

Contesting the 1920s: Malcolm Cowley versus Kay Boyle, John Glassco, Katherine Anne Porter – and Robert McAlmon

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Abstract

Grounded in biographical research and drawing on archival sources, this essay examines how the influential paradigm of literary modernism and the expatriate 1920s that was established by Malcolm Cowley in his *Exile's Return* (1934; 1951)—and, concomitantly, his parsimonious appraisal of Robert McAlmon—was contested by his literary coevals Kay Boyle, Katherine Anne Porter, and John Glassco. The appearance of Boyle's and McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together* (1968) and Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970) triggered altercations in print and private correspondence which, centered on the figure and function of Robert McAlmon, challenged premises and assumptions—of politics and geography, of gender and sexuality—in Cowley's narrative that made his claim of representativeness disputable. The essay also considers how the contestations of the 1920s by Cowley, Boyle, Porter, Glassco and McAlmon conjointly anticipated the large-scale revision of (the canon of) "high" modernism that was propelled by the rise of postmodernist theory and feminist revisionism in the 1980s, and how more recent scholarship, including insights from sexuality and queer studies, may help us come to a literary re-appraisal of Robert McAlmon. It shows how, even when the decade was still within human memory, "writing the 1920s" was a complicated, contested and contradictory enterprise, fraught with dissent and distortion, fabulation, manipulation and revision—a dynamics of historiography that may likewise make "writing the new Twenties" a highly tenuous, provisional and indeterminate enterprise that will be subject to ongoing contestation and adjustment, revision and subversion.

Keywords

American Modernism; 1920s; Expatriation; Memoirs; Historiography; Malcolm Cowley.

Introduction

First published in 1934 as “a narrative of ideas,” then revised in 1951 into a “literary odyssey of the 1920s,” Malcolm Cowley’s *Exile’s Return*, combining autobiography/memoir with literary historical analysis and cultural interpretation, established a paradigm of the 1920s that remained authoritative and iconic for much of the twentieth century (a Penguin Classics edition was issued in 1994). Extrapolating from the transatlantic migratory experience of his own “lost generation,” it posited a formative pattern of “exile” and “return,” of alienation and reintegration, as defining for the canon of modern(ist) American literature. Cowley’s paradigm was rooted in premises and assumptions—of politics and geography, of gender and sexuality—that made his claim of its representativeness disputable. Even during his lifetime, female contemporaries like Kay Boyle and Katherine Anne Porter protested against being fitted into what they saw as Cowley’s procrustean experiential paradigm. The publication of two competing accounts of the 1920s—*Being Geniuses Together* (1968), a “stereoscopic” memoir of the 1920s by Boyle and Robert McAlmon, and John Glassco’s *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970)—generated a fierce altercation, in print and private correspondence, between Cowley and Boyle, centered about the figure and function of Robert McAlmon, with Porter and Glassco playing auxiliary roles. In this essay, grounded in biographical research and drawing on archival sources, I examine the ways in which Boyle—flanked by Porter and Glassco—contested Cowley’s reading of the 1920s, in particular his literary appraisal of McAlmon, and challenged the premises of gender and literary politics underlying Cowley’s paradigm of modern American literature. In a coda and conclusion I consider how the ways in which Cowley, Boyle, Porter, Glassco and McAlmon conjointly contested the 1920s anticipated the large-scale revision of (the canon of) “high” modernism that was propelled by the rise of postmodernist theory and feminist revisionism in the 1980s, and how more recent scholarship, including insights from sexuality and queer studies, may help us come to a reappraisal of Robert McAlmon from perspectives that go beyond the personal or cultural horizons of not only Cowley but Boyle, Porter, Glassco—and McAlmon himself.

This essay hopes to show how, even when the decade was still within its actors’ human memory, “writing the 1920s” proved a complex historiographical exercise, in which contestation and contradiction vied with fabulation and distortion, revision and manipulation. Lived experience clashed with personal memory and retrospective reconstruction, precluding a uniform, consonant or monolithic account and necessitating the competing co-existence of multiple perspectives and counterpoints on a legendary decade that for the literary historian must remain fluid, malleable and mercurial. It stands to reason to expect that the historiographical dynamic that governed the writing of the “old” Twenties may similarly come to determine the writing of the “new” Twenties, making it—by necessity and definition—a highly tenuous, provisional and indeterminate enterprise that will be subject to ongoing contestation and adjustment, revision and subversion.

Exile’s Return in American Literary History

Cowley’s *Exile’s Return: A Narrative of Ideas* (1934) was a retrospective account of the intellectual and aesthetic trajectory followed by the author and his cohort of literary coevals

between 1915 and 1930. Cowley presented himself as a representative voice of the “lost generation” of American writers, as he sought to explain the role they had played in the emergence of a modern national American literature from a process of cross-fertilization with European modernism. *Exile's Return* traced the formative years of the post-World War I young generation from being “uprooted, schooled away, almost wrenched away, from its attachment to any region or tradition” (34) in high-school and university; through volunteer service in World War I (where it cultivated a “spectatorial attitude” [47] to the war, which persisted into post-war life and society); through a stint of living as poor, struggling artists-on-the-make in Greenwich Village; to a feeling of disaffiliation from an America in the grip of puritanism, philistinism and prohibition; to the embrace of “salvation by exile” (84), the expatriate experience in Europe, the confrontation with international modernism, the rediscovery of America's aesthetic potential, and the “return” to America on the eve of the Depression. The core of Cowley's critique of the past was his analysis of the symbolist aesthetics at the heart of modern literature and its ethical, social and political implications. Written under the auspices of his Depression-inspired conversion to radical politics, the 1934 *Exile's Return* amounted to a repudiation of the aesthetic, non-political poetics which had marked his generation in the 1920s; it ended with a stirring call to radical engagement. The book was controversial, and met with a strongly mixed, and for the author discouraging reception.

In 1951 the book was reissued by Viking in a newly revised edition, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*. Though Cowley claimed that he had left the core of his account unaltered, in effect the 1951 edition amounted to a different book: it placed the intellectual and artistic peregrinations of Cowley and his generation in a de-politicized light and emphasized the timeless mythical underpinnings of the “odyssey” of his generation. This time, the book was hailed as a contemporary classic of American literary history, a tribute to the achievement of the “lost generation,” and an influential study of the “making” of American literature. It cinched Cowley's reputation as one of America's major critics.¹

Though never unchallenged, *Exile's Return* for several decades maintained its position of authority among the countless memoirs and autobiographies by key figures or fellow travellers of the “lost generation” that began to flood the US literary market in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1930s Fitzgerald's pioneering “Echoes of the Jazz Age” (1931) and Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) had preceded *Exile's Return* (1934) as revaluations of expatriation in the 1920s, and close upon its heels had appeared Vincent Sheean's *Personal History* (1935), Harold Stearns's *The Street I Know* (1935), and Robert McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together* (written in 1934 but not published until 1938, in London). The 1940s saw Janet Flanner's *An American in Paris* (1940), Edmund Wilson's compilation of Fitzgerald's *The Crack-Up* (1945) and Samuel Putnam's *Paris Was Our Mistress* (1947). But with the post-war revival of interest in the 1920s an avalanche of lost-generation memoirs followed Cowley's revised edition of *Exile's Return* (1951), most prominent among them Caresse Crosby, *The Passionate Years* (1953), Sylvia Beach, *Shakespeare and Company* (1956), Harold Loeb, *The Way It Was* (1959), Robert M. Coates, *The View from Here* (1960), Matthew Josephson, *Life Among the Surrealists* (1962), Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (1963), Morley Callaghan, *That Summer*

in *Paris* (1963), Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (1964), John Dos Passos, *The Best Times* (1966) and Nancy Cunard, *Those Were the Hours* (1969). In 1968 Fitzgerald's "My Generation" (written in 1939) posthumously appeared, and Kay Boyle published what Padraic Colum on the dustjacket called "a binocular view" of the 1920s in her revised edition of McAlmon's *Being Geniuses Together*, supplemented by alternating chapters of her own reminiscences. In 1970 appeared John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, a book that on Cowley's strong recommendation was reissued in a US paperback edition by Viking Press in 1973.

Though the sheer number of retrospective accounts published between the early 1930s and 1970 in and by itself belied the possibility of a consensual and unified historiography of the "old" Twenties (and more expatriate memoirs would follow Glassco's), *Exile's Return* retained a uniquely influential position. Rooted in memory and imaginative reconstruction of autobiographical experience, Cowley's book went beyond the personal, anecdotal and gossipy reminiscence of a wild and wasteful decade of literary and erotic adventure that marked most 1920s memoirs, and established a larger design of literary historical analysis and cultural interpretation, which would set the dominant image of the Lost Generation and confirm its place of centrality in the American literary canon for the remaining decades of the twentieth century. Not until the culture wars of the 1990s, and the revision of the canon of American literature through enterprises like *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*—the first edition of which appeared in the year of Cowley's death, 1989—would the paradigm of modernism which *Exile's Return* helped to establish be displaced.²

Over time, critical appreciations of *Exile's Return* fluctuated with literary and political fashions, as critics challenged Cowley's "narrative of ideas" not only (as this essay will show) from the perspectives of feminism, gender and sexuality studies, but also from the perspectives of neo-marxism, neo-conservative criticism, multiculturalism, diversity studies, and transnational American studies.³ But even its most fervent detractors and dissenters had to grant its influence and authority as "the book that did more than any other to popularize [the legend of the lost generation] even as it was among the first to validate the great importance of the literature which made the legend possible" (Aldridge 481). Yet even in Cowley's lifetime its status and interpretation were disputed, sometimes furiously, by fellow-writers and coevals.

Cowley, Boyle and McAlmon: Living and Remembering the Expatriate 1920s

Among the most vocal detractors of Cowley's reading of the past was novelist, poet and political activist Kay Boyle (1902–1992), whose 1968 reissue of *Being Geniuses Together* was the occasion for a bitter altercation with Cowley, focused on their different appreciations of Robert McAlmon (1895–1956), poet, fiction writer, memoirist and—through his *Contact Editions*—an influential publisher of American expatriate writing in 1920s Paris. Though Boyle felt she did not technically qualify as an "expatriate"⁴—in marrying a French officer Richard Brault in June 1922 she had surrendered her American nationality to become a French citizen—she was, in Cowley's 1951 perception, perhaps "the only permanent expatriate" (292) among the writers of the "lost generation". Cowley's actual period of expatriation was limited

to two years, 1921–1923. An American Field Service Fellowship allowed him to immerse himself in French Classicism for a year at the University of Montpellier in the South of France, which was followed by a summer of European travel (Brussels, Berlin, Innsbruck, Vienna) and a second year in Paris and Giverny, when he met the “saints” of modernism (Joyce, Valéry, Eliot), fell under the spell of the French Dadaists (Tzara, Aragon) and was arrested and jailed for his “significant gesture” of punching the café proprietor of La Rotonde in the face (Cowley, *Exile’s Return: A Literary Odyssey* 110–32, 164–70). The two years Cowley spent in France were watershed moments in his literary career, when he first developed the ideas that would remain axiomatic with him and—partly through working for *Broom* and *Secession*—rediscovered the aesthetic potential of “America” by viewing it from a European perspective (Bak, *Malcolm Cowley* 178–275). Boyle, by contrast, spent many more years, from 1923 to 1953, in Europe, mostly in France, England, Austria and Germany—with the exception of a 1940s war-time interlude in New York. In the 1920s she published in the expatriate little magazines—*Broom*, *This Quarter*, *transition*—and moved in expatriate circles with Eugene Jolas, James Joyce, Harold and Caresse Crosby, Harold Stearns—and Robert McAlmon. In *Exile’s Return* Cowley mentioned her, almost in passing, as one belonging to Harry Crosby’s circle and listed her as one of the signers of *transition*’s “Revolution of the Word” proclamation (251, 262, 277n, 284, 292n).

Boyle and Cowley had not personally met in Paris in the early 1920s, though technically they might have, as they moved in different but convergent circles, and their stays in Paris briefly overlapped, Boyle arriving in France with her French husband on June 5, 1923 (Mellen 55), Cowley departing to New York on August 2 (Bak, *Malcolm Cowley* 276). But Cowley was aware of her through *Broom*⁵ – Boyle’s poem “Morning” had appeared in *Broom*’s January 1923 “American” number, which also contained Cowley’s “Pascin’s America” – and may even have caught glimpses of her in Montparnasse: in 1963 he recalled her as “a rather elfin creature” (79) in her Paris days. In 1922, Boyle had worked as “business manager” for *Broom* in its New York office, serving as assistant to Lola Ridge, a revolutionary activist and poet, like Boyle of Irish descent. Ridge had hoped to have editorial control over which writers to include in *Broom*’s “American” number (she objected to the inclusion of Gertrude Stein), but when editor Harold Loeb proved reluctant to give her the autonomy he had promised her, she resigned as the magazine’s New York editor. When in January 1923, upon learning that his sponsors were to withdraw their financial support, Loeb decided to halt the magazine, Ridge and Boyle offered to take it over (Mellen 49–53). By Boyle’s account, Loeb consented, then within 48 hours changed his mind, cabling from Europe “second thought, no,” and passed editorial control of *Broom* over to Matthew Josephson, Malcolm Cowley and William Slater Brown, much to the anger and frustration of both women, who experienced Loeb’s reversal as a patriarchal act of curt dismissal. The memory would rankle. Loeb’s cable, Boyle later wrote to Cowley, was like “a death sentence passed on all our hopes.”⁶

Once in France Boyle was determined, not without bitterness towards Loeb, to find her own way among the “cliques” and “camps” of expatriate Paris (Mellen 63) and empathically took her distance from Cowley. As she wrote to Lola Ridge in September 1923, she came

prepared to attack “the cheap cheap cheap criticism of Jean Toomer, Matthew Josephson and Malcolm Cowley” (qtd. in Mellen 62) which she had encountered in the pages of *Broom*. “How often,” she told Ridge on September 12, “have I thought that were I Malcolm Cowley I should long ago have written a clever superficial note on French provincial life—‘this land where horses go uncastrated and all good journeaux eventually become toilet paper,’ relying on several lines of magnified type to carry my point” (Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century* 55). It is likely that Boyle’s wrath was roused by Cowley’s tongue-in-cheek cultural criticism in a series of caricatural portraits which had appeared in *Broom* between October 1922 and March 1923.⁷ More immediately she reacted against Cowley’s “Snapshot of Young Lady” in the August 1923 *Broom*, a Dada-inspired satirical fantasy, full of bizarre coincidences and illogical plot twists, which parodically conflated cliché’s from pulp fiction murder mysteries and male fascination with Hollywood’s hazle-eyed, golden-haired romantic heroines.⁸ Her Paris, she was adamant, would not be the Paris of glamor, license, and literary bickering between the editors of little magazines: “Paris doesn’t mean for me ‘The Dôme’ and the hot fierce arguments across liquor—, not Harold Loeb’s Paris, nor Cowley’s, not Gorham Munson’s!”⁹ Even so, as much as any expatriate she was eager to escape a bourgeois and capitalist American culture grounded upon “the business of money-making, money-spending, money-saving,” as she wrote to Lola Ridge. For her, as for many an American expatriate, Europe represented freedom, America enslavement (Mellen 69).

From her New York days on *Broom*, Boyle had been aware of Robert McAlmon, as a consort of William Carlos Williams, co-editor of *Contact* (which published two of her poems in 1923), and founder of Contact Publishing Company. Through Harold Loeb she first met McAlmon in 1923 in Paris at the terrace of the Café de la Paix, and, herself an impressionable 21-year-old, fell under the spell of this handsome man seven years her senior. McAlmon, she recalled in *Being Geniuses Together*, had “a profile not unlike John Barrymore” and, for all his brutal cynicism and icy blue eyes, “appeared to be totally without conceit.” She found him a witty conversationalist, his thin lips marked by “a half-humorous, half-mordacious twist” and “acrimonious laughter” (*Being Geniuses Together* 94-95). Four years later, at 25, she found McAlmon “honest and sensitive . . . the real thing”—beneath his “hard, obdurate, stubborn and insensitive manner” he was “keenly sensitized to the subtleties of truth” (qtd. in Mellen 102-03). Poet Evelyn Scott, however, sensing Boyle’s hero-worshipping tendency, noted an “emotional prejudice” (Mellen 106) towards McAlmon.

Boyle did not settle in Paris until 1928, when she began moving in the circles of Jolas’ *transition*, with Carnevali, Joyce, Sylvia Beach, Gertrude Stein, Stearns, and the Crosbys. Though she found McAlmon openly hostile to *transition* and its “Revolution of the Word,” Boyle—writes biographer Joan Mellen—“fell in love with Robert McAlmon, even as she knew the truth about his homosexuality” (118) and despite his verbal cruelty. McAlmon, recently released from a marriage of convenience with the lesbian—and wealthy—poet Bryher, could or would not publicly (and only very rarely privately) avow his homosexuality, and Boyle and he were never lovers, despite Boyle’s infatuation and her enduring belief that he must be in love with her (Mellen 124). Even after she had been the lover of the bisexual John Glassco,

who presumably was McAlmon's lover too, and had faced further evidence of McAlmon's homosexuality, Boyle clung to her illusion of love, remained loyal to McAlmon, and persisted in feeling that he had never received proper recognition as publisher and catalyst of American writing in 1920s Paris (Mellen 125, 148, 285).

In glaring contrast, in *Exile's Return* (1934) Cowley virtually erased McAlmon from the expatriate scene, barely granting him a place or role of any significance: his name occurs only once, in passing and dismissively, in a quote from a June 29, 1923, letter to Kenneth Burke, as one with whom one should avoid getting involved in "petty literary wars" (1934, 171; 1951, 162). Cowley had met McAlmon shortly after his arrival in Paris in 1921, but he had ironically read his presence there as confirming that Paris was little more than an extension of Greenwich Village bohemia (Bak, *Malcolm Cowley* 180). Indeed, little love was lost between McAlmon and the members of Cowley's group. Since his Village days McAlmon had regarded Burke, Cowley and Josephson as belonging to a "reprehensible species of egghead" in possession of a forbidding erudition, and had preferred the company of William Carlos Williams (Josephson 74, 77). In contrast to Burke and Cowley's appreciation for the formalist intellectualism of modern literature, McAlmon preferred to engage in literary partnership—and an ensuing long-lasting friendship—with Williams through their joint magazine *Contact* (1920–1921, 1923), which propagated a literature of lived experience grounded in "contact" with, and using the idiom of, native locality (Smoller, *Adrift* 30–32). Burke, Cowley and Josephson, on their side, continued to feel cold toward McAlmon through the 1920s.

The summer 1928 issue of *transition* was an "American Number" featuring, among others, a poem by Cowley ("Seven O'Clock"), a poem by Boyle ("The United States"), and a poem by McAlmon submitted through Boyle under the pseudonym of "Guy Urquhart." It also, ironically, included a twenty-page group manifesto, "New York 1928," concocted by Cowley, conjointly with Burke, Brown, Josephson and Robert Coates, from a room at the Chelsea Hotel.¹⁰ The manifesto testified to a change of heart among former "exiles" and amounted to a double-aimed critique: savage and comico-serious attacks on notorious expatriates like Pound were counterbalanced by scathing satires on the insipidity of American culture in an age of mass production and consumerism. McAlmon, as archetypal expatriate, came in for the brunt of bitter renunciation by the exiles-turned-nativist: one jingle, a parody of Heine, read: *I dreamt that I was Pound himself, / Whom heavenly joy immerses, / And ten McAlmons sat about / And praised my verses*. A couplet composed by Slater Brown belittling McAlmon's quality as a writer belatedly gained notoriety: *I'd rather live in Oregon and pack salmon, / Than live in Nice and write like Robert McAlmon*.¹¹

The jingles infuriated Boyle: in her 1968 *Being Geniuses Together* she denounced the manifesto as "some limping and would-be waggish doggerel, the blunt barbs of which were directed against American exiles, doggerel which a group of New York literary men had apparently spent an uproarious night composing in a room at the Chelsea Hotel" (337). Without giving away names, she denounced its facile humor, "intellectual effrontery" and "embitterment"—sentiments she would never allow to cloud her "love" ("deeply and wholly without question") and appreciation of McAlmon and Jolas (337–38). Writing to Boyle in December

1967, Cowley confessed: “Those doggerel verses in *transition* that made you so angry were written by Slater Brown. I thought they were funny, and so did Jolas, but then we weren’t friends of McAlmon.”¹²

In the original version of *Being Geniuses Together* (1938) McAlmon included a trivializing account of an incident Cowley blew up to symbolic proportions in *Exile’s Return* as a Dadaist “significant gesture”—his well-advertised fisticuffs with the *patron* of La Rotonde on Bastille Day 1923 and his ensuing arrest and imprisonment: “It appeared that Malcolm Cowley had taken a sock at the patron of the Rotonde and the cops arrested him. We were all against the patron of the Rotonde. He disliked Americans, had become rich through them, and was sour-faced and mercenary at best. The lot of us flocked to the police station and swore that the patron had started the fight . . . It was thought that Cowley had been saved a six months jail term, for they are strict about fisticuffing in France” (113–14). McAlmon’s account, written in February 1934, antedated the publication of *Exile’s Return* in May of that year, but McAlmon would have read Cowley’s report on his “significant gesture” pre-published in the September 1931 issue of *The New Republic*, the magazine on which Cowley had recently succeeded Edmund Wilson as literary editor.¹³ McAlmon implied that he had played a mediating role of some importance in effecting Cowley’s release. Though his intervention, with that of American companions like Laurence and Clotilde Vail and Kitty Cannell, may have helped to sway the French judge, Cowley had effectively been released through the help of French literary friends, in particular André Salmon, who as reporter of Paris murder trials for *Le Matin* was on good terms with the police (Bak, *Malcolm Cowley* 264–65).

McAlmon followed up his 1934 account of Cowley’s trial with a spiteful recollection of Cowley’s altercation with Archibald MacLeish, in *The New Republic* in the early fall of 1933, about the American involvement in World War I. At the time, Cowley had come to understand the war through Communist spectacles as a war of imperialism, which had claimed too many who had “died in vain.”¹⁴ Cowley’s stance—and his implied critique of MacLeish’s connection with Henry Luce’s big-money enterprises *Time* and *Fortune*—roused McAlmon’s ire and contempt, and he reported on Cowley’s new political allegiances and his supposedly limited powers of intellectual analysis with barb-wired condescension:

In any case, Cowley soon went back to America and joined the staff of *The New Republic*, to continue being duly ponderous, the young-intellectual fairly slow on the uptake, for in 1933 he bolted somewhere to the middle-rear as a leader of thought by declaring war is a sell and a disillusionment and that so and so should declare themselves. At the time Osbert Sitwell, Beverly Nichols, Storm Jameson and a crew of English lady novelists had been declaring themselves passionately anti-war for some time, and in cases analyzed the conditions and persons – i.e. munition-makers, bankers, those seldom involved in the agonies of but profiting by wars – responsible for war . . . Perhaps Cowley should go a bit deeper into the causes for war, and leave the emotional outcry against the cruelty and futility of it to women’s clubs, even if their outcry does not seem to influence those in authority. (McAlmon 114–15)

When, in the 1960s, Boyle came to revise McAlmon's memoirs for her "binocular" edition of *Being Geniuses Together*, she deleted most of McAlmon's diatribe against what he had deemed Cowley's slanted and wrongheaded reading of the First World War. But she retained McAlmon's barbed mockery of Cowley's presumed intellectual deficiencies, and she made sure that in the revised passage McAlmon appeared in a more favorable light:

In any case, Cowley soon went back to America and joined the staff of *The New Republic*, where he could be duly ponderous, the young intellectual fairly slow on the uptake, who startled a naïve public by daring to declare (in 1933) that war is a sell and a disillusionment, and that MacLeish, Hemingway, and all of us should say so. After that blast from Cowley's pen, I got romantic and read again *War and Peace*, and *Le Feu* and *Three Soldiers*, and other anti-war books, and recalled that Osbert Sitwell, Beverley Nichols, Storm Jameson, and a crew of English lady novelists had been declaring themselves passionately against war for some time past. (*Being Geniuses Together* 42)

Over the ensuing years, Boyle remained loyal to her hero-worshipping memories of love and friendship for McAlmon. After having been a prolific author and an influential publisher in the 1920s, McAlmon's career declined in the 1930s, even though he published a book of stories in 1932, a volume of poetry in 1937, and his memoirs in 1938. McAlmon continued to reside in Europe until 1940, when he returned to the US to live in Texas, and died, almost forgotten, in 1956. Boyle continued to feel that McAlmon had been "exploited, betrayed, neglected, deceived, and imitated beyond recognition" (qtd. in Mellen 303), and she became determined, upon his death in 1956, to revive his reputation, writing in *The Prairie Schooner* in 1960: "It was McAlmon who, in liberating himself from genteel language and thought, spoke for his generation in a voice that echoes, unacknowledged, in the prose of Hemingway and that of other writers of his time" (qtd. in Spanier, *Kay Boyle* 26).

Boyle versus Cowley, Part One: *Being Geniuses Together* (1968)

Though both writers maintained distant, if mostly cordial and diplomatic relations over the years, Boyle's resentment against Cowley's reading of the expatriate 1920s, especially his in her eyes wrongheaded appraisal of McAlmon, lingered, to flare up in full force in the late 1960s. By then, their careers had followed divergent paths: by the time of her definitive return from Europe in the 1950s, Boyle had moved from *transition's* aesthetic rebelliousness to a more socially and committed stance that culminated in anti-Vietnam political activism; Cowley, by contrast, had abandoned his 1930s leftist activism to become part of the literary establishment (in 1956, the year of McAlmon's death-in-oblivion, he was elected President of the National Institute of Arts and Letters) and a publicly recognized authority on the "lost generation" of the 1920s. By the early 1960s—in the wake of the deaths of Hemingway, Faulkner and Cummings—both Boyle and Cowley had become legendary survivors of a patina-covered literary generation: in 1963 both featured in a double-spread group photograph of "The Last of the Lost Generation" published by *Esquire* magazine.¹⁵ In an accompanying essay,

Cowley spoke of the “lucky” rather than “lost” generation and, with a humorous twinkle, described Boyle as “looking more Latin than Irish; one might take her for an admired diva who has passed in a moment from a fit of scorn to an outburst of hilarity.” He singled her out as “the baby of the group” (incorrectly giving her date of birth as 1903, a fib often used by Boyle herself), recalled that in Paris she had seemed “a rather elfin creature,” and ended on a retrospective note of admiration: “one looks back with amazement at the work she has accomplished. Besides raising six children by three marriages, she has written twenty volumes of fiction and three volumes of poetry” (Cowley, “Last” 79).

Some years after Boyle’s return to the US in 1953, she and Cowley had resumed epistolary contact in a vein of mutual respect and friendship. But the cordiality of their relations took a downward turn when in October 1967 Cowley announced to Boyle that he had been asked by Ken McCormick, Boyle’s publisher at Doubleday, to give his verdict of Boyle’s latest project, a revised reissue of McAlmon’s 1938 *Being Geniuses Together* interspersed with chapters from Boyle’s own memoirs of the 1920s.¹⁶ Boyle’s undertaking was motivated by her loyal determination to give McAlmon the recognition as an influential publisher and mentor in expatriate Paris that she felt had unfairly been withheld from him. As she wrote to Katherine Anne Porter, she was eager to put McAlmon “in a proper perspective” and remedy the dismissive treatment of McAlmon she had encountered in *Broom* and *transition* in the 1920s, as well as more recently in Cowley’s *Exile’s Return* (the 1951 revised edition had been reissued as a Compass paperback in 1965) and Josephson’s *Life Among the Surrealists* (1962): “Bob was annihilated as a writer by Cowley, Josephson, Slater Brown, and others, and this book will, I hope, help to reinstate him both as a writer and publisher in our time.”¹⁷ The manuscript of McAlmon’s original memoirs, she wrote to Edward Dahlberg, had been much “emasculated” by his London publishers, largely from fear of libel, and she knew McAlmon had been “bitterly disappointed” in the published version.¹⁸ Boyle was now adamant to restore the book’s “original power” by going back to the 1934 text. Indeed, she did not hesitate to revise and rewrite according to her own light.¹⁹ As the British novelist Anthony Powell perspicaciously noted, Boyle had cleaned up McAlmon’s original narrative by omitting stories that showed him in a less than favorable light (Mellen 457). In order to focus her book of combined memoirs more astringently on the 1920s, Boyle left out the chapters in McAlmon’s original version that dealt with the years 1931–1934, including McAlmon’s eye-witness account of Hitler and his Brown shirts parading through the streets of Munich in 1932. In this way, as Brian Busby noted, Boyle “refashioned the memoir to better resemble her idealized image” of McAlmon, “a man for who she had once felt an unreciprocated love” (219–20). “It is my hope,” Boyle wrote undauntedly in a prefatory note to the new edition, that “the present revision will do more than provide a deeply sympathetic portrait of a writer and publisher who deserves to be remembered for his unique qualities, but that it will as well help to accord to Robert McAlmon his rightful and outstanding place in the literary revolution of the early nineteen-twenties” (xiii).

As soon as she learned of McCormick’s request, Boyle jumped to actively discourage Cowley from complying: “I can’t think why Ken McCormick thought you would want to read

even the revised version of *Being Geniuses Together*. I know you did not like McAlmon, and he is not complimentary to you in the book, and had Ken McCormick asked my advice first I would have said you should not be bothered with it . . . So please do forget about the whole thing.”²⁰

Ignoring Boyle’s plea, Cowley wrote to McCormick to express his verdict of *Being Geniuses Together* (“superb title”): the alternation of McAlmon’s and Boyle’s chapters gave “a special feeling of solidity” to the book as they complemented each other “in a curious fashion”: “McAlmon, a realist able to make shrewd judgments, but lacking in imagination and blind to anything beyond the end of his own nose; Miss Boyle, a romanticist and still full of illusions forty years after the events she describes, but very often able to grasp the essence of a character and always eager to acknowledge greatness in others because there is something of greatness in herself.” Indeed, Boyle possessed in excess what McAlmon crucially lacked, and Cowley frankly owned up to his predilections: “I enjoyed her chapters much more than I did McAlmon’s. He drank with every one, he tells good stories, but he wrote his part of the book at a time when everyone else was becoming famous, or so it seemed, and he was sinking into obscurity, so that he was full of grudges and resentments. Miss Boyle keeps insisting on his generosity, but there is hardly a hint of it in his prose. She, on the other hand, is generous to a fault, generous to everyone including McAlmon, and leaves one with a feeling of courage and warmth.” The book was most effective, he thought, when both writers dealt with the same people and events: together they offered “a stereoscopic view” which made for an “indispensable” account of Paris in the 1920s.²¹

Writing to Boyle, Cowley was more unrestrained: he had read the book “with fascination” and “admiration” for Boyle’s chapters but found the quality of McAlmon’s writing “rather saddening”—“He had a certain amount of raw talent, but he couldn’t write prose, and on principle refused to learn.” Again, Cowley confessed to bias: “No, I didn’t like him, and I like him rather less after reading his narrative”—but if McAlmon helped others “in an admirably off-handed fashion,” Cowley was hard-pressed to find even “a shred of generosity” in his work—“only grudges and resentments.” Part of the reason for this, Cowley surmised, was McAlmon’s unhappiness about his declining reputation: “Almost everybody he had known in Paris was becoming famous, while he was becoming obscure. He had been the patron of others, almost the Maecenas, and now he needed help, which nobody offered. It would have taken a great spirit not to feel resentful. McAlmon wasn’t a great spirit. In some ways he was a man of the eighteenth century: realistic, shrewd, skeptical, but short-sighted . . . He lived among the great without ever knowing what made them great.” Nor was Cowley, contrary to what Boyle suspected, “in the least” aggrieved by McAlmon’s “little crack” about him as the *New Republic* editor who “could be duly ponderous, the young intellectual fairly slow on the uptake”—“What saddens me are the cracks he insists on making about better people than I am.” Boyle herself, unlike McAlmon, wrote “with imagination” and “real generosity of spirit” and Cowley had felt “deeply moved” by her narrative.²²

Cowley thought the book was important enough to warrant an extended review, in a place of prestige and high visibility: on June 9, 1968, the front page of *The New York Times*

Book Review featured “Those Paris Years,” illustrated with photographs of Boyle as a wavy-haired, unfathomable beauty in Nice in 1930, and a black marble sculpture of a long-necked McAlmon by Mariette Mills. Cowley devoted the entire front page (almost two-thirds of his review) to an uncharitable discussion of McAlmon, before offering a generous appraisal of Boyle’s share of the book—a choice which thwarted Boyle’s purpose to restore McAlmon to his proper stature. Written with American down-to-earthiness, a touch of poetry, but also witty (sometimes vicious) innuendoes, Cowley’s review recapitulated the verdict he had given in his letters to McCormick and Boyle, now couched in a tone of ironic nostalgia and avuncular retrospection befitting a piece rooted in personal recollection and generational memory. In a Twain-like character vignette of McAlmon, he pictured him as blowing into Paris in 1921 “like a wind from the prairies” and, with his broad-brimmed hat, resembling “a wild Cayuse or its rider.” Aiming to be fair, Cowley described McAlmon as a man with “self-confidence, a winning smile, and . . . a generous supply of money, derived from his incredible marriage to the poet Bryher,” who seemed “destined” to have a “brilliant career” and built an impressive network among the great (Eliot, Pound, Joyce) while secretly cherishing his superiority. Being “generous to younger and needier writers,” he founded Contact Editions and published a distinguished roster of “famous or soon-to-be-famous authors”—Cowley listed Hemingway’s “first two booklets,” Pound, Williams, Mary Butts, H.D., Coates, Stein, “as well as seven books of poetry and fiction by Robert McAlmon” (Cowley, *Flower* 243–44).

Rising above the specific book under consideration, Cowley made his review into a mini-treatise on key themes that would resound through his later, more substantial essays: the dynamics of failure and success, the interactions of talent and character, the requirements of a living and possibly lasting art. Cowley was clearly fascinated as well as puzzled by McAlmon’s decline from high promise into oblivion and inclined to attribute this to a combination of personal and professional elements. Unlike Boyle, who agreed with friends who held that McAlmon had been “exploited, neglected, deceived, and imitated beyond recognition, but anyway preyed on by the vultures of the literary world” (244), Cowley refused to see McAlmon as the victim of a bitterly competitive literary world but looked for explanations in McAlmon’s personality: he “did not bear his sorrows like a Christian” but offered “so many harsh judgments” on those more successful than himself that the book’s original version seemed “McAlmon’s revenge on almost all the writers he had known” (244). For Cowley “the true cause of his failure” lay in McAlmon’s irredeemable literary inadequacies: “he never in his life wrote so much as a memorable sentence,” he charged, severely and somewhat hyperbolically (245). But his deficiencies were aggravated by flaws of character, Cowley thought: McAlmon “refused to accept instruction,” even from renowned mentors like Pound, and, mostly from stubborn pride and a (mistaken) sense of superiority, was unable “to learn from his own mistakes.” Inclined to always use “the first and easiest words,” he violated a basic tenet of the modernist creed (Pound’s “make it new”); as a result, his writing lost “its original freshness” and earned him his coevals’ mocking contempt, as in the couplet printed in 1928 in *transition* – “After forty years,” Cowley noted, “Miss Boyle is still indignant about it” (245).

If he was parsimonious in his appraisal of McAlmon, Cowley was amply fair to Boyle: her chapters gave McAlmon the centrality and recognition she felt were his due and thus, Cowley reflected, bestowed on him “a dignity of failure.” Unlike McAlmon Boyle was “bound to the craft [of writing] like a medieval apprentice” and “determined to learn.” While Boyle could muster the requisite humility to study others as a model, McAlmon committed what for Cowley was the unforgivable sin for a critic: “he read books to judge them, most often with a hostile and contemptuous eye” (246).

But Cowley also measured McAlmon and Boyle as writers by a deeper standard of literary failure or success—to what extent does the writer “give himself away,” engage in honest self-revelation? McAlmon, he thought, might be “candid about other people,” even spiteful, but “he tells us little about his feelings and almost nothing about his intimate life.” Boyle, by contrast, might be “less than candid about others,” being given to protectiveness and “romantic illusions,” but she did “give herself away” by “speaking frankly of her worst follies” and thereby achieved “a sort of selflessness.” Boyle thus met what Cowley’s friend, the poet Conrad Aiken, had defined as the primary responsibility of the writer, namely, to “take off the mask” and she allowed her readers “a glimpse of the despairing face” behind the mask, the “moment of self-revelation” that McAlmon withheld from his readers (246–47). Still, Cowley concluded his review, the cooperation was “amazingly successful.” By offering a picture of people and events “from different angles, as if they had been taken with a stereoscopic camera,” the book achieved a level of “depth and substantiality” absent in other memoirs of 1920s Paris, “notably” in McAlmon’s original book (247).²³

Most critics agreed with Cowley’s verdict that Boyle was the better writer; Jean Stafford in *The New York Review of Books* typically found McAlmon’s prose “repetitious and boring” while Boyle’s was “instinct with grace and gallantry” (qtd. in Mellen 457). In Joan Mellen’s judgment, Cowley had even erred on the side of generosity to Boyle: Boyle’s chapters had been “distressingly pretentious” and “self-dramatizing,” full of “overblown” analogies, “riddled” with “errors of fact and of omission,” unreliable in its account of literary history, and marred by “excessive romanticizing,” even as there were “moments of striking honesty” (Mellen 457–60). Busby, too, noted how in her own chapters Boyle had “fabricated for herself a richer history” by distorting and rearranging biographical facts (Busby 220).

Boyle was infuriated by Cowley’s appraisal of *Being Geniuses Together*. She wrote to him she was “very much saddened” by the review, which she read as Cowley’s “revenge” for McAlmon’s slur about his being “ponderous” and “a little slow on the uptake.” She launched into a five-point enumeration of what she—partly wrongheadedly—assumed were “inaccuracies.” She took offense at what she felt was Cowley’s belittling mention of McAlmon having published Hemingway’s “first two booklets,” and thought it was “inaccurate, and vindictive” to imply that McAlmon had launched Contact Editions largely to publish his own work. She was angered by Cowley’s suggestion that McAlmon “never wrote a memorable sentence” without specifying which books of McAlmon’s he had read, and she thought it unfair to quote “the relatively unknown” William Slater Brown on the quality of McAlmon’s writing, where Katherine Mansfield, Porter, Joyce and Eliot had praised his work. Lastly, she resented Cow-

ley's referring to Ethel Moorehead as "Ernest Walsh's mistress" and fulminated: "Had you ever read my novel *Year Before Last*, you could never have made this inaccurate and insensitive statement. I have no choice but to conclude that in reviewing *Being Geniuses*, you reviewed a book written by two people whose work you simply were not familiar with." She was not "indignant," she insisted, "just saddened that you chose to get back at McAlmon in this way."²⁴

Cowley kept his cool—and his humor. In an even-tempered letter he countered Boyle's "catalogue" of inaccuracies, confessing he in turn was "very much saddened" by her suggestion that he had wanted to "get back" at McAlmon for his slur: "My God," he noted with self-irony, "that was almost praise, considering what he said about other people. It isn't even wholly untrue, though what I'm really slow about is the comeback." If he had wanted revenge, he would not have so strongly urged people to read the book, he added. He admitted that he had indeed not read *Year Before Last* ("though I have read some of your other books with admiration") and he apologized for his inaccurate reference to Moorehead as Walsh's "mistress."²⁵ For the publishing record of Contact Editions, Cowley explained, he had taken his facts from Robert E. Knoll's *Robert McAlmon, Expatriate Writer and Publisher* (1957), which had listed seven titles by McAlmon. As for Hemingway, he insisted, *Three Stories and Ten Poems* and *in our time* could rightly, and without belittling, be termed "booklets"²⁶—Hemingway's "first real book" was *In Our Time*, published in New York in 1925. Cowley persisted that "after forty years" Boyle's account of the jingle mocking McAlmon had "the unmistakable ring of indignation"—his point, he explained, was that "it expressed what most people of my acquaintance felt about McAlmon's writing; that's why it achieved 'a certain amount of notoriety.'" In their praise of McAlmon, he maintained, Porter and Pound were "the exceptions." But Cowley really refused to budge about the quality of McAlmon's writing, and he now reiterated his charge with redoubled force: "I have read as much of McAlmon's work as I could and have never found a memorable sentence or the promise of his being able to write one. If I'm wrong, will you please quote me a memorable sentence that he wrote?" Boyle, he urged, should stop defending the indefensible and shed her illusions about McAlmon's writing: "For heaven's sake, Kay, why can't you admit that Bob McAlmon, for all his wining qualities (not winning to all), was radically incapable of writing the English language? . . . I am amazed that anyone who writes as well as you can should fail to recognize the lack of this ability, this vocation, in another, and I put it down to your generosity of spirit."²⁷

But Boyle would not give up her illusions or her loyalty so easily. Persuaded that Cowley had acted from "personal spite," she turned for help to John Glassco (1909–1981), the Canadian poet, translator and (later) author of erotic fantasy who had been both Boyle's and McAlmon's lover in Paris in the late 1920s (Mellen 125). She asked him to hunt for memorable lines from McAlmon's work that she could use in rebuttal to Cowley. Glassco marked up a few passages from McAlmon's stories, but also had to admit that—though he thought Cowley "rather sterile and Establishment"—he considered his review "not so bad" (qtd. in Mellen 461) and found himself in general agreement with Cowley's verdict: "I do think C. has a point about 90% of Bob's writing: it is pretty slapdash," he wrote to Boyle. The remaining ten per-

cent showed what McAlmon “might have done if only he’d taken more care with his writing” (qtd. in Busby 217). Boyle reacted with four months of silence.

How closely Glassco’s appraisal of McAlmon’s writing and Boyle’s reclamation project dovetailed with Cowley’s appeared from a letter of praise he wrote to Boyle on June 28, 1968, just as she was in the midst of her quarrel with Cowley: “What a wonderful book *Being Geniuses* is! It holds the essence of those days as no other book of the period does. But surely Bob never wrote as well as this! You must have done some very judicious revising to make him articulate without losing his own particular ‘quality’ (that favorite word of his!).” Glassco confessed to “a wonderful feeling that the whole period has really been pinned down for the first time. Your idea of alternating your own work with Bob’s was brilliant: it gives both variety and a kind of double vision trained on the scene. Your own part strikes me as better than his: Bob never gave himself, the way you do” (qtd. in Busby 216).

Cowley versus Boyle, Part Two: John Glassco and *Memoirs of Montparnasse*

After a last brief spasm Boyle’s and Cowley’s epistolary debate about the quality of McAlmon’s writing died down in late 1968.²⁸ But three years later their conflicted reading of the expatriate 1920s—and Robert McAlmon—once more flared up into acrimonious dispute when Cowley reviewed a book published in Toronto, *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970) by John Glassco. Cowley found the book “of unusual interest,” he wrote Glassco, but “almost completely overlooked in the US,” and launched into an enthusiastic campaign to find an American reading public for it.²⁹ To Reed Whittemore, then editor of *The New Republic*, he offered to review this “extraordinary” book, “the best account I ever read of Montparnasse in the 1920s.” Not beyond fabulating himself, Cowley depicted its author-protagonist as “a Canadian boy so handsome at the time that the elderly lechers of all sexes descended on him crying ‘Meat! Meat! Meat!’ as cannibals used to do when they went into battle.”³⁰ In an enthusiastic memo for Viking Press, he argued for a US reissue of the book as a Viking Compass paperback. This, he advanced, was “the liveliest and raunchiest” of the memoirs of Paris in the 1920s. Most of these were “based on nostalgic memories”—but this one, as Cowley (following Glassco) assumed, was begun “on the scene” in 1928–1929, and completed as Glassco was awaiting a life-threatening operation for tuberculosis in a Montreal hospital in 1932–1933; it was “the McCoy.”³¹ Despite their age difference (Glassco was eleven years younger) and the discrepancies in their expatriate experiences (Glassco’s being decidedly more libidinous and licentious) Cowley enjoyed the literary and memoirist rapport he felt with Glassco, in whom he recognized a gifted fellow-writer. Cowley recognized many of the real-life characters represented in Glassco’s book, and both writers entered upon a decade-long lively correspondence which only ended with Glassco’s death in 1981.

Cowley’s review, “We Had Such Good Times,” appeared in the Christmas 1971 issue of *The New Republic*. It was a big plug for a book that he felt had undeservedly “received very little notice” with American readers. Among expatriate 1920s memoirs—by Cowley’s “hasty count” at least eighteen—Glassco’s book stood out for being “fresher and truer to the moment than the others, as well as being more novelistic and, in a sense, legendary.”

Glassco's, Cowley believed, was not written "long after the events they colored with various shades of repentance, resentment, and nostalgia" (as had been most others, including his own *Exile's Return*), but "on the very scene" – it evoked the events with unparalleled immediacy. In his review Cowley noted that, by taking Glassco under his wings, McAlmon had saved him from complete degradation, but he also referred to McAlmon—almost in passing—as "the bitter homosexual novelist" who "had a generous side that redeemed his bitterness." *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, Cowley concluded, not only embodied "a fable," it presented "the most accurate picture of Montparnasse" he had seen; "this is the way it was" (Cowley, *Flower* 247–51).

Glassco was tickled by the review.³¹ But Boyle, still resentful after three years, once more took to the barricades: she was "distressed," she wrote Cowley, by his "lack of objectivity" regarding McAlmon, and persisted in her refusal to acknowledge his sexual identity: "Was Robert McAlmon a homosexual? I knew him probably as well as anyone, and I would not for a moment feel I was being accurate if I made such a statement." She was vexed by what she called Cowley's "distasteful labeling" and wondered: "why not 'Gertrude Stein, the Lesbian innovator,' or 'the sexually promiscuous Henry Miller,' or the 'however-you-might-wish-to-label-me, Kay Boyle'?" Determined as ever to restore McAlmon to his proper importance, she grievously noted: "If only you could have described McAlmon as 'the generous benefactor of young and old writers alike, and the dedicated publisher of their work! Such a designation would have been accurate, and would have brought credit to you both.'" "You do have a thing about McAlmon," Cowley responded, but he refused to capitulate. Since he was retelling Glassco's story, and "since Glassco had a close relation with McAlmon until they quarrelled," he maintained, it would have been "dishonest" and "falsifying" not to acknowledge that McAlmon was homosexual. Moreover, he granted, persisting in his earlier appraisal: "He was generous, extremely generous in a quiet and sometimes self-sacrificing way, but he also had one of the meanest tongues in Paris, which is a strong statement, and he 'absolutely, positively' refused to learn anything about the craft of writing – Glassco calls him 'illiterate,' and isn't that essentially true? In your long acquaintance with him, did you ever know him to read a book from beginning to end?"³⁴

Boyle was so infuriated at Cowley's "labeling" of McAlmon that, a day after writing to him, she vented her anger to her friend Katherine Anne Porter, whom she knew to be a loyal defender of their common friend from Paris days, and admitted her distrust of Cowley's motives: "It is not that what Malcolm says is derogatory or insulting but that Malcolm certainly wished it to be." She was convinced Cowley lost "no opportunity to vent his venom on Bob," where he should have placed McAlmon "in the literary scene of the time."³⁵

Porter had had her own altercation with Cowley about the way he had portrayed her Mexican experience as a mode of "exile" in his revised edition of *Exile's Return*.³⁶ When, in 1965, Cowley's book was reissued in a new Viking Compass paperback edition, she vented her anger circumstantially to Cowley in a series of letters.³⁷ Cowley, she charged, had not grasped the real nature of her affection for the people and culture of Mexico. She particularly resented his observation that "Mexico City was her Paris and Taxco was her South of France"—and

curtly set him straight: “Mexico City was not my Paris; it was my beloved Mexico City . . . I went to Mexico because I was not going into exile, but I was going back to a place I knew and loved.”³⁸ In defense, Cowley reasoned that he had “only” used her Mexican experience as a personal variation on what he persisted was “the general pattern of the age”—of “departure and return” or “to use fancier words, alienation and reintegration”—and insisted on the general validity of his thesis: “Yes, yes, you were moderately alienated from the American life of the time, in your own fashion, it’s true, but still with a cousinly resemblance to the sense of alienation that the rest of us felt.”³⁹ He offered to make minor revisions in a future edition, but Porter was hardly pacified. In her altercation with Cowley, as Jeffrey Lawrence pertinently suggested, she in effect challenged the modernist paradigm of “exile” and “return” (and its implied Eurocentric and masculinist bias) which Cowley had influentially posited as defining for modern American literature (37–38).

Enlisted by Boyle in her campaign against Cowley, Porter—notorious for speaking with slashing, if slanted, malice about her literary contemporaries, male or female—wrote back that she had never been able to decide whether Cowley “is just so stupid that he doesn’t know what he is saying, or just stupidly malicious—and swings his hatchet blindly.” Porter’s letter was less a response to Cowley’s review—she had not actually seen *The New Republic* lately, she confessed—than a personal endorsement of a female friend’s verdict: she welcomed Boyle’s writing her about “M’s brutal remarks about our dear McAlmon,” adding that Boyle, McAlmon and Sylvia Beach had been “the only people I knew in Paris that I loved and trusted.” McAlmon, she emphasized, was “a kind of living center of our many sympathies,” and Porter admired Boyle’s “elegance and restraint and perfect candour in this rebuke to Malcolm—it is too good for him, but yet it may seep through if there are any pores in that thick hide.” As for McAlmon’s homosexuality, she—somewhat disingenuously—admitted to Boyle that she “never knew anything” about McAlmon’s private, sexual life, nor did she ever discuss it with him, except by confidential implication: “I took for granted that sex is a private, individual mystery that cannot be explained, analyzed, subjected to public curiosity.”⁴⁰ Boyle thought Porter’s rejoinder a “strong and beautiful letter” and confessed herself “touched”—“I hope very much that you will write Cowley,” she added.⁴¹ Cowley’s rebuttal, she noted, was an “evasion” of all her objections: “There was never any discussion about whether Bob ever learned about ‘the craft of writing’ and all this illiteracy rot,” she insisted. Unwilling still to accept McAlmon’s homosexuality, she advanced that she had been “rebuking Cowley for his crass assumptions about Bob’s private life.” Since McAlmon’s sexual identity had “nothing whatsoever to do with the book Malcolm Cowley was reviewing,” she could only conclude he was “malicious, not just blunderingly stupid.”⁴²

Boyle’s—and Porter’s—reluctance or inability to acknowledge McAlmon’s homosexuality was not uncommon among the members of the lost generation and an integral part of the literary culture of the 1920s, even among self-proclaimed anti-bourgeois liberals. Cowley and his cohort, for example, knowing full well of the homosexual proclivities of their much-admired poet-friend Hart Crane, tended to be tacit and reticent in speaking publicly about them in the 1920s and 1930s. They knew themselves surrounded by a homopho-

bic conservative culture which easily identified the modern artist with deviant modes of sexuality that might necessitate forms of disguise or explain eruptions of unorthodox raging (in Crane's case) or bitterness (in McAlmon's). If they were ready to proclaim Crane's poetic genius, they were also adamant to have it understood that Crane's friends were not themselves homosexuals (Fisher 224-25). A similar concern about the effect on her own and McAlmon's literary standing may have made Boyle reluctant to speak out. As Mellen surmises, "by 1968, believing perhaps that any admission of McAlmon's homosexuality would damage the reputation she was working diligently to resurrect, Kay Boyle chose to deny it altogether" (460).

Boyle's resentment may well have been fanned by Cowley having done for Glassco's memoirs precisely what she had hoped to do for McAlmon's: give new visibility and recognition to a book and a reputation undeservedly underrated. But Boyle and Glassco, too, for all their loyalty in friendship, were in discord, both about McAlmon, about *Being Geniuses Together*, and about *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. In correspondence with Cowley, Glassco was more explicitly critical of McAlmon than he had been in writing to Boyle: "I only saw McAlmon's original work in fragments of typescript," he told Cowley, but in their joint *Being Geniuses Together* Boyle, or her editor, must "certainly" have "improved his syntax. I think we must face the fact that he was almost illiterate." Boyle's chapters, he added, were "very much like her"—but her memories, he agreed with Cowley, weren't "exactly reliable."⁴³ Indeed, as Busby has noted, there are telling discrepancies between Boyle's and Glassco's memories of their relations (47). Boyle, for one, had been fairly reticent about her relations with Glassco in her chapters of *Being Geniuses Together* (332-33). In the original manuscript of *Memoirs of Montparnasse* Glassco had modelled a "May Fry" after Boyle, and had been explicit about their "wonderful feats of inventiveness and endurance" in bed together (qtd. in Mellen 125). But when, as he now told Cowley, he had sent Boyle his original passages for approval, she had objected that "she didn't talk like that" and asked Glassco to "rewrite all her dialogue – and since this was obviously impracticable I had to re-name and disguise her completely."⁴⁴ In the published version of Glassco's memoirs Boyle appears, disguised but still recognizable, as the "famous" British novelist "Diana Tree," with whom he has an affair doomed to be short-lived; she appears side by side with a character named "Kay Boyle" (32, 80-87, 108-11, 190-95).

In *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, it is "Diana Tree" who introduces Glassco to McAlmon at the counter of the Dôme. Glassco portrays McAlmon as likable and generous with his wife's money ("Robber McAlimony"), but also as a man given to posturing, provocation, and abrasive, contemptuous estimates of others. Glassco is reputedly struck by McAlmon's "charm, loneliness and bitterness" and "touched by his vanity and refreshed by his rudeness" (50-51). But Glassco also shows that he shared Cowley's frugal estimate of McAlmon's qualities as a writer that so offended Boyle. Reading two of McAlmon's books, he noted, he found them little more than "literal transcripts" of vivid recollections, written without invention or subterfuge, and marred by the author's propensity to project himself as "the centre of everything"—"There were occasional flashes of observation and understanding, even moments of grace; but the style and syntax revealed the genuine illiterate" (79-80).

Glassco's portrait of McAlmon was—much like Cowley's own—ambiguously appreciative at best.⁴⁵ Boyle was again quick to hit back. Writing to Cowley, she insisted Glassco's account was as unreliable as Glassco had claimed hers was: “Either as fact or fiction, I thought the book without interest as a record of anything except Buffy's [Glassco's nickname] fantasies. It is, as you suggest, ‘novelistic’—and that to such an extent that I asked Buffy to take out the passages in which I appear as they were totally (although quite complimentary) without basis in fact.”⁴⁶ In correspondence with Boyle, Glassco frankly acknowledged his “fabrication”: “our friendship has been blown up, glamourized and made intensely significant in the framework of the story itself,” and “the events of the whole book have been re-arranged, telescoped, speeded up and dramatized in the same way”—in sum, he confessed: “It's really fiction: I was trying to re-create the atmosphere and spirit of the Paris of those days as it was for *me*. The way George Moore and Casanova did for the world of *their* youth.”⁴⁷ “The real value of ‘memoirs,’” Glassco insisted to Boyle, was “not so much a record of ‘what happened’ as a re-creation of the spirit of a period in time.”⁴⁸ Like a fiction writer, it was verisimilitude, not veracity, he was after.⁴⁹

In his 1971 review of *Memoirs of Montparnasse* Cowley finely intuited the book's truthfulness of spirit rather than fact: he highlighted its novelistic and legendary qualities, and yet, though he called it “a fable,” at the time of writing his promotional review Cowley may well have underestimated or downplayed the degree to which Glassco had fictionalized and fabulated. In view of Glassco's confession to Boyle, Cowley's claim that this was “the most accurate picture of Montparnasse” he had seen, that “this is the way it was,” comes to sound overblown (Cowley, *Flower* 251).

Nor, in view of what we now know of the genesis of *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, can we fault Cowley for believing, as did most critics at the time, that Glassco's manuscript, as he advanced, had indeed been composed “on the scene” (xiii) in 1928–29 and shortly after, during three months in 1932–1933 when he lay eye-to-eye with death in a Montreal hospital. In reality, much of the book was written in 1963–1964.⁵⁰ As did not become apparent until after Glassco's death, his claim that the manuscript had lain dormant and untouched for thirty-five years and that even then he had “changed very little of the original” (xiii) was a disingenuous one. Just as Cowley, in revising *Exile's Return*, had claimed that he had “left most of the narrative untouched, out of a feeling that myself in 1934 had as good a right to be heard as myself today” (12; Bak, “Fall”), so Glassco claimed to have resisted the temptation to revise “the youthful memoirist in all his flippancy, hedonism and conceit,” and taken his distance from his younger self: “This young man is no longer myself: I hardly recognize him . . . and in my memory he is less like someone I have been than a character in a novel I have read” (xiii).

Though Glassco continued to spread the myth that he had left the manuscript untouched since the early 1930s, in the years after his death scholarship has revealed the extent to which he tinkered, revised and expanded the original, thereby casting further doubt on Cowley's contention that “this is the way it was.” Canadian poet and critic Louis Dudek, made newly aware of the author's use of “high-level literary tactics,” reversed his ear-

ly judgment that the book was historically accurate and reliable: “*Memoirs of Montparnasse* is a great little book, but only if you remember that it is not a memoir, it is not a history, it is a work of fantasy and imagination” (Busby 4, 231–32). Though historians and biographers like Humphrey Carpenter have continued to quote Glassco’s memoirs as authentic and reliable literary history, in effect, as Busby establishes, many “anachronisms, inconsistencies, and improbabilities” mar the veracity of the book, making it “an untrustworthy keystone” of biographical or historical accuracy (3). Indeed, in *Memoirs of Montparnasse* Glassco had admitted that he was “always, though mainly in self-defence, a great practitioner of deceit” and “an accomplished liar” (38). He left several signposts of his manipulations, fabrications and deceit in his Personal Journal, confessing that one quarter of the book was “lies,” and inscribed the copy he presented to Boyle with a poem which called the book “this loose and lying chronicle” and appealed to her understanding of “how the falsehoods of the printed page / Are the true image of our vocal rage” (Busby 232–33).

Coda and Conclusion: From Contestation to Reappraisal

Drawing on published sources as well as unpublished correspondence, my essay has aimed to illuminate how Cowley, Boyle, Porter, Glassco and McAlmon – each in their own way an actor and participant in modes of “exile” or “expatriation” in 1920s Paris – questioned each other’s accounts of shared acquaintances or historical moments, each attributing to the others varying degrees of fabulation, distortion, sentimentalizing or romanticizing. Conjointly their memoirs provide a multi-perspectival if not always consonant autobiographical and historical record of the experience of expatriation that had been the foundational impulse of American literary modernism. If their views and memories showed discrepancies, conflicted versions and wilful fabrications of “the way it was,” Boyle’s and McAlmon’s *Being Genius-es Together*—as well as Glassco’s *Memoirs of Montparnasse*—deserve be taken into account, as Sandra Spanier has aptly noted, as offering “a strong counterpoint” to Cowley’s *Exile’s Return*, for so long “generally considered the classic account of the era.” (Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century* xxvi) Such a shifting dynamic of reminiscence and historiography, while typical for the legendary 1920s, is certainly not restricted to it; in the longer run it is likely to also govern both the contemporary and retrospective historiography of the “new” Twenties.

It is important to note that Boyle’s (and Porter’s) contestation of Cowley’s reading of the 1920s—in particular as focused on the figure and function of Robert McAlmon—anticipated the large-scale revision of the canon of modernism (and related phenomena like “expatriation,” “exile,” and the “lost generation”) that was propelled by the rise of postmodernist theory and feminist revisionism in the 1980s. As Shari Benstock’s *Women of the Left Bank* (1986) pathbreakingly demonstrated, these new modes of scholarship—very much in line with Boyle’s and Porter’s earlier critiques of Cowley—have challenged the masculinist, patriarchal assumptions underlying a presumably unified, monolithic master narrative of “high” modernism that critics like Cowley—for all their sensitivity to individual nuance and variation—had helped to establish and keep in place. Benstock persuasively argued the need for a more richly diversified and pluralistic conception of modernism and its canon that reckoned with

varieties of female experience and sexual orientation beyond the hegemony of masculinist patriarchy and heterosexuality (6–7, 312). As she also perspicaciously noted, through his Contact Editions McAlmon not only published work by Hemingway, Williams, Nathanael West, and Cowley's friend Robert M. Coates, but as an expatriate critic, editor and publisher he also advanced the work of a disproportionately large number of women writers—among them Kay Boyle, Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, H.D., Djuna Barnes, Bryher, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair and Edith Sitwell (361). By contrast, in *A Second Flowering* (1973), published in the wake of his altercations with Boyle and Glassco, Cowley centered his “canon” of the Lost Generation around eight “representative” male writers: Hart Crane, Cummings, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Thornton Wilder and Thomas Wolfe. Strictly applying a criterion of age (his canonical authors were all born between 1894 and 1900), Cowley not only sidetracked younger and older writers like Miller, Steinbeck, or West but also effectively excluded female writers like Porter, Barnes, or Millay for the—disputable—reason that “the admired writers of the generation were men in the great majority” (240). Though behind the scenes, in private counsel or as publisher's advisor for Viking Press, Cowley fully supported female writers like Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Louise Bogan, Dawn Powell and Tillie Olsen (Bak 2014), in delineating his “lost generation” canon he was not able or willing to lift himself above the gender determinants of his critical and cultural horizons.⁵¹ As in his altercations with Boyle, Porter and Glassco, in *A Second Flowering* Cowley stuck to his earlier verdict: he again presented “McAlmon, a homosexual,” as “a bitter but often generous man who regarded himself as an unacknowledged genius,” who was “radically unteachable” as a writer, and who maliciously spread what Cowley held to be “baseless tales” about Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's sexuality (61; cf Smoller, *Adrift* 222–25). Cowley's judgment of Boyle also remained unaltered. As late as 1988, in a personal note for a special Kay Boyle issue of *Twentieth-Century Literature*, Cowley still “questioned” Boyle's account of shared events and noted: “I thought she fabulated.” But he also praised her “gifts as a writer” and her “personal courage in difficult times,” and saluted her “long and brilliant career” (Spanier, *Kay Boyle* 271–72).

Cowley's appraisal of Robert McAlmon as a writer was largely confirmed by Sanford J. Smoller in the first—and still only—full-fledged biography of McAlmon, *Adrift Among Geniuses* (1975).⁵² Charges of slipshod writing haunted McAlmon throughout his career—his detractors being always more numerous than his defenders (with Boyle, Porter, Pound and Williams as his most faithful supporters)—and McAlmon remained persistently disdainful of revision; he valued spontaneity and authenticity of expression over formalist precision and craftsmanship (Smoller, “Introduction” xlv), much as would Jack Kerouac, whose *On the Road* (1957) was shepherded into publication with Viking Press in the year after McAlmon's death—by none other than Malcolm Cowley. Joyce, for one, though generally supportive of McAlmon and thankful for his generosity, thought McAlmon's writing so careless and “racy” that at his suggestion McAlmon's first collection of short stories was entitled *The Hasty Bunch* (1921) (Smoller, *Adrift* 64); later he derogatorily dubbed McAlmon's 1938 memoirs “the office boy's revenge” (qtd. in Smoller, *Adrift* 259). In line with Cowley's appraisal, Smoller also shows that, after 1925, McAlmon became increasingly embittered: “As his peers [Hemingway, Fitzgerald]

started to achieve the commercial success he thought he deserved, anger, bitterness, and frustration sapped his vitality and fragmented his efforts” (166). As his promise remained unfulfilled, or at least unrecognized, McAlmon sank into anonymity, the list of broken friendships and enemies growing exponentially, and enforcing his sense of remoteness, oblivion and isolation.

As Boyle had hoped to accomplish, McAlmon’s record as a prolific author and influential publisher of expatriate writers became firmly established.⁵³ Though his bisexuality is today beyond doubt, McAlmon remained reticent and ambiguously veiled about his sexuality in his published writings (Smoller, *Adrift*; “Introduction”). Only by rare exception did he reveal his sexual identity—as when, in a Paris bar in 1929, he drunkenly sneered to the Canadian writer Morley Callaghan, “I’m a bisexual myself, like Michelangelo, and I don’t give a damn who knows it” (qtd. in Smoller, *Adrift* 212). And in a late confidential letter, he reflected: “There are no real homos, male or female, but there is the bi-sex, and in more people than know it about themselves. Personally the types I object to are the female who droops female sex appeal or the male who swaggers with virility. They are the real ab-norms” (qtd. in Smoller, *Adrift* 216).

Recent scholarship, taking into account the complicated dimensions of McAlmon’s sexuality, has emphasized the need for a literary reappraisal of Robert McAlmon from perspectives that lay beyond the personal or cultural horizons of not only Cowley but Boyle, Porter, Glassco, and possibly McAlmon himself. Reviewing the 1990 reissue, by University of New Mexico Press, of McAlmon’s novel *Village* (first published in Paris in 1924), James R. Mellow (biographer of Hemingway, Stein, and Fitzgerald) argued it was “time to rescue” McAlmon the writer and to undertake a “long overdue assessment of his real contribution to American literature.” After reissuing *Village*, Edward Lorusso also brought out McAlmon’s 1923 novel *Post-Adolescence* (1991) and *Miss Knight and Others* (1992), thereby—in the wake of the deaths of both Cowley (1989) and Boyle (1992)—opening up the path to re-appreciation and rehabilitation of McAlmon’s writing.⁵⁴ The opportunity was enhanced when, in 2007, Smoller brought out an edition, from typescript, of the book McAlmon wrote in the 1940s, *The Nightinghous of Paris*, which offers a fictionalized portrait of McAlmon’s boundary-blurring encounters in late 1920s France with, among others, John Glassco and his friend Graeme Taylor that, in the verdict of Smoller, deserves to be placed with McAlmon’s and Boyle’s *Being Geniuses Together* and Glassco’s *Memoirs of Montparnasse*.⁵⁵

From the perspective of queer studies McAlmon’s work has recently gained renewed attention, in particular *The Nightinghous of Paris* and *Distinguished Air (Grim Fairy Tales)*, a compilation of three stories, including “Miss Knight,” which was first published in 1925, at what Smoller (1975) deemed “the high point of his career” (166), then forced to circulate underground because of its presumed obscenity. (324) The stories explore, “without didacticism or sentimentality” (164), the nightlife of Berlin as McAlmon had experienced it in 1921 – a fluid space of transvestites, gays, lesbians, heterosexuals and bisexuals in a city both permissive and constricting, both liberating and threatening.⁵⁶

Subsequent reappraisals from new perspectives may also be able to address the question to what extent McAlmon’s peculiarities of character, which triggered such wildly

fluctuating and contradictory responses of high appreciation (Boyle) and ferocious dislike (Cowley) among his expatriate coevals, may be rooted in his desire to find a safe and private place for living in contra-normative sexual freedom. It is this longing that may well have been a primary motivation for expatriating himself to France where, in contrast to the United States, a bisexual could—as Dimock suggests—benefit from the “lack of a sodomy law and relaxed obscenity laws” (98). It is in this context, also, that we may seek to understand the impact of McAlmon’s controversial and often mocked and misunderstood marriage to Annie Winifred Ellerman, the lesbian daughter of a wealthy British shipping magnate, who published under the name “Bryher.” Their marriage (1921-1927) was an arrangement of convenience, allowing Bryher to live out her lesbian relation with the poet H.D. in unencumbered freedom yet under the cloak of bourgeois respectability, and enabling McAlmon, thanks to the fortune that came with it, to become the generous and influential publisher and *Mæcenas* of 1920s Paris. If the marriage earned him the contempt that resounds in the nickname his contemporaries bestowed upon him (“Robber McAlimony,” as Glassco called him), it also taught him the complex pain of living outside the scope of conventional categories of sexuality and the price of a masked existence (cf Smoller, *Adrift* 49-166, *passim*).

As my examination of the memoirs, reminiscences and unpublished correspondence of Cowley, Boyle, Porter and Glassco has shown, there were boundaries to the ability or willingness of each to understand or acknowledge the full complexities of McAlmon’s veiled sexual identity—and, concomitantly, his literary abilities. Boyle and Porter each had difficulty admitting to McAlmon’s homosexuality, even though they personally knew him well. Cowley might boldly (and to some offensively) label him “the bitter homosexual novelist” but he seemed unable or unwilling to probe deeply enough into the reasons why McAlmon was not able to “take off the mask” and honestly reveal his sexual identity and its concomitant tribulations. Insofar as their personal correspondence reveals, none appears to have entertained the possibility that McAlmon’s bitterness, the “icy stare” that the young Boyle found so attractive, may in part have been a mask, his way of protecting or defending himself against an American culture that—as Tennessee Williams confirmed in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1949) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955)—until far beyond the Second World War regarded homo- and bisexuals as victims of degeneracy or perversion, condemning them to an underground, veiled or disguised existence. Further research will have to examine to what extent possible blinders to Cowley’s and Boyle’s perception of McAlmon may have been a matter of personal failure of perception or of restraining culturally imposed norms. Though they thought of themselves as liberal and progressive, and even, at different moments of their careers, oppositional and subversive writers, from today’s perspective they may well have been less openminded, tolerant or perspicacious than they thought.

Finally, further research will have to examine the degree to which McAlmon fit or deviated from the paradigm of “exile” and alienation followed by “return” and reintegration established by Cowley in *Exile’s Return*, the book so long regarded as the master narrative of expatriation.⁵⁷ Unlike most who fit Cowley’s pattern and who – after an enforced or voluntary return to the United States—managed to successfully re-establish themselves as writers in

the home culture they had left in disenchantment, McAlmon never re-found his niche in the United States: he remained, in the words of his biographer, “a constitutional exile” who could find “no home in the world,” but was fated to “roam incessantly, in perpetual discontent” (Smoller, *Adrift Among Geniuses* 322). If this is so, then Cowley was, ironically enough, and in a way different from his intent or understanding, perhaps justified in according McAlmon a position of minor importance in *Exile’s Return*. By another ironic twist of literary history, it had been Kay Boyle who, echoing Cowley’s paradigmatic words in an early review, had pointedly spoken of McAlmon as “an exile who couldn’t return” (Boyle, “Exile”).

Notes

¹ For a discussion of Cowley’s 1951 revisions of his original 1934 account and the contrastive reception of both, see Bak, “Fall.”

² For a discussion of the impact of the *Heath Anthology*, see Bak, “Heath.”

³ For additional critical, revisionist or alternative interpretations of the paradigm outlined in *Exile’s Return* beyond the ones discussed in this essay, see John D. Hazlett, *My Generation: Collective Autobiography and Identity Politics* (1998); Kenneth S. Lynn, *The Air-line to Seattle* (1984); Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank – Paris 1900–1940* (1986); Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (1995); Marc Dolan, *Modern Lives: A Cultural Re-reading of ‘The Lost Generation’* (1996); Craig Monk, *Writing the Lost Generation: Expatriate Autobiography and American Modernism* (2008); Susan Winnett, *Writing Back: American Expatriates’ Narratives of Return* (2012); and Nancy F. Cott, “Revisiting the Transatlantic 1920s: Vincent Sheean vs Malcolm Cowley.”

⁴ Boyle and McAlmon, *Being Geniuses Together* (1968), p. 11.

⁵ Cowley to Boyle, July 31, 1981. Kay Boyle Papers, Morris Library, Southern Illinois (hereafter KBP).

⁶ Boyle to Cowley, July 26, 1981. Malcolm Cowley Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago (hereafter MCP); Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, pp. 685–86. Boyle continued her work for *Broom*, unpaid, until the March 1923 issue, but had, Mellen writes, been “granted her first lesson in the duplicities of literary politics” (53).

⁷ “Young Man with Spectacles” in *Broom* vol. 3, October 1922, pp. 199–203, portrayed a Cowley-like young man befuddled by the contradictory manifestations of modernism; “Young Mr. Elkins” in *Broom* vol. 4, December 1922, pp. 52–56 satirized Harold Stearns’s cultural renunciation of America and embrace of European culture; and “Portrait by Leyendecker” in *Broom* vol. 4, March 1923, pp. 240–47 mocked the consumerist ideal of life as propagated by American advertising.

⁸ “Snapshot of a Young Lady,” *Broom* vol. 5, August 1923, pp. 3–10.

⁹ Boyle to Lola Ridge, August 11, 1924; Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, p. 85; also qtd. in Mellen, pp. 72–73. Munson was the editor of *Secession* (1922–1924).

¹⁰ The 1928 manifesto was partly intended as a reprise of *Aesthete* 1925, an earlier group manifestation targeting Ernest Boyd. See Bak, *Malcolm Cowley*, pp. 323–32.

Notes

- ¹¹ For a more elaborate discussion of “New York: 1928” see Bak, *Malcolm Cowley*, pp. 402–04.
- ¹² Cowley to Boyle, December 10, 1967, KBP.
- ¹³ Cowley, “Exile’s Return: Significant Gesture,” *The New Republic*, September 30, 1931, pp. 172–76.
- ¹⁴ The altercation with MacLeish is reprinted in Cowley, *Think*, pp. 35–47.
- ¹⁵ Besides “forerunners” Carl van Vechten, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray, the photograph (by Carl Fischer) showed eight others, including, besides Cowley and Boyle, Caresse Crosby, Dawn Powell, Glenway Wescott, William Slater Brown, Matthew Josephson, and Virgil Thomson.
- ¹⁶ Cowley to Boyle, October 22, 1967. KBP.
- ¹⁷ Boyle to Porter, August 8, 1967; Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, p. 605.
- ¹⁸ Boyle to Dahlberg, January 4, 1967, Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, p. 595.
- ¹⁹ See Monk, pp. 145–60 for a systematic discussion of the scope, strategy and effects of Boyle’s revisions of McAlmon’s original text. In 2007, McAlmon’s biographer Sanford J. Smoller thought it “debatable” whether Boyle had done McAlmon’s reputation a service by revising and editing his memoir (xxviii).
- ²⁰ Boyle to Cowley, November 10, 1967. KBP.
- ²¹ Cowley to Ken McCormick, December 9, 1967. MCP.
- ²² Cowley to Boyle, December 10, 1967. KBP.
- ²³ It remains unclear whether, as Sanford J. Smoller pertinently wondered in 2007, Cowley knew if the English publisher of McAlmon’s original 1938 memoirs had cut a sizable part of it because it was (in McAlmon’s words) “too vulgar, dangerous or American” – and if Cowley would “have changed his opinion [of the 1968 re-issue] if he had” (xxix).
- ²⁴ Boyle to Cowley, June 22, 1968, MCP; Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, pp. 612–13.
- ²⁵ In 1985, when “Those Paris Years” was reprinted in Cowley’s *The Flower and the Leaf* (1985), pp. 243–47, he remembered Boyle’s objection and changed the phrase to “Walsh’s former Mrs. Maecenas” (247).
- ²⁶ Ford, pp. 404–06, lists twenty-one titles published by Contact Editions, including six by McAlmon and fifteen by others. Among the latter is Hemingway’s *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923); *In Our Time* (1924) was published by Bill Bird’s Three Mountain Press. The latter also brought out a seventh title by McAlmon. Bird’s and McAlmon’s presses shared the same quarters on the Ile Saint Louis, which may explain the confusion about the number of McAlmon titles. Cf Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, p. 613, n2.
- ²⁷ Cowley to Boyle, June 26, 1968; KBP.
- ²⁸ Cf Boyle to Cowley, November 3, 1968 (Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, pp. 613–14); Cowley to Boyle, November 10, 1968, KBP.
- ²⁹ Cowley to Glassco, December 15, 1971, MCP.
- ³⁰ Cowley to Reed Whittemore, November 1, 1971, MCP.

Notes

- ³¹ Viking Memo, November 2, 1971, Bak, *Long*, pp. 630–31.
- ³² Glassco to Cowley, January 21, 1972, MCP.
- ³³ Boyle to Cowley, December 30, 1971, MCP; Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, p. 635.
- ³⁴ Cowley to Boyle, January 8, 1972, KBP.
- ³⁵ Boyle to Porter, December 31, 1971; Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, p. 636.
- ³⁶ In the new epilogue for his revised 1951 edition of *Exile's Return*, Cowley had written: "Each life has its own pattern, within the pattern of the age, and every individual is an exception. Katherine Anne Porter was a newspaper woman in the Southwest before she went to Mexico and worked for the revolutionary government; Mexico City was her Paris and Taxco was her South of France" (291).
- ³⁷ Cf Porter to Cowley, March 3, 1965, MCP; Cowley to Porter, March 9, 1965, Bak, *Long*, p. 582; Porter to Cowley, March 16, 1965, MCP.
- ³⁸ Porter to Cowley, March 16, 1965, MCP; Unrue 2012, p. 307.
- ³⁹ Cowley to Porter, March 9, 1965; Bak, *Long*, p. 582.
- ⁴⁰ Porter to Boyle, January 21, 1972; Katherine Anne Porter Papers, University of Maryland Libraries.
- ⁴¹ As appears from an undated fragment in Porter's papers at the U of Maryland, at Boyle's request Porter set out to draft a letter to Cowley about McAlmon, but did not finish it.
- ⁴² Boyle to Porter, January 26, 1972; Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, pp. 636–37.
- ⁴³ Glassco to Cowley, December 16, 1971, MCP.
- ⁴⁴ Glassco to Cowley, December 16, 1971, MCP.
- ⁴⁵ See Smoller's "Introduction" (xxx–xxxiv) for a fuller discussion of Glassco's portrayal of McAlmon in his *Memoirs of Montparnasse* and McAlmon's portrayal of Glassco in *Nightinghous of Paris*.
- ⁴⁶ Boyle to Cowley December 30, 1971; Spanier, *Kay Boyle: A Twentieth-Century*, p. 635.
- ⁴⁷ Glassco to Boyle, December 2, 1968; qtd. in Busby, p. 218.
- ⁴⁸ Glassco to Boyle, March 19, 1969; qtd Busby, p. 221. See Busby, pp. 218–21 for a discussion of Glassco's revisiting and revising of his memoirs in the late 1960s, and Boyle's and Glassco's correspondence about their respective memoirs.
- ⁴⁹ The distinction is George Wickes' in his *Americans in Paris* (Doubleday, 1969), p. 52.
- ⁵⁰ For a close study of the chronology of composition of Glassco's book, see Thomas E. Tausky, "Memoirs of Montparnasse: A Reflection of Myself," *Canadian Poetry: Studies/Documents/Reviews* 13 (Fall/Winter 1983), pp. 59–84.
- ⁵¹ In a 1973 letter to Nancy Milford, then at work on a biography of Edna St. Vincent Millay, Cowley advanced it was age not gender that explained the critical disregard of Millay by her

Notes

male contemporaries, and granted that he himself had “missed at the time her immense importance as a folksinger of the sexual revolution.” Bak 2014, pp. 640–41.

⁵² An abbreviated and updated version was published as the introduction to Smoller’s 2007 edition of McAlmon’s *The Nightinghousls of Paris*.

⁵³ See Smoller, *Adrift*; Robert E. Knoll, *Robert McAlmon, Expatriate Publisher and Writer* (U of Nebraska Studies, 1956); Knoll, ed., *McAlmon and the Lost Generation: A Self-Portrait* (U of Nebraska P, 1962); Hugh Ford, *Published in Paris: American and British Writers, Printers and Publishers in Paris, 1920–1939* (1975; Pushcart P, 1980), pp. 34–94, 404–05.

⁵⁴ Lorusso himself gave an impetus to a reappraisal of McAlmon’s fiction in *Naked Truth* (independently published, 2020), arguing that, contrary to the perception of many of his co-evals, McAlmon’s writing deserves to be seen as multilayered and textually complex.

⁵⁵ As Smoller observes in his introduction, though in *The Nightinghousls of Paris* McAlmon is “perfectly direct about sexual couplings and uncouplings” of Glassco and Taylor as of others including Boyle, he remains “reticent” about himself (xxxii–xxiii).

⁵⁶ For illuminating close readings of McAlmon’s stories from the perspective of queer studies, see Richard E. Zeikowitz, “Constrained in Liberation: Performative Queerness in Robert McAlmon’s Berlin Stories,” *College Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Summer 2004), pp. 27–42; and Dimock, 88–160. “Miss Knight” was included in *The Columbia Anthology of Gay Literature*, edited by Byrne R.S. Fone (Columbia UP, 1998).

⁵⁷ For a useful first attempt at “mapping McAlmon’s biography against Cowley’s dominant narrative,” see Dimock 95.

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