Boyle’s short story, “The Lost.” It was presented last year at the United Solo Festival on Theatre Row in NYC where it won the award for Best Adaptation. Tandy has performed major classical and contemporary roles in theatres across North America. She has recorded numerous audio books, notably Foreign Bodies by Cynthia Ozick, and two volumes of Ursula K. Le Guin’s short stories, The Unreal and The Real. On the internet she serves as Artistic Director of Poetry Theatre.org, an online site for great poems read by distinguished actors. In this issue, she recommends Kay Boyle’s short story “The Lost” for our Ports of Entry section.

Maria Cruz is a Professor of English and American Literature. In her spare time, she obsesses over all things Modernism and Paris in the twenties. In this issue, she recommends Kay Boyle’s book Being Geniuses Together (co-authored by Robert McAlmon) for our Ports of Entry section. Additionally, she recommends the book Post-Adolescence: A Selection of Short Fiction by Robert McAlmon for our Boylesque section.
Sidney Dark was an English journalist, critic, and author of over 30 books. An unsigned “Briefer Mention” review from The Dial by Kay Boyle of his book Mr. Antiphilos, Satyr, appears in this issue.

Remy De Gourmont was a French Symbolist poet, novelist, and critic. An unsigned “Briefer Mention” review from The Dial by Kay Boyle of his book Mr. Antiphilos, Satyr, appears in this issue.

Emily Dickinson was an American poet during the mid to late 1800s. Most of her poems were published posthumously, though she is now almost universally considered to be one of America’s most significant poets. Her poem “I Have No Life But This” appears in this issue.

John Donne was an English poet. He is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poets and highly influential in the Modernist movement. His poem “The Good-Morrow” appears in this issue.

Hilda Doolittle was an American poet, novelist, and memoirist. She was associated with the Imagist poet group with included such members as Ezra Pound and Richard Aldington. She published under the pen name H.D. In this issue, Donna Hollenberg recommends her novel Paint It Today for our Boylesque section.

Sergei Dovlatov was a Russian journalist and writer. In this issue, Alex Gilvarry recommends his novel Pushkin Hills for our On Our Nightstand section.

Juliette Drouet was a French actress who abandoned her stage career once she became the mistress of author Victor Hugo. In this issue, an excerpt from one of her love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.
Mary Duffy is a writer, editor, and genealogist at work on a book about the Jewish refugee crisis prior to America’s entry into the Second World War. She is a Senior Editor at The Scofield. She interviewed Kelley Baker for this issue.

Paul Laurence Dunbar was an American poet, novelist, and playwright. He was one of the first African-American authors to establish a national reputation. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

Jules Feiffer is a New York based cartoonist, author, playwright, and screenwriter, whose notable works include the comic series Feiffer. In this issue, Grace Bello recommends his book America: From Eisenhower to Reagan for our On Our Nightstand section.

Gustave Flaubert was a French writer. He is widely considered to be the leading exponent of literary realism. His works, including the novel Madame Bovary, influenced a host of Modernist writers. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Richard Fletcher is an associate professor in the Department of Classics at Ohio State University, where he enjoys teaching a class about Classical Mythology to 700+ students. He is the author of Apuleius’ Platonism: the Impersonation of Philosophy (Cambridge, 2014) and writes a blog about the dynamic between Classics and Modern/Contemporary Art (http://minusplato.blogspot.com). This issue features his essay “The Limits of Mythology in Kay Boyle’s The Underground Woman.”

Tristan Foster is a writer from Sydney, Australia. His writing has most recently been published in Words without Borders, Gorse, Music & Literature, The Stockholm Review of Fiction and Black Sun Lit. He is a reviews/nonfiction editor at 3:AM Magazine. His commentary on Kay Boyle’s Plagued by the Nightingale is featured in this issue.

Robert Frost was an American poet. A United States Poet Laureate, his work won multiple awards including four Pulitzer Prizes. His poem “Love and a Question” appears in this issue. Additionally, a photograph of his grave titled A Lover’s Quarrel by John Stevenson also appears.
Du Fu was a Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty. His poem “Moonlight Night” appears in this issue.

Alex Gilvarry is the author of the novel From the Memoirs of a Non-Enemy Combatant. He was selected as a “5 Under 35” nominee by the National Book Foundation and received the Hornblower Award at the 2012 New York City Book Awards. He is the Artist-in-Residence at Monmouth University where he teaches fiction. In this issue, he recommends Sergei Dovlatov’s novel Pushkin Hills for our On Our Nightstand section.

Allen Ginsberg was an American poet and one of the leading figures of the Beat movement, perhaps most famous for his controversial, generation-defining poem Howl. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

Linda Hamalian is the author of two biographies, The Cramoisy Queen: A Life of Caresse Crosby, and A Life of Kenneth Rexroth, and is coeditor of Solo: Women on Woman Alone, a collection of short stories. She recently retired as Professor of English at William Paterson University of New Jersey. In this issue, she recommends Kay Boyle’s novel My Next Bride for our Ports of Entry section.

Woody Haut is the author of a novel, Cry For a Nickel, Die For a Dime, published by Concord Press, and three works of non-fiction: Pulp Culture: Hardboiled Fiction and the Cold War, Neon Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction, and Heartbreak and Vine: the Fate of Hardboiled Writers in Hollywood, all published by Serpent’s Tail. He has contributed to a variety of periodicals and has a blog (woodyhaut.blogspot.com) that covers noir fiction, film, music, poetry, and politics. In this issue, he reminisced on studying under Kay Boyle.

Ryan Healy is a writer who earned his MFA in Fiction from Hunter College in 2012 where he was a Hertog Fellow and an adjunct instructor. His work has been published in The Olive Tree Review, Big Bell, Neon Signs and at the Academy of American Poets. He lives in Manhattan and is finishing his first novel. In this issue, he recommends the novel The Suicide of Claire Bishop by Carmiel Banasky for our On Our Nightstand section.
Ernest Hemingway was an American author and journalist. A Nobel Prize winner, he revolutionized writing with his lean, terse, athletic prose. In this issue, Amy Bauer recommends his short story collection *Men Without Women* for our On Our Nightstand section.

Conor Higgins is a writer and professor. He is a Senior Editor at *The Scofield*. He interviewed Shawn Wong for this issue.

Ferdinand Hodler was a Swiss painter during the nineteenth century. He employed the use of parallelism in his later work. His painting *The Dream of the Shepherd* appears in this issue.

Chelsea Hodson, author of the chapbook *Pity the Animal*, is an MFA candidate at Bennington College. She was a PEN Center USA Emerging Voices fellow, and currently teaches nonfiction at *Catapult/Electric Literature*. She lives in Brooklyn. This issue features her essay “Second Row.”

Paul Holdengräber is an American interviewer, curator and writer, known for organizing literary conversations for the New York Public Library’s public program series Live from the New York Public Library. Tyler Malone interviewed him for this issue.

Donna Krolik Hollenberg, Professor Emerita of English at the University of Connecticut, is the author or editor of four books, most recently *A Poet’s Revolution: The Life of Denise Levertov*. She has also published many essays on other writers in England, America, and Canada. Her next book, *Denise Levertov in Company*, is in the final stages of review at the University of South Carolina Press, and she is currently writing a biography of the poet H.D. In this issue, she recommends the book *Paint it Today* by H.D. for our Boylesque section.

Michel Houellebecq is a controversial French author, probably best known for his novel *The Elementary Particles*. In this issue, Jonathan Lethem recommends his novel *Submission* for our On Our Nightstand section.
Horton Humble is a New Orleans-based painter, ceramicist, and visual artist. He recently completed a residence at Roundabout Studio in Lisbon, Portugal, and is currently nominated for the United States Artist Grant. To see more of his work, visit www.hortonhumble.net. His painting *The Couple* appears in this issue.

Dustin Illingworth is a Managing Editor of *The Scofield*. His work has appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Electric Literature*, *Literary Hub*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Music & Literature*, and *The Rumpus*. He is a Contributing Editor at *3:AM Magazine*. His requiem “Bow & Eros” appears in this issue. His comic strip *Yellowed Archives* will appear in each issue of *The Scofield*.

James Joyce was an Irish novelist and poet. Author of such works as *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, he is widely regarded as the preeminent figure of the Modernist avant-garde and one of the greatest authors of all time. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

Franz Kafka was a German-language writer of novels and short stories, regarded by critics as one of the most influential authors of the 20th century. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Frida Kahlo was a Mexican painter who is best known for her self-portraits. She was married to muralist Diego Rivera. In this issue, an excerpt from one of her love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

John Keats was an English Romantic poet. Though his work was not well received during his short life, his reputation grew posthumously, and he is now one of the most beloved and analyzed English poets. His poems “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Bright Star” appear in this issue.

Additionally, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

Anthony Kennedy is an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States who was appointed by President Ronald Reagan in 1988. An excerpt from his Opinion of the Court in the Obergefell v. Hodges ruling appears in this issue.

Porochista Khakpour is a novelist, essayist, journalist, and professor. She is the author of the forthcoming memoir Sick (HarperPerennial, 2017), and the novels The Last Illusion and Sons and Other Flammable Objects. Her writing has appeared in or is forthcoming in Harper’s, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal, Al Jazeera America, Bookforum, Slate, Salon, Spin, The Daily Beast, Elle, and many other publications around the world. She is an Editor-at-Large for The Scofield. This issue features her essay “Love (13 Disambiguations).”

Søren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic and religious author who is considered by many to be the first existentialist philosopher. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Martin Luther King Jr. was an American Baptist minister, activist, humanitarian, and leader in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

Alexandra Kleeman is a NYC-based writer of fiction and nonfiction, and a PhD candidate in Rhetoric at UC Berkeley. Her fiction has been published in The Paris Review, Zoetrope: All-Story, Conjunctions, Guernica, and Gulf Coast, among others. Her nonfiction essays and reportage have appeared in Tin House, n+1, and The Guardian. Her work has received scholarships and grants from Bread Loaf, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Santa Fe Art Institute, and ArtFarm Nebraska. She is the author of the forthcoming debut novel You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine (Harper, 2015) and Intimations (Harper, 2016), a short story collection. A review of her novel You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine appears in this issue.
Jarett Kobek is a Turkish-American writer living in California. **In this issue, Jonathan Lethem recommends his novel I Hate the Internet for our On Our Nightstand section.**

**Gaston Lachaise** was a 20th century American sculptor of French birth whose female nudes helped to redefine the form. **His bust Scofield Thayer appears on the title page of this issue.**

Meridel Le Sueur was an American writer associated with the proletarian movement of the 1930s and 1940s. She also appeared in a number of movies as a stuntwoman. **In this issue, Beth Widmaier Capo recommends her novel The Girl for our Boylesque section.**

**Tom LeClair**, Professor Emeritus at the University of Cincinnati, is the author of three critical books, six novels, and hundreds of reviews in national periodicals. He lives in Brooklyn. **In this issue, he recommends the novel The Pale King by David Foster Wallace for our On Our Nightstand section.**

Jonathan Lethem is the author of nine novels, including the bestsellers The Fortress of Solitude and Motherless Brooklyn, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award. His stories and essays have appeared in The New Yorker, Rolling Stone, Esquire, McSweeney’s, Tin House, The New York Times, and others. He currently serves as the Roy E. Disney Professor in Creative Writing at Pomona College. **In this issue, he recommends both the novel Submission by Michel Houellebecq and the novel I Hate the Internet by Jarett Kobek for our On Our Nightstand section.**

**Nancy Malone** is a retired professor of English and Mythology at Diablo Valley College. She received her MFA at San Francisco State, studying under Kay Boyle while she was a student there. **In this issue, she is the subject of Tyler Malone’s travelogue “Auntie-Matter: Notes on a Trip to the Bay Area to Visit My Aunt Nancy,” which includes various excerpts from her MFA thesis, a novel entitled A Bird on the Sill.**
Tyler Malone is a writer and professor of English. He is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of The Scofield. His writing has appeared in The Huffington Post, The Millions, Full Stop, The Offing, and elsewhere. He wrote the Letter from the Editor and interviewed Paul Holdengraber for this issue. This issue also features his essay “Auntie-Matter: Notes on a Trip to the Bay Area to Visit My Aunt Nancy.” Additionally, he recommends the book Memory Theater by Simon Critchley for our On Our Nightstand section.

Bethany Ober Mannon recently completed a PhD in English and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Penn State University. She discovered Kay Boyle while researching her dissertation on self-representation and activism in 20th century American women’s writing. Bethany currently works as a Research Associate for the Hemingway Letters Project. She interviewed Sandra Spanier for this issue.

Katherine Mansfield was a prominent Modernist writer of short fiction who was born and brought up in colonial New Zealand and eventually settled in England, where she befriended the likes of D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. In this issue, Andrew Mason recommends her book Stories for our Boylesque section. Additionally, an excerpt from one of her love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

Andrew Mason is a Brooklyn-based reader and writer. In this issue, he recommends Kay Boyle’s novel The Crazy Hunter for our Ports of Entry section. Additionally, he recommends the book Stories by Katherine Mansfield for our Boylesque section.

Quentin Massys was a painter in the Flemish tradition and a founder of the Antwerp school. He was born at Leuven, where legend has it he was trained as an ironsmith before becoming a painter. His painting Ill-Matched Lovers appears in this issue.

Robert McAlmon was an American author, poet and publisher. He was a close friend to William Carlos Williams. In this issue, Maria Cruz recommends his book Being Geniuses Together (co-authored with Kay Boyle) for our Ports of Entry section. Additionally, Maria Cruz recommends his book Post-Adolescence: A Selection of Short Fiction for our Boylesque section.

Claude McKay was a Jamaican-American writer and poet, who was a seminal figure in the Harlem Renaissance. His poem “Flame-Heart” appears in this issue.
Joan Mellen is a professor of English and Creative Writing at Temple University in Philadelphia. She is the author of twenty-two books, among them biographies Kay Boyle: Author of Herself and Hellman and Hammett. She has also written film and literary criticism, as well as history, such as A Farewell to Justice; Our Man in Haiti and The Great Game in Cuba. Her latest work, Faustian Bargains, will be published in September 2016 by Bloomsbury. An excerpt from her book Kay Boyle: Author of Herself appears in this issue.

Charlie Meyard is a guy who likes to create the funnies. His comic strip The Panel of Dead Authors will appear in each issue of The Scofield.

Amedeo Modigliani was an Italian painter and sculptor who worked mainly in France. He is known for portraits and nudes in a modern style characterized by the elongation of faces and figures. His painting Reclining Nude appears in this issue.

Deborah Denenholz Morse is the Vera W. Barkley Term Professor of English and inaugural Fellow of the Center for the Liberal Arts at The College of William and Mary. Deborah is also currently a Plumeri Faculty Excellence Scholar at the College. She is the author of the first feminist study of Anthony Trollope, Women in Trollope's Palliser Novels, and Reforming Trollope: Race, Gender, and Englishness in the Novels of Anthony Trollope (Ashgate 2013). She has published forty essays on the Brontës, Trollope, Gaskell, Maxine Hong Kingston, A.S. Byatt, Mona Simpson, Kay Boyle, Elizabeth Coles Taylor, Hesba Stretton, Catherine Cookson, and within Animal Studies. In this issue, she recommends Kay Boyle's short story “Winter Night” for our Ports of Entry section.

Jonathan Morton lives in London. His writing has been published in a number of magazines, journals, and anthologies including Words Without Borders, Magma, and Rialto, and he was a contributor to 1001 Books to Read Before You Die. In this issue, he recommends the novel The Wave by Evelyn Scott for our Boylesque section. Additionally, his poem “K.B.” appears in this issue.

Vladimir Nabokov was a Russian-American novelist, perhaps most famous for the controversial Lolita. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.
Pablo Neruda was a Chilean poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Brian Newman is a jazz musician based in New York City. A frequent collaborator with Lady Gaga, he most recently appeared on the Lady Gaga & Tony Bennett album Cheek to Cheek and its corresponding tour. This issue features his essay “Love Songs.”

Anaïs Nin was an author born to Cuban parents in France best known for her journals which span more than 60 years. In this issue, an excerpt from one of her love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

Charlie Parker was an American jazz saxophonist and composer. Also known as “Yardbird” and “Bird,” Parker was a leading figure in the development of the Bebop school of jazz. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Plato was a philosopher in Ancient Greece. He is considered central to the development of philosophy in the Western world. He was the founder of the Academy in Athens, the Western world’s first institution of higher learning. An excerpt from his dialogue Phaedrus appears in this issue.

Al Ravenna was a staff photographer for the New York World Telegram and Sun. His photograph of Kay Boyle appears in this issue.

Abraham Nunez appreciates post-punk and the occasional police procedural. When he is not playing music or opening restaurants he is generally up to no good in San Francisco, California. He created the Swimming Nan cocktail recipe based on Kay Boyle’s novel The Crazy Hunter for this issue.

Odilon Redon was a French Symbolist painter, draughtsman, printmaker and pastellist. His painting Baronne de Domecy appears in this issue.
Anne Reynes-Delobel teaches literature and translation at Aix-Marseille University, France. She is the current president of the Kay Boyle Society. **In this issue, she recommends Kay Boyle’s novel Year Before Last for our Ports of Entry section.**

Lola Ridge was an Irish-American anarchist poet. **Her poem “The Garden” appears in this issue. Additionally, she is the subject of Terese Svoboda’s biographical sketch “Lola Ridge Takes an Assistant.”**

Henry Peach Robinson was an English pictorialist photographer best known for his pioneering combination of joining multiple negatives or prints to form a single image, an early example of photomontage. He created the iconic photograph *Fading Away.* **His photograph She Never Told Me Her Love appears on the cover of this issue.**

Vita Sackville-West was an English poet, novelist, and garden designer. A lover of Virginia Woolf’s, she helped to inspire her novel *Orlando: A Biography.* **In this issue, an excerpt from one of her love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.**

Evelyn Scott was an American novelist, playwright, and poet. In this issue, Jonathan Morton recommends her novel *The Wave* for our Boylesque section. **Her poem “Love Song” appears in this issue as well.**

William Shakespeare was an English poet, playwright, and actor. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world’s pre-eminent dramatist. **This issue features one of his sonnets, as well as an excerpt from his play *Romeo and Juliet.***

Jim Shepard is an American author and professor of creative writing and film at Williams College. **A review of his novel *The Book of Aron* appears in this issue.**

Juliana Spahr is an American poet, critic, and editor. **In this issue, Shane Boyle recommends her book *That Winter the Wolf Came* for our On Our Nightstand section.**
Sandra Spanier is Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University. She is the author of *Kay Boyle: Artist and Activist* (1986), the first book about Boyle’s life and work, and editor of Boyle’s *Life Being the Best and Other Stories* (1988) and *Process* (2001)—Boyle’s long-lost first novel, the manuscript missing since the 1920s until Spanier discovered it in an archive. She also serves as General Editor of The Letters of Ernest Hemingway, being published in a projected 17 volumes by Cambridge University Press. Bethany Ober Mannon interviewed her for this issue. Additionally, a quote from her book *Kay Boyle: Artist and Activist* acts as an epigraph for this issue.

Laura Spence-Ash is an MFA candidate in Fiction at Rutgers-Newark where she is a Presidential Fellow and also teaches composition. Her work has appeared in *One Story* and *The Masters Review*. This issue features her biographical sketch “The Writer and the Spy.”

John Stevenson is a mechanical engineer, who lives in Fort Worth with his wife Michelle. An avid photographer for over 15 years, his work has been featured in numerous publications throughout the United States and abroad. He picked up his eye for composition from his father and his love of photography from his grandfather. His photograph *A Lover’s Quarrel* appears in this issue.

Dorian Stuber teaches at Hendrix College. His work has appeared in *Words without Borders* and *Open Letters Monthly*. He blogs about books at [www.eigermonchjungfrau.wordpress.com](http://www.eigermonchjungfrau.wordpress.com). This issue features his essay “‘The Emotional Thing’: Kay Boyle’s *Death of a Man.*”

Terese Svoboda is the author of sixteen books, with two forthcoming: *Anything That Burns You: A Portrait of Lola Ridge, Radical Poet* and *When The Next Big War Blows Down The Valley: Selected and New Poems*. This issue features her biographical sketch “Lola Ridge Takes an Assistant.”

Isabella Tangherlini will be receiving her degree in Communication Studies from Manhattanville College. Her work has appeared in *Hunger Mountain*. In this issue, she reviews Alexandra Kleeman’s novel *You Too Can Have a Body Like Mine.*

Scofield Thayer was the publisher and editor of *The Dial* from 1920 to 1926. He is the namesake of *The Scofield.*
Matthew Thomas wrote the *New York Times* bestselling novel *We Are Not Ourselves*, which was shortlisted for both the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize and the James Tait Black Prize, longlisted for the Guardian First Book Award, nominated for the Folio Prize, and named a finalist for the John Gardner Fiction Book Award.” It was named a Notable Book of the year by the *New York Times*, one of the fifty best fiction books of the year by the Washington Post, one of the ten best fiction books of the year by Entertainment Weekly, one of the five most important books of the year by Esquire, one of the best fiction books of the year by Publishers Weekly, Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and Apple, and one of Janet Maslin’s ten favorite books of the year in the *New York Times*. In this issue, he reviews Jim Shepard’s *The Book of Aron*.

Leo Tolstoy was a Russian novelist. He is often regarded as one of the greatest writers of all time. He is best known for *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec was a French painter, printmaker, draughtsman, and illustrator. One of the most famous painters of the Post-Impressionist period, his work showcases the life of Paris during La Belle Époque. His painting *The Sofa* appears in this issue.

Matthew Vollmer is the author of two story collections, *Future Missionaries of America* and *Gateway to Paradise* as well as inscriptions for headstones, a collection of essays. With David Shields he co-edited *Fakes: An Anthology of Pseudo-Interviews, Faux-Lectures, Quasi-Letters, “Found Texts” and Other Fraudulent Artifacts*, and he also edited *A Book of Uncommon Prayer*, an anthology of everyday invocations by 64 authors. He teaches at Virginia Tech. This issue features his story “The Visiting Writer.”

Ian Von Franckenstein is the son of Kay Boyle and the manager of her estate. This issue features his poem “At Night.”

David Foster Wallace was an American novelist and essayist, and a professor of English and Creative Writing at Pomona College. Best known for his novel *Infinite Jest* (1996), David Ulin called Wallace “one of the most influential and innovative writers of the last 20 years.” In this issue, Tom LeClair recommends his novel *The Pale King* for our On Our Nightstand section.
Alexa Weik von Mossner is Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of Klagenfurt in Austria. She has published widely on cosmopolitanism, affective narratology, and various ecocritical issues in American literature and film. She is the author of *Cosmopolitan Minds: Literature, Emotion, and the Transnational Imagination* (U of Texas Press, 2014), the editor of *Moving Environments: Affect, Emotion, Ecology, and Film* (Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2014), and the co-editor of *The Anticipation of Catastrophe: Environmental Risk in North American Literature and Culture* (with Sylvia Mayer, Winter 2014). An excerpt from her book *Cosmopolitan Minds* appears in this issue.

Orson Welles was an American actor, director, writer, and producer who worked in theatre, radio, and film. He is best known for the film *Citizen Kane*. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part one of our Billet-Doux section.

Kirsty Whiten is an internationally exhibited artist. She creates highly crafted artworks, intricate paintings, and detailed drawings. Several of her paintings are featured in this issue.

Oscar Wilde was an Irish playwright, novelist, and poet, perhaps best known for *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*. In this issue, an excerpt from one of his love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section. Additionally, an excerpt from his letter *De Profundis* also appears.

Virginia Woolf was an English writer and one of the foremost Modernists of the twentieth century. She is often considered one of the greatest writers in the English language. In this issue, an excerpt from one of her love letters appears in part two of our Billet-Doux section.

Shawn Wong is an author and Professor of English at the University of Washington. He studied under Kay Boyle. Conor Higgins interviewed him for this issue.