
Kay Boyle letters to Helga Einsele
1951-1992

Abstract: Award-winning American author, educator, and political activist Kay Boyle (1902-1992) was a prominent member of the American expatriate modernist circle of the 1920s and 1930s. Boyle's later years are characterized by her extensive political activism. The Kay Boyle letters to Helga Einsele document Boyle's decades-long friendship with criminologist and prison reformer Helga Einsele (1910-2005). The collection comprises letters from Boyle and their enclosures, drafts of Einsele's replies, photographs of Boyle, as well as clippings of articles honoring Boyle at the end of her life and after her death.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 655
Title: Kay Boyle letters to Helga Einsele
Inclusive Dates: 1951-1992
Extent: .3 linear feet and oversize removals (1 box)
Language: Materials in English and German.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 655, Kay Boyle letters to Helga Einsele, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.
Shelving Summary: Box 1: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes (1 inch); Removals: Shelved in MSS oversize mapcases.
Location: Special Collections, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/
Source: Gift of Nele Löw Beer, 2011.
Processing: Processed and encoded by Elyse Brown, September 2012.
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Biographical Notes

Kay Boyle

Award-winning American author, educator, and political activist Kay Boyle (1902-1992) was a prominent member of American expatriate modernist circle of the 1920s and 1930s. Boyle's later years are characterized by her extensive political activism.

Boyle's career as a writer began in 1923, after moving from St. Paul to New York City, with the publishing of her poem, "Morning," in Harold Loeb's art and literary magazine, Broom. Soon after, she married a French exchange student, Richard Brault, and moved to France for a 20-year period. During that time she divorced Brault and, in 1931, married a fellow expatriate, Laurence Vail (previously the husband of Peggy Guggenheim). She published four novels, Plagued by the Nightingale (1931), Year Before Last (1932), Gentlemen, I Address You Privately (1933), and My Next Bride (1934), which reflected her experiences in France. Boyle divorced Vail and, in 1943, married Baron Joseph von Franckenstein. The two were together until his death in 1963.

A prolific short story writer, Boyle won the first of her two O. Henry short story awards in 1935 for the title story of The White Horses of Vienna and Other Stories. Her second O. Henry was awarded in 1941 for "Defeat." She continued to write short stories throughout her life. The last collection, Life Being the Best and Other Stories, was published in 1988. In addition to the O. Henry award she was a recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship (1934) and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

In 1960, Boyle moved to San Francisco and took a position as an English professor at San Francisco State University. Boyle's later works include the 1967 Autobiography of Emanuel Carnevali and a 1968 revision of Robert McAlmon's memoirs, Being Geniuses Together, 1920-1930, to which Boyle added several supplementary chapters.

Throughout her life, Kay Boyle was politically active. This activism reflected a general belief, fostered by her mother, that privilege demands social responsibility. In the 1950s her activism became reinvigorated as she worked toward furthering integration policies, civil rights, a ban on nuclear weapons, America's withdrawal from Southeast Asia, women's rights, and global peace initiatives.

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

Helga Einsele

Dr. Helga Einsele (1910-2005) became head of the Preunegsheim women's prison in 1947. Championing the cause of humanization of the German penal system, her work led to groundbreaking reforms in the living conditions of women prisoners. A special area of interest for Einsele was the rights of incarcerated mothers to see their children. In 1969, Einsele was awarded the Fritz Bauer Prize of the Humanist Union and received the Wilhelm Leuschner Medal, which honors individuals who have been successful fighting for humanitarian interests and the resistance of unduly oppressive state power. Near the end of her career (1974), she was instrumental in creating the "mother-child home" system, which allows young mothers with dependent

**Sources:**


Scope and Content Note

The Kay Boyle letters to Helga Einsele documents Boyle's decades-long friendship with criminologist and prison reformer Helga Einsele (1910-2005). The collection comprises Boyle's letters and their enclosures, drafts of Einsele's replies, photographs of Boyle, as well as clippings of articles honoring Boyle at the end of her life and after her death.

Einsele and Boyle met during Boyle's time as a foreign correspondent (1946-1953) for the *New Yorker* while working together at the women's prison Einsele directed in Frankfurt, Germany. They quickly formed a friendship based on their mutual respect for one another and their shared liberal values and belief in promoting those values through active political and social engagement. Much of the content of the letters in this collection reflects these shared values.

The collection is arranged into two series: I. Letters and II. Photographs and clippings.

Series I. contains letters from Kay Boyle to Helga Einsele as well as many of the enclosures from these letters, such as newspaper and magazine clippings, letters addressed to Boyle from others (often requesting Einsele's opinion on how to respond or react to them), and newsletters. The clippings include pieces by or about Boyle, as well as current events relating to political and social activism and the United States prison and justice systems. In their correspondence the women also frequently consulted each other's opinions regarding works in progress. Also included is a typescript draft of a piece written by Boyle titled "Frankfurt Revisited," which has minor autograph corrections and insertions that appear to be in Boyle's hand. The content of the letters themselves often referred to notable historical events, such as the Kennedy assassination, the 1972 Olympic Games tragedy, Germany's political situation, the fall of the Eastern Bloc, and Ronald Reagan's presidency—which Boyle critiqued frequently. Because Boyle was especially politically active during her years living and working in San Francisco (1963-1979), the letters from these years also followed the political and social situations of the city closely. Boyle and Einsele also cultivated a close, personal friendship over the years. They kept each other updated on personal and family matters. Boyle concluded most letters by inquiring about or sending her love to Einsele's devoted daughter, Nele Löw Beer.

Series II. contains material Einsele had preserved in memory of Boyle. The file contains two photographs of Boyle as well as newspaper clippings, from German publications, celebrating Boyle in the last years of her life and after her death.
Selected Search Terms

**Personal Names**

Boyle, Kay, 1902-1992--Correspondence.

Einsele, Helga, 1910- -- Correspondence.

Beer, Nele Löw.


Franckenstein, Joseph von.

Hongisto, Richard D.

Moscone, George, d. 1978.

Milk, Harvey.

Bryant, Dorothy, 1930-

Mellen, Joan.

**Corporate Names**

Amnesty International.

San Francisco State College.

Radcliffe Institute for Independent Study.

War Resisters League.

**Topical Terms**

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

Activists, Human rights--Correspondence.

Activists, Peace--Correspondence.

Criminologists--Correspondence.

**Geographic Names**

Germany.

San Francisco (Calif.).
Ireland.
Frankfurt (Germany).

**Form/Genre Terms**
Letters (correspondence).
Clippings.
Photographs.
Drafts (documents).
Newsletters.

**Occupation**
Authors.
Journalists.
Activists.

**Personal Contributors**
Einsele, Helga, 1910-, correspondent.

**Related Materials in this Repository**
MSS 131 Kay Boyle papers
MSS 262 Kay Boyle papers relating to the Citizens' Mission to Cambodia
MSS 287 Kay Boyle papers relating to research on Irish women
MSS 410 Kay Boyle papers relating to Robert Nellen
Arrangement

I. Letters
II. Photographs and clippings
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. Letters, 1951-1992

1951 May 5-1956 December [Box 1 F1]

Also included is a letter sent to Boyle from prominent German writer Walter Mehring.

1959 September 16-1961 September 20 [Box 1 F2]

Also included are a copy of a letter to the US Director of Prisons in which the wife of convicted Rosenberg accomplice Norton Sobell petitioned for conjugal visits, a related newspaper clipping reporting that her request had been denied, and clippings promoting Boyle's latest novel Generation Without Farewell.

1962 February 5-1963 December 1 [Box 1 F3]

Letters include material relating to Einsele's requests for permission to translate pieces from The Nation and Liberation magazines into German for her own leftist magazine. Pages from Liberation (January 1962) are included as well.

1964 February 26-1965 August 30 [Box 1 F4]

Also included are a draft of a piece by Boyle titled "Frankfurt Revisited" and a letter to Boyle from one of her fans, Lotty Noelle, a victim of the Nazi regime seeking help from Boyle's contacts. There is also a clipping relating to Boyle's trip to Cambodia (see MSS 262 for more materials relating to this mission).

1968 July 7-1972 September 8 [Box 1 F5]

Notable topics in these letters are Boyle's planned project for writing a history of German women (which she never finished, see MSS 131 for a draft) and Boyle's inquiring about Amnesty International (she would later found the San Francisco chapter).

1973 February 10-1977 August 17 [Box 1 F6]

Some of these letters mention the trip to Ireland Boyle took during this time (see MSS 287 for some of the work produced relating to this trip).

1978 April 2-1982 September 5 [Box 1 F7]

Also included is a letter written by Einsele to a mutual friend of Einsele and Boyle.

1983 March 3-1986 July 30 [Box 1 F8]

Politics and activism are especially prevalent themes in these letters, in spite of Boyle's acknowledgment of her declining health.

1988 January 14-1992 [Box 1 F9]
Several of these letters were mediated through others, such as the staff at Boyle's retirement community or her son Ian. Also included are a copy of a defensive letter from Boyle to writer Dorothy Bryant regarding Bryant's "personal view" of Boyle in the *Twentieth Century Literature* issue devoted to Boyle's life and a letter to Einsele from Temple University professor Joan Mellen regarding information for her book about Boyle (*Kay Boyle: Author of Herself*, 1994).

**Series II. Photographs and clippings, 1968, 1991-1992**

Series II. contains photographs and clippings collected by Einsele, including a photograph of Boyle dated January 1968 at a sit-in, an undated photograph of Boyle in her later years, and clippings about Boyle's life and work from German newspapers.