1960

Critical study of six short works by Kay Boyle

Ronnalie J. Roper

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
A CRITICAL STUDY OF SIX SHORT WORKS BY KAY BOYLE

by

Ronnalie Roper

B.A. Montana State University, 1958

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1960

Approved by:

[Signatures]

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

Date
CONTENTS

Chapter I: Introduction ........................................... 1
Chapter II: "Wedding Day" ......................................... 14
Chapter III: "One of Ours" ....................................... 28
Chapter IV: "Life Being the Best" ................................. 41
Chapter V: "The White Horses of Vienna" ...................... 55
Chapter VI: The Crazy Hunter .................................... 73
Chapter VII: "Adam's Death" ..................................... 91
Chapter VIII: Summary and Conclusion ......................... 106
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although one thinks of the term "stream of consciousness" primarily in connection with James Joyce, it was first used by William James in his Principles of Psychology (1890). James wished to capture in that name the flux, continuity, and continuous change of the mind's working—the same characteristics that Joyce later wished to set down in his novels. Nor were these two the only ones to recognize the complexity of the thought process. Novelists previous to Joyce, however, felt bound by the conventions of art to report only the most consciously organized, the most logical, of their characters' thoughts. One sees an awareness of this limitation, for example, in the writing of Feodor Dostoevsky:

It is well known that whole trains of thought sometimes pass through our brains instantaneously, as though they were sensations, without being translated into human speech, still less into a literary language. But we will try to translate these sensations of our hero's, and present to the reader at least the kernel of them, so to say, what was most essential and nearest to reality in them. For many of our sensations when translated into ordinary language seem absolutely unreal. That is why they never find expression, though everyone has them.¹

Leon Edel calls the stream-of-consciousness novel an attempt on the part of the author to let the reader live inside his character's mind, knowing not only the mind's greatest awareness, but also its "fringes"

and 'haloes' of thought, conscious and unconscious.\textsuperscript{2} Although Joyce was the first to accomplish this kind of psychological study, both Henry James and Edouard Dujardin led the way for his technique. The stream-of-consciousness genre can be surveyed in three stages: the period of the men who provided the background for Joyce, including James and Dujardin; the development of the genre by Joyce himself; and the experimentation with the genre after Joyce, experimentation carried on by such authors as Virginia Woolf and Kay Boyle.

Edel calls James's concern with the \textit{point of view}, the "illumination of the situation and characters through one or several minds,"\textsuperscript{3} the "preparation" for the psychological works, especially Joyce's, which were to follow:

The point of view is at the centre of James's aesthetic of the novel. And it must be at the centre of any study of the stream of consciousness in the contemporary novel: for once we are within a given mind we can obviously have only the inner vision, the point of view of that particular mind. In studying the problems of his fixed and varying centres of consciousness, Henry James was preparing the way for those who would follow and carry this technique to its logical conclusion: to record the action of the mind itself.\textsuperscript{4}

The influence of Henry James upon Joyce can be readily seen, since Joyce's works display concern for the point of view of the character, the point of view, as Edel says, of the character's inner mind. Joyce, however, said that the most profound influence upon his innovation of a genre was Edouard Dujardin's \textit{Les Lauriers Sont Coupés} (1888), which Joyce

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 20.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 36.
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 38.
read at the age of twenty. Edel points out the "narrative awkwardness" of the novel, the maneuvering of Dujardin to "remain inside his hero's mind while seeking to impart to the reader the data customarily given by the omniscient author in conventional fiction." Dujardin finally added to the story a section in which his hero, Daniel Prince, reads the letters he has received from the actress whom he loves. With these letters in mind, the reader can reconstruct the story of Prince's love for the actress and of her exploitation of his love. Primitive as the interior monologue of the story may seem, it represents an effort to reproduce a whole story, using the mind of a character as a screen on which to project it. As in the later stream-of-consciousness novels, the reader can identify himself with Daniel Prince, but can also appraise the man, "standing off from him, evaluating his own testimony, and seeing him from outside for the dupe that he is."


Unlike Henry James, who worked by analysis of great trends in normal life, he had begun to evolve in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* a synthetic method, the construction of character by odds and ends, by minutiae. He did not allow his characters the sudden, tense climaxes towards which James ushered the people of his books, and preferred instead to subdue their dramas. His protagonists moved in the world and reacted to it, but their basic anxieties and exaltations seemed to move with slight reference to


their environment. They were so islanded, in fact, that Joyce's development of the interior monologue to enable his readers to enter the mind of a character without the chaperonage of the author, seems a discovery he might have been expected to make.7

Joyce's next novel, Ulysses, was heir to the experiments of A Portrait:

Joyce's first interior monologue was inserted at the end of A Portrait of the Artist, where, however, he makes it seem less extraordinary by having Stephen write it in a journal. It had a dramatic justification there in that Stephen could no longer communicate with anyone in Ireland but himself. But it was also a way of relaxing by sentence fragments and seemingly casual connections among the thoughts the more formal style of most of the narrative.... Having gone so far, Joyce in Ulysses boldly eliminated the journal, and let thoughts hop, step, jump, and glide without the self-consciousness of a journal to account for their agitation.

In Ulysses Joyce created a day in Dublin, mainly within the minds of the two major characters, Stephan Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. The reader constructs the lives of these two characters and evaluates them without direct author intervention. He finds that the novel explores many areas of the consciousness, from completely directed thoughts to those thoughts nearest the area of the unconscious (the thoughts that "hop, step, jump, and glide"). He is aware that time does not follow in these characters' minds a specific, chronological order, but that the present influences one's view of the past as the past has influenced the present. One is impressed, finally, with two intimate and totally distinctive visions of Dublin, and of life, within a single day.

8Ibid., pp. 368-369.
Before going on with the discussion of the stream-of-consciousness novel and determining Kay Boyle's place in the tradition, let us pause to define some of the terms now used in connection with the genre. The tradition of the stream-of-consciousness novel is perhaps best defined by Melvin Friedman, who says that the critics are often confusing a "genre"—stream of consciousness—with a "technique"—interior monologue. A stream-of-consciousness novel should be regarded as one which has as its essential concern the exploitation of a wide area of consciousness, generally the entire area, of one or more characters; that is, whatever plots, themes, or general effects are achieved in these novels result from use of the consciousness of the characters as a "screen" or "film" on which they are depicted. What we mean by consciousness is actually the entire area of mental attention, which includes the gradations leading to unconsciousness as well as the state of complete awareness.

Friedman goes further to explain the place of the technique of interior monologue within the genre of stream of consciousness, as well as to define several other techniques used in the genre. Since the mind has no logical restraints in its process, he says, the author must guide the reader in some way. One such guide in the interior monologue, which can reproduce any area of the consciousness, is the dramatization of the thoughts by the use of words proper to the thinking of the particular character. As the author creates the illusion of thoughts passing at random through the character's mind, he may also guide the reader by using the leitmotiv:

---


10 Ibid., p. 4.
The leitmotiv is invariably short—in the monologue framework it is usually a clipped phrase distinguished from the rest of the notation—so that it is easily recalled to the mind of the reader upon its recurrence. It has a programmatic association, since it must refer to something beyond the tones or words which it contains.\(^{11}\)

Probably the leitmotiv is one of the uniting factors Robert Humphrey is indicating when he says that "other unities" must make up for the lack of plot in the stream-of-consciousness novel.\(^{12}\)

As Lawrence Bowling asserts, it would be impossible to incorporate the whole of consciousness in the interior monologue, so that the stream-of-consciousness novel must include other techniques if it is to accomplish its purpose.\(^{13}\) A second device used in the genre is internal analysis, which according to Friedman "tends to summarize the impressions of the character in the words of the author."\(^{14}\) Robert Humphrey says that this method, which he calls "indirect interior monologue," has the "possibility of greater coherence and of greater surface unity through selection of materials" and still retains the "peculiarity of character's psychic processes."\(^{15}\) At times the author using internal analysis sets off the interior monologue with quotation marks to distinguish it from internal analysis.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 15.


\(^{13}\)Lawrence Edward Bowling, "What Is the Stream of Consciousness Technique?" *PMLA*, LXV (June 1950), 336.

\(^{14}\)Friedman, p. 5.

\(^{15}\)Humphrey, p. 29.
The last technique Friedman discusses is that of sensory impression in which "the mind, remaining almost completely passive, records only the least digested impressions—often rendered aesthetically as poetic images." This is the exploration of the area farthest from consciousness.

The intent with sensory impression is to reproduce impressions of so personal a nature that the language, in order to reproduce the sensation, must rely on unprecedented word forms and usages.

Bowling adds to this description that sensory impression is often indicated by ellipsis and by single nouns with participles to denote action.

The various techniques used in Joyce's stream-of-consciousness novel did not stop with him. As Edel says,

Art is never static. It neither accepts conformity nor does it like repetition. When it is reduced to the status of propaganda, it ceases to be art and becomes advertising. Art thrives best on the variousness of life and on a search for new forms and new techniques.

As Joyce received his inspiration from Dujardin, we find that others in their turns read Joyce, perceived the type of realism for which he was striving, and began their own particular searches for literary expression. Among these followers, Virginia Woolf is one of the more notable.

16 Friedman, pp. 6-7
17 Ibid., p. 6.
18 Bowling, p. 342.
19 Edel, p. 142.
Edel places Virginia Woolf in the tradition of the stream-of-consciousness novel in this way:

Virginia Woolf was not one of the architects of the stream-of-consciousness novel. She read Joyce, Proust, and Dorothy Richardson and absorbed their lesson. Her peculiar contribution to the novel of subjectivity lay in her awareness almost from the first that she could obtain given effects of experience by a constant search for the condition of poetry.20

Since, as Edel implies, Woolf did not imitate Joyce's work, but strove for her own mode of expression based on his experimentation, one might expect that Woolf would produce works with an individual quality. This she did, by creating feelings, scenes, and even novels in her own poetic idiom rather than by attempting to capture the idiom of her characters.

Light, tone, colour play through her cadenced work in a constant search for mood and with no attempt to impart an individual character to the style of thought. There is no attempt at portrait painting; rather does she try to evoke a state of feeling by a kind of mental poesy.21

In her search for unity in the poetic quality of her novels, Virginia Woolf adopted a method which at least one of her successors, Kay Boyle, later took for her own. This method, the focus of the attentions of every major character upon a single incident or object, is probably best seen in To the Lighthouse. Friedman calls the novel a compromise between Virginia Woolf's Jacob's Room, which he calls "too digressively poetical," and her Mrs. Dalloway, which is, he says, too attentively

20 Ibid., p. 127.
21 Ibid., p. 128.
patterned.\textsuperscript{22} \textit{To the Lighthouse} uses the lighthouse, or rather the trip to the lighthouse, to reflect the thoughts of the various characters over many years.

It is at this point that we turn to Kay Boyle. The very fact that Friedman separates the various techniques from the genre implies that an author might use one or more of these techniques in a work without writing a piece explicitly following the tradition of the stream-of-consciousness novel. Such an author is Kay Boyle. One may find in her works examples of the interior monologue and internal analysis, but one finds also a plot, a surface movement, which is not depicted on the "screen" of consciousness of her characters, but is narrated in the particular language of the author herself. Her use of the various stream-of-consciousness techniques will become clearer in succeeding chapters.

Kay Boyle is connected with the tradition of stream of consciousness in yet another, and perhaps more important, way. Friedman stresses the poetic quality of stream-of-consciousness work in relationship to the techniques of the genre, saying that both sensory impression and interior monologue rely on poetry for effects, with the arrangement of words poetical rather than logical.\textsuperscript{23} One finds such poetry, quite frankly the poetry of the author's own mind rather than an attempt to individuate the thoughts of characters, when one reads Virginia Woolf:

\begin{quote}
...all had folded itself quietly about her, when the girl spoke, as, after a flight through sunshine the wings of a bird fold
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{22}Friedman, pp. 198-199.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 18.
themselves quietly and the blue of its plumage changes from bright steel to soft purple. 24

The close relationship of Kay Boyle's prose to poetry may be seen in a criticism of *A Glad Day*, in which Reuel Denney says, "Miss Boyle's interesting novels have the virtue of precise and colorful imagery, and the finest things about these poems is the same quality." 25 Denney says also that her poetry is disorderly because poems do not have the rich context that stories have. The critic discusses the imagery and language of Kay Boyle's poetry and stories as though the author were not writing in two separate genres. He adds that familiarity of action makes her stories successful, and lack of it often makes her poetry fail.

Kay Boyle is interesting partly because she makes unusual use of the resources of fiction. Virginia Woolf says, however, in her introduction to *Mrs. Dalloway*, that "the more successful the method, the less it attracts attention." 26 The most important failing in Kay Boyle is that of technique which calls attention to itself. One searches in some of her stories for a real personality with which to identify himself, and meets instead a hazy, imagistic situation through which the characters are propelled by the author rather than living in their own right. The introduction to a volume of American short stories mentions a failure in Hawthorne which one might apply in part to Kay Boyle:

He knew well enough that every story risks failure if it does not "possess enough physical substance to stand alone;" and although he reminded himself that human nature craves a certain materialism," still he fixed his attention so unwaveringly upon those spiritual realities that he did not at times heed his own warning....

Kay Boyle might be said to fix her attention so unwaveringly upon the single word, or the image, that at times the story becomes a collection of images without a single real person in it. Richard C. Carpenter has noted the overuse of poetic language and the "method of implication and reticence" in Miss Boyle's work: "Naturally, this method can be overdone, as it is in her third novel, Gentleman, I Address You Privately, where we see everything through a glass most darkly, so much so that it is difficult to realize what the theme is...."

An interesting fact about this poetic language is that it is describing some of the more terrible aspects of life, including death, disease, and war. Gentleman, I Address You Privately is a novel about sexual perversion; Plagued by the Nightingale is the story of a married couple and their fear of having children because of the husband's hereditary disease; and even her first novel, Year Before Last, tells of a woman who leaves her husband to go away to southern France with a tubercular lover. The problem is to discover when and how the author finally achieves a workable interaction of poetic language and realistic subject matter.

---


Most of the critics, however, fail to say anything about Kay Boyle except that her language is enchanting or that it is precious, without relating technique to theme or defining precisely the interaction of technique and theme which makes the language successful or unsuccessful. Even Carpenter, who says that Kay Boyle offers "a deeper understanding," fails to mention at what points the author allows her "prose poetry" to overshadow her subject matter. What the critics fail to recognize, and what Carpenter might seem to imply, but does not state clearly, is that there is a point in Kay Boyle's development as a writer at which she has control of her technique to the extent that it does not call attention to itself. At this point the reader becomes more interested in the characters, which are more real than previously, and in the plot and movement of the story. At this point, too, the reader finds that the action of the story arises from the individual characters without contrivance on the part of the author. It will be a major concern of this paper to trace this development through six chronologically arranged short works, discussing plot and character in relation to technique, and arriving at a conclusion as to where a successful fusion begins in the author's writing career.

This is not to say that at a certain point the author's works are all successful—two novels which are obviously potboilers, Avalanche and A Frenchman Must Die, were written after Kay Boyle had exhibited a capacity for effective writing—or that everything written before a certain period demonstrates the same degree of ineffectiveness. One may compare the title story of Wedding Day with two others of the volume, "Vacation-Time" and "Spring Morning," to find that the former has
character and movement which the reader can follow, but the latter two seem to be unselective ramblings of a mind, a description of mood which is never quite clear to the reader.

Each chapter of this paper will begin with a theme analysis of the story to be discussed, will turn to a discussion of technique and its interaction with theme, and will consider the comparative success of the story in light of this interaction. Although the main development to be traced is that of the author's mastering of her technique, and the finding of her characteristic themes and characters, several minor points will be traced; the importance of plot, or surface movement, in the pieces, the author's own attitude toward her characters, and the problem of reader identification with these characters.
CHAPTER II

"WEDDING DAY"

Kay Boyle's first collected edition of short stories, Wedding Day and Other Stories, was published in 1930. These stories, as one critic has said, are most valuable for their exploration of the subconscious.¹ However, as the critic also notes, the subconscious explored in a stream-of-consciousness technique, "helter-skelter," with little relation to an order of events or a development of character, has small value for the reader.² For example, one finds that "Spring Morning," one of the least controlled stories of the volume, begins like this:

Albion must you fail me now may some force strike him the Teuton god if I cannot before he wakes get back the lip of a canvas as if it were a she-goat and recognize the teeth of it some of them suckled at Cezanne and some at the custom man's some of them elsewheres.³

Since "Spring Morning" has neither surface action nor character drawing, it can hardly be termed a story. It aims to develop a mood by the use of language, and this aim, of course, overlaps into the field of poetry. We might well call "Spring Morning" an exercise in "prose poetry."

Several other stories of the volume are more detailed in action so that they become more meaningful. "Vacation-Time" is concerned with a

²Ibid.
³Kay Boyle, Wedding Day and Other Stories, (New York, 1930), p. 97. Succeeding references to this volume will appear as page numbers in the text of this chapter.
woman in a bar who has just sent her daughter off on the train and is lamenting her husband's death; "On the Run" is about a sick man and a woman who arrive at a hotel and are sent on because of the man's illness; and "Theme" takes place in the mind of a woman whose love for her son is spurned by him. These last stories are less obscure than "Spring Morning," but they are still but descriptions of emotions, the "shapes of feeling," with little framework of action and physical reality with which to direct the meaning of the many and vivid (but often strained) images.

Other stories of Wedding Day are far more controlled. For example, "Letters of a Lady" is a story related entirely through letters written by a woman. The letters thank a man called Sir Basil for his suggestions concerning her daughter's schooling and her greenhouse, for his visits and for gifts he has given her. The letters imply an infatuation on the part of the woman, and build to the climax, which comes when the woman writes: "Dear Sir Basil, It was indeed good of you to send me the photograph of your wife and two children." (120) Although the story can hardly be called serious, it has a structure that allows the reader to feel that it is more intelligible than the imagistic pieces. As a critic has said, Kay Boyle is better in a story of this kind, a story with "order, progression, resolution."^5

In this latter classification (stories with a framework of physical reality) are pieces such as "Episode in the Life of an Ancestor" and


"Polar Bears and Others." A critic says of the bears (who symbolize the men) of "Polar Bears and Others" that they are "open to extreme hurt [the critic appears to mean emotional upset] when they are confronted by a sudden shift in the conventions of their lives," and that this situation is the same as that in which the two bachelors of the story are involved, when one becomes interested in a woman. However, the story is burdened by the obviousness of the symbol, which is set off at the beginning of the story rather than integrated cleverly within the plot, as Kay Boyle is capable of doing.

"Episode in the Life of an Ancestor" is more successful in subtlety, in its suggestion of the grandmother's relationship to the horse, but it is marred by long, meaningless descriptions of horse behavior, which have little to do with the horse of the story. It, too, is primarily experimental. The story is told partly from the author's point of view, partly from the father's, partly from the horse's. This last viewpoint is unreal in such passages as "he was in a quiver of admiration and love for her" and "She urged him to such a frenzy of kicking that he was ready to faint with delight." (12) The internal-analysis technique, which hardly seems appropriate in regard to a horse, is far more effective in one of the author's later novelettes, The Crazy Hunter, in which the horse's psychology is explored through the thoughts of a girl.

The title story of the volume falls somewhere between the vague emotion of "Spring Morning" and the resolute progression of "Episode in

Ibid., p. 8.
"the Life of an Ancestor." A mother and her two children, daughter and son, sit at a table having their last lunch together before the daughter's marriage that same afternoon. In the course of the conversation, the mother, who is "praying that this occasion at least pass off with dignity," (28) says that she did not want the wedding. The brother and sister leave the table to go out-of-doors; they ride together in a little train among the trees, row in a boat on the pond. The brother tells his sister, '"It isn't too late, yet,"' and they both think before and during the wedding, "This was the end, the end." The brother gives the bride away that afternoon at the elaborate ceremony, and as she dances with the guests, he drinks punch until he recklessly throws the guest cards about the room. The mother, dancing with the General, is pleased that the scattering of the cards is all that his resentment about the wedding causes. She thinks, "What a real success, what a real success!" (35)

Rather than a development, "Wedding Day" is an unfolding of the characters and of the theme. The first comment on the wedding is implicit in the image of the first line: "The red carpet that was to spurt like a hemorrhage from pillar to post was stacked in the corner." (25) The image works in two ways, first, to hint of the death of the brother and sister's former life (they think later in the story, "This was the end, the end." and, second, to foreshadow the mother's triumph at the end of the story. Structurally, the rug image beginning and ending the story pulls the piece together and furnishes its central image and meaning. It is unfortunate that the carpet image, though vivid and startling, is strained, portending violence which does not exist. The final
act of the boy and girl is of submission, though unwilling submission, and the most violent reaction is the boy's scattering the guest cards.

Before the wedding the boy and girl ride a miniature train in the woods and row out in the boat, as they have probably done for years before in their youth. The author attempts to describe both the natural surroundings and the mood created by the characters in relationship to it:

Here then was April holding them up, stabbing their hearts with hawthorn, scalping them with a flexible blade of wind... The clouds were cracking and splitting up like a glacier; down the sky were they shifting and sliding, and the two with their heads bare were walking straight into the heart of the floe. (28-29)

Like the carpet image, this passage translates mental anguish into physical terms—"stabbing," "scalping." The brother and sister's desolation is shown by their walking "straight into the heart of the floe," into natural surroundings which share their sense of coldness and death, and intensify this sense, presumably because these same surroundings were once the setting for their happiness.

The author at times describes nature in a harmony with the character's moods: "Over them was the sky set like a tomb, the strange unearthly sky that might at any moment crack into spring." (31) In contrast to this relationship of brother and sister to nature, there is the comic scene of the mother and her plants: "They found their mother upon her knees in the hallway, tying white satin bows under the chins of the potted plants. As they passed she was staring a cactus grimly in the eye." (32) The mother prods, pushes, and changes even the plants to fit
into the pattern of what she believes is correct. The wedding, too, is to fall into this pattern.

As the above detail about the mother hints, she finally becomes a comic, grotesque character. Kay Boyle shows her as a person attempting a dignity which is beyond her. Her incapability of actually achieving the appearance she desires is brought into sharp focus in some of the description about her. She is called a "fine arrogant old lady," but a few lines later, when her son points a finger at her, "she looked at him with dignity," but "her eyes wavered and crossed." A little later she is "whimpering" and her lip is "trembling" as she carves the meat only as fast as the son can eat it.

The story has previously indicated the mother's wish that appearances of dignity be preserved. She asks her children to sit up at the table "as if they were of the same flesh and blood not odd people at a lunch counter." (25) (The irony of this statement is more obvious later in the story when the reader realizes that the brother and sister are fully aware of their kinship, that it seems to mean far more to them than it does to the mother.) Before this, the mother has asked that the "wedding cake be held aloft and not bowed like a venerable into the servants' entrance." (25) She allows her desire for dignity to distort her thinking until she becomes, not mildly comic, but a truly grotesque character. Included in her vision of the way she wants things to be is her fear that the saucepans will be used by her daughter—"Not a bite had been cooked in them for twenty years." (26)

The mother, who is able to think, "What a real success" of the wedding which is considered "the end" by her children, has no sympathy
with nor insight into the feelings of her daughter and son, but has a very real feeling for the saucepans: "The pride of the kitchen to be scratched, burned, buttered, and dined. At the thought of them her heart swelled in an agony of sorrow." (26) When her thoughts turn to the important event, the wedding, she prays "that this occasion at least pass off with dignity, with her heart not in her mouth but beating away in peace in her own bosom." (28) The mother's distortion of values (saucepans more important than her own offspring) and her ridiculous postures ("staring a cactus grimly in the eye," eyes wavering and crossing) would make her merely comic were it not that she is involved in a situation considered tragic by her daughter and son. As it is, she becomes grotesque, pursuing her aim of dignified appearances to the exclusion of all other visions, including the vision of her offspring.

Because the boy and girl differ from their mother, the author calls them "another race." They can, she says, stamp "an easy trail through the wilderness of Paris" and "by lifting of the head only be starting over again." (29) Kay Boyle says that "in their young days they should have been saddled and strapped with necessity so that they could not have escaped. Paris was their responsibility....And who was there to tell them, for the trees they had come to in the woods gave them no signs." (29) The story is vague here, for one wonders what, exactly, is the responsibility of the boy and girl in Paris. Perhaps it is a Bohemian existence in contrast to the mother's sense of propriety, but the author gives no definite indication. However, whatever their lives before have been, the author intends that nature here be not only nature, but symbol of the death of their former lives. The "willowing trees" are mournful.
Spring is identified with its rain, the sky "set like a tomb," and the wedding which is "the end." Lacking the guidance to free them from their former lives, the brother and sister go to the wedding, though their "feet fled in various ways, seeking an escape" (33) and the author implies that they are doing the mother's will. The wedding seems to include the brother as well as the sister, since they are so much identified one with the other, and the mother never realizes that the wedding is a kind of death for both of them, or realizing it, imposes her will anyway.

At the lunch, the mother turns on the son, who has asked her about the saucepans: "'Your brother is looking for some trouble to make.... he is trying to make trouble between you and your young man.'" (27) Then she denies her part in the marriage: "'I certainly did not want this wedding.... Your sister's choice has appalled me.'" (27) Significantly, she expects contradiction, so that if she hasn't arranged the marriage, she has at least acquiesced in its arrangement. The theme of the story evolves as the imposition, deliberate or not, of one way of life upon another, the death, not of childhood alone, but of the brother and sister's dream of a different life from the mother's (although one is never quite sure of the part the mother plays in the death of their childhood).

While the action of the story has a definite, chronological order, there is actually little development in the characters. The mother does not evolve except as a one-sided character, though the reader learns more about her as the story progresses. Neither the brother nor the sister feels differently about the wedding at the end of the story than they do at the beginning. The story exemplifies the "unfolding" of theme and
character which Carpenter mentions and is built on the contrast of the mother with her children, the building of the mood.

One of the most effective parts of the story is the reversal of an established symbol: Spring is the beginning, the re-birth, and the wedding is the beginning of another part of the girl's life. But the wedding is for both brother and sister "the end," something from which they seek escape, and the spring, though beautiful on the one hand, is also ominous and portending. April is "stabbing" and "scalping," "the strange unearthly sky might at any moment crack into spring," "irons of spring...shackled them," (32) and "the desolate, the barren sky continued to fling down dripping handfuls of fresh rain." (34) The spring rain, because the brother and sister feel desolate, implies mourning. The success of this symbol reversal is heightened by detailed description which is not descriptive of mood but of the boy and girl in relation to nature:

Down, down could the brother and sister see into the very depths of the pond. Down under the tough black paddling feet of the swans and below their slick wet bellies could be seen the caverns of the pond with flowers blooming under the water. (31)

One has the feeling from this description that the brother and sister also have depths to their characters, with "flowers blooming" under the surface.

Later, when the girl is dancing, her powder puff falls to the floor and is "kicked by the dancers like a chrysanthemum." (34) The imagery

of this natural life is a consistent identification with the girl; here it is buffeted as she herself is. A sense of the girl is conveyed by the description of her dancing, "her feet like white butterflies escaping by a miracle the destructive feet of whatever partner held her in his arms." (34) Again, she is identified with nature, but with nature that is threatened by a "destructive" society, nature that has an innate frailty.

The author's attempts to dignify the son occasionally fail. In one description she couples a statement seemingly intended to show him as a suffering person—"in his bitterest moments his eyes traversed the heads of the company and exchanged salute with hers" (34)—with another, quite far-fetched statement—"Like a continental gentleman he slapped his thighs, exchanged jokes with the other gentlemen...." (34) When the son is affected by the punch, however, one is still not allowed to forget that the wedding is not a happy occasion.

The punch it was that daintily and unerringly picked out her brother's steps and made him dance, that took his joints and swung and limbered them, divined the presence of his antagonism and sent him jigging. (34)

The characters of the story other than the daughter and son are treated ironically. The guests arrive and present their cards, "hastening forward to press their hostess' hand." The author says, in the midst of the sorrow of the occasion, "the army was handsomely represented." (33) (This is actually the only indication the author gives of the identity of the groom, who must be an army officer.) Somewhat later Kay Boyle writes that "The greater part of the American colony fluttered behind the piano," (34) and she chooses a word of action insignificant
for the large body of supposedly dignified people. The son scatters the cards as though he were actually tossing aside the guests, "a handful of army officers here, a handful of deep-bosomed matrons strewn across one shoulder." (34)

The mother is also presented in a scornful tone, though one might suspect that the irony is too heavy in respect to her. There is a dissonance in the contrast of "fine arrogant old lady" and "she looked at him with dignity" with "her eyes wavered and crossed" and "she was whimpering...her lip trembling." Far better and still ironic is the picture of the mother "staring a cactus grimly in the eye." But this flat, grotesque picture of the mother is not the only difficulty meeting the reader when he tries to believe in her character. Some of the speech put into her mouth is equally unbelievable: "The mother was shouting down the stairway that the wedding cake be held aloft and not bowed like a venerable into the servants' entrance." (25) Since the reader has no idea of the mother's motives for anything she does, and since she does not develop, the mother remains fairly unbelievable.

Although "Wedding Day" has an action which rises from preparation for the wedding to the ceremony itself, it is far from dependent on plot for its structure. It is held together, first, by the wedding as it is viewed from the mother's eyes as well as from her children's, and second, by the allusions to and images of nature. There is a great deal of implication in the story, so much, in fact, that the story begins, at times, to become blurry before the reader's eyes. For example, one wonders exactly what the author considers the children's responsibility to Paris. One might also wonder why the author does not include slightly
more definitely the circumstances under which the marriage has been arranged.

Although the reader learns something about the three main characters, the author describes their feelings and thoughts with little description of their outward appearances. The mother has a thin face and a "faded top-knot of hair," and the daughter and son have "yellow heads," "teeth alike in size," and a "proud arch in their noses." These descriptions, however, include both of them. Among the few separate descriptions is one of the "little yellow hairs" on the boy's arm. The description of a part of a character's body without a real relationship to the character is typical of the story: "Her feet were fleeing in a hundred ways throughout the room, fluttering from the punch bowl to her bedroom and back again...." (34) The effect is that the characters seem, at times, disengaged from their own bodies, thoughts and feelings floating unattached to the physical realities of the scenes. Possibly the author wishes to show the disconnection at this point of mind from body, but the effect is disconcerting. Balancing the disconnected physical description and poetic language are some terse lines describing the action of the story, such as when the son sees the silver platter, and kicks "it smartly down the hall." (32)

Though not so imagistic as some other stories of the same volume, "Wedding Day" is still told in images to a large extent. Some of these images are strained and add to a sense of unreality, as in the description of the cake "with its beard lying white as hoarfrost on its bosom." (24) Others are vivid without approaching the grotesque, as the reed "podded with clear bright bubbles of light closely strung." (31) The images,
however, are more controlled in the story than in some of the others (for example, "Vacation-Time") because the story is directed by at least an outline of action.

"Wedding Day" captures the wanderings of the mind. Its success lies mainly in the mood created by its images, in the recurring motif of plants and skies, in the tension of wills of mother and her children, the switch between the two points of view (that of the mother and that of her offspring). In later stories, which will be discussed in the following chapters, the author continues her writing by implication, image, concern with the mind, but adds a more definite physical reality and a more directed plot. David Daiches says of "Wedding Day":

In the early group of stories there is sometimes a technical exuberance, an exultation in the potentialities of the medium, which shows the author almost exhibitionistically relishing her own power. We see this in "Wedding Day." Nevertheless, what compelling use of incident Kay Boyle makes in this story! Consider the episode of the brother and sister on the lake. It is almost too much in its realized particularization of the moment, flanked on both sides by inconsequentialities of action and the haunting repetitions in the language ("The sun was an imposition, an imposition..."). But the zest for life is there, the controlled excitement, the fascinated and sympathetic curiosity about the different kinds of texture which experience can wear.¹

We notice, however, that Daiches makes his comment in regard to the technique of the story, and we might well agree with him. The author seems to have written the story with the attitude that she was

exercising her power over the word. The reader is forced to read "Wedding Day" as an experiment. Since Kay Boyle omits important information about the characters, including such information as the responsibility of the brother and sister to Paris, the reader's interest must lie almost entirely in the situation itself. The reader feels that the author's interest has been more with the situation and the words building the mood of the situation, than with the characters. Lacking characters who are individualized and complete, "Wedding Day" presents itself as an experiment, interesting because of its experimentation, but not a story in which the reader becomes involved.
CHAPTER III

"ONE OF OURS"

Kay Boyle's next volume of short stories, The First Lover and Other Stories, was published in 1933, three years after Wedding Day. Louis Kronenberger sees in the second volume an advance over the first. As a sign of growth he says, "In three of its stories, for instance, we encounter women whose ignorance or romanticism leads them to misunderstand simple situations." This "tougher and more significant theme" Kronenberger has mentioned in regard to three stories—"To the Pure," "Lydia and the Ring-Doves," and "The First Lover." Strangely enough, the critic does not mention the theme of "One of Ours," although the theme is similar to those of the three stories he does list.

The First Lover, however, does not entirely represent an advance over the earlier work. "I Can't Get Drunk" resembles in technique some of the less coherent stories of Wedding Day. "Rest Cure" is another approach to the author's favored disease theme. Because the author has become, on the whole, slightly less experimental than previously, one can more often feel that the characters live. One might expect pathos in the stories if the author continues in the same vein as before, but there are times when the pathos becomes sentimentality. "His Idea of a Mother" is an example of this failure. The story involves a small, orphaned boy who lives with a harsh aunt and is visited finally (while

he is running away from home) by a kindly uncle. Although the story's failure is not in the dialogue alone, the dialogue is partly what puts the story in a class with unimaginative and overly romantic works:

"'Are you going to thrash me?' said the little boy. 'Is that customary in greeting a nephew?' asked Uncle Dan.\(^2\) Dialogue such as this reminds one of both the situation and dialogue of a slick-magazine story. It is indicative of the hackneyed theme of the poor child who suddenly finds one kind person in the world. Probably the most interesting scene of the story is in the boy's contentment with the "mother-cow." Kay Boyle later uses the situation of the orphaned and unhappy child in "Life Being the Best" (from *The White Horses of Vienna and Other Stories*) but builds upon it a more significant theme.

Several other stories in the volume are interesting in that they evolve, or parts of them evolve, into expanded, and often better, works later in the author's career. "Art Colony," for example, becomes a full-length novel, *My Next Bride*, one year after the publication of *The First Lover*, and has in it some of the same characters. The puppet show of "Friend of the Family," a device which becomes more successful in "The White Horses of Vienna," is none too subtle in indicating the father, the mother, and the visiting Baron, who has fallen in love with the mother. The author tells the reader far too much when she has the father say, "'I don't like the part that's been given me.'" (185) The author has evidently learned a great deal about subtlety when she again uses the scene of a puppet show.

\(^2\) Kay Boyle, *The First Lover and Other Stories* (New York, 1933) p.15. Succeeding references to this volume will appear as page numbers in the text of this chapter.
As Margaret Dawson points out, the stories of the volume which are as obvious and heavy-handed as "Friend of the Family" are striking at first, but they "fade." Kroy Wen" is another such story, portraying a movie producer on shipboard who wants to take pictures of an Italian woman suffering with childbirth near at hand. The producer's badgering of the woman is, finally, so grotesque as to become somewhat ridiculous: "Mr. Wurthenburger felt his mind revolving in his skull. He crossed the deck and crouched before them again. 'Listen,' he said with a cold terrible patience. 'Just let your jaw fall open and scream.'" (29)

Obviousness is one of the author's more important failings, but it is not the only one. "The Man Who Died Young" rushes on at such a rapid pace, covering so many years of the heroine's life, that the reader can never quite feel that the story is real or that the heroine exists. "Black Boy" is an initiation story which fails because the author plays too much on the theme of prejudice without showing the effects of the girl's recognition of the situation. "The First Lover" is marred by the heavy reliance on the coincidence of the Englishman having been a student of the girls' father. "Lydia and the Ring-Doves" is concluded with a tour-de-force and a horror which has not been prepared nor foreshadowed, and which becomes unbelievable. The vegetable man has been overwhelmingly kind and gentle, so that the reader is not prepared for "'Henry has a painless way of doing away with them....He just holds their heads under in a glass of water!'" (168) as an explanation.

for the doves' disappearance.

One of the better stories of the volume is one in a humorous vein. "One of Ours" has a plot which is far more important to the story than the plot is to "Wedding Day." Mrs. Umster visits the Empire Exposition in England, and as she walks through the British colonial exhibitions—life of India, Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Ireland, and Australia—she thinks of each colony and person, "All, all belonged.... One of ours." Mrs. Umster seems to look on the displayed power of England in several ways: It has become translated in her mind into her own personal power ("one of ours"), and it shields her from the kinds of lives led by the Irish, the bushmen, the Nigerians—the kinds of lives Mrs. Umster finds not merely distasteful but abhorrent. She is secure because she feels herself a part of this power and is happy that her face "might have been the face of any nice woman she passed in Westminster." (49) In the "clean white building which housed Australia," Mrs. Umster buys a golden-wigged doll with the intention of giving it to a "child who would really hold it dear." (50) When she stops at the club house for a sandwich, she finds that the Nigerian exhibit is just outside of the terrace, and she watches the Nigerians look for vermin in each other's hair. Mrs. Umster wonders how she could "include them, how believe that any good or wisdom dwelt in their contorted souls?" (51) As she prepares to leave, the chief she has been watching comes over the terrace railing and she believes that he might attack her. The waiter sends the chief back and asks Mrs. Umster, "'Maybe you wouldn't like to do it?....The poor chappie's like this the minute he sees a doll-baby.'" (56-57) The waiter means to ask if Mrs. Umster wouldn't like to give the
chief the doll, but Mrs. Umster believes he is asking if she wouldn't like to have sexual relations with the chief. "Suddenly her eye fell on the doll she was carrying. But even then, with her mind working slowly and carefully in her head, she could not understand." (57)

Richard Carpenter says that "One of Ours" studies through image and symbol the hidden feelings of a most proper Englishwoman who thinks a savage at an exposition is lusting after her—a projection of her desires, for he is really interested in the doll she is holding. The theme of distortion is carried out by her fascination with the savage's maleness as well as her fear of him.\footnote{Richard C. Carpenter, "Kay Boyle," College English, XV (November 1953), 85.}

The beginning of the story shows Mrs. Umster's identification of herself with her country: "Mrs. Umster walked down the wide golden avenues of the exposition knowing, for all her austerity, that everything belonged." (47) "She always referred to the colonies as though they reposed in the hollow of her hand: India the heart, Egypt the fate, Australia the head of those exterior possessions." (48) She appears to view the nation as another person would view the family, as a group which accepts one because of blood ties rather than for one's accomplishments, as a unit which is a part of one. Most important, she appears to see, unwittingly, the British as stereotypes rather than as individuals, and she desires that she fit into her stereotyped picture. Even the early show of her pride in her country is grounded on a basic shortsightedness in regard to people. Kay Boyle says, "Here and there in the June afternoon were long brown transplanted eyes grieving for the sight of the sun." She intimates that Mrs. Umster is thinking, "One step
around the wicker fence took you from the British Indies to Nigeria. What more could the natives ask?" (47) Obviously, Mrs. Umster doesn't know what the natives actually feel. From the beginning of her story Mrs. Umster is unable to accept these savage people as "one of ours" although she keeps thinking, "all, all belonged." The confusion of her thought is apparent to the reader. Although Mrs. Umster intellectually believes, or tells herself that she believes, in the "belonging" of people such as those from the bush, she is emotionally disturbed at the prospect of contact with them. The paradox in her thinking remains unresolved throughout the story.

Mrs. Umster allows herself to be ruled by her vision of the British, a vision which finds the British correct, superior. Mrs. Umster was tempted to stoop down and pull off her galoshes, but British prudence forbid." (48) Even her own reflection in the mirror, with its "iron hair and the gray fringe visible on her forehead," (49) she views with an English pride. The reader sees Mrs. Umster differently, even in physical appearance, than she sees herself. She is satisfied with her face in the mirror because it is "nice" and because she feels it to be typically British. The reader, however, sees it as mediocre (as "nice" might imply), possibly even nondescript. Mrs. Umster condescends to the Irish woman who is "one of ours despite the thickness of her speech." (48) But, though she likes the Australian girls, who "might have been English born and bred, so clean and dapper were they," she has no patience with the bush, "That heathen blot on the face of a civilized dependency!" (50) Mrs. Umster feels herself secure within her own correct society, several steps above the better of other people.
One begins at this point to wonder if perhaps Mrs. Umster does not subconsciously fear that her vision of British propriety might somehow be deflated by the colonials. At least when one finishes the story he can look back and feel that Mrs. Umster's recoil from the unusual amounts to a fear, no matter the terms of superiority with which she expresses her aversion.

As Mrs. Umster sits on the terrace, she finds herself looking at Nigeria. The Nigerians are, to her, something vaguely evil, "like a knot of black gleaming serpents wound and interwound beneath a hairy foreign tree." (50) Mrs. Umster tells herself that she doesn't "care to know" what the people of the exhibition are doing. She is, however, drawn to them and to their activities, and she rationalizes her need to watch: "For the sake of comparison she glanced again over the railing and into the blackest depths of bestial ignorance." (51) Only by looking into the eyes of the doll can Mrs. Umster remain sufficiently undisturbed by the savages to eat her sandwich. Her fascination with the Nigerians seems to be with their bestiality, with her vague feeling that they are evil. She sets the doll up before her—"Such a sweet it was, the other extreme; so clean, so decent." (51) Mrs. Umster does not realize how laughable her contrast is, the stuffed, dead doll with the life she sees before her. The doll seems to Mrs. Umster symbolic of herself. "'You poor duck,'" (51) she says to it, feeling that it, like Mrs. Umster herself, has wandered into a hostile world.

The woman's identification of the savages with reproduction and fertility begins with her seeing a child emerge "as though from a womb." (51) Her observations of the chief are vivid in physical terms
and center on his strength and manliness. She notes the "red feather worn for modesty," the "hair growing between his soft black bosoms," his thighs "thick as the trunk of a tree." (52) She also notices the reaction of the native women to him, "The clapping of a hundred black silky palms and their foreheads bent forward to smite the ground with love." (53) Mrs. Umster allows her own fantasies to color her thinking, although she does not recognize them as subconscious desires. She thinks, with a "quiver of fear," "That, on a dark night, in the jungle, with his blood on fire and his jaws dripping!" (52)

When the chief comes onto the terrace, Mrs. Umster misinterprets his action, again letting her own sexual fantasies come to the fore. "She saw some unfortunate creature in a pith helmet somewhere, an English woman for all she knew, lost in the heart of Nigeria, in a long white linen coat, the symbol of purity, crying out for mercy, imploring a beast and a savage to leave her undefiled." (54) During the entire scene, Mrs. Umster is mentally noting the chief's masculine appearance, and although she is frightened, "She lifted her head, suddenly strong, with the strength and rectitude of the empire in her glance" and tells him, "Never, no," (55) in answer to what she thinks is his question. Mrs. Umster is so engrossed in her fantasies that she cannot believe, even when the waiter tells her, that the chief wants the doll rather than her.

The theme of the story is comic on the one hand—the belief of a middle-aged woman in her desirability, and the woman's involvement in fantasy. However, the story is more serious than this. It is what Kronenberger calls one of the "tougher" themes of The First Lover, because Mrs. Umster is a woman whose ignorance leads her to "misapprehend" a "simple
situation." She hides behind the social code of a particular society. Not only has she no real sympathy with people of a culture other than English, she doesn't even know herself well enough to realize that she is projecting her desire. Her narrow point of view makes her incapable of understanding the situation.

"One of Ours" as a study in character is an expansion, in a sense, of the mother of "Wedding Day." The mother is described ironically, with a contrast in the description of her as a fine arrogant woman and her actions, which are neither fine nor arrogant. Mrs. Umster identifies herself with Britain, which she considers superior to all other countries and unreproachable. She sees herself superior to other people without realizing that she is not so very different from anyone else. She, too, has physical desires, however subconscious they are, and she is victimized by a fear of the unknown. The story is an example of sustained irony with the first tension set in the first paragraph, perhaps even a little too obviously. The author pulls back from Mrs. Umster's viewpoint to mention the "long brown transplanted eyes grieving for the sight of the sun." The intrusion breaks the pattern of the story, but it does have its intended effect. The reader realizes that here the author is presenting reality, the fact that the British cannot transplant the natives and make them completely satisfied. The switch back to Mrs. Umster's point of view demonstrates that she is unaware that such a reality exists. Mrs. Umster's condescension toward foreigners is merely humorous until one finishes the story and becomes fully aware of its irony in view of the woman's lack of understanding. Even before the conclusion of the story, however, the American reader realizes, as is intended, that Mrs. Umster knows so little about people as not to
know that Americans have, in their thinking, passed the "rebel" stage. The objectivity of the story, related through the eyes of Mrs. Umster (though in the third person) makes sustained irony possible. The comic note concerning the mother in "Wedding Day" is a discordant note in view of the rest of the story, but in "One of Ours," because a comic irony forms the complete framework of the piece, it is more effective. Fortunately, it has a meaning beyond the pleasure of humor.

Mrs. Umster herself falls so completely into the American stereotype of an Englishwoman that it might be considered a lack in the story. Stereotyped though she is, Mrs. Umster's identification of herself with Britain adds to the irony and humor of the story. One has the feeling that she almost believes that she is Britain, that the whole exposition has been her personal undertaking. Because of this vision of herself, she does not dare to see the truth when it is shown her. However, the author might well have demonstrated ignorance of self in a character that is individual and particular.

Mrs. Umster's character doesn't actually develop, since she hasn't learned more about herself or changed her attitude by the end of the story, but the whole situation becomes apparent to the reader in the almost tour-de-force ending. The revelation in "Wedding Day" is a gradual building up of a sense of the situation. "One of Ours" carefully builds Mrs. Umster's attitude before her meeting with the chief by seeing her trip through the exposition from her eyes. From then on, the events come in chronological order, building to the waiter's final speech. The story is less rich than "Wedding Day" in one way, because it is told from a single point of view. On the other hand, it is more successful
than "Wedding Day" in retaining a single tone, the comic irony on which it is constructed.

The story does not rely on plot alone, however, for its meaning. Its implication is not so vague as that of "Wedding Day," but it is still a large part of the story. In the first place, Mrs. Umster's projected desire is implied, and the reader suspects early in the story that Mrs. Umster's world is seen from a very limited point of view. There is also an implication that, though part of the woman's fear is a real fear of the savage, another part arises from her unwillingness to acknowledge her subconscious. One might well believe that the author is implying a commonality among people, basic instincts readily recognized by some but concealed and distorted by others under the direction of their cultures. The story becomes a criticism of rigid behavior, for the savage is a stronger character than Mrs. Umster. He recognizes his desire for the doll and follows it, not with violence as the British woman believes, but by straightforwardly asking for the doll.

Because the story is a more plot-directed one than "Wedding Day," its language differs from the former story. In this case, a sense of unreality is not conveyed accidentally, in strained metaphor, as in the description of the wedding cake, but in direct sentence—"One step around the wicker fence took you from the British Indies to Nigeria"—and is an effective part of the story. The metaphor of the story is mostly symbolic (for example, the child emerging "as though from the womb"). It would be difficult to believe that the comparison of the savages to serpents ("At least half of Nigeria was massed in a heap, stirring but slightly, like a knot of black gleaming serpents wound and
interwound beneath a hairy tree," (50) and "But the 'hi' and the 'hee' and the 'willa walla' of the black folk's ease and laughter stretched them out like snakes uncoiling." has no meaning other than description. One remembers that it is Mrs. Umster's mind which is making the comparison and serpents would be something ominous and evil to her. Beyond this, the author undoubtedly intends the reader to see the subconscious temptation in the situation for the woman, expressed in Mrs. Umster's subconscious by the serpent, the phallic symbol.

One could not call "One of Ours" a typical Kay Boyle story, even so far as the author can be categorized. However, one sees the humorous aspect even in the generally serious tone of "Wedding Day" and is not surprised at the expanded comic irony of the second story. The story still makes use of symbol and imagery, though not in such a startling manner as "Wedding Day" does. The story shows an advance in one way, in the simpler and more directed plot which still unravels with subtlety and implication. In "One of Ours" the author seems to know exactly what she is saying. There is no vagueness to her theme, and there is a clear, sharp discrepancy between reality and the character's view. The discrepancy is demonstrated by a character for whom the reader has, unfortunately, no pity because she is stereotyped, so that the story is viewed with more detachment from the characters than in most of the author's works.

As we have seen, there are changes in technique from the earlier "Wedding Day." Still, one cannot say that the author has subordinated her technique or her language to the theme, nor does the theme arise naturally from a character who lives for us. We cannot identify
ourselves with a woman who is not individual and for whom we feel dis-
taste. We seem to be out of the story watching it unfold as the author
directs its production. We then might wonder if Kay Boyle has still
a story too thin to stand without the aid of an elaborate language or
if her own lack of interest in a character communicates itself to us.
CHAPTER IV

"LIFE BEING THE BEST"

Kay Boyle's third volume of short stories, The White Horses of Vienna and Other Stories (1936), contains writing as uneven in quality as did her earlier volumes. The stories seem, as a whole, to follow closely in the footsteps of "One of Ours" insofar as technique goes, for the completely imagistic description of emotion has been abandoned for plots which direct the stories. Yet, as in "Wedding Day," one still finds that, more often than not, the theme is gradually unfolded before the reader's eyes. The stories which fail seem to fail because the author has taken too large a step in the direction of plot, so that the plot appears to be so contrived that it is as unbelievable as some of the author's very early manipulations of language.

"Major Alshuster" is a gothic story, the romantic tale of love between a ghost and a live woman. Others of the stories slip over the line into sentimentality. "Security" tells of a young boy who edits a typewritten magazine. He returns a government bond his grandfather has given him, because he feels that if he keeps the bond he will be obliged to print the grandfather's political views. On the boy's birthday, the contrite grandfather gives back the gift. The stock triangle love story is exploited in this volume with two stories, "Winter in Italy" and "Maiden, Maiden." Other stories are better, except that Miss Boyle does not always seem to have anything startling to say. She tells objectively both "Natives Don't Cry" and "White as Snow," which saves the stories from
sentimentality. "Natives Don't Cry" is the story of a governess who feels forced to cover her loneliness by a lie to the family about letters she has received. "White as Snow" tells of a Negro girl who is employed as nurse for the children in a white family. She is shown discovering the boundaries beyond which her color is forbidden. These last two stories have been chosen by more than one book reviewer as the best of the volume: Evelyn Hart chooses these two and "Security."¹ One might, however, better agree with Edith H. Walton, who admires the way in which these two stories are written, but recognizes the fact that the themes are hackneyed.²

Thematically, another potentially good story of the volume disintegrates upon examination. "Your Body Is a Jewel Box" begins as a sensitive probing into the mind of a mentally ill girl who thinks that she is not "a girl anymore." Her sister, Olive, is a fine, healthy contrast to her and a good demonstration of insensitivity and lack of sympathy. But after the sick girl is committed to the asylum, the story continues with Olive's affairs with the four men in the returning truck and their ultimate death in the lake. Edith Walton calls the story "meaningless,"³ and one must admit that there seems to be little point in the story, or else the meaning fails to make itself felt.

The volume also has several short pieces of humor. The humor in both is far heavier-handed and obvious than that of "One of Ours," and

³Ibid.
is intended for entertainment rather than revelation. "First Offense" is the tale of the rationalization of a Negro bishop as he talks his way out of his troubles. It fails because of the author's inability to resist her own elegant language in a dialect piece. The story begins, "Bishop Delicatatem was fine figger of a black man dressed up in what he liked." The sentence is quite suitable for the type of story it is, but one is unsettled a few lines later by the swift change from the idiom of the Negro to the idiom of the author: "with his hair like a wreath of soft black velvet buds worn tight around his skull." The second comic story, "Rondo at Carraros," is a farcical account of a trial which falls on its face with an extremely flat ending: "'Now this is one of the worst cases I've ever heard of in the whole country,' said His Lordship, and he adjourned the trial until the next session of the Court of Galway." (305)

Among the better stories of the volume are "Life Being the Best" and the title story, "The White Horses of Vienna." "Life Being the Best" is set in the mountains of a European country, probably Austria. Mr. Virgil, "a lean, loving, scholarly young man," is the teacher in a small country school, and one of his favorite students is Young Palavicini, the son of an Italian immigrant. Young Palavicini's father is a mason, his older sister works in a shop in the city, and his mother has died a year and a half before the time of the story. Although he would like to play out on the square with the other boys, he goes

"Kay Boyle, The White Horses of Vienna and Other Stories (New York, 1936), p. 213. Succeeding references to this volume will appear as page numbers in the text of this chapter."
directly home every afternoon after school because he must cook supper for his sister and father. One of the greatest annoyances of his life is Chiesa, another Italian boy, who taunts him with "'Cooks... should keep their noses in their kitchens.'" (85) Young Palavicini is awed by Mr. Virgil even though he doesn't always understand what the teacher is trying to tell him. The abstractions of religion are outside the boy's understanding, and he believes God to be the priest who got drunk when his mother died.

One morning as Young Palavicini walks with Mr. Virgil to the monastery, Mr. Virgil asks the boys, "'If life is the best of all good things, Palavicini, then what would the worst of all evils be?'" (89) The boy doesn't know what Mr. Virgil wants him to answer, but the teacher finally tells him that the worst evil is homicide. When they reach the monastery they are greeted by Mrs. Marincola, who seats Young Palavicini by the fire, takes off his shoes, and washes his feet. When her husband and her son (who is the same age as Young Palavicini) return with the goats, the Marincolas, the teacher, and Young Palavicini sit down to eat. Before the teacher and the boy leave, Young Palavicini is given a pair of slippers by the Marincola boy. As they are walking away, Mr. Virgil tells Mrs. Marincola that he will come back until she consents to send her son to school.

Young Palavicini returns home, not minding that he is not with the boys on the square because "he must keep apart to remember the better the memories in his head." (103) He is cooking supper when Chiesa stops by to taunt him, saying that his father is going to report the Marincolas for cutting down trees on the monastery property. Chiesa leaves. Young
Palavicini takes his father's gun from the wall, loads it, and stands at the open window. "Across the lane, Chiesa had his foot on his own doorstep and when Young Palavicini called out his name he spun round smiling." (104)

A large part of the meaning of the story is implicit in the relationship between Mr. Virgil and Young Palavicini. There is nothing said about Mr. Virgil's background, but one has the feeling that he is not native to this mountain country, and he is separate from the people of the area "because the words he used were never on anyone else's tongue in the country." Mr. Virgil is different from the previous teachers, "for he never lifted a hand to them," yet "their lessons were better learned with him than with any man before him." Mr. Virgil is unmarried, so that "whatever he had in care and passion went out to the altering natures of his pupils." (77) The teacher doesn't seem to understand the natures of the hill people and talks above the head of Young Palavicini, speaking in abstractions that cannot be followed by the boy, whose own view of religion is confused with the concrete experiences of his life. Mr. Virgil's idealistic tendencies extend even to Young Palavicini's relationship with Chiesa. He says, "Chiesa should be as close as a brother to you," (80) not realizing that the situation makes this an impossibility. Even at the monastery, Mr. Virgil demonstrates an other-worldliness when he begs that Mrs. Marincola send her son to school. Mrs. Marincola shows him the impracticality of sending the boy so far, but the teacher still does not understand. Mr. Virgil seems to have almost no connection with the physical realities of life and is dedicated to knowledge for his students ("So he spoke of it, as though knowledge
were a light that might suddenly be cast down in glory upon the hearts of the children without seeming to realize of what, exactly, their lives consist.

The boy is, on the other hand, thoroughly and inescapably immersed in a life which is both real and unpleasant. Although he would like to be with the boys on the square after school, he must make supper for his sister and father. He is poorly fed, his stockings have holes in them, and his rather hard life is made worse by Chiesa's taunting. He turns to Mr. Virgil, one might suppose, for kindness unsupplied in his own home (even his sister returns at night too tired to give him any attention) and because he is interested in what Mr. Virgil has to say. At the Marincola's, the boy experiences the family meal which he has envied Chiesa and has lacked in his own home. Young Marincola gives him berries and sheepskin slippers, Mrs. Marincola washes his feet and warms him by the fire, and Mr. Marincola sings after supper. The Marincolas are also Italian, and Young Palavicini is very taken with the family. When he "looked at the Marincolas he felt the breath come short in his own heart." (100). Young Palavincini is shy around the Marincolas, but the family offers him something within the limits of his experience—kindness and a unified family situation—in contrast to the jumble of ideas which Mr. Virgil is adding to his already distorted knowledge.

The story's conclusion is prepared in this way: Young Palavicini becomes enraged at Chiesa for many reasons, but especially for his smugness. The boy has experienced in the Marincola house the satisfaction of family life that makes him think of the family as he prepares supper. During the same day Mr. Virgil has impressed upon him that taking one's
life is the gravest thing one can do. The author says, "No thought had come or gone in Young Palavicini's head" as he goes to get the gun, but the reader reconstructs what has happened. Young Palavicini has endured Chiesa before, but now Chiesa threatens the Marincolas, whom Palavicini holds most dear. The boy has already shown that he does not have a faculty for abstract reasoning, but he takes Mr. Virgil's word as truth. To him, the worst thing he can do to Chiesa is to murder him, and the boy in this moment would have the worst happen to Chiesa in order to save the Marincolas. The theme of the story is involved in the boy's education: The teacher imposes idealistic, abstract concepts upon a boy whose experience has been of a ruder sort, and the boy, not understanding what is meant, distorts the half-digested teaching and reacts to it in a way in which the teacher didn't mean it to be used.

Like "One of Ours," "Life Being the Best" relies on a development in the action to expose characterization and theme. "Wedding Day" unfolds gradually and doesn't take the characters from one point to the next. Its characters are unnamed and vague in physical description and differentiation between brother and sister. "One of Ours" approaches more nearly a solidarity in that one views a great deal of the situation through the eyes of Mrs. Umster. Still, one does not know a great deal about her, and the story begins at an advanced point in her life and exposes her. The situation of "Life Being the Best" is slightly different. Although one knows little about Mr. Virgil except that he is an avid teacher, the general background of the boy is sketched in. Because one knows his background he is more apt to believe in the boy's reactions to his present situation. Being Italian himself makes him
more likely to respond to the Marincolas and their customs. Being from a peasant family would make him more susceptible to a superstitious view of God ("'After awhile everybody in Italy had to put a black shirt on or else Jesus came along and made trouble.'" he says. [73])

Still, for all that one can place Young Palavicini in a certain kind of life, the physical descriptions of the characters are again vague and nonspecific. Young Palavicini is "thin and stained dark by the mountains, and his hair curled up black on his head" and Mr. Virgil is "pale and gaunt," (78) but none of these characteristics distinguishes them physically from great numbers of people. Rather than giving imagistic portrayals of the mind, however, the author explains her characters in several scenes by their dialogue. When it becomes difficult to believe in the school teacher, the difficulty is that the author leaves the distant description of what kind of man he is and puts a stilted dialogue in his mouth: "'Knowledge can do this thing to your mind,' he said softly. 'It can be like a sharp knife whittling your thoughts clean for you.'" (79) The reader must feel that he would like to know more about such a person, a man who (almost unbelievably) delights in expounding to a young boy who could not possibly comprehend what he says.

The story is largely objectively treated, although it has a great deal more sympathy with the main character than does "One of Ours." At times the method is effective, as it is in the following passage:

He [Young Palavicini] saw the lamplight spring up in the windows of Chiesa's house, and the brothers and sisters there sit down to supper at the table. The mother moved from place to place, as his mother had done, setting the full
plates of food before them. He could see Chiesa's black apron buttoned up to the back of his neck, and the movement of his jaw on his food as he bowed his shaved head and ate. (88)

The boy has already been explained well enough so that the simple description of the scene evokes for the reader what the boy feels. One knows how he yearns to be a part of a similar scene, so that "as his mother had done" recalls this yearning. The fact that Palavicini detests every gesture made by Chiesa is enough to remind one of the boy's hate when Chiesa is simply described.

In this story Kay Boyle mingles the objective and subjective treatments. When she uses the interior monologue for the thoughts of the boy, she uses it as a supplement to the predominant view, the author's. The main part of the interior monologue is conversation that the boy would like to speak aloud to Mr. Virgil:

What do you find in him to hold against him?
He could hear Mr. Virgil's far voice complaining....Have you seen how his hair grows, how his ears stand out, how he skips, sidles, shifts? (86)

The catalogue of the things about Chiesa which annoy the boy is effective in its premise that, because he dislikes Chiesa, Chiesa's minutest gesture is irritating.

The author also uses internal analysis, often in imagery, to explain Young Palavicini: "But the flames of his rage snapped up berry and bush, and sent the sparks cracking to heaven." (86) She returns to objective narrative, however, during an important scene, the visit to the Marincolas. Strangely enough, the scene is more overwritten, even though it is third person narrative, than are some of the scenes done in interior monologue and internal analysis. In the first place, it is very long and overbalances.
the rest of the story. In the second place, it is so crammed with acts of kindness and overwrought imagery (as in the description of the goats—"One after another the shy bleats came, speaking one another's names uncertainly in sweet bewildered tones") that the reader loses interest in it and is a little shocked in the rapid change in tone from this scene to the conclusion.

One needs only to examine several of Kay Boyle's stories to expect unevenness in the effectiveness of her imagery. Among the more effective and less extravagant are such descriptions as this: "Mr. Virgil...had been made a gaunt man of because of his pacings to and fro in the asylum of his mind." (78) On the other hand, Kay Boyle again cannot resist the unreal effect which she often obtains in her imagery: "'I'm tired, I'm tired,' she [the sister] said, so gently that the whole darkening room crept suddenly into her lap and burst out crying." (87) (This metaphor of the room is repeated with the room "nodding, sleeping, snoring" and "rocked soft in her arms." [88]) In this story the simple description of action is often more effective than the metaphor. Undoubtedly the last paragraph would not be nearly so striking were it filled with elaborate imagery.

The attempts at humor in the story are also uneven in effectiveness. Young Palavicini's description of God—"'God wouldn't go home until he had his beads back out of the bottle where they had fallen into, and they couldn't get the beads out until they had finished the bottle!'" (83)—is heavy, but it adds to the story in that it makes the reader aware of how rudimentary are some of the boy's concepts. Later in the story, Kay Boyle writes, "The faces of the two young children at her skirts did not alter when one dog lifted his hind-leg and quietly watered Mr.
Virgil's leg," (94) The description is not only humor of a slapstick variety, but is also an extraneous detail.

Among the subtleties which are successful in the story is the description of Mr. Virgil and the bird. He coaxes the bird on, even interrupting his conversation to call out "in warmth and promise." (91) But, finally, "The bird did not follow them here, having come so far after them, but was left calling out endlessly with its ear cocked for answer in the muffled forest behind." (93) The boy is like the bird, in a way, because he follows the teacher to great lengths, but finally misses the message. Mr. Virgil, not being able to descend to the boy's intellectual level, has really no more to offer him than he has to offer the bird. The teacher's name, Virgil, reminds one of the poet and implies profundity and perhaps a little of the other-worldliness that actually does belong to the teacher.

Others of the smaller points of the story are less successful. For example, the author seems to intend the use of sheep and goats for the leitmotiv. One reads, "He stood for a moment at the door, harking to the voices of Chiesa and the others on the square, standing alone but turning his thoughts of loneliness aside, like stray sheep turned to the shelter of Mr. Virgil's fold," (85) Later when Young Palavicini is angered, his thoughts become sheep in flight: "Now he could not longer woo or bend his thought, and up the stony flights of fury leaped the wild scattered flock." (86) The comparison of thoughts to sheep is a strained image, but the mention of the goats is even less successful: "One after another the shy bleats came, speaking one another's names uncertainly in sweet bewildered tones." (98)
When one reads in the final paragraph that each move made by the boy "seemed shaped by preparation," (104) the meaning of the story falls into place. Indeed, this last paragraph is so much more effective than the central part of the story that the over-all effect is uneven. One might wish that Mr. Virgil were a little more concrete, even though he is idealized through Young Palavicini's eyes. One might ask that the monastery scene be not so long and sweet. Finally, if one accepts the author's view of Palavicini's life, the difficulty of the life is still more vivid for the reader in the boy's thoughts and in the understated contrast with Chiesa's dinner than in the room creeping into the sister's lap to burst out crying.

In the final analysis, this story does not seem credible to the reader. We can believe that a young boy could misinterpret the statements of someone he admires intensely. The plot as such, the incident itself, is believable. It must, therefore, be the technique of the story which makes it fail. Considering this failure, one discovers that the Marincola scene is not only uninteresting in its sweetness, but is also detrimental to the story. The description of the goats, as well as of other parts of the scene, seeming to be poetry for its own sake, fails to disclose anything about the characters or to build a scene, unless it be one of pure saccharinity. Since one would judge, in light of the ending, that this is not a saccharine story, the reader can only call the scene an example of uncontrolled prose poetry.

It has been mentioned in this chapter that the reader reconstructs what has taken place within the boy's mind before he prepares to shoot Chiesa. But, one might wonder quite legitimately, should the reader be asked to supply such important thoughts? When one reviews the characters
he finds this: Mr. Virgil, who could be an interesting character, is only slightly known and Young Palavicini is a confused but not, according to the story, a particularly complex, boy. The interest of the story, then, must lie in the feelings experienced by Young Palavicini rather than in the exploration of the depths and complexities of either his or Mr. Virgil's characters. But in the boy we find thoughts leaping "up the stony flights of fury" rather than his specific thoughts. We find more descriptions of the room "creeping" into the sister's lap to sob than we do of the boy's reaction to the scene. Toward the end of the story we are told nothing of the boy's internal reactions and must guess all. The reader can believe the ending of the story, but he does not feel it because he has been swept along by a digressively poetic language which neither builds nor explores the characters.

The reader discovers, then, that this is a story in which technique overshadows the characters. Perhaps the author was so concerned with her theme that she neglected to let the theme arise naturally from the characters and their actions, or so interested in her poetic prose that she forgot that the reader wants to know about the characters more than he wants to read elegant language. Or perhaps it is again the author's approach which makes the story unsuccessful. Looking back, one remembers that the protagonists of "Wedding Day," the brother and sister, stand for nothing in terms of positive values, nothing, that is, which is stated, and that Mrs. Umster of "One of Ours" demonstrates negative values. In "Life Being the Best" we find, not a negative main character, but one who is too unformed in personality to embody any positive thinking. Obviously, writers have written successful works which are
criticisms, which approach the theme negatively, but the reader should remember Kay Boyle's experience in these first three stories with this type of approach. It is possible that a lack of admiration on the part of the author for any of her characters leads her to a concern for technique, or that her lack of control over technique produces the thin characters.

At any rate, we have seen in Kay Boyle her experimentation with prose poetry, with stream-of-consciousness techniques, and with various kinds of characters and themes. It becomes evident that the experimentation will eventually result in works which have the advantage of the previous experimentation and are, because of it and because of the author's comparative freedom from concern with technique, more interesting and more effective.
CHAPTER V

"THE WHITE HORSES OF VIENNA"

In 1935 Kay Boyle won the O. Henry Memorial Prize for a story called "The White Horses of Vienna." The story was first published in a collection in the short story volume of the same name, and in 1946 was reprinted in Thirty Stories. Finally, in 1957, when New Directions published Thirty Stories by Kay Boyle, the story was again reprinted.

The setting of the story is the Tirol of Austria, where a doctor and his wife live. Because the doctor sprains his knee "coming down the mountain late," he sends for a student doctor from Vienna to help him. The student doctor, Dr. Heine, is remarked upon immediately by the doctor's wife as being Jewish. She says, "'They must be mad to have sent him. They know how everyone feels.'" However, because the older doctor needs him, young Dr. Heine begins work. During supper conversation, he tells the doctor and his family a story about the Lipizzaners of Vienna, and about how one was bought by a maharaja of India, but was killed by a groom who couldn't bear to have the horse taken away from him.

When the Heimwehr men come to ask the doctor the way up to the swastika fires above the house, both the doctor's wife and Dr. Heine defend him by mentioning his hurt leg. But the leader of the men says, "'Yes...and we know very well that he wouldn't have been injured if he

1 Kay Boyle, Thirty Stories (New York, 1946), p. 116. Succeeding references to this volume will appear as page numbers in the text of this chapter.

55
stayed home instead of climbing mountains himself at night!" (121)

When Dr. Heine, who regrets that "'It's impossible to have casual conversations or abstract discussions any more!'" (121) because of the agitated political situation, asks the doctor about the fires, the doctor replies, "'Some people light them because of their belief...and others travel around from place to place and make a living lighting them.'" (121)

After supper the doctor shows his puppets before the family, as he often does, and includes his newest, a "great, gleaming grasshopper." Dr. Heine immediately compares the grasshopper to the white horses of Vienna, but the doctor has other plans for his puppet. The grasshopper is called "The Leader" and the droll little clown, who is the only other puppet in the show, is called "Chancellor." "The Leader" is clearly the hero of the show, "And whatever the argument was, the Chancellor always got the worst of it." (124) Finally the clown says, "'Ow, mein Gott, the clouds are giving way!'" and the grasshopper replies, "'But you are relying upon the heavens to support you. Are you afraid they are not strong enough?!'" (125)

Some time after Dr. Heine has come, the Heimwehr men return for the doctor, saying that Dollfuss has been shot. Dr. Heine tells the doctor that he will throw food up to the prison window. He stands "thinking in anguish of the snow-white horses, the Lippizaners, the relics of pride, the still unbroken vestiges of beauty bending their knees to the empty loge of royalty where there was no royalty any more." (127)

Sylvia Pass, in an article entitled, "What Is It All About?" questions the meaning of "The White Horses of Vienna" by asking if the doctor is pro- or anti-Nazi" and by wondering what the satire is behind the
marionette play. However, the critic might have answered her own questions by even a cursory reading in Austrian history of the 1930's and by a careful examination of the story. Mary MacDonald, in a short work entitled *The Republic of Austria 1918-1934*, explains the Heimwehr men (and through them the political situation of Austria) in this way:

This organization had sprung up in the immediate post-war period, as a self-help movement among the peasantry in several of the Provinces.... These groups had no definite aims beyond the general intention of protecting peasant and other property against the depredation of the Yugoslavs and the "Reds."³

In 1932 the storm broke, and the Nazi party emerged for the first time as a strong force in Austrian politics.... The Heimwehr movement split in two, the members of the larger group becoming openly or covertly partisans of the Nazis. The peasants and the members of the moderate wing of the Christian Socialists turned in despair to Dr. Dollfuss as the one man who might save them.⁴

Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was assassinated on July 25, 1934. This brief look at Austrian history, combined with the story itself, lets the reader place the doctor. In the first place, the author mentions in the first paragraph that the doctor "sprained his knee coming down the mountain late. He wrenched it out of joint making his way down with the other men through the pines." (112) Even his wife goes up with the men if they "need" her. All of this prepares one for the later mentions of the swastika fires and for the accusations of the Heimwehr men.

²Sylvia Pass, "What Is It All About?" *The Christian Century*, LIII (March 4, 1936), 368


⁴Ibid., p. 12.
The author saves the story from being propaganda by making the Nazi doctor a sympathetic character. "He had come back to his own country after the years as a prisoner of war in Siberia, and after years of studying in other countries, and the years of giving away as a gift his tenderness and knowledge as he went from one wild place to another."

(113) He loves the Tirol and his own peasant background: "In the summer he wore the short, leather trousers of the country, for he had peasants behind him and he liked to remember that it was so." (114)

The author explains the doctor in this way:

His face was as strong as rock, but it had seen so much of suffering that it had the look of being scarred, it seemed to be split in two, with one side of it given to resolve and the other to compassion. (114)

Because he is partly given to resolve, he is a "savagely clean man" (113) and he is efficient in his profession. But the doctor is also able to greet Dr. Heine politely and to answer his wife that "it wasn't a good thing for the young man's sake. It's harder on him than us. If he works well, I have no reason to send him back. We've waited three days for him. There are people sick in the village." (116) To the doctor, the fact that the people need medical care and that the young Jewish doctor will suffer from being in an anti-Jewish area is more important than his personal prejudices.

The doctor's wife is a nurse and devotes herself to her husband's practice and beliefs. She has a reaction to Dr. Heine which is unfounded on her own personal knowledge:

So much had she heard about Jews that the joints of his tall, elegant frame seemed oiled with some special, suave lubricant that was evil, as
a thing come out of the Orient, to their clean, Nordic hearts. (ll6)

Immediately in the story, however, the author begins to show the young doctor as a person rather than as the stereotyped Jew that the woman sees:

But at lunch he had talked simply with them, although they were country people and ignorant as peasants for all he knew. He listened to everything the doctor had told him about the way he liked things done; in spite of his modern medical school and his Viennese hospitals, taking it all in with interest and respect. (ll6-117)

Still, the woman listens as he tells of the Lippizaners, "giving quick, unwilling glances at this man who could have no blood or knowledge of the land behind him." (ll8) She misunderstands his motives in speaking of the maharaja buying the horse, silently accusing him of trying to "poison my sons with the poison of money and greed!" (ll9) Dr. Heine's story is about the groom who loved the horse as much as Dr. Heine loves their symbolism ("the royal, white horses of Vienna, still royal, he said, without any royalty left to bow their heads to" [ll8]), but the woman is unable to see this.

Dr. Heine is very much alone in his temporary position. The doctor is polite to him, but the doctor is a part of "some secret gathering of power that cast him and his people out, forever out upon the waters of despair." (ll1) Dr. Heine realizes acutely the political situation which disturbs his life: "Everything is politics now. One can't meet people, have friends on any other basis. It's impossible to have casual conversations or abstract discussions any more." (ll1)

In view of the characters of the doctor and Dr. Heine, the puppet
show becomes ironic. The doctor sees the grasshopper as "The Leader," "a fine, green-armored animal, strong and perfectly equipped for the life he had to lead." (124) In contrast to the "superthing," the clown has a "round, human face" and a "faltering human voice," (124) and he is carrying flowers to his own funeral. The clown obviously represents Dollfuss, the Chancellor of Austria, and is even named "Chancellor." In the same scene, one is reminded of what power the young doctor admires when he compares the grasshopper to the white horses. The young doctor has idealized the aristocracy which is now gone. Peter Quennell calls the white horses symbols of "an existence at once pathetic and noble, magnanimous and stupid—doomed to vanish, yet somehow splendid in its rapid decline." However, more important than the decline itself in this story is the young doctor's attitude toward the loss of the aristocracy.

Although the puppet scene shows the characters of the two men, it is not a scene of intellectual or emotional meeting between them. When the student doctor sees the men coming to take the doctor away, he sees them as a "little search party come to seek for him in an alien land." (125) He still feels himself very much alone in this section of Austria. When the doctor leaves, he asks, "'What can I do to help?'... and he was thinking of the pure-white horses of Vienna and of their waltz, like the grasshopper's dance across the stage." (127)

The author has incorporated in this story a theme similar to those of "Keep Your Pity" and "Dear Mr. Walrus"—the idealism of a culture which has decayed and passed. The young doctor's reveries concerning the

---

white horses amounts to a worship of the power of the aristocracy. This theme, however, is only a part of the story. Carpenter says that the problem of the story is the "pathos of prejudice and misunderstanding. The young Jewish student-doctor, who has been called in to assist the injured Nazi, ought to be able to be a friend—he and the Austrian are really much alike, the Austrian with his worship of power and the Jew with his nostalgic idealism, his memory of the royal white horses of Vienna....But of course they cannot be friends."6 Frances Valensi calls the story an indirect treatment of the Nazi-Jewish question, "more subtle than it is deep," which withholds the full meaning until the last sentences—"The effect is more of completion than of surprise."7

However, the author does not seem to intend a theme which is dependent upon surprise. She unfolds, little by little, the characters of two men and shows her theme through their relationship. Although they are connected by the medical profession and by a strong tendency to be idealistic, they are unable to meet on any basis except a polite and formal one. Carpenter says that they cannot be friends, but the author shows that they do have a formal friendship. The pathos of the situation exists in the fact that the young Jewish doctor recognizes in the end, in his last comparison of the horses and "of their waltz, like the grasshopper's dance across the stage," that he and the doctor have something in common, but that they are irreparably set apart because of their backgrounds and the political situation.


"The White Horses of Vienna" goes back, in a way, to the technique of "Wedding Day." Both "One of Ours" and "Life Being the Best" depend upon a plot and a climax of events, but "The White Horses of Vienna" is again a study in the contrast of characters and of the relationships which exist among them.

A great deal is disclosed about the doctor in the opening pages of the story. He is, first of all, a man who refuses to be idle, regardless of the circumstances. As he sits in the sun, letting his sprained knee mend, "working like a well man," (112) he makes a puppet. One learns later that the puppet is not for idle pleasure, but is a vehicle for the doctor's strong political views. The doctor is so active, even though his knee is sprained, that his wife upbraids him for not letting her help. The man is capable, probably because of his peasant background, of building his own house, which he erected "with only his two sons and his wife to help him lift the squared, varnished beams into place." (113) His capability extends to his profession: "He even did a bit of dentistry too, when there was need...." (113) His strength is emphasized by the fact that he has built his house "on the sloping mountainside" with "no real road leading to it." (113)

The doctor, however, is a man not only of energy, capability, and strength. The author mentions, in connection with his house, that "It was as if the doctor had chosen this place to build so that the village might leave him to himself unless the need were very great." (113) The description implies that the doctor is willing to offer his services, but that he is also a man of solitude. The desire for solitude hints of another side to his nature, which the author bears out in details.
The reference to "his own paintings of Dalmatia and his drawings of the Siberian country" (113) show his sensitive, artistic leanings. The mention of his making a special place for his bookshelves bespeaks his learning. After all, the doctor has returned to the Tirol by choice, "after years of studying in other countries." (113) He is a compassionate man, having spent years "giving away as a gift his tenderness and knowledge as he went from one wild place to another." (113) "His face was strong as rock, but it had seen so much of suffering that it had the look of being scarred, it seemed to be split in two, with one side of it given to resolve and the other to compassion." (114) He has not only seen suffering, he himself has suffered. The author mentions that he spent "years as a prisoner of war in Siberia." (113)

The doctor's resolve is demonstrated most dramatically by the fact that he has been in the Rathaus previous to the story, but he does not abandon his political views. Indeed, he is actively for them, even to lighting the fires. He retains his resolve regardless of his years in the prison camp, of his learning, of his wide experience. "All of the places that he had been before, Paris and Moscow and Munich and Constantinople had never left an evil mark. None of the grand places or people had ever done to him what they can do." (114) The author implies that he has returned to the Tirol because he feels that he is part of the peasantry in spite of his learning, because he loves the wilder parts of the country, and because he is needed by the villagers.

However, the doctor, who is one of the two main characters, is not developed as thoroughly by his thoughts as is his wife, a minor character. The author uses both internal analysis and interior monologues in the
story, and switches from the objective to the woman's or Dr. Heine's point of view, so that it would not change her technique were she to explore more thoroughly the doctor's mind.

The author gives the reader a realistic picture of the woman's prejudice. The wife distorts Dr. Heine's story of the horse so that she believes he is telling the story to show Viennese shrewdness. She attacks him for his belief in art and science but not in the needs of people. When she has a personal contact with the young Jew, after he singes his coat on the lamp, she offers to fix the coat. "And then she bit her lip suddenly and stood back, as if she had remembered the evil thing that stood between them." (118) The woman is representative of people who would judge Dr. Heine, not on his own merits or faults, but by prejudice. She seems almost to guard her prejudice so that Dr. Heine will not destroy it. Ironically enough, if she were to judge Dr. Heine by his own character, she might well have true reason to dislike him.

Dr. Heine is described in his speech as well as by internal analysis and imagery. "The White Horses" becomes the motif which shows his idealistic tendencies. His conversation shows him to be naive, since when he talks to the woman he does not seem to know that she is attacking him. His great loneliness at the house of the doctor is described through imagery and simple narrative:

He was lost in this wilderness of cold, lost in a warm month, and the thought turned his blood to ice. He wanted to be indoors, with the warmth of his own people, and the intellect speaking. He had had enough of the bare, northern speech of these others who moved higher and higher as the land moved. (125)
Dr. Heine becomes an unsympathetic person, not because of traits the doctor's wife ascribes to Jews, but because of his own faults. The author imbues him with incredible naivete. He never realizes during the puppet play or after it the doctor's symbolic meaning for the puppets. Early in the story, when he sees the fox, he asks, "Is this a dog or a cat?" (115) The author mentions that he answers "quite guilelessly" (123) the woman's implications about his liking the arts. One wonders if any person so strongly aware of his Jewishness could be unaware of an attack on it, of if anyone, city dweller or not, would not know a dog or cat from an animal he had never seen before. Though the author emphasizes too strongly Heine's naivete, it is obviously a quality which she wants him to have.

The trait one next notices in Dr. Heine is a slight condescension. But at lunch he had talked simply with them, although they were country people and ignorant as peasants for all he knew. He listened to everything the doctor had told him about the way he liked things done; in spite of his modern medical school and his Viennese hospitals, taking it all in with interest and respect. (116-117)

Because he believes that the doctor and his wife might be as "ignorant as peasants," he overlooks their strong characteristics. The countryside is to him merely a "wilderness of cold," rather than a test of fortitude. He is so idealistic that he becomes an ineffectual dreamer. This is best shown by the contrast in an exchange between him and the doctor:

"Politics, politics," said the student-doctor, "and one party as bad as another. You're much wiser to make your puppets, Herr Doktor. It takes one's mind off things, just as playing
cards does. In Vienna we play cards, al­
ways play cards, no matter what is happen­
ing."

"There was a time for cards," said the doctor... 
"But now there is something else to do." (121-122)

The dialogue demonstrates Heine's ignorance of the fact that the doctor is an active Nazi, as well as the difference in Heine's and the doctor's philosophies. Dr. Heine would ignore the real, the actual, the un­
pleasant; the older doctor would do something to change it. The politi­
cal situation is viewed by Heine as a discomfort which makes it "impos­
sible to have casual conversations or abstract discussions any more;"
(121) the doctor suffers discomfort, even prison, to back his political views.

The last section of the story shows Dr. Heine lapsing into almost morbid self-pity. He deplores his situation in the mountains, and when he sees the men coming up the mountain "like little beacons of hope carried to him," (125) he says to himself, "'Come to me... come to me. I am a young man alone on a mountain. I am a young man alone, as my race is alone, lost here amongst them all.'" (126) Soon after, the doctor is taken to the Rathaus for his Nazi activities. He closes his hand in "comfort" over Heine's as the younger man asks how he can help. The doctor smiles, "his cheeks scarred with the marks of laughter," showing how well he can endure his trials. Heine, on the other hand, is unable to do anything for his idealistic vision, but to think "in anguish of the snow-white horses, the Lippizaners, the relics of pride, the still unbroken vestiges of beauty bending their knees to the empty loge of royalty where there was no royalty any more." (127)
The theme of the story includes, then, not only the inability of two idealistic men to meet on common ground, but also the important differences between their respective idealisms. The doctor's is immediate, worthy of struggle, and consequently, vital. Heine's lets him live the past and allows him to despair, or perhaps because he is lethargic he has come to worship the past.

There is greater attempt to describe physical appearance in this story than in any of the ones previously studied, although one still finds such generalities as "She was quite a young, beautiful woman," (113) which is only slightly qualified with "She was burned from the wind and the snow in winter and burned from the sun at other times of the year; she had straight, long, sunburned limbs, and her dark hair was cut short and pushed behind her ears." (113) Because the description of the woman's physical appearance is general, she must live for the reader in her thoughts and actions. Better than the description of her appearance is dialogue such as this, which shows her strength and her positive nature: "'They're taking Father to prison again. Now you must come and kiss him. Neither of you is going to cry.'" (126) One expects, since she has also climbed the hill to light fires with her husband, that this is the kind of face she would show to her children when their father is going to be taken away.

The doctor is described as having "coarse, reddish, well-scrubbed skin, and the gold hairs sprang out of his forearms and his muscular, heavy thighs." (113) Mark Van Doren upbraids Kay Boyle for "hammering" (in the entire volume) at the hairs on the backs of hands, forearms and legs, and says that because of it, the characters do not live.8

This might be true, but the above description of the doctor is indicative of physical strength corresponding to strength of character.

There are, in the description of the doctor's appearance, details which help us to know what kind of man he is:

Because of his own strong, humble pride in himself his shirt was always a white one, and of fresh, clean linen no matter what sort of work he was doing....the woven stockings that ended just above his calves were perfectly white and the nails of his broad, white hands were white. They were spotless, like the nails of a woman's hand. (114)

Since, in such descriptions as this, the author tells us what kind of man the doctor is, she need never have said that he is "savagely clean." The doctor, though one does not enter his thoughts, becomes more physically real than Dr. Heine, who is described through the eyes of the woman: "He had a pale skin, unused to the weather of mountain places, and his skull was lighted with bright, ambitious eyes." (116) With Dr. Heine the author returns to the description which Van Doren objects to, but one must realize that the woman sees what stereotyped features she chooses to see:

She stood very close, casting sharp looks at Dr. Heine, watching his slender, delicate hands at work, seeing the dark, silky hairs that grew on the backs of them and the black hair brushed smooth on his head. (116)

A large part of the story is told in objective narrative of action, another large part is conversation, and still another is internal analysis. However, the author has not abandoned her imagery. The injured doctor is described as a "great, golden, wounded bird" (114) as he hops about on one leg; The image conveys a sense of the doctor's essential dignity. The imagery is successful when it describes Dr. Heine's reaction to the
fires, since it conveys both a sense of his poetic nature and a sense of his nearly overwhelming despair:

They were blooming now on all the black, invisible crests, marvelously living flowers of fire springing out of the arid darkness, seemingly higher than any other things could grow. He felt himself sitting defenseless by the window, surrounded by these strong, long-burning fires of disaster. (121)

The image furnishes another contrast of ideals. The Nazi symbol is "marvelously living," frightening Heine with its vitality. There are failures of imagery at times, however, such as the "small necklace of men coming to him," (125) in which "necklace" seems to have little connection with either Heine or the men. The former example of imagery, however, seems to be more typical of the story than the latter.

The author uses, in this story as she has in others, a single incident which explains a great deal about the characters. In the following passage from "Count Lothar's Heart" (The White Horses of Vienna and Other Stories), as the Count watches the swans, he tries to explain to his future bride that during the war he had turned to sexual perversion:

And he turned his eyes back, slowly, in dumb confusion to the sight of the birds on the edge of the slipping water. Some of them had thrust the long pure stalks of their throats down into the deeper places before the falls and were seeking for refuse along the bottom. Nothing remained but the soft, flickering, short peaks of their clean rumps and their leathery black elbows with the down blowing soft at the ebony bone. In such ecstasies of beauty were they seeking in the filth of lemon rinds and shells and garbage.....

the passage is symbolic, with the swans, "emblems of passion," and displays a feeling rather than a theme, unless the theme be the co-existence of beauty and filth. In "The White Horses of Vienna," however, the author abandons vagueness in the focal incident. It becomes evident in the puppet scene that the doctor admires "The Leader" and despises weakness. His political views, as well as Dr. Heine's idealism are demonstrated without a doubt.

A success of the story is, as it is in "Wedding Day," an effective reversal of an established symbol. The doctor, who believes in Nazism as strongly as any stereotyped Nazi figure might be imagined to believe, becomes an admirable character. Heine also departs from the stereotype. Far from being "evil" with "bright, quick, ambitious eyes," as the doctor's wife believes, he is close to being ineffectual. In departing from the stereotype, the author seems to attempt to show Heine as a sympathetic character. A large portion of the story is seen in his thoughts, including the beginning and ending paragraphs of the important last section. One pities his plight, but does not admire his reaction to it. It might well be a flaw in the story that, though the doctor is viewed objectively and the reader sympathizes with him, Dr. Heine is explored through his thoughts and is shown to be more distasteful than sympathetic. The same treatment for both (for example, a great deal more internal analysis for the doctor) might show the theme more clearly.

One finds in "The White Horses of Vienna" a mixture of the techniques of the author's former stories. There is a greater attention to outward actions and appearances and less imagery than in "Wedding Day."

10 Carpenter, p. 85.
The author, however, leaves the distinct plot progression of "One of Ours" and especially of "Life Being the Best" to return to the character analysis and gradual theme unfolding of "Wedding Day." The story is more specific in locale and situation than many of the earlier stories, so that the implication the author uses in connection with historic fact is far more obvious than the implication of "Wedding Day." Kay Boyle also returns to the switch in viewpoint which she had abandoned in the second two stories discussed, even though she neglects a major character with this type of exploration. One sees in the story some of the blending of outward actuality and the workings of the character's minds, as well as the character contrast and implication, which the author uses again in her novelette, *The Crazy Hunter*.

One is more concerned with the characters of this story, however, than with its techniques. It is interesting to compare and contrast technique with earlier stories, but the reader is more interested in finding out exactly what kind of men the doctor and Dr. Heine are, in discovering the relationship between them, in knowing where their separate idealism have led them by the end of the story. There might be several reasons for this shift in interest. First, the author obviously has a particular comment to make, and second, this comment arises specifically from these characters rather than from stereotypes. One observes the scenes of "Wedding Day," one is amused by Mrs. Umster, and one is surprised by Young Palavicini, but there is no character in these stories who embodies a positive view, whom we can admire for following a particular vision. In "The White Horses of Vienna," we meet such a character. One does not need to feel that the Nazi doctor
has a practicable ideal. One appraises him, sees the failures of his
idealistic Nazism (especially from the vantage point of the present),
but admires him for his feeling for human dignity, his belief in action,
his refusal to allow prejudice to influence his care of the people.

It seems to be at this point in Kay Boyle's career that she
effectively subordinates her technique to theme and character. Possibly
her success arises because her approach becomes positive, not showing
characters who face life with a warped or negative vision, but reveal­ing
characters who demonstrate a specific and admirable attitude. It
is interesting to note that the next story to be considered, The Crazy
Hunter, also embodies a positive attitude on the part of at least one of
the characters.
In 1940 Kay Boyle published a volume containing three novelettes—The Crazy Hunter (the title story), The Bridegroom's Body, and Big Fiddle. Big Fiddle is the story of an American musician who plays the bass viol with a group in Austria. He has an "attack of nerves" and leaves the group to travel in England. He is haunted by an episode with a promiscuous girl in an orphanage in his younger days, an episode for which he was blamed by the priest. In England, Big Fiddle is watched by the police because he looks suspicious, but unsuspectingly goes his way. After he meets a girl in the cafe and walks with her, he tells her that he loves her, but must tell her about the prison term he has served. When he talks about the promiscuous girl in the orphanage, the girl believes that he is insinuating something about her own morals, and she runs away. Big Fiddle goes to Italy and makes friends there, one of whom is an English policeman. He is arrested and is told that the girl from the cafe has been found dead on the beach.

Otis Ferguson calls the plot of Big Fiddle "transparent" and says that it is out of key with Kay Boyle's writing.\(^1\) The critic does not say, and should, that the story lacks a theme of any significance and that it relies heavily on the coincidence of the girl's death. It might

be that Big Fiddle actually did kill the girl, but, if so, one wonders why he killed her and why the story so carefully covers up the murder.

The *Bridegroom's Body* is a more successful story. The story is set at an English swannery where Lady Glourie, wife of the swannery owner, awaits a nurse to take care of the hired man's wife. The woman has been very lonely for female companionship, but when the nurse, Miss Cafferty, arrives, Lady Glourie becomes jealous because of the attraction that seems to exist between Lord Glourie and Miss Cafferty. When Lady Glourie rushes out in the pond at night to try to save the already dead young swan (the "bridegroom" of the title) from the attacks of the old male swan, Miss Cafferty hysterically confesses that she has repelled the advances of the men at the swannery because of her intense admiration for Lady Glourie.

As one critic has pointed out, the greatest success of the story is in the swans' lives, which symbolize "the impotent desire...of Lord Glourie; the restless, unsatisfied energy of his wife; the tenacious habits of the old swanherd; the new blood of the young farmer...the clear and honest innocence of a young Irish nurse...." Carpenter calls the novelette an "initiation story" in which "Lady Glourie realizes that the young nurse who has come from the city has not been, as Lady Glourie suspected, in love with Lord Glourie or the farmer Panrandel but really with Lady Glourie herself." In spite of Carpenter's enthusiasm for the story, however, Otis Ferguson's criticism of it seems valid and

---


perceptive: "But the love of the one woman for the other and its climax in violence and revelation seem less prepared than striven for. It is half true, half trick."\(^4\)

The title story of the volume, *The Crazy Hunter*, was reprinted in 1952 in a college text book, *Nine Short Novels*, edited by Richard M. Ludwig and Marvin B. Perry, Jr. The editors of the volume say of their selected short novels,

> In length these selections fall between fifteen and fifty thousand words. With the unity and immediacy of impact of the short story, they combine something of the intricacy and extended development of character and theme proper to the full-length novel. Whether as long short stories, as separate and distinctive fiction types, or as embryo novels, they furnish rich material for a mature and careful study of the methods of fiction.\(^5\)

The editors also give *The Crazy Hunter*, among the nine selections, credit which has been lacking in many criticisms of her previous work:

> The purpose or end of all these stories is, broadly speaking, the same: the shaping of a selected aspect of human experience in the light of a particular literary form and of an individual writer's intelligence so that the finished work may have a meaning worthy of the serious consideration of thinking men. (vii)

From this general introduction one expects a far more intricate work than the short stories considered in the previous chapters.

*The Crazy Hunter* is a study of three characters—Candy Lombe, his wife, and their seventeen-year-old daughter, Nancy. The action of the

\(^4\)Ferguson, p. 480.

\(^5\)Richard M. Ludwig and Marvin B. Perry, Jr., eds., Introduction to *Nine Short Novels* (Boston, 1952), p. vii. Succeeding references to this volume, including *The Crazy Hunter*, will appear as page numbers in the text of this chapter.
story is set on a horse and cattle ranch in England in the month of June, shortly after Nancy has returned from a boarding school in Florence. Mrs. Lombe is following in the profession of her father, who was a horse rancher. Candy is Canadian rather than English and was once a painter, although, at the time of the story, he has given up art as a profession. The story begins with Nancy and Mrs. Lombe swimming together in the river. As they return from the swim, Nancy sees a bird caught and struggling in a tree. Two years ago Mrs. Lombe had taken the lead in dragging a drowned groom out of the water, Nancy remembers, and now it is Mrs. Lombe who pulls the fish hook out of the bird's throat. After the rescue of the bird, Nancy asks if she may return to school in the fall, in Paris or Florence, but her mother refuses her, saying that she is too young to live in a city alone.

The second chapter begins in the stable, where Nancy argues with Apby, the groom, about the age of the gelding, Brigand, which Candy has bought against his wife's wishes. When Nancy rides the gelding out, she meets her father, dismounts, and walks with him. While they are walking, Brigand is attacked by retinitis and goes blind. Later, in the Lombe house, Candy and Nancy listen while Mrs. Lombe talks to the veterinarian. Mrs. Lombe decides to call a veterinarian down from London, even though both she and the local man agree that the horse's case is hopeless. When the London veterinarian comes, Candy is able to persuade Mrs. Lombe to give the girl two weeks with the horse before he is killed. Neither Candy nor Mrs. Lombe knows that Nancy is walking the horse at night on the advice of letters from Sheehan, a young Irishman whom she had met in Florence. Nancy plans to surprise her parents, but at the
end of the story, they still do not know that the horse has been ridden. During one of these nightly excursions, Apby wakes to the sound of the horse going past and goes to the paddocks where Nancy is watching Brig- and frolic with the fillies. Apby advises Nancy to ride the gelding, since, Apby says, a horse which isn't used is a dissatisfied horse.

Candy, who is desperately afraid of horses himself, does not know that Nancy is riding the horse at night and tries to dissuade her from just such an action. Nancy tells her father that she will turn over the feeding of Brigand to Apby if her father will give her more time for the animal's life. Candy agrees, although the local veterinarian has been kicked badly by a draught animal and the accident makes Candy terrified for his daughter's safety.

Nancy receives an invitation to attend the wedding of Sheehan's sister in London. The night before she is to leave she takes Brigand over a jump with Apby calling out the distance because it is too dark and rainy for her to see. Nancy leaves for London on a Friday afternoon, and the following morning Mrs. Lombe plans for Brigand's death. Candy, drinking in the house, overcomes his own fear of the horse enough to load a revolver and go to the stable to stand guard over Brigand. Mrs. Lombe is forced to send the haulers away and tries to coax Candy into letting the horse be killed. Candy is still in the stall, frightened and drunk, and has fired several shots to drive off the haulers, when Mrs. Lombe sees Nancy coming up the driveway.

The theme of the story is as intricate as the interrelationship of the characters involved. The attempts of critics to explain the story are few and unthorough. One critic even says that "Candy... meets his
doom through the menace of the hated horses," even though the author doesn't say he does and even implies that he eventually escapes from the stall. She writes, toward the end of the last scene, that he is "so far untouched and perhaps immuned by this passive, abeyant, this almost ludicrous posture of martyrdom." (172) William Soskin says that the key to the theme of the story is in the "physical fraternity of intuition which unites frightened young adolescents, defeated men, frustrated poets and quivering, frightened horses and birds in a single special race." They must live close, he says, to the reality of death and cope with an efficient, extrovert world. His observation is probably closer to the meaning of the story than that of another critic who says that the upshot of the story is that "life is a unity, that people, animals, birds, branches are all part of the same thing, all projections of each other." Philip Rahv has a clue to the meaning of The Crazy Hunter, even though he is considering the volume as a whole and the comment is too general to be an aid to interpretation: "The three stories are unified by a common concern with integrity of feeling and its violation by the compulsive accident of life and the callous conventions of society." 

Although Candy and Mrs. Lombe are important characters, the story


8 Mary M. Colum, "Poets and Psychologists," The Book Forum, CIII (June 1940), 324.

9 Philip Rahv, "Improvisations of Reality," The Nation, CL (March 23, 1940), 396.
is essentially Nancy's. Early in the story the reader finds Nancy aware of her emergence from childhood and desirous of shaping her life in some way, even though the way is not completely clear to her. She says to herself as she and her mother swim,

There is a school of children everywhere with me here, all of that one child I was once running along the house's east ivy-covered wall and down through the stables and pastures. (97)

The echo of her desire to form herself is in these words, again spoken to herself:

Students...their faces looking different from other faces because they are still on adventure, looking for a thing nobody here wants or has heard of wanting: knowledge or the way to knowledge or else simply the way, because of what families or conventions want, of keeping curious and keeping free. (99)

Nancy's resistance to her mother's dominance is also made clear early in the story. Mrs. Lombe tells Nancy that she has grown a great deal since the previous fall. Nancy expresses her resentment for this statement to 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.... (99)

Nancy, seeking some way to "establish" herself, feels that the ranch stifles this growth. It is significant that she attains the independent growth she desires while she is still on the ranch.

One must analyze Mrs. Lombe and Candy in order to see what Nancy wishes to escape. One of the early clues to the character of Mrs. Lombe is in Nancy's mind when Nancy thinks of her, "I am a woman sitting here watching you refuse the stream its current by your will." (99)
One expects Mrs. Lombe to be strong-willed, and so she is. Mrs. Lombe runs the ranch, letting her husband do some of the buying, but not much, because she is impatient with his mistakes. Mrs. Lombe is characterized even by her hands, "the resolute nails cut short on a doer's not a dreamer's hand." (104) She has the kind of realistic attitude necessary to pull the drowned groom out of the water. She wants a successful ranch and her desire for this success does not admit such nonsense as Candy's buying Brigand, a horse with "bad blood in him somewhere," (102) even as a gift for Nancy. Though the reader might feel that Candy's lack of practical knowledge has partially forced his wife into her position of mastery, there is no denying that Mrs. Lombe's unbending strength has alienated both her husband and her daughter from her.

Candy Lombe is identified by Nancy with the crazy hunter. She calls the hunter "my horse in protest...to murmur alone to in fortification of my father's errors; the substance of identity and revolt and love to hold to...." (109) She sees love in her father and a tendency to resist Mrs. Lombe's dominance (though one cannot say that his is open revolution). Candy sees in himself failure because he has abandoned his painting, drinks too much, is useless on the ranch, and is afraid of horses. Candy's failure is summed up in his words to Nancy:

The old skeleton's there under the rest; under all the fanciness and vagueness you've got to find out in the end that he's there and how he goes together and how he moves. That's what I never paid enough attention to, Nancy. Perhaps that's why I never made a go of things. (119)

Candy might be talking of painting, of the necessity for learning bodily structure in order to control the painting of a figure. He seems, however, to apply his words to much more of his life, to the need to recognize
that there are practical aspects of life, unpleasant situations in the world, that there are, on occasion, grooms to be pulled out of the water. The "pure and perfect substance of Art" (119) is not enough without the control of facing up to the physical and psychological realities of life. But for all of Candy's realization of his failures, he desires his daughter's love, and certainly his daughter feels a greater bond between them than she does between herself and her mother.

The development of the characters is focused in the hunter. Nancy has shown her growth in one way by taking the bird out of the tree (the incident is made sharper by Nancy's memory of her inability to face the scene of the dead groom). She is not, as her father is, afraid of horses, and her riding skill is applauded by Mrs. Lombe. With Brigand, Nancy begins to show how she is shaping her inheritance from her mother, tempering it with the inheritance she has received from her father. She works with the now blind horse, not giving him up because he is impractical nor trying to master him by force or will, but practicing him patiently. She asks advice of Sheehan by mail. She quietly defies her mother, who has asked her to stay away from the horse. She gets Apby the groom to help her, not by ordering him, but by winning him slowly to her side. The relationship she establishes with the men of the story is one, not of submission on the part of any, but of equality, a mutual giving and receiving. The triumph of her method is in the jump she finally takes with the blind horse. She has won Apby over, she has made the horse useful, and she has conquered her own fear (she remembers, as she gallops the horse toward the jump, a particularly frightening fall when she was younger) in facing the danger, the possible death, of
jumping a blind horse in a treacherous rain.

Candy does not know that Nancy has jumped the horse, or even that she has ridden it. He is, however, forced to earn his daughter's love by protecting the horse in the final scene. Mrs. Lombe has arranged for Brigand's death and Candy is satisfied at the thought of it. He remembers the veterinarian killed by the draught horse and thinks,

Horse, it's your turn to die. This time it's not Penson or me but you, horse not man, you blank-eyed espial spying upon the secrets of eternity, you milky-eyed deserter. (164)

It is only when he thinks of Nancy that he forces himself to face the terror of the horse's stall. He identifies himself with the horse in that both of them are "foreign," and both of them are "love as it works out against—against this, this empire building and this suppression of the native...." (169) And "this almost ludicrous posture of martyrdom," which he takes up as he "swooned and drowned in terror" (172) in the horse's stall, is his earning of his daughter's love, the facing of death for it, the seeing of the "skeleton" beneath the "fanciness and vagueness."

The theme of the story evolves as this: On the one hand there is Mrs. Lombe who feels bound to uphold her father's tradition in horse breeding, who is actually forced to take the responsibility for running the ranch. On the other hand there is Candy who resents his wife's authority even while he recognizes its necessity. In order to keep his daughter's love, Candy must face the horse, with all of the terrors the horse holds for him. The central theme of the story lies in the problem of freedom for Nancy as she seeks to escape the separate traps into which her parents have fallen. Her solution is a discipline of her talents (which Candy admits he has lacked), a refusal to be mastered by people or
circumstances (evident in her training of Brigand), a winning over of other people (her relationship with Apby) instead of the stern mastery of her mother. Nancy learns that she must face danger for the horse, which she loves, and shares in Candy's final discovery, that love must be an active force and must be earned.

Here, as in "The White Horses of Vienna," we have a plot which is detailed, realistic, and important to the story, seeming to arise from the characters themselves. Even the last scene, the climax of both the action and Candy's psychological development, is a result of the kind of characters these are. The men are asked to come to kill Brigand while Nancy is gone because Mrs. Lombe wants to be rid of what she considers a useless animal and a danger to Nancy, and because Mrs. Lombe wishes to spare her daughter the pain of seeing the horse shot. Candy comes to the stable because he feels he must protect Brigand for Nancy's sake. Although the daughter and son of "Wedding Day" resent the wedding, one is never quite certain upon what their rejection is based. One understands, however, Dr. Heine's reference to the Lippizaners, his view of the puppet show, his feeling of alienation in a strange land, just as one sees that Nancy treats Apby and the hunter as she does because she wants to "establish" herself and that Candy's appearance in Brigand's stall is a triumph over himself.

The main movement of the story arises from the characters, but the action is, as well, a method of exploring the characters. Thus a scene such as the freeing of the bird from the tree has a delicate interaction of character and action. Nancy's monologue is a reminder of the groom:

Two years ago the thing was lying in the water and I couldn't look down at it again. I
stood staring at her [Mrs. Lombe's] face until she finally turned her face down to see....We'll have to get him out quick she said...Mother, I can't, I can't do anything, said Nan's voice, dying. I can't. I'm too afraid. (103)

It is only later in the story that one realizes that Nancy's inability to face the unpleasant is a trait of her father. When it is she who takes the bird from the tree, however, one sees that she has gained control over her reluctance.

She closed her eyes so as to see it no longer and crouched blind, dazed in the tree with the nightmare of frail desperate life tearing, beak, claw, and wing, at the string's vein through her fingers. (106)

But difficult as it is for her, Nancy rescues the bird. The scene shows us, in Nancy's monologue, the part and the development of her character from the past to the present. Her ability to free the bird, the action of the scene, arises from her character growth.

As in "The White Horses of Vienna," the success of The Crazy Hunter lies as much in the subordination of detail to character as in the subordination of plot. For example, the author makes use of monologue and internal analysis to explore all three of the main characters, but this is not monologue for the sake of poetic sound. We have seen how a pertinent bit of Nancy's past has been brought in by her monologue. Now let us examine the early monologue of Mrs. Lombe, who speaks in her mind to Nancy:

He [Candy] hasn't any preferences or any real will of his own....I'm the one who has the money, born with it, kept it, doubled it after your grandfather died, and your father has to show he's somebody with something, even if it's only the say-so. (101)
The monologue shows us, first, Mrs. Lombe's position of running the ranch, her pride in her type of will. It shows, as well, the relationship between Mrs. Lombe and her husband, a relationship which is unhappy for both. It hints of the characteristics to be found in Candy, his weaknesses and his efforts to compensate for them. Before Candy comes into the story, the reader already has a sense of what kind of person he is.

The interior monologue explores not only Nancy's past, but also her parents'. While Nancy sits in the living room with her parents and the veterinarian, awaiting the decision on Brigand, she listens to her mother's almost masculine talk and begins to think. She reviews her care of the horse after his blindness, remembers a scene from her tenth or eleventh year. When Candy, drunk, was lying on the grass of the yard in the dark, Nancy climbed out of her window to sit with him. He was moaning to himself about the wife he had lost, the wife who was dying in the sanitorium. The reader realizes (as Nancy did, finally) that he was talking about Mrs. Lombe, about how she had changed.

"I lost her," he said, "you never knew her young and ill. You knew somebody who came a long time after that." (130)

The difference to him is that Mrs. Lombe, "young and ill," needed his love and even, the implication is, his physical strength. The monologue is of Nancy's realization of the gulf between her parents, of explanation for Candy's attitude, of the change in Mrs. Lombe. The irony of Mrs. Lombe's death sentence for a horse which is now as helpless as she once was is emphasized when Nancy cries out to her, "'What if you were ill once and nobody--nobody happened to come along and take care of you..."
how would anybody like dying when they're young and not ready for it yet!" (132)

Thus the reader learns about the characters little by little. Candy's greatest disappointment, the loss of his "young" wife, is not disclosed until chapter three. The author asks us to look for the hints and implications she gives us, to piece together the bits of the past which go into making up the character. She explains why Candy is as he is, she shows Mrs. Lombe's heritage, and she makes us understand Nancy's struggle to put together, from two separate inheritances, the individual way she wishes to follow.

The focus of the three characters is in the horse. The author builds a physical picture of him, but he lives most clearly in the minds of the characters. Mrs. Lombe regards him with an only slightly ambivalent attitude. He is another error made by Candy, an error which she believes might be made partly in defiance. He is a source of danger for Nancy. He is, most of all, useless for stud or for showing. Her verdict when he goes blind is death. For Nancy, on the other hand, the hunter has several meanings. Her ability to ride him and her lack of fear are inherited from her mother, but Nancy also sees something of herself and of her father in the horse. She tells her father, "'He's looking for a personality, you know, the way you have to when you're young,'" (116) as she herself is. She sees him also as a token of love from her father, "the substance of identity and revolt and love to hold to." (109) When the horse goes blind she wishes to help him develop into a useful animal. It is Candy who is most divided in his view of the horse. Even in chapter two he sees Brigand, along with all horses, as a danger to himself
and Nancy, an enemy of man:

Here it was, the threat, the menace of horses again, the monstrous promise in their bone and hide of mutilation, the even fatal evil they could wreak on peace... (116)

But he also sees in this particular horse something of himself: "A freak and a fool and a hack like me, he thought..." (117) Because Nancy wants the horse saved, Candy goes to the stable at the end of the story, but he is still torn in his feelings for Brigand. In the final scene he feels strongly identified with the horse:

This horse, he isn't horse any more, any of us are horses, he's the forces of good against the forces of destruction, he's me just as much as me as artist, foreigner, just as much an outcast he's freak and he's love... (169)

But the meat of the horse, the flesh and bone, still terrifies him, so that one knows that Candy is fighting to save, not the horse itself, but Nancy's, and to some extent, his own, vision of the horse.

Since the focus of characters and theme is in the crazy hunter, he emerges as an important character of the story. Yet there is no more ready to "faint" with "delight" as in "Episode in the Life of an Ancestor." The horse's psychology is explored in the mind of Nancy:

So you'll stand there day after night, night after day, not knowing one from the other until your time's up, she said. She could feel him strong as stone but living as she shoved past him in the stall. You'll stand here, what's in you rearing for death and shaking with fright unless you listen to me.... Your eyes, my friend, have clotted in your head. However, the road still flows away under your feet, the fence still bucks under you when you gather up your legs to rise.... Let the bush slap you full in the face and you will acknowledge its presence the same way as you did when you saw it unexpectedly turn and wave a branch. (136)
The horse becomes real to the reader because he exists, with his fears and his desires, in Nancy's mind. The terror of "the bush because the bush unexpectedly turns and waves a branch" (135) is the leitmotiv which reminds one that Nancy must conquer the horse's fears as well as her own if she is to attain the goal she has set for herself.

When the story focuses so intensely on so many aspects of meaning in Brigand, it seems strange that Ludwig and Perry can say so lightly, 

Brigand is thus in one sense a symbol of folly, of sentimentality, yet is there not, Miss Boyle asks, a genuine valiancy in the defense of a folly that is innocent and loved? (xviii)

William Soskin comments on Brigand as a symbol of "futile beauty, of death close by, of the insecure loneliness of an animal living defiantly as itself, not as a link in a chain of progeny." He fails, however, to call attention to the main purpose of the horse, that of exposing and explaining the major characters of the novelette.

The imagery of The Crazy Hunter is less elaborate than that of some of Kay Boyle's earlier work, and it is, on the whole, more carefully controlled than previously. When Nancy has untangled the string the bird is caught by in the tree, we find this description:

And now the terrible, wild, tugging life freed of the branch pulled on the string her hands held, tore through the leaves in frantic terror like a fish leaping underwater with the hook caught in him. (106)

This simile makes the reader feel the horror of the bird's plight, but more especially of Nancy's feelings toward the struggle of the bird. Another example of metaphor is in "the two survivors moving through a

10 Soskin, p. 3.
bleached plague-stricken land" (142) when Nancy and the blind horse walk at night. Again, the metaphor is phrased in the way that Nancy would see herself and Brigand. The success of the imagery of *The Crazy Hunter* is this: It is no longer imagery for the sake of poetic language, but is subordinated to the visions of the characters.

So also are experimental techniques of the story important only as they explore the characters. The first lines are surprising when one remembers them later in the reading:

> The woman and 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. (96)

The author is speaking of Nancy and Mrs. Lombe, but there seems to be a distance between the two, the distance between two strangers. This is an appropriate beginning because it portrays physically a distance which actually exists mentally between them. When Nancy is recalling to herself her care of Brigand right after he is stricken, she adds remarks in parentheses to her own monologue:

> (Stick to the story, please, said the cold hard core of listening in rebuke. Tell us what actually took place, don't tell us what you thought.)

> (Very well, said the Court, bringing its mallet impatiently down. Get on with it without any dramatization, please.) (125)

Again, this is not experiment for the sake of experiment. It is instead a way of showing Nancy's recognition of the fact that she must conquer, to an extent, her subjectivity, that her reason for training the horse is beyond sentimentality.
Herein lies the success of the novelette: The plot, imagery, experimental techniques—all are means of developing the characters. One finds in The Crazy Hunter the control lacking in Kay Boyle's early stories, and, perhaps because of this control, a theme which is more significant as it arises from real, developed characters. One finds in "Wedding Day" an exercise in words and mood, in "One of Ours" an experiment in theme by implication, in "Life Being the Best" an interest in plot—all without sufficient character development. In The Crazy Hunter, as in "The White Horses of Vienna," one finds people first and theme second, and it is for these the reader looks rather than for experimental technique.

The Crazy Hunter has several things in common with "The White Horses of Vienna": a specific locale (in fact, one critic regrets the specific setting of England, since, she says, Kay Boyle has so well represented the loneliness of the American psyche\(^\text{11}\)), important surface movement, a theme which is definite but has no trickery, and a positive element. As the reader sees in the Nazi doctor decidedly favorable traits, so he sees in Nancy "the forces of good." One feels that Kay Boyle has written the story because Nancy lives as an individual in the author's mind, and because, as an individual, Nancy is both interesting and admirable.

\(^{11}\)Colum, p. 324.
CHAPTER VII

"Adam's Death"

The latest volume of short stories by Kay Boyle is The Smoking Mountain (1950). If the stories were incorporated in a larger collection, such as Thirty Stories, they could be designated "The German Group," since all of them are set in Germany after World War II and are concerned with the reconstruction of the land. Virgilia Peterson says of the book, "But on the whole, these stories of postwar Germany are a blend of dispassion and dislike."¹ The critic says that the dislike is for the Germans, except those who are Jews or who have been in concentration camps. As another critic mentions, however, the framework of the volume is "obviously observed fact." The stories are neither anti-German nor anti-American, but comment on both the occupied and the occupier, with neither one being seen as protagonist or antagonist.² The situation itself is distasteful to the author, but she blames no single group. The background of the story is similar to that of "The White Horses of Vienna"—a historic situation which is chosen by the author as the background for her own comments.

The volume begins with a very long "Introduction," the narrative of the trial of a German for war crimes. The trial is conducted by the

¹Virgilia Peterson, "Another Face of Germany," New York Herald Tribune: Books, April 22, 1951, p. 8
²"The Smoking Mountain" (anon. rev.), Booklist, XLVII (April 15, 1951), 285.
Germans themselves. There is a difference of critical opinion as to the effectiveness of this writing. Louise Field Cooper calls the essay imitative of Rebecca West and says that it throws the book out of balance.\(^3\) Virgilia Peterson, however, believes the essay to be the most important and effective part of the volume, with a theme which carries through the entire book: The Germans must liberate and redeem themselves by rejecting "their own outrages," and the mass is responsible for crimes by "indifference and silence," but only a small group realizes this responsibility.\(^4\) Richard Carpenter is also favorably impressed with the introduction. He says that it is better than some of the stories, which tend to be sentimental.\(^5\) However, the themes of the essay are carried over into the stories. The author has erred by including an essay so long that it overshadows these fictional pieces. She appears to have partially defeated the purpose of the volume, which should be to explore characters and situations, and, through them, themes which interest the author. The introductory essay tells the themes rather than portraying them, and it lacks the effectiveness of art because it allows the reader to read without involvement.

Among the stories which fail because they are sentimental, one finds "Frankfurt" and "Home." In "Frankfurt," two women sit in a café drinking wine. One is a Jewess who left Germany years before and the other is an American working in Germany. The talk is mostly the reminiscences of the

\(^3\)Louise Field Cooper, "Averted Hearts," *Saturday Review of Literature*, XXXIV (April 21, 1951), 17.
\(^4\)Peterson, p. 8.
Jewish woman, who is now going back to Germany. "Home" is the story of an American Negro soldier who buys clothes for a small German boy. When he is told by the shopgirl that the boy is one of the many who are working a racket on Americans, the soldier replies, "'At home, ma'am, I never had much occasion to do for other people, so I am glad to have had this opportunity offered me."

"The Lost" is another sentimental story telling of a German orphan who is waiting for an American Negro to adopt him. When he is told that the adoption will not be allowed because the soldier is Negro, he leaves a note telling the soldier that he has heard from his parents and that he is going back to them.

In general, the characters of The Smoking Mountain, despite some sentimentality in the volume, are quite believable. At times, however, the author allows her desire for theme to overcome her sense of craft.

"Begin Again" shows German people as they accept rides from an American woman. The story comments upon the Germans as not realizing their own responsibility for the chaotic conditions of Germany, but it becomes more theme than story. It does not reveal a single character, but a group, and no one character lives for the reader. "Cabaret" is the description of satirical entertainment produced by a group of young Germans. Again one cannot feel that he knows a single character. The author hits heavily on her theme at the time of the act ridiculing Hitler. She says of the audience's reaction:

For what was he but the point of a colossal joke that history had played upon the world, the burlesque of a man some other people had chosen as their leader

---

6 Kay Boyle, The Smoking Mountain (New York, 1950), p. 167. Succeeding references to this volume will appear as page numbers in the text of this chapter.
once at some other time and in some other place? This was someone they had no use for any longer, for he had deceived them into believing he would succeed in what he had set out to do. There would be another, a better one soon, who would give them back their pride. (151)

There is also a lack of artistic subtlety in "Summer Evening."

The story shows a party given by some American occupiers in Germany, and ends with the old Hausmeister asking to go to America because his mother was American. The Americans' trick on him is another example of what Peterson calls the author's "dispassion and dislike." Probably one of the more important commentaries the author makes on the occupying forces is in the following passage:

But to anyone passing on the road below the garden wall it might have seemed that it was the Americans who were at ease on a familiar soil and the musicians, playing their nostalgic music, who were exiled from a homeland that lay far across the sea. (102)

Harry T. Moore criticizes one of the volume's more successful stories, "Auf Wiedersehen Abend." An American ex-pilot meets at a party a musician from a town that he had bombed. The critic mentions the "danse macabre of two skeleton-thin 'entertainers'" as an "appropriately disturbing symbol," but as he also says, the symbol does not pull together a poorly structured story. Moore mentions another of the author's more successful stories when he speaks of her "subtle deployment of ironies and parallels, as in 'Adam's Death,' a grim picture of lingering German anti-Semitism. In such stories Miss Boyle usually handles themes of prejudice so adroitly and so understandingly that is is surprising to find her, elsewhere in the book, falling into one of the Nazi ideological

traps by speaking of "Jewish blood." (An example of this failure is in the last phrase of "Begin Again." [88])

The story the critic mentions, "Adam's Death," is one of the more skillful and subtle of the volume and contains a theme typical of the work as a whole. An American woman, whose husband is stationed at Darmfurt, leaves the city with her small boy to live in a village "in that part of Germany designated as Land Hesse." She is leaving because she fears for her child in war-ruined and disease-ridden Darmfurt. She finds a room in a Gasthaus and offers to bring food bought at the commissary for the owners. The Gasthaus keeper and his wife, however, say they want their payment in Deutschmarks because they can buy food.

The woman and her son, walking in the woods nearby, discover a grave with the inscription "Adam's Tod, 1944," and the woman is reminded of her fear of disease. Two days later, the boy falls and cuts his mouth. Since the doctor is away, the woman takes the boy to the dentist, Dr. Eli Jacobi. The woman sees in his office a drawing of the grave and asks about it. The doctor tells of how the peasants erected the stone for Adam, and how they now feel guilty for his death. "Because once they knew a man who did something for them for nothing, one man without a name, a refugee, asking nothing of them except the right to stay alive." (241) When the woman asks Dr. Jacobi how much she should pay him, he says, "'Not money.... You see, a country dentist cannot ask much—one mark or two. It is never enough to pay for what they have to sell. But if I could ask you—that is, if you could bring something else, not now,"

8Ibid., p. 5.
but when it is available...." (243) The American woman perceives that he needs food and offers to bring some. He answers, "Yes, food.... Whatever you could spare." And there was nothing more to say." (243)

One may begin a study of "Adam's Death" by examining the woman who is a wife of one of the soldiers occupying Germany. She is obviously not concerned with the German people nor with the broad problem of reconstruction in Germany. The author says of her,

For two weeks, she had thought of flight, had talked of it with the boy's father—of flight from the city, leaving the fear, the menace to other mothers, other children, giving them, as a parting gift to keep forever, the hospital beds, the tortured limbs, the strangling breath; believing, in instants of savagery, that she loved or feared more hopelessly than other mothers loved or feared. (229)

She is so afraid for the boy's health that she warns him that he must not play with other children, and she hopes, "Maybe it will be better here.... Maybe it won't be like Germany any more." (229) When the woman finds a room, she tells the Gasthaus keeper's wife that "twice in the week she would drive back to the city for food—for American food bought at the commissary." (231) The author implies that the woman is offering the food as she has offered it previously, in exchange for what she needs. (The implication is more certain if one has read "The Lovers of Gain," in which the American woman gives cigarettes to the German people who work in a grocery store.)

The author, however, does not seem to judge the woman. The woman is merely a mother obsessed about the safety of her child and willing to employ various means to insure this safety. She is at fault because her obsession does not allow her to realize the full meaning of what goes on
around her. The woman sees, on the "kitchen dresser," "three great wheels of country bread, and butter in a crockery dish. Just behind the pitcher of milk could be seen a carton of Camel cigarettes, and four brightly lettered little tins of G. Washington instant coffee, but the mother was not thinking of these things." (233) Finally, she even asks, "'But where do they come from—the rice, the soap, the coffee?'" (234) She is answered that "the Amis over here have so much they have to get rid of it. Overproduction in America....If they don't keep it moving around the world, then the selling price will drop below the cost of producing, and then they'll have inflation." (234) Even when the woman discovers the grave in the woods, she does not conceive of any meaning for it except one that is directly connected with her own fears:

"Acat's Death," the mother said under her breath, and it seemed to her suddenly then that all they had fled from might come this far to reach them, might pursue them and outstrip them here. (236)

A second major character of the story is the villagers, considered collectively. The villagers are not so much unaware of Germany's plight as they are determined to ignore it. The woman says that her husband is stationed in Darmfurt,

...but to them, whom the Occupation had scarcely touched, this was almost without meaning. Darmfurt, they had been told, was no more than an agglomeration of ruins now, but whatever it was, it lay two hundred kilometres outside the confines of their curiosity. (233)

When the Gasthaus keeper speaks of the food he and his wife get, he savors "the prosperous flavor of the things he said." (234)

The villagers buy the American food, but they, like the woman, are concerned only with their private and immediate welfare, since they are
actually hostile toward the Americans. The Gasthaus keeper defies the occupation "in a private way" when he kills the pig, "not bringing the government regulations into it." (234) His wife "is not at all sure that they [the woman and her child] would be worth the trouble they would give." (231) The author describes the villager's reaction to the woman in this way:

The eyes must have censured the bizarre print dress, the red suede shoes, seeing in peasant outrage or uproarious peasant mirth her tanned naked legs and her arms bare from the shoulder, and the pagan silver bracelets moving at her wrists—and seen, but with pity for him, because of their abomination of her, the boy in faded corduroys who walked beside her, holding the nameless creature's thin, restless hand. (230)

The third major character is Dr. Eli Jacobi, whose shingle announces that he has been educated at the Universität Saarbrücken. He lives poorly in "nothing more than a chicken house...with salvaged squares and patches of tin nailed to the boards to spare it from the weather." (238) Still, the doctor has managed to salvage something of a better life—a piano, "a framed photograph of an Epstein sculpture," "the Gershwin and Stravinsky scores, the yellowing sheets of Mozart's and Purcell's composing." (240) The doctor says that he had come to the village eight months earlier, "'A little late,' he repeated, saying it bitterly, ironically. 'My studies were interrupted.'" (240) He is referring, of course, to the Hitler regime, under which he, because he is Jewish, was persecuted. Shortly, he mentions the ghettos in which he had been imprisoned.

Because the doctor has contact with most of the village people, he knows the feeling of guilt which underlies their surface stolidity. He speaks of Adam, dead four years before the doctor came: "'I knew him
alive, or men so like him that I can say I knew him....we were together in every ghetto of Europe together—men so like him or so like myself that we could be taken one for the other!' "(241) A crucial part of the story lies in the doctor's words, "'One man they didn't have to drive a bargain with!'" (242) His condemnation is of both American and Germans, in the situation which necessitates bargaining for survival. Dr. Jacobi speaks of the villager's guilt:

But the peasants speak of him [Adam] to me when they come here with their aching teeth, for he still lies heavy of their conscience, the village conscience. Sometimes it seems to me that they come not because of the pains in their teeth but because of the words they want to speak of him and do not know how to say. (241)

And perhaps sometimes he lays his hand on their hearts in dreams at night, and that wakes them, for there are days when they come uneasily to me and ask me if he had had more flesh to cover his bones, would he have died so quickly by the roadside, or they ask me if they should put a cross upon his stone. (242)

The irony of the story lies in the last few paragraphs. The woman has been moved by the doctor's words so that it is hard for her to speak of money, but she finally does, "and at the sound of her words the quality of strength or pride or reticence he had was taken from him, as if his manhood were taken from him, and he looked away." (243) The doctor, who has implied his distaste for bargaining, asks the woman not to give him money but "something else." When the woman mentions food, "Dr. Jacobi turned his head quickly 'and' she saw the bright, violent light of hope that burned now in his eyes." (243) Despite the fact that Dr. Jacobi represents the story's vision of the villagers, the village's conscience, he, too, is reduced to "bargaining" for his own survival.

The vision of "Adam's Death" is a vision of guilt. The distant
backdrop of the whole story is the ruins of Darmfurt, but the villagers are complacent with their success. Even their hostility toward the American woman is passive. This is a world in which relationships and successes are placed on the basis of bargaining power, but underneath this complacency runs the feeling of guilt which haunts the villagers. Their crime in regard to Adam was also passive, not persecution but failure to acknowledge the man's need. In the woman's reaction (although she seems finally to share in Dr. Jacobi's vision) the author implies that the occupiers have also had a hand in placing the villagers in the position in which they find themselves. The guilt of both the American woman and the villagers is that of acquiescence.

"Adam's Death" both gains and loses in having a very specific, historic setting. The theme is narrower than that of many of the author's stories, but, on the other hand, the reader has a feeling that this story is a description of an actual event. Part of the sense of reality in the story is the fact that the author describes her characters fairly thoroughly in terms of physical appearances. Dr. Jacobi is "a short, thin, soft-looking man, white as a slug—a man of forty, or even older.... His crimped red hair receded from a tenuous point of gold above his forehead, his nose was white and prominent, his nostrils were curved, and he had an anxious, light-lashed eye." (239) The woman is described mostly through the eyes of the villagers, but the village women are again described fairly specifically even though they are considered collectively:

There were other women there, women older than the Gasthaus keeper's wife, sitting working at the table, their skirts as heavy as winter coats, and coarse white kerchiefs tied across their heads.... The mother saw that their strong, seamed hands were stained from the flesh of the plums they
touched, and she saw, as well, that their wrinkled cheeks were sucked inward, drawn tight as silk across their empty gums... (232)

Along with this type of description, the author describes the physical setting simply and without imagery. For example, she mentions the food on the cupboard but lets the reader draw his own inferences.

The author seems to have abandoned a great deal of her stream-of-consciousness technique. There are a few passages, such as this one, that go back to the interior monologue: "She sat looking down at her hands, thinking. You see, if you die, you can't enjoy activities. Death isn't cooperative. It isn't cooperative at all." (229) At other times, however, the author translates a character's thoughts into her own idiom: "It was not for her, who was herself merely woman, to tell them whether to go or stay." (232) The author often openly inserts her own comment, without attributing the thought to any character:

But the issue—the crisis even—was something else, something that dealt with the boy no longer but with strangers, something so alien that one could not put one's finger on its name. (239)

But the heart of the story was not this; it had nothing to do with a boy's courage or a man's precision. (239)

The reader is also very much aware of the author in some of the story's description. She says first that "At the craftily curtained windows of the village houses, there were no faces to be seen—only potted geraniums, red and pink and white, lending the miniature panes a look of innocence." (230) Then the author describes the reaction of the villagers to the woman, but in the author's own words as though she were guessing: "But still the eyes of the old and of other women must have watched from behind them.... The eyes must have censured the bizarre
print dress...." There is no longer an attempt, in this piece, to
develop a story through the consciousness of a character.

Even though the author interprets some scenes, the reader must
discover a greater part of the story from his observations of the objec-
tive narrative. The dialogue and description of the story then become
important to the reader in creating a specific and believable situation.
Louise Cooper calls attention to some of the description, "the Christmas
card setting of the countryside,"\(^9\) and its contrast with the sullen
attitude of the villagers. This tension is effective in such scenes as
the one in which the German woman shows the room to the American:

As the woman mounted the dark wood stairs before
them, there was a wariness in the set of her
narrow shoulders, and when they stood in the big,
clean room together, it was there in the side of
her face, in the small, close, cautious ear, the
guarded eye. The ceiling was white and low, and
the posts of the painted bedposts were a primal
blue in color, with flowers stencilled on them in
clear yellow, red, and green. Between the posts
billowed the soft, deep feather beds, buttoned
into starched envelopes, bloated with plumage,
and immaculately white. (231)

The boy's interruptions as his mother tries to do business are a part of
the more successful realistic detail of the story: "Would you rather be
rich or would you rather be hot?" the little boy asked his mother as
they followed her down the Gasthaus stairs." (232) His unconcern with
his mother's fear for his health ("But I like to play with children")
is also quite believable.

But the author is not so successful with the character of the
mother. The fact that the woman reads Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and

---

\(^9\)Cooper, p. 18.
William Faulkner, and that she knows the paintings of Rousseau, by the very obvious inclusion of the facts in the story, makes one expect more from her than she seems capable of giving. If the author's point is that the woman has trained her sensibilities in an intellectual way, but still remains ignorant of human nature, the point doesn't come alive for the reader.

The author has not completely left the poetic quality of her earlier stories. The description of the horse which the little boy follows is reminiscent of earlier Kay Boyle work:

And behind the mare or beside her, or else cavorting ahead, came a slim black colt, the fruit of her loins, without bridle or rope, making a show of freedom but tethered to her by love. He was so shy that when pigeons winged up from a courtyard, his supple neck arched like a hunter's bow and his unshod hoofs stamped on the cobbles, but he had a certain kind of giddy humor in his eye as he skidded from one side of the village road to the other. (237)

The same paragraph which includes the quotation above contains an example of the kind of metaphor the author uses in the story, a metaphor more pointed to the feeling of the story than the author sometimes used previously. This metaphor conveys a sense of the peasant's indifference:

The peasant wheeling slowly on the bicycle, the mare, the colt, did not pause, not merely not spectators to it [the boy's falling] but as if they were not on the same unfolding length of film on which this had occurred. Their own complete procession, in perfected Technicolor, flickered a little longer, until they made the turn, on the screen of alternating sun and shade. (237)

This paper has suggested the gains and losses of a specific, historic incident as background for the story: the greater narrowness of theme balanced by a better sense of immediacy and of reality of the
situation. In this story we find a theme of guilt which becomes real for us because it arises from a particular group of people at a particular time. Here, as in "The White Horses of Vienna," the doctor, though not the main character, is the most admirable character of the story.

It seems unfortunate that the author waits until so late in the story to enlist the reader's sympathy (when the doctor is brought onto the scene), for the reader must be unsympathetic to an extent with the woman, and certainly to a very great extent with the villagers. In "The White Horses of Vienna" the doctor exists from the beginning of the story, representing the positive elements of the theme as he lives side by side with Dr. Heine.

There seem to be several reasons for the lesser success of "Adam's Death," which has specificity of scene and the theme of anti-Semitism in common with "The White Horses of Vienna." First, the structure of "The White Horses of Vienna"—the Nazi doctor and Heine contrasting throughout the narrative—is more effective than the structure of "Adam's Death"—the detached picture of the woman and the biting commentary on the villagers, finally brought into focus by the positive values of the doctor. One wonders if perhaps the structure of "Adam's Death" did not result from the author's own view being more negative than positive.

One sees, secondly, that in "Adam's Death" the author seems to be more interested in theme than in the characters. After all, the greater part of the action of the story revolves around a woman who is not particularly interesting and who is not individualized.

One notices, however, that the failures of "Adam's Death" cannot be attributed to a language which is digressively poetical nor to stream-
of-consciousness techniques which pull attention away from the characters. We are still more conscious of the theme and characters of the story than we are of the techniques used. It is the theme of "Adam's Death," which is not so fresh and original as that of "The White Horses of Vienna," and the characters, which are not so interesting nor so thoroughly explored as those of The Crazy Hunter, which make "Adam's Death" a less effective story. The implication is that by this time the author is thoroughly in control of her technique, and her stories succeed or fail, not by the technique used, but by the author's own vision as it is appraised by the reader.
CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Kay Boyle is still writing, but one may guess that most, if not all, of her best stories have already been written. If one of the author's latest published novels, *The Seagull on the Step* (1955), is an indication, one may expect stories after it which tend toward a Hollywoodish intrigue with poetic language which becomes ridiculous because it is covering up a thin theme. The novel is a mystery story of the fishermen's opposition to the building of a casino. After the heroine is injured in a bus wreck, the doctor says to her: "'A little uncertain still, like the breast of a dove—this wrist with the life quivering in it.'"¹ How different is such imagery from even the strained metaphor of the "carpet that was to spurt like a hemorrhage" in "Wedding Day."

In the latter story, strained though the imagery might be, the language concerns itself with the theme and mood of the story rather than with its own poetic quality.

One might well wonder what would induce the artist to lower her literary standards once she has attained a certain accomplishment. The decline of Kay Boyle's art could be traced to its beginnings even before the author was regularly writing less effective novels. For example, *Avalanche*, published in 1944, has been criticized by Edmund Wilson in this way:

Avalanche was written for the Saturday Evening Post. I did not see it there, but I have been haunted since I read it by a vision of Saturday Evening Post illustrations, in which the ideal physical types of the skin-lotion and shaving-soap are seen posing on snowy slopes. Nor do I doubt that this novel was constructed with an eye to the demands of Hollywood, that intractable magnetic mountain which has been twisting our fiction askew and on which so many writers have been flattened.\(^2\)

There is a good possibility that Mr. Wilson has discovered the key to Kay Boyle's later writing as well—the author's desire to appeal to the mass audience.\(^3\)

The decline of an art, however, is neither so interesting nor so important as the rise of the art. In a concluding look at the works of Kay Boyle, one may consider this rise in regard to the importance of plot, or of specific action, in the story. "Wedding Day" relies little on this plot or action, but seems instead to be built on incident. The story begins with the mother shouting that the wedding cake "be held aloft," switches to the luncheon scene, then to the children's afternoon out-of-doors, before coming, finally, to the scene of the wedding itself. The only circumstances to which the characters react is that of the wedding. The luncheon is incidental, as is the ride on the pond, because each incident merely displays further the children's feeling of "the end" in regard to the wedding. The result is a story in which the characters' emotions (the brother and sister's belief that the kind of life they want is ended and the mother's slight apprehension that the wedding will not be a "success") do not change from the beginning to the end, in which


\(^3\)Avalanche was eventually serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post*. 
various situations do not seem quite real because the characters have no positive reactions to them, in which the existence of the characters is a hazy, internal one. The reader is hard pressed to believe that these are real, living people.

The situation of "One of Ours" is, on the other hand, quite specific—the British exposition of colonies. Whatever one knows about Mrs. Umster one knows by her reaction to this exposition. The climactic incident of the story, Mrs. Umster's misunderstanding of what the chief wants, arises also from Mrs. Umster's being at the exposition. One knows no more about Mrs. Umster's background and previous experiences than he knows about the mother and her children of "Wedding Day," and Mrs. Umster's reactions to the events of the story are, unfortunately, those of a stereotyped British character. Mrs. Umster, however, lives for the reader because she does react to the circumstances which surround her.

"Life Being the Best" is another story in which the character reacts to the story's events. Given some of young Palavicini's background (that his mother is dead and that he must work in the kitchen to help his sister and father), the reader understands his worship of the teacher, his hatred of Chiesa, and his love for the Marincolas. In fact, Palavicini reacts so violently at the end of the story that the incident seems a bit contrived. The story seems to be the one step beyond the plot structure of "One of Ours" which carries one back to the disbelief of "Wedding Day" but makes us disbelieve for a different reason than does "Wedding Day." One is sceptical of "Wedding Day" because there is so little about the characters that one can actually feel is real and specific. The reader wonders about Paris and the brother and sister's supposed
"responsibility" to it and about how and why the wedding has been arranged. One cannot quite believe in "Life Being the Best," even though the author tells the how and why of all of Palavicini's reactions, because the explanations are a little farfetched, and one does not quite feel Palavicini, with his gentle nature, capable of killing Chiesa.

This heavy reliance on plot and the character's reaction to circumstance seems to be a path which leads the author nowhere. The theme begins to arise from plot alone, and the reader might wish, while reading "Life Being the Best," for the subtle unraveling of theme and characters which he found in "Wedding Day." There, at least, a quite believable focal incident, the wedding, was a point of exploration for the characters and the plot did not push the character.

"The White Horses of Vienna" finally combines the two techniques. The setting, the Tirol of Austria, is as specific as that of "One of Ours." The year can be determined as 1934, the political condition of the country becomes an integral part of the story, and the doctor's role in this political upheaval becomes obvious. Certain specific events happen, and the characters react to these events. For example, Dr. Heine worries when he first comes about how he will be received, the doctor's wife is disconcerted to see that he is Jewish, and the doctor accepts the fact and welcomes the young man. However, the characters' reactions to the puppet show (the doctor's Nazi vision and Dr. Heine's vision of the royalty of the past) are not so important, each alone, as the comparison and contrast of these two visions. As one compares the mother's and children's reactions to the wedding in "Wedding Day," so one sets up the doctor and Dr. Heine in relationship to one another to study their
differences and to come to a conclusion about these differences. The story no longer has the simple reaction of a Mrs. Umster to a savage's asking for a doll or of a Young Palavicini to a chain of events, but a subtle conflict of characters. As a result of a realistic and fairly well developed plot, the story is believable. As a result of a comparison of two characters, the author escapes both stereotypes and too sketchy characters.

The Crazy Hunter again employs the specific scene, in this story a ranch in England. There is a movement of the plot as Nancy tries to save Brigand by working with him so that he will become a useful animal and as Mrs. Lombe tries to destroy him. Again, we have the comparison of reactions rather than the single character's reaction which is important, and this comparison is even better realized than that of "The White Horses of Vienna." For example, in the scene of the bird caught in the tree, Nancy remembers the drowned groom. The reader compares Nancy's reaction to what it would have been two years before: Since she can now take the bird out of the tree, she has developed in her ability to face unpleasant actuality. The reader also compares Nancy's reaction to her mother's and finds that Nancy is still more squeamish than her mother. The focus of this comparison of reactions is, of course, the crazy hunter. The horse as a focal point is even more effective than the wedding of "Wedding Day" and the puppet show of "The White Horses of Vienna," since it not only explores the characters but shows Nancy's development as well. The horse is a part of Nancy's inheritance from her mother, who has come from a family of horse breeders, but Nancy's attitude toward Brigand helps her shape her inheritance in her own way, by
patience and persuasion rather than by command. The horse is also a focus of Candy's development, since his need for his daughter's love compells him to overcome his terrible fear. One is able to believe that only his desire for Nancy's love (he shows his wife's disapproval has a far lesser effect on him) could commit him to such an act.

In The Crazy Hunter, as in "The White Horses of Vienna," the reader can believe that the characters react as they do, since the author builds them, detail by detail, in relation to one another.

"Adam's Death" has a specific, and even historic, setting—Land Hesse in Germany during the period directly after World War II. The plot is, like that of "The White Horses of Vienna," a series of incidents more than a broad movement to an inevitable climax like that of The Crazy Hunter. The woman of "Adam's Death," however, reacts to these incidents, and her reaction is colored by the haunting fear that her son will fall ill. She has come to Land Hesse to escape the disease of the city but when she discovers the grave she is again stricken with the fear of disease. She remains ignorant of the villager's economic situation since she excludes everything from her mind except her child's well-being. The story also has a focal incident with a contrast of reaction to it. As a newcomer to the area, the woman's reaction to "Adam's Death" is one of fear for her child; Dr. Jacobi's is bitter and accusing, fixing the blame for the death on the villagers for their failure to acknowledge the need of the living Adam; the villagers' reaction is that of guilt for having been indifferent to Adam while he lived.

The author gains as she writes stories which are more reliant on character than on language or plot. Along with this reliance one may
trace the author's attitude toward her characters, the possibility of reader identification with them. "Wedding Day" forces the reader to be merely an observer, since the strongest character is the mother, the antagonist of the story, and the protagonists, the brother and sister, are not fully enough drawn for the reader to have any real feeling for their predicament. As has been mentioned in chapter one, the story lacks a specific positive element.

Again, in "One of Ours" and "Life Being the Best," the reader observes as the author presents her criticism without showing her good example. Mrs. Umster is laughable, invites our scorn, but we do not compare her to another character of the story, nor do we involve ourselves emotionally with her. We pity Young Palavicini, we may even like his youth and sincerity, but we finally find nothing in him to make us identify ourselves with him. For he is, after all, too confused and unformed to become a positive character. And when, finally, plot conquers all, we are still observing almost a puppet show.

It would be impossible to say that "The White Horses of Vienna" and The Crazy Hunter succeed because they both have strong, positive characters. Still, the contrast of the Nazi doctor with Dr. Heine and the contrast of Nancy with both her mother and her father allows the author to individualize and to explore her characters. On the other hand, "Adam's Death" is again a criticism with a very brief sketch of the doctor, who represents the author's vision, and its failure seems to be in the impossibility of the reader including himself in the story or feeling with a character the struggle to control an unsatisfactory life. But since one cannot say whether a definite positive vision results in a
successful story or the successful story illustrates a positive vision because the story is clear and definite in its theme development, this statement remains a hypothesis: Kay Boyle appears to write her effective stories when she has control of her own vision well enough to incorporate it in a believable character, and when she balances her criticism by a positive element.

The mention of the "believable character" is perhaps the most important part of this statement. It, at least, is not supposition, for the most obvious element of Kay Boyle's successful works is the characters themselves. These characters are not only believable, but they are also fully developed. They respond to specific situations and they draw us into the story with them. When this happens, the story lives because of its characters. The reader is all too aware of the prose poetry of "Wedding Day," the theme-without-character of "One of Ours," the mood and plot of "Life Being the Best." It is only when one reads "The White Horses of Vienna" that one must concentrate on the details in order to discover the characters of the Nazi doctor and Dr. Heine. The details in the beginning of the story are interesting because they give a picture of the doctor, the relationship between Dr. Heine and the Nazi develops the characters of the two men in contrast, the puppet show is a focus of this contrast, and the parting scene is the dramatic reminder of all that the reader has discovered about both of the main characters. There is no plot constructed for its own sake, no poetry independent of characters, no theme arising except from the characters themselves. The story is an integrated whole, with every aspect of it secondary to character, so that the reader is not concerned with technique except as it develops Dr. Heine and the Nazi doctor.
The story marks the turning point of Kay Boyle's career. It is at this point that the author begins to utilize what she has learned from the years of experimentation with technique, that she applies the results of her experiment to the exploration of the complexities of character and situation. At this point, also, the reader becomes involved in Kay Boyle's vision of personal integrity, of the struggle to overcome the ways of a world which is warped and chaotic. The fictional world becomes peopled with characters which are believable, complex, and individual. The maturity of these characters marks the maturity of Kay Boyle's art.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Selected Bibliography of Works Consulted


Colum, Mary M. "Poets and Psychologists," The Book Forum, CIII (June 1940), 324-325.


Millett, Fred B. Contemporary American Authors. New York, 1940.


"The Smoking Mountain" (anon rev.), Booklist, XLVII (April 15, 1951) 285.


