

Kay Boyle:

An Inventory of Her Collection in the Manuscript Collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Boyle, Kay, 1902-1992

Title: Kay Boyle Collection

Dates: 1945-1990

Extent: 2 boxes (.63 linear feet)

Abstract: The Kay Boyle Collection includes manuscripts, correspondence, and personal documents.

RLIN Record #: TXRC07-A5

Language: English

Access: Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition: Purchases, 1961-2007 (R4289, R4815, R12298, R12578, R13442, R16497)

Processed by: Bob Taylor, 2007

Repository: [Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin](#)

Biographical Sketch

Kay Boyle was born in Saint Paul, Minnesota, on February 19, 1902, to Howard Peterson Boyle and his wife Katherine Evans Boyle. With the encouragement of her mother, Kay arrived in New York in 1922, determined to forge a literary career for herself. Soon her interest led her to Lola Ridge's literary magazine *Broom*, which published her first poem "Morning" in 1923. That same year she married French-born Richard Brault; a visit to his family in Brittany turned into an eighteen-year residence in Europe for Boyle.

In Paris Kay Boyle soon became a member of the American expatriate literary community, achieving periodical publication for her writing in Ernest Walsh's *This Quarter* and in Eugene Jolas' *Transition*. In 1929 Harry and Caresse Crosby's Black Sun Press published Boyle's first book-length work, *Short Stories*.

Following her divorce from Brault, she married artist-writer Laurence Vail in 1931. During the 1930s Boyle worked hard at her craft, creating short stories, novels, and poems that garnered her a strong and growing reputation. Boyle found particular success with the short story, winning the O. Henry award in 1935 and again in 1941. In 1943, two years after her return to the United States, she divorced Vail and married the Baron Joseph von Franckenstein.

At the end of the 1940s both Boyle and Franckenstein, again living in Europe, became victims of McCarthyite witch-hunts. Boyle lost her position as foreign correspondent for *The New Yorker*, and Franckenstein his post in the U.S. State Dept. As a result of these experiences the political aspect of Boyle's writing became increasingly strong and political activity a larger part of her daily life.

Following Franckenstein's death in 1963 Kay Boyle accepted a creative writing position at San Francisco State College. During her tenure at SFSC (1963-79) she continued writing and her political activity as well as gaining wide acceptance as a teacher. Through the early to mid-1980s Boyle held other writer-in-residence positions for briefer periods of time.

Kay Boyle died in Mill Valley, California, on December 27, 1992.

Sources:

"Boyle, Kay, 1902-1992," in *Contemporary Authors. New Revision Series*. Vol. 61, p. 103-107. Detroit: Gale, 1998.

Mellen, Joan. *Kay Boyle, Author of Herself*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994.

Spanier, Sandra Whipple. *Kay Boyle, Artist and Activist*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986.

Scope and Contents

The Kay Boyle Collection includes manuscripts, correspondence, and personal documents. The collection is organized in three series: I. Works, 1955-84, II. Correspondence, 1945-89, and III. Other Papers, 1948-90. In the first series the works are arranged alphabetically by title, and the second alphabetically by correspondent. The last series is arranged topically. This collection was previously accessible through a card catalog but has been recataloged as part of a retrospective conversion project.

Series I. includes a chapter from Kay Boyle's unfinished Modern History of Germany begun in 1961, along with several drafts of "A Poem for Samuel Beckett" dating from the years 1981-84. Also present is an editorially-marked typescript and plate proofs for her 1955 novel *The Seagull on the Step*.

Found in Series II. is a small but important collection of letters to and from Kay Boyle written in the years after World War II. There is a large group of letters from Boyle to author Roy S. Simmonds written in the period beginning in 1973 when Simmonds was researching his 1984 biography of William March. Also present here are twenty letters from Edward Dahlberg to Boyle written during 1967 along with a single prickly response from Boyle. Other correspondents include Samuel Beckett, Marcel Duchamp, Langston Hughes, Katherine Anne Porter, and William Carlos Williams.

Series III. contains an interesting response by Langston Hughes to, it appears, Boyle's criticism of Hughes' "On the Road," along with two contracts for Boyle's 1948 short story collection *Thirty Stories*.

Related Material

Additional material relating to Kay Boyle in the Ransom Center may be found in the papers of Alfred A. Knopf Inc., Samuel Beckett, Noël Riley Fitch, Charles Henri Ford, Bernard Malamud, Peter Matthiessen, and Evelyn Scott.

Index Terms

People

Beckett, Samuel, 1906-1989.

Dahlberg, Edward, 1900-1977.

Duchamp, Marcel, 1887-1968.

Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967.

Boyle, Kay, 1902-1992

March, William, 1893-1954.

Porter, Katherine Anne, 1890-1980.

Williams, William Carlos, 1883-1963.

Subjects

Authors, American--20th century--Biography.

Document Types

Christmas cards.

Legal documents.

Postcards.

Series I. Works, 1955-1984

A Modern History of Germany, ch. 3, p. 64-95, typescript, 1961

**Box 1
Folder 1**

A Poem for Samuel Beckett, partial drafts, 1981-84

Folder 2

The Seagull on the Step, 1955

Typescript

Folder 3

Plate proofs

Through p. 124

Folder 4

Page 125 to end

Folder 5

Boyle, Kay, 1902-1992

Series II. Correspondence, 1945-1989

B-D

Box 1 Folder 6

H-W

Folder 7

Simmonds, Roy S., 1973-86

Box 2 Folder 1

Series III. Other Papers, 1948-1990

Remarks by Langston Hughes concerning [Boyle's] analysis of "On the Road," carbon typescript **Box 2**
Folder 2

Contracts for *Thirty Stories*, 1948 **Folder 3**

Envelopes, 1968-90 **Folder 4**

Index of Correspondents

Box and folder numbers are followed by parenthetical notations indicating number of letters from that correspondent to Boyle followed, if appropriate, by the number of letters from Boyle to that correspondent. In three cases (Cohn, Engle, and Redding) there is a single piece of third-party correspondence from that person filed under the name of another correspondent whose name has been indicated in parenthesis.

- Beckett, Samuel, 1906-1989--1.6 (6 to Boyle, 2 from Boyle)
- Bird, William Augustus, 1888-1963 (*Tangier Gazette*)--1.6 (8 to Boyle)
- Brown, Andreas--1.6 (from Boyle)
- Cohn, Ruby--1.6 (with Beckett)
- Crosby, Caresse, 1892- --1.6 (from Boyle)
- Dahlberg, Edward, 1900-1977--1.6 (20 to Boyle, 1 from Boyle)
- Duchamp, Marcel, 1887-1968--1.6 (12 to Boyle)
- Engle, Paul, 1908-1991 (International Writing Program)--2.1 (with Simmonds)
- Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967--1.7 (11 to Boyle)
- Mitgang, Herbert--1.7 (2 from Boyle)
- National Institute of Arts and Letters (U.S.)--1.7 (2 from Boyle)
- Porter, Katherine Anne, 1890-1980--1.7 (5 to Boyle, 2 from Boyle)
- Redding, J. Saunders (Jay Saunders), 1906- (Hampton Institute)--1.7 (with Hughes)
- Rich, _____--1.7 (from Boyle)
- Simmonds, Roy S.--2.1 (37 from Boyle)
- Williams, William Carlos, 1883-1963--1.7 (3 to Boyle)