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In *transition*: Catholic Overtones in Kay Boyle's "Theme" and Katherine Anne Porter's "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall"

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IN THE 1968 POSTHUMOUSLY co-authored *Being Geniuses Together*, Kay Boyle explains how she came to publish in one of the largest and most important journals of the Modernist era: "a man named Eugene Jolas, whom I did not know, sent me a telegram from Paris saying that he was going to go on with what Ernest Walsh had not been able to finish. He was going to start a magazine, he said; it would be called *transition*, and would I send him my stories and poems as quickly as possible for the first number."¹ And so began Boyle's contributions to Jolas's avant-garde periodical published out of Paris that gathered together the radical forces of international art. Throughout the late 1920s and into the early 1930s, Boyle consistently submitted her work to *transition*, which published more women than other journals of its time. Printing a total of twenty stories and poems and establishing herself as a writer in its pages, Boyle was an important presence in this magazine, along with her biggest rival for the best American female writer of short stories: Katherine Anne Porter. Twelve years older than Boyle and three-times published in *Century* magazine, Porter printed two stories in *transition*: both written in 1927, "Magic" was first published in the summer 1928 number and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" in the February 1929 edition. Although the details surrounding Porter's involvement with *transition* aren't as well documented as Boyle's, most likely her close friends, Josephine Herbst and Matthew Josephson, convinced her to submit the two stories to Jolas, thus advancing her writing career by securing an even wider, international readership.

This article provides readings of Boyle's little-known "Theme," the first story she published in *transition*, and the second and last story Porter published in Jolas's review, her well-known "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," to show that these stories appealed to Jolas because they upheld *transition*'s mission of unleashing the unconscious and representing what he called the "language of night," and, in so doing, explored Catholic themes.² In these stories, Boyle and Porter treat Catholicism

through probing the interiors of their characters, revealing a deep yearning for a connection with the Divine who, it can be read, is portrayed as a potential lover. This discussion might help support the emerging field of Modernism and Christianity, as outlined by Erik Tønning, Stephen Schloesser, and Pericles Lewis.³ In his 2015 article on Catholic Literary Modernism, Mark Bosco correctly writes that as Modernist studies continue to be re-contextualized in various cultural environments, there is little discussion of its Catholic figurations.⁴ Despite the long-held assumption in the narrative of Modernism that it witnessed the death of God, we can no longer deny the continuing influence of Christianity as a cultural and religious force throughout the Modernist period, as Marjorie Perloff notes.⁵ The Catholic Church indelibly influenced the work and thought of Boyle and Porter, both of whom were Catholic converts—and even Eugene Jolas. Whether embracing or dismissing, celebrating or criticizing, these writers employed Catholicism.

Surprisingly, Eugene Jolas, despite editing a journal seemingly against all conventions, was not just a member of the Catholic Church—a religion steeped in traditions and rituals—but at one point had studied for the priesthood. Born in New Jersey to immigrant parents, Jolas grew up learning both his father's French and his mother's German. His family moved to Alsace-Lorraine when he was young. In this linguistically diverse and religiously divided environment, he was baptized into the Roman Catholic faith to which, he said, he's "adhered—with rebellious interruptions—throughout [his] life."⁶ His mother was a devout Catholic who raised her family in the strict orthodox tenets of the Church. Because of her influence, Jolas developed a deeply religious nature. Thinking him destined for the priesthood, his parents sent him to the seminary at Montigny, near Metz, Lorraine, where he studied from 1908–1909. However, when his family faced financial problems, he left the seminary and returned to America to find work. Dougald McMillan, *transition's* biographer, writes: "Though he did not take vows and later rebelled against the church, he never entirely left it."⁷ Religion and spirituality remained an important part of his life, and he viewed his writings and editorship of *transition* "as a modern day continuation of the search for transcendent experience."⁸

Appearing first in April 1927, *transition* had an impressive run, especially for a little magazine: it published 20 issues in its first phase (April 1927 until June 1930) and 5 in its second incarnation (from 1932 to 1938), ending when it was clear that a second world war was imminent. It has been considered "the last important exile magazine of the interwar period and one of the most important magazines of its generation" that

“produced some of the best literature of the century.”⁹ More concerned with art than politics, its vision privileged aesthetics over social engagements and called for a new and radically different manner of expression. Katherine Anne Porter said of *transition*’s frequent contributors: “They wrote in every style under heaven and they spent quite a lot of time fighting with each other.”¹⁰ Indeed, *transition* juxtaposed the work of eclectic and diverse artists who were experimenting with style and form, and quite a few linguistic puzzles found their way between its covers. Commenting on the journal’s tenets later in life, Boyle worded it this way: “We wanted a grandly experimental, furiously disrespectful school of writing in America.”¹¹

Although its radical nature caused more than one critic to refer to it as a “generally unintelligible periodical,” that contained an “irritating mixture of brilliance and nonsense,” *transition* was incredibly popular and instrumental in shaping Modernism.¹² Deriving its name from Edwin Muir’s 1926 *Transition*, which was a collection of essays that expressed sympathy for the artist in revolt against tradition (published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s Hogarth Press), *transition* circulated 4,000 copies whereas most little magazines averaged 1,000.¹³ For its 11 years, Jolas remained at its helm, accompanied by his wife, Maria, and co-editors, Elliot Paul and later Robert Sage (after Jolas and Paul had a falling out). With 500 contributors from all over the world, *transition* marked a critical moment of High Modernism as it published a notable roster: the literary greats and the near-greats whose work appeared in its pages included James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Erskine Caldwell, Hart Crane, H. D., Ernest Hemingway, Archibald MacLeish, William Carlos Williams, Henry Miller, and Anaïs Nin. Jolas included the work of the Surrealists and Dadaists, of Picasso, Man Ray, Diego Rivera. He published almost all of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, which at that time was called “Work in Progress,” and a great deal of Gertrude Stein’s writing including a republication of *Tender Buttons*. Hart Crane’s “The Bridge,” early poems by Dylan Thomas, and the very first texts of Samuel Beckett were also printed. It introduced Franz Kafka to English readers and bid farewell to Joyce’s contributions to the little magazines. *transition* was so influential that a copy was burned in Munich during one of the Nazis’ infamous campaigns against “decadent” literature—which was quite a feat for a magazine that claimed to be apolitical.¹⁴

What originated as a laboratory for Jolas to tackle his own personal language problems transformed into an editorial that upheld art as the link between continents and that privileged the dream/unconscious state as the gateway to the supernatural. Jolas’s journal was the first Anglo-

American magazine to make a concerted effort at exploring the relation of language and the unconscious. In addition to uniting fellow humans around the globe, *transition* sought to connect humanity with God. Jolas was influenced by a number of philosophies, including Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, St. John of the Cross's goal of *via mystica*, and Novalis's concept of the night. The collective unconscious was useful to Jolas in theorizing that people's impulses are universal. Of St. John and the Spanish mystics, Jolas said that he was attracted to them most by "the precision with which they had succeeded in describing their inner transformations and illuminations."¹⁵ He came to define the goal for the artist as one of bringing the dream and the daydream, which he viewed as the theater of the struggle between good and evil, into union with the world perceived by the conscious mind. In his quest to turn away from realism and imagism, he advocated for a neo-romantic literature that explored the dark mysteries of the psyche. The romantic ideals, which included a yearning for a higher being, became an important part of *transition*. Jolas shared with Novalis the belief that life was not "a journey toward darkness . . . but . . . a slow progression toward the luminous, the spiritual night, a night analogous to that described by St. John of the Cross."¹⁶ Although Jolas negated the constructive effort which had traditionally been necessary to narrative art, his romantic quest was never simply a negative mission. It strived to be in communion with the Absolute. As Jolas at one point put it, "[p]erhaps we are seeking God."¹⁷

Placing attention on the imagination, Jolas felt that the dual reality of dream and life could liberate the static forms of literature; thus, he emphasized the nocturnal world of the dream which revealed the unconscious state. He held that our interior experiences could free us from the limitations of our current reality and transform us into something better. Of course, these interior and unconscious experiences often house repressed sexual urges and traumatic memories. Jolas, absorbed with these altered states of wakefulness that are pre-logical or instinctive in nature, concludes the final, 1938, volume of *transition* with the statement: "I am still engaged in a search for this *language of night*."¹⁸

According to Jolas, Joyce's "Work in Progress" best articulated the unconscious, the "language of night," and more pages of the magazine were devoted to publishing and explaining Joyce's novel than to any other writing or author. Developing work on the relationship between language and the unconscious culminated in the "Revolution of the Word," the most memorable of *transition*'s manifestos. Published on the first page of the double 16/17 issue in June 1929, the "Revolution of the Word" was a twelve-point proclamation that declared war on traditional

literature and, among other things, stated that “The writer expresses. He does not communicate,” and it ended by damning the “plain reader.”¹⁹ In flouting direct communication, the document encouraged abstractions. Boyle referred to the document as a “revolt against all literary pretentiousness, against weary, dreary rhetoric, against all the outworn literary and academic conventions.”²⁰ This proclamation, which announced that “the revolution in the English language is an accomplished fact” warned against hackneyed words, predictable syntax, and “static psychology.” Joyce’s bewildering novel was the exemplar. Sixteen expats signed the Proclamation. (Ironically, Joyce was not one of them.)

In addition to being the first to sign the “Revolution of the Word,” Boyle, who published more texts than Joyce in *transition*, contributed a story to the inaugural issue that highlights the tension between a mother’s unconscious desires and society’s conventions. Titled “Theme,” republished in *Wedding Day and Other Stories* in 1930, this piece was written while Boyle was pregnant with her first child, conceived with Ernest Walsh, who died before the birth. Boyle was convinced that the baby would be a son. Like many of her early works, this one contains traces of how deeply Walsh’s death affected Boyle; she used her writings as a way to mourn and to make meaning of the tragedy. On the surface, “Theme” is an autobiographical account of Boyle’s fear that her son would abandon her. The plot of the story can be summed up in a few sentences as there is very little action and dialogue. It opens with a mother sitting in her kitchen anxiously awaiting her son’s return. She spends most of her time talking to him in her mind. And yet in his presence “she would be silent.”²¹ There is a brief, awkward exchange between the two. He then goes to Chicago, and she follows him. Boyle uses a third-person narrator to tell the story. As in much of her later work, the action is psychological: most of the story involves the mother’s internal thoughts, desires, and fantasies. Commenting on this piece, Sandra Spanier and Elizabeth Bell have pointed out the stark contrast between what the mother thinks and what she actually articulates, noting that the story depicts a mother’s fierce love for her child laced with incestuous desire.²² In her review of “Theme,” Porter called it an admirable, “subtle feat in unraveling a complicated predicament of the human heart.”²³

Boyle’s story chronicles the unhealthy sublimations of perhaps not just any mother but a figuration of Jesus’s mother, a fallen Mary, living in the modern world and yearning for a lover yet denied human touch by an abstinent God. Boyle offers the reader insight into this Mary’s unconscious. This highly poetic story given to abstractions contains many Catholic images. For example, it opens with “There was one woman, a woman

of habits.”²⁴ In addition to habits referring to one’s routine behavior, it could also describe the garment worn by religious orders. Mary is often depicted with a habit around her head. The “one” calls attention to this woman’s singularity and importance. This mother is said to have a face like a horse’s, an old mare, which plays on the word Mary.²⁵ Piercing is mentioned twice in the story: her heart is pierced on the first page, and she thinks that her son should have a bird-like beak with which to pierce her.²⁶ In Luke 2:22–35, when Jesus is presented in the Temple, Mary is told that she will be pierced: “a sword will pierce [her] soul.” Throughout the day, the mother of Boyle’s story talks to her son in her thoughts; in other words, she could be praying. However, contrary to the prayer most think Mary would say to her Son, Boyle upsets this assumption. In “Theme” she depicts Mary as fearful that her Son will see her for who she really is—a spiritually revolting woman engaged in sexual sins.

At the start of the story, the female character comes down early in the morning “to the fire while the coals were still as black as iron.”²⁷ The imagery Boyle uses here invokes Purgatory. Although leading to Heaven, Purgatory is often described as hellish. As the mother of this story watches chestnuts cook—perhaps a symbol for souls burning—she ponders her unattractive physical attributes: big teeth, long chin, and white arms. She imagines passing bread to her Son, bread being a sign of the Communion as the Body of Christ. The Son breaks the silence and tells her that he is going to Chicago at the month’s end. This particular “Windy City” conjures images of the Holy Spirit, as wind is the shape that the Holy Spirit often takes, such as on Pentecost. Perhaps the Son is telling his mother that he is ascending into Heaven. The Mary figure goes after him to Chicago, wanting to serve her Son, “to be a Slavic mother”—to worship him.²⁸ However, the reunion is short-lived and the story ends with him saying that she never wanted a son, and coupling this statement with the sexual overtones throughout the story, the suggestion is that perhaps she really wanted a lover, which the Virgin Mary would have been denied according to Catholic theology.

Why does the mother think that her son finds her ugly? Boyle drops references that might provide answers. Namely, George Moore is referred to twice. Boyle read the work of this Irish writer whose fiction explored such provocative topics as prostitution, extramarital sex, and lesbianism. An avid reader of Moore, James Joyce was influenced by his novels, many of which were met with disapproval because of their subject matter. A few years prior to writing “Theme,” Boyle took a copy of Moore’s *The Brook Kerith* with her to France.²⁹ Interestingly, this book portrays Jesus of Nazareth as fully human, not divine, and not dying on the cross but,

rather, nursed back to health. As recorded in *Being Geniuses Together*, she also read *The Lake* shortly before crafting her story.³⁰ This work tells of an Irish priest discovering that instinct is man's true mode of communion with his soul. Referenced in "Theme" are Moore's correspondences, including Frank Harris, remembered mainly for his multiple-volume 1922 memoir *My Life and Loves*, which was banned in countries around the world for its sexual explicitness. The reader can infer that Boyle's Mary, nursed on Moore's books, engaged in sexual sin, making her spiritually unattractive to her son, who is a metaphorical Christ. As she says "ah" in front of the mirror, her tongue is compared to "a beast's tongue."³¹ This comparison establishes that the mother is reduced to a creature, something less than human that lives according to carnal impulses.

The story also includes references to Anton Chekhov. In addition to citing "Cherry Orchard," his last play, Boyle writes "Chekhov and his *femme!*"³² Apparently, as reported in Phillip Callow's biography, Chekhov viewed "lovmaking as something likely to undermine more important activities."³³ He is quoted as saying of his brother's wasted talent: "The trouble isn't his boozing, but *la femme* . . . The sexual instinct is a greater hindrance to work than vodka."³⁴ Some have assumed that Chekhov withheld sex from his wife because he didn't want to be distracted from his writing. The woman, his "femme," must have been sexually frustrated. Boyle writes, "I'd like to have seen them, the dear queer people. I'd like to have seen them when no one was about. She with her white face hanging through her fingers and he with his foot in her mouth to stop her crying. . ."³⁵ He tries to please his wife by placing his foot in her mouth when she seems to want penetration elsewhere. Boyle's mother identifies with this woman, holding her face the same way that Chekhov's femme does. It's as if God is withholding sex from Mary who would remain a perpetual virgin. Boyle's mother then prays to God to push her face up until a crown forms, perhaps a subtle reference to Mary, often called the Queen of Heaven and Earth.

Like George Moore's wayward female characters and Chekhov's "femme," Boyle's Mary seems to long for sexual fulfillment. "I can be many things to you. I can change into a soft skin for you" she thinks "in anguish."³⁶ "Ah, but there are other things I can be to you. . ." the story repeats.³⁷ In an ambiguous line, Boyle suggests that the son sees his mother's breasts harden as he tells her that she never wanted a son. Instead of reading this as the inability of humans to communicate, Boyle herself said, "Might not the son more likely be disturbed by guilt, by his inability to respond to, as well as being revolted by, his mother's love rather than being 'insensitive and blind?'"³⁸ Assuming human form, Jesus

would have felt the complicated emotions of guilt and desire—much like his mother, Mary. The “theme” of Boyle’s title is the longing for a connection with the Divine amidst the insatiable urges of a sinful humanity.

Throughout her story, Boyle explores the “language of night” to show that repressed desires can unveil a yearning—albeit perhaps a sexual yearning—for the supernatural, thus upholding the aesthetic Modernist principles Jolas privileged in *transition*. In this psychologically penetrating tale, Boyle suggests that the mother’s interior experiences are very real to her and yet disjointed from her everyday existence, as evidenced in her limited interactions with her son despite her thoughts being consumed by him. Boyle’s story illustrates how difficult Jolas’s goal is for the Modernist writer in bringing the dream and the daydream into union with the world perceived by the conscious mind. Unearthing the subterranean depths can lead to questions about foundational Catholic teachings—in this case, the cost of the humanity of Mary and her Son who are depicted as estranged family members.

Written around the same time as Boyle’s story, Porter’s “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” shares many similarities with “Theme.” This essay makes use of the version she published in *transition*, which is significantly different from the one published in her 1930 *Flowering Judas*. In “Jilting,” Porter depicts another woman of habits, this one a dying grandmother who keeps her house in perfect order with everything labeled and arranged neatly. Nearly eighty years old, Ellen Weatherall is on her deathbed. In stark contrast to her tidy home, Ellen’s thoughts while bedridden are disheveled: they drift in and out of consciousness, punctuated by distant traumatic memories that she relives while dying. Porter disorders the story’s sequence and familiar forms of remembering as she explores the intricacies of a dying woman’s unconscious mind and her heightened sensations. In so doing, she suspends time, playing with distinctions of past and present, memories and reality. The psychologically complex story is full of confused dialogue as it seeks to integrate Ellen’s repressed experiences with her current state. Porter employs the stream-of-consciousness device so completely that it leaves readers “to infer connections . . . between the seemingly disparate images in her mind.”³⁹ One thing she can’t seem to get out of her thoughts is that, at the age of twenty, she was left at the altar by a man named George, whose letters, we learn in the revised story, she still keeps in the attic next to those from her husband John, an anomaly in Ellen’s organized house.

Much like “Theme,” this story has autobiographical ties, particularly to three events in Porter’s life. Although Porter said that she drew on several grandmothers for her story, the most apparent one is her own

paternal grandmother—Catharine Ann Skaggs Porter, who partly raised Porter and her siblings after their mother's premature death. Porter experienced her grandmother's death while on a visit to west Texas with her in 1901. Her death threw the already fragile Porter family into extreme disarray. Additionally, Porter herself almost died in the 1918 influenza pandemic. She was just 28 years old at the time when her obituary was written. Furthermore, a defining event that informs this story is Porter's failed marriage to the son of a well-off ranching family, John Koontz, who abused her repeatedly. Porter converted to Catholicism during her marriage to Koontz. When her first marriage ended in divorce, it's very likely she felt betrayed by both Koontz and Catholicism, and one way to read "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" is as Porter's "darkest discourse on ineffectual religion," to use Darlene Unrue's words.⁴⁰

In contrast to the characters of "Theme," we do know that Ellen and her family are practicing Catholics. Ellen receives Last Rites from Father Connolly, and there's mention of rosary beads, Holy Communion, the Hail Mary prayer, saints, a crucifix, and mass. Even Dr. Harry, who Ellen thinks is floating at the start of the story, is described as a saint "with a rosy nimbus" surrounding him, perhaps ushering her to death.⁴¹ Toward the end of "Jilting," a burning candle is found next to a crucifix placed on a linen cover, reminiscent of a sacrificial altar similar to the one used in Catholic liturgical rites during mass. This imagery also recalls the altar where Ellen was jilted. The story ends with Ellen's stark image, in an unforgiving state, stretching herself out much like Christ on the cross and blowing out her light, the symbol for her life. Many critics believe that Ellen puffs out her light because Jesus, the second bridegroom, fails to come for her. The story's grammatically ambiguous title could also imply that she jilts Jesus. Nonetheless, as in "Theme," we can say that the Christ of Porter's story is displeased with the maternal figure. This ambiguous light imagery is important and indicates that Porter meant for her story to be, among other things, a retelling of the parable of the ten virgins, noted by critics Joseph Wiesenfarth, George Hendrick, and David Mayer.⁴²

In this tale found in Matthew 25:1–13, ten bridesmaids took their lamps to meet their bridegroom, a symbol for Jesus. Half of them didn't bring oil. They all fell asleep when the bridegroom was delayed. At midnight, he was spotted and all awoke; however, only half could light their lamps. Because the ones with the oil wouldn't share with the others, the oil-less women went to buy some and thereby missed the bridegroom's arrival. The five who were prepared were rewarded while the other half who were not were disowned. The parable ends with "Keep awake therefore,

for you know neither the day nor the hour,” a stern reminder that salvation is not to be assumed. Echoing this image of Jesus as a bridegroom, Porter’s story uses this exact word at the end, when He does not appear. Interestingly, Porter doesn’t use the word *bridegroom* when referring to George. The question Porter poses, if never clearly answering, is whether it is Christ or Ellen who has been unfaithful.

Along with the question of whether or not Ellen is received into heaven, the story also leaves unanswered the identity of Hapsy, what her role in the story is, and if she has anything to do with the state of Ellen’s soul. Critical theories have that she is Ellen’s child with her husband John, one of her “sick negroes” who died, Ellen’s lesbian lover, the Virgin Mary, a figment of Ellen’s imagination, Ellen’s and John’s unborn daughter, Ellen’s child with George, and a symbol for happiness.⁴³ When asked whether Ellen couldn’t go to heaven because she died before forgiving George, Porter replied, “Oh, I don’t know. Maybe she did, maybe she didn’t. . . We all have too much to forgive . . . But the first bridegroom had given her plenty.”⁴⁴ “The baby,” Porter clarified, “She fainted you know.”⁴⁵ If what Porter said is true, then the “something else” not given back that Ellen thinks about in the story could very well be her virginity, and the owner of the ambiguous hand that catches the fainting Ellen could be John, who threatens to kill George and to make it up to Ellen—in other words, to raise Hapsy as if she were his own as he seemingly pursues her while she is on the rebound.⁴⁶ If Hapsy is Ellen’s daughter conceived with George, as Porter hinted, then this story could be read, much like “Theme,” as a tale of a mother who is guilty of sexual sin and has an unusual yearning for her child. Ellen longs for the child she conceived out of wedlock: the story tells us, “It was Hapsy she wanted.”⁴⁷ More so than John or George, Hapsy is who Ellen calls for.

Throughout the story, Hapsy’s identity is never clear. Unlike the “dutiful” Cornelia, who was most likely conceived out of obligation, Hapsy was probably conceived out of love, suggested in the line: “When this one was born it should be the last. The last. It should have been born first, for it was the one she had truly wanted.”⁴⁸ This leaves the reader to question if Ellen regrets having her other children. Despite its title, the story focuses on Ellen and her children, not her grandchildren. There is mention, however, of Hapsy’s baby: “Hapsy standing with a baby on her arm. She seemed to be Hapsy also, and the Baby on her arm was Hapsy too.”⁴⁹ Perhaps this baby made Ellen a grandmother for the first time. However, Porter seems to be saying that it doesn’t really matter whose child Hapsy is or who the unidentified baby belongs to. What does matter, however, is something that Hapsy tells Ellen upon seeing her: “You

haven't changed a bit!"⁵⁰ As many critics believe, Hapsy is dead (which admittedly isn't entirely clear in the story as on the last page Ellen thinks that Hapsy should wear the amethyst set, which suggests she's alive, but then is told by Cornelia that she'll see Hapsy again, knowing that her mother is about to die). If Hapsy is dead, then she is most likely commenting on the state of Ellen's transitioning soul. Ellen does not seem to be living a Christian life as she criticizes everyone who is trying to help her: Doctor Harry, Father Connolly, and her children, especially Cornelia who is nursing her unappreciative mother. Porter indicates that her feeling "easy about her soul," and thinking that she has a special arrangement with God and her few favorite saints, is her downfall—her sin of pride.⁵¹

The narrator tells us towards the beginning that Ellen thinks she is "on [her] feet now, morally speaking" and that she prepared herself for death when she was sixty.⁵² Providing Ellen's train of thought, Porter includes a pleasant memory of Ellen's when she was diligent about tending to her light earlier in life. She would light the lamps for the children, signifying hope, security, and triumph over darkness, a synonym for evil. Porter spends an entire paragraph detailing just how beautiful the lighted lamps were. Once lit, the children were no longer scared and would go off by themselves. She ends the paragraph with Ellen's prayer: "God for all my life I thank Thee. Without Thee my God I could never have done it. Hail Mary full of grace."⁵³ Although Porter leaves the *it* ambiguous, the merging of the lighting of the lamp with the praying of a Catholic devotion to Mary suggests that after the jilting by George, Ellen was living a Godly life. However, the bridegroom, much like the one in the parable recorded in Matthew, was delayed. This parable condemns the women who were unprepared, who did not bring oil. Their sin was one not of purity as they were all virgins, but of pride, of vanity, of which Ellen is accused after she is left standing at the altar: "Wounded vanity, Ellen, said a sharp voice in the top of her mind. Don't let your wounded vanity get the upper hand of you."⁵⁴

In her current state, Ellen doesn't have all of her worldly chores finished, and putting things off until tomorrow is repeated throughout the course of the story. For example, left undone are sorting through her letters which "would be tomorrows' [sic] business," specifying in her will who will get the Forty Acres, and finishing the altar cloth and sending wine to the nuns.⁵⁵ Her uncompleted tasks could indicate that spiritually Ellen isn't ready to meet her Maker. As Ellen puts it, "I went to Holy Communion only last week. Tell [Father Connolly] I'm not so sinful as all that."⁵⁶ Unlike most Protestant sects of Christianity that believe one can receive eternal life upon confessing just once that Jesus is Lord,

Catholics believe that salvation cannot be assumed, that it is a daily effort. Porter suggests that Ellen's downfall is that she was too convinced of her redemption. As many critics have noted, by the end, Ellen aligns with the five unprepared virgins—the ones not invited to the wedding banquet. However, I would add Porter hints that it is Ellen, not Christ and not George, who proved unfaithful, not unlike the mother-Mary figure of Boyle's "Theme," who most likely failed to remain chaste, in thoughts if not also in actions.

"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" offers a glimpse into a woman's final hours as her repressed memories of rejection and pain flood her consciousness. Unsuccessful in feinting off memories of being stood up at her wedding, Ellen is also unable to stop time and her impending death. Like Boyle, Porter illustrates the difficulty of reconciling the unconscious with the conscious and how an exploration of the unconscious can show a yearning for the Absolute, a yearning couched in sexual terms. As in "Theme," Porter's tale illuminates how external reality can be disconnected from interior experience. Aside from some loose ends, Ellen Weatherall will take her secrets and memories with her to her grave. Questioning the nature of the supernatural, Porter's story relies on the commonly held fear that a place in heaven is not guaranteed. Providing more questions than answers, the story offers no firm indication that Ellen will be united with the Bridegroom.

In his memoir titled *Man from Babel*, Eugene Jolas comments on his time as editor of *transition*, conjuring images of the expatriate scene. He writes, "Kay Boyle, whose sensitive poems and short stories I had been publishing since the first issue of *transition*, came to Paris from England in 1928. She was a lank, striking girl whom we all liked instantly and whose caustic wit and brilliancy was admired. She wrote her early stories in a feverish mood of lyricism."⁵⁷ Little did Jolas know that the "lank, striking girl" would convert to Catholicism a year before she died, motivated in part, as her daughter Faith Gude told me, because she found the priest and his Irish brogue quite attractive.⁵⁸ Unlike the protagonist of "Theme" whose sexual nature led her away from the Church, in an ironic reversal, Boyle's desire for a man of the cloth led her to join the Catholic Church. Guided to the Church by her first husband, Porter fell away but was reconciled in the last decade of her life. Although Boyle and Porter embraced Catholicism as much older women, their early stories, "Theme" and "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," engage Catholic imagery and were appropriately first published in a journal that promoted exploring the unconscious as a way to connect to God and whose editor grappled with the Church's teachings. It seems as if, that in addition to the ques-

tions of language, the questions of faith preoccupied Jolas, Porter, and Boyle, which undermines the assertions that art was their religion and that the post-Christian era began with the end of World War I.

NOTES

1. Robert McAlmon and Kay Boyle, *Being Geniuses Together 1920–1930*, Revised and with supplementary chapters by Kay Boyle (New York: Doubleday, 1968), 233.
2. Kay Boyle, “Theme,” *transition* 1 (1927): 31–35; Katherine Anne Porter, “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” *transition* 15 (1929): 139–146.
3. Erik Tønning, *Modernism and Christianity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris 1919–1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
4. Mark Bosco, S. J., “Shades of Greene in Catholic Literary Modernism,” *Integritas* 6.3 (2015): 1–17.
5. Marjorie Perloff, endorsement on back cover of Tønning, *Modernism and Christianity*.
6. Eugene Jolas, *Man from Babel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.
7. Dougald McMillan, *transition: The History of a Literary Era, 1927–1938* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1975), 10.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Céline Mansanti, “Between Modernism: *transition* (1927–38).” In *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Volume II, North America 1894–1960*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 718; McMillan, *transition: The History of a Literary Era*, 230.
10. Katherine Anne Porter, “Example to the Young,” *The New Republic*, April 22, 1931, 279.
11. Quoted in Leo E. Litwak, “Kay Boyle—Paris Wasn’t Like That” *New York Times Book Review*, July 15, 1984, 32.
12. Harry Salpeter, “Some Opinions (1929).” In *In transition: A Paris Anthology* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 114; Quoted in Noel Riley Fitch, Introduction to *Ibid.*, 16.
13. Mansanti, “Between Modernism,” 718.
14. McMillan, *transition: The History of a Literary Era*, 71.
15. Jolas, *Man from Babel*, 155.
16. Jolas, “Novalis, the Mystic Visionary (undated).” In *Eugene Jolas: Critical Writings, 1924–1951*, ed. Klaus H. Kiefer and Rainer Rumold (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 309.
17. Jolas with Elliot Paul, “Suggestions for a New Magic,” *transition* 3 (1927): 179.
18. Jolas, “Inquiry into the Spirit and Language of Night,” *transition* 27 (1938): 245.
19. Jolas et al., “Revolution of the Word,” *transition* 16/17 (1929): 11–13.
20. Quoted in Litwak, “Kay Boyle—Paris Wasn’t Like That,” 32.
21. Boyle, “Theme,” 33.
22. Sandra Spanier, *Kay Boyle: Artist and Activist* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 45–46; Elizabeth Bell, *Kay Boyle: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 11–12.
23. Porter, “Example to the Young,” 279.
24. Boyle, “Theme,” 31.
25. *Ibid.*

26. Ibid., 31, 34.
27. Ibid., 31.
28. Ibid., 34.
29. McAlmon and Boyle, *Being Geniuses Together*, 48.
30. Ibid., 119.
31. Boyle, "Theme," 32.
32. Ibid.
33. Philip Callow, *Chekhov: The Hidden Ground* (Chicago: Ivan R. Lee, 1998), 56.
34. Ibid.
35. Boyle, "Theme," 32.
36. Ibid., 34.
37. Ibid., 35.
38. Quoted in Spanier, *Kay Boyle: Artist and Activist*, 46.
39. Roseanne L. Hoefel, "The Jilting of (Hetero)Sextist Criticism: Porter's Ellen Weatherall and Hapsy," *Studies in Short Fiction* 28.1 (1991): 16.
40. Darlene Unrue, *Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 63.
41. Porter, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," 145.
42. Joseph Wiesenfarth, "Internal Opposition in Porter's 'Granny Weatherall,'" *Critique* 11.2 (1969): 52–53; George Hendrick, *Katherine Anne Porter* (New York: Twayne, 1965), 92; David R. Mayer, "Porter's 'The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,'" *Explicator* 38.4 (1980): 33.
43. Porter, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," 142.
44. Quoted in Charlotte Laughlin, *Katherine Anne Porter Remembered*, ed. Darlene Unrue (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 238.
45. Ibid.
46. Porter, "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," 144.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 140, 144.
49. Ibid., 144.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., 139.
53. Ibid., 142.
54. Ibid., 143.
55. Ibid., 140.
56. Ibid., 144.
57. Jolas, *Man from Babel*, 121.
58. Email with Faith Gude, June 9, 2017. Ian von Franckenstein, Kay Boyle's son and brother to Faith Gude, provided me with a slightly different version of the story of how Boyle became Catholic. In an email, dated June 18, 2017, he wrote that "Kay's attraction was not so much a romantic attraction as it was simply a social pull, to the priest, Father O'Rourke at the Redwoods in the early 90's." He explained that Boyle's "closest and favorite family members" included himself, his father Joseph, Boyle's daughter (with Laurence Vail) Apple, and her mother-in-law Anna Esterhazy von Franckenstein. Aside from Ian, who, to his father's dismay, left the Church in his teenage years, all were Catholic. "She believed, as she was approaching the end of her life, that by converting to Catholicism, she would 'stand a better chance' to be reunited with these three cherished individuals in heaven, or in some existing 'after-life' place. It was for this reason, primarily, that brought her to the decision to become a Catholic."