

The Kay Boyle Society

Virtual Panel

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Kay Boyle's Lives

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyQKPyu8SP0&t=24s>

Chair: Sandra Spanier, Pennsylvania State University

1. "The Writer and the Baron: How Joseph Franckenstein Shaped the Life and Work of Kay Boyle," Anne Boyd Rioux, University of New Orleans
2. "Kay Boyle: Our Last Days Together," Ian von Franckenstein, Independent Scholar
3. "Why it Matters that Kay Boyle's Irises are Blooming in My Garden: The Challenge of Writing Truthful Fiction," Carol Piasente, Independent Scholar
4. "Kay Boyle's Correspondence with James Laughlin," Krista Quesenberry, Albion College

"The Writer and the Baron: How Joseph Franckenstein Shaped the Life and Work of Kay Boyle," Anne Boyd Rioux, University of New Orleans

Abstract:

I have been working on a book about Kay Boyle, covering the years 1934-1954, from her stay in fascist Austria through the war, her time in post-war Germany, and her return to the U.S. after being branded as a Communist. It was her evolution as a writer in response to Nazism that has most interested me. Yet, the more research I have done, the more I have realized how instrumental her third husband, Joseph Franckenstein, was to that evolution. Falling in love with Joseph, an Austrian refugee of the Nazis, changed the course of her life and her work for the rest of her long life. So I have decided to write a dual biography, focusing on the two of them—their incredible love story, their encounters with fascism, their responses to it, and their determination to devote their lives to destroying it. Kay Boyle's writings of this period—such as *Primer for Combat*, *The Smoking Mountain*, and some of her best short stories ("Men," "Winter Night," "The Lost," and "Adam's Death")—are inextricably linked to Joseph's experiences and her great empathy for him and all victims of fascism. Kay told Joseph that he was the perfect "argument . . . against Nazism," symbolizing everything the Nazis sought to destroy. His experiences fleeing his homeland, being incarcerated in concentration camps in France during the war, fearing deportation or incarceration in the U.S., and finally as a member of the U.S. Army, as a spy for the O.S.S., and as a diplomat in Germany after the war, brought her up-close to the lives she most wanted to write about and fueled Kay's activism in prose and in life.

Bio:

Anne Boyd Rioux is Professor of English at the University of New Orleans and a specialist in American women writers. She has a Ph.D. in American Studies and has published seven books, the most recent of which are *Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy: The Story of Little Women and Why It Still Matters* (Norton 2018) and *Collected Stories* by Constance Fenimore Woolson (Library of America 2020). Her current project is a book about Kay Boyle, focusing on her years in Europe before, during, and after WWII, for which she has received support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and American Philosophical Society.

“Kay Boyle: Our Last Days Together,” Ian von Franckenstein, Independent Scholar**Abstract:**

My subject outline will be a brief recollection of time spent with Kay in and around the Redwoods during the last years of her life in Mill Valley.

Bio:

Actor, radio broadcaster, ESL (English as a Second Language) instructor, dance floor DJ, bartender, and theater set carpenter for the past 25 years, Ian has lived a full and varied life that would appear to have always embraced the many forms of communication. He holds a Bachelor of Music degree from San Francisco State University, and a graduate degree in Linguistics from Sonoma State University. Now, in his retirement years, he is pursuing yet another career in communication, that of an author of both prose and poetry.

“Why it Matters that Kay Boyle’s Irises are Blooming in My Garden: The Challenge of Writing Truthful Fiction,” Carol Piasente, Independent Scholar**Abstract:**

I first encountered Kay Boyle in a classroom at San Francisco State University. As a young writer struggling to find and trust my fictive voice, I looked to Kay as my muse and inspiration. She taught me to write, and now I’m writing a bio-fictional novel about her. The book takes the young Kay — ambitious, talented, but still naive — through her tragic love affair with the dying poet/editor Ernest Walsh, the birth of their daughter, and her emergence as a rising star of the ex-pat Parisian literary crowd. It’s a story complicated by a health crisis and temporary madness brought on by grief. Writing bio-fiction about a person known to me as a teacher, mentor, and friend carries a special responsibility for creating a character who believably comes alive on the page. Through examples from the novel, I’ll illustrate how bio-fiction differs from biography and history: voice, purpose, interiority, and speculation — not only what happened, but what could have happened. Voice and point of view: In biography, the story is told in the biographer’s voice. The biographer may quote from letters or recorded dialogue but is compelled to stick with what’s known. A bio-fictional writer is free to decide who is telling the story, whether in the first person or third. Purpose: The purpose of biography and history is to inform. Bio-fiction intends to reveal or create a character's interiority. The writer shows what a character sees through their eyes and what they think and feel at any particular time. Creating interiority In bio-fiction, character is created based on the known facts and a degree of speculation to get at the character's emotional truth. The job of the writer of fiction is to fill out what's known with the imaginative details that make a character ring true. What could have happened? The bio-fictional novelist is free to imagine what's behind the curtain, in other words, to speculate. In the end, the bio-fictional novelist has to be able to say: “It’s a work of fiction. I

don't pretend that it records what happened, but given the facts at our disposal, it imagines what could have happened."

Bio:

Carol Piasente is an award-winning writer who takes her themes from history, travel, and the hidden layers of the human heart. As a student of Kay Boyle's, she is now writing a bio-fictional novel about Kay's tragic love affair with the poet/editor Ernest Walsh and her emergence as one of the leading authors of the modernist avant-garde. "Kay Boyle was my muse and inspiration," she says. Kay's books and stories and a recently rediscovered cache of letters written to her by Kay, along with Kay's notes on her manuscripts, served as a touchpoint through the process of bringing "the character" Kay Boyle alive to a new generation of readers. When she's not writing, Carol loves to travel and imagine the stories that have shaped the locales she visits. She shares with Kay Boyle a belief that with privilege comes responsibility. You can visit her online at www.carolpiasente.com

"Kay Boyle's Correspondence with James Laughlin," Krista Quesenberry, Albion College

Abstract:

In Kay Boyle's letters, she bestows praise generously and genuinely on many fellow writers, but she is also never shy about delivering an honest critique. Her correspondence with New Directions publisher James Laughlin (from the 1930s on) is littered with Boyle's direct and matter-of-fact assessments of books she's reading, a running account of the many books she is eager to begin reading, and a catalog of the tributes, reviews, and translations she produced in appreciation of writers she admired. I have always understood Boyle as representing to Modernist literary history a radical sense of human interconnection and support -- not *unqualified* appreciation but material and professional encouragement of the people, works, and values she cared deeply about. Her correspondence with Laughlin, much of it as-yet unpublished, bears witness to this persistent generosity.

In this essay, I consider three literary-advocacy examples from the Laughlin-Boyle correspondence on behalf of Italian poet Emanuel Carnevali, young American novelist John Haweks (who was recommended to Boyle by Laughlin), and Japanese-American bookseller Shig Murao (during his recovery from a stroke). These three very different scenarios illustrate in small part how Boyle consistently worked to shape and promote an idiosyncratic, transnational literary community using her immense and fiery powers as an advocate.

Bio:

Krista Quesenberry is a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Albion College in Albion, Michigan, where she teaches professional writing, journalism, and literature. Her scholarship focuses on American life-writing of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and her work has appeared in *American Literary Scholarship*, *Life Writing*, *The Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *The Hemingway Review*, and various edited collections. She was also an Associate Volume Editor for Cambridge UP's *The Letters of Ernest Hemingway, Volume 5 (1932-1934)*. Currently, Krista is working with Sandra Spanier on a collection of Kay Boyle's correspondence with James Laughlin of the New Directions press, which is under contract with Norton and will be the first volume in its Laughlin series to feature a female correspondent. Krista holds a dual-title Ph.D. in English and Women's Studies from Pennsylvania State University.