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**No Place Like Home:  
Voice, Identity and Belonging in Kay Boyle's "The Lost"**

Anne Reynes-Delobel

"The Lost"<sup>1</sup> stands out as one of the most haunting stories which were inspired by Kay Boyle's prolonged time as *The New Yorker's* European correspondent in post-war Germany.<sup>2</sup> The story, set in northeast Bavaria around 1947, tells of three boys, between twelve and sixteen, who are driven to a Children's Center run by an American Relief Team where children uprooted by the war are "processed" before a final decision is taken by the American consul regarding their future. In compliance with UNRRA procedure, as the matronly clerk in charge of "screening" the boys tells them, those with living relatives in their country of origin are renationalized and repatriated, while those whose relatives are found to be dead can file for emigration and be sent to adoption centers in the United States.<sup>3</sup> The fate of the three boys is all the more harrowing as they have been adopted as G.I. mascots by U.S. troops and have spent the last three or four years traveling throughout Europe with their respective infantry units.<sup>4</sup> Having but dim memories of their countries of origin and attracted by the prospect of a fresh start overseas, they have set their hearts on immigrating to the United States. However, as they have learned the hard way at the hands of the Military Police, this involves more than slipping onto a troop transport at Bremerhaven. Instead, their fate rests on a large body of rules and assumptions about what constitutes the "best interests" of displaced children in the context of the postwar reconstruction of European nations.

Boyle's story tackles the conflicting issues of self-identity, national interests and internationalist idealism by questioning vocal identity. The three boys, even though they are

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<sup>1</sup> First published in *Tomorrow* (March 1951): 10-17.

<sup>2</sup> Boyle was assigned by *The New Yorker* magazine as European correspondent in November 1946. She travelled to Germany where her husband, Joseph von Franckenstein, was stationed with the U.S. Civilian Occupation Forces. In a letter to her agent, Ann Watkins, dated 2 August 1947, she lucidly wrote: "The actual work of writing is about as depressing as anything else in the world, but the accumulated pages give life a meaning [...]. [R]emembering this gives me some comfort when I think I just can't sit another hour or another night and bang out the necessary explanations for those who will not read, anyway, and will not want to understand" (*Kay Boyle* 448).

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Relief and Refugee Association (UNRRA) was created in 1943 "to assist the surviving victims of war and to provide emergency relief prior to their repatriation" (Gatrell 90). The organization was supported predominantly by American funds. To this day, it is remembered for its work with displaced persons (Cohen 439-40). In 1947, it was replaced by the International Refugee Organization (IRO) "whose primary purpose was less to repatriate refugees than enable them to find new homes beyond Stalin's reach" (Gatrell 86).

<sup>4</sup> G.I. mascots are not a well-documented phenomenon. In the U.S., however, the figure of the G.I. mascot was popularized by *Dondi*, a syndicated comic strip created in 1955 by Irwin Hasen and Gus Edson. Dondi, a World War II orphan of Italian descent, was found wandering through a war-torn village by two soldiers who brought the child back to the United States. The little boy with large, ill-fitting G.I. hat, shirt and pants became part of the daily life of many Americans for more than three decades.

Czech, Italian and Polish by birth, speak American English “as good as you might hear at home” (*Fifty Stories* 516), one with a Brooklyn accent and another with a Southern one. This makes the experience of “recognizing” them quite arduous, even painful, for the reader who is gradually led to call into question the notion that “voice” is an indicator of personal identity.<sup>5</sup> Much in the same way as their ill-fitting or cut-down G.I. clothes, the boys’ speech does not seem to “fit” their bodies but rather sounds like a non-natural, prosthetic construct whose overall effect is to introduce a disquieting negativity into the story and undermine presumptions about origin and authority. Moreover, by imitating not so much how a character sounds but how one character sounds to another, “The Lost” calls attention to the way voice establishes and affects the interaction between speaker and listener, thus making it the site of an unmediated encounter with alterity.

### **Identity politics**

Boyle’s stylistic realization of voice in “The Lost” relies on the permeability of identity and anonymity intrinsic to the situation of displaced persons in wartime and postwar Europe. As a metonymical reflection of the transitory nature of refugee life in camps, the Children’s Center which the three boys are driven to in an army truck one morning is described at the beginning of the story as having been in succession a “baronial farmer’s demesne” and a Nazi selection camp before being turned into an UNRRA DP (displaced persons) camp. With the advent of the war, the place has become a cog in a machine whose function is the selection of human beings for ruthless (albeit very different) purposes. The comparison between selection camp and children’s center, however outrageous it might have appeared to some of Boyle’s contemporaries, serves to introduce the idea of the delicate balancing act in which good human deliberation consists: the presence of the “neatly and alphabetically filed” records and photographs of the long-gone, voiceless thousands “who had passed through [the selection camp] on their way to forced labor or to extermination” is a reminder of the risk of bureaucratic aberration faced by those given the task of providing relief and rehabilitation to homeless, voiceless children who “had wandered so long that they could no longer remember their family’s names, [so] new names were given to them, and they were given Displaced Persons’ cards, these children from Poland, or Holland, or Czechoslovakia, or Hungary. They were known as Unaccompanied Children...” (515). As the use of the passive voice clearly indicates, providing these children with a new “official” identity is understood less as a way to empower them with a renewed sense of self-definition or self-framing than as a means to

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this article, the word “voice” is used to refer to “characters’ voices.”

meet logistical objectives based on the essentialist assumption that every displaced child possesses a single nationality or origin.<sup>6</sup>

This conflation of individual identity and national identity is bluntly voiced by the officer who runs the camp when she tells the younger boy, who was born in Anzio, that returning to his home country is probably the best thing he might do in his present situation: “Look, kid,” the woman said abruptly, “if Italy is your country, perhaps you ought to pack and go back there. You think it over. Perhaps that’s where it’s right for you to be” (520). According to this rationale, displaced children become colorless numbers and statistics in the process of quick repatriation, while their official memory is lost “in the endless shuffling of children, effaced by the endlessly changing faces and names and histories” (531). Thus, far from embracing a starry-eyed vision of U.N. postwar identity politics, “The Lost” confronts the reader with the defective reality of an organization whose humanitarian principles rely on national identifications in a context where millions of civilians have been driven outside the national borders of their country by the war. As the social worker in charge of the camp herself acknowledges: “It’s like a big puzzle, or like the pieces of a big vase somebody dropped and broke here, right on the ground in Europe [...] and all the pieces are jumbled together, and maybe we’ll never get it straight, because a lot of the pieces are lost. That’s what we’re trying to do here, and we’re doing it slowly, and maybe we’re not doing it very well” (520). As the story unfolds, we understand that the interaction with the three G.I. mascots is for the woman yet another occasion to acknowledge the irreducible individuality of each displaced person, as well as to try and cope with the shortcomings of the bureaucratic machinery of refugee care and relief. Interestingly, her experience closely resembles that described by Kathryn Hulme<sup>7</sup> in her 1953 autobiography, *The Wild Place*, which describes conditions at the refugee camp of Wildflecken:

Never again, would I be able to look on a refugee mass, even in pictures, and see it collectively, see it as a homogeneous stream of humanity that could be handled with the impersonal science of the engineer. [...] Each individual encounter would repeat the

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<sup>6</sup> On national and international activism around children after World War II and the reconstruction of families in postwar Europe, see Tara Zahra.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Hulme (1900-81) spent six years in Germany working in a number of DP camps with the UNRRA/IRO field teams. She arrived in Wildflecken in April 1945. Wildflecken was a huge former S.S. base, not to be found on any map, about 50 miles north of Würzburg. The camp, operated by 18 UNRRA workers, housed about 20,000 Poles. As Hulme reported in her diary, Kay Boyle’s visit to Wildflecken on 23-24 January 1947 was of tremendous importance to her: “Kay Boyle walked through the door of my office at 2:20 pm. She said ‘If you knew me, you’d have known I’d have got through somehow’ [...] A being from the Outside, getting through somehow to what I thought was world’s end Never-Never land [...] I almost broke down when she left [...] but I’ll never feel the same again about Wildflecken. People actually CAN get through! Though it’s not on any map, this wild spot can be found. She was like some bright beautiful herald of coming happiness [...] I have expectancy now, every time I look toward the West” (Kay Boyle Papers, SCRC, SIUC, Carbondale).

misery in a slightly different form. [...] The “DP problem” [...] had as many faces as there were people composing it. (Hulme 13)

Emerging at the intersection of individual and collective life, of the personal and the impersonal, the experience of “voice” adequately expresses the moral quandary posed by the “DP problem.”

### **My language/not mine**

In “The Lost,” a story already undermined by absence as its title indicates, voice does not operate as a signifier of presence but as a disrupter of presence, blurring the boundaries between self and other, and debunking common assumptions about such notions as “child” or “home.” By anchoring characterization in vocal tone and accent,<sup>8</sup> Boyle inscribes sounded differences among the speakers so as to get the reader immediately acquainted with their personalities and complexities:

“I bet a nickel that’s the kitchen over there,” [the youngest boy] said in a high, bright voice, and he jerked his chin toward the right wing of the house.  
“You hurting for chow already?” said the second boy. His accent might have come straight from Brooklyn, except that it had come from somewhere else before that, and, as he spoke, he folded his arms upon his breast, and spat casually across the drive.  
The tall boy looked back from the trembling leaves in the strong, ancient branches, his eyes sober, his head hanging heavy on his soiled slender neck.  
“Let’s go and sign ourselves in,” he said, the drawl in his voice having come, it seemed, from a Southern state. “That’s what we come here for,” he said. (517)

Intonation, stress and rhythm give precious indication about each boy’s frame of mind in relation to what lies in store for him once he is officially registered as a “displaced person”: the high-pitched, expectant voice of the younger prefigures his willingness to comply with the camp’s rules, while the reluctant, even hostile, attitude of the second one is suggested in his short, sharp Brooklynese inflection. By contrast, the older boy’s slow lengthened tone bespeaks his gentle, abiding nature. Simultaneously, the tough-talking and affected American accents introduce an alien element into the boys’ idiolect, which both underlies the incongruity of their presence at a refugee orphan camp and loosens the indexical bond between person and voice. Who actually are these very “unchildlike children”?

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<sup>8</sup> “The Lost” was recently adapted into a one-woman play by the British playwright Simon Bent. The emphasis on voices, personalities, and accents is what makes Boyle’s story “singularly dramatic,” according to actress Tandy Cronyn: “‘That’s right,’ said the tall boy. ‘His wife, she done pass on back in ‘43, and he ain’t got no one left to care for. He’s an ignition expert, and I learn how to suhvice cars with him.’” So speaks a fifteen-year-old Czech boy of his G.I. mentor (a black sergeant from Chattanooga, Tennessee) in the southern drawl he learned from the soldier who has taken him under his wing. Or the fourteen-year-old Polish boy—“I done everything that every son-of-a-bitch in the army ever done”—spoken in a Brooklyn accent the boy has picked up from his G.I. buddies. The characters, fully formed, leap off the page and onto the stage with full theatrical impact—a joy for the actor to play” (Cronyn 19).

One way to answer this question would be to object that these boys, respectively aged twelve, fourteen and sixteen, do not quite qualify as “children” in the first place. Their situation, however, only reflects the demographic reality of the immediate postwar setting. As Tara Zahra explains, “many displaced ‘children,’ especially Jewish children, were actually adolescents since the Nazis had efficiently murdered those unable to work” (“Lost Children” 52). Among those adolescents, some had been separated from their family and country of origin for close to ten years.<sup>9</sup> In Boyle’s story, Janos, the oldest boy, tells the matron that he knows for sure that he has no relative left in Czechoslovakia because he saw his parents hanged in a place called Noverzcimki in 1942. A little while later, the middle boy, a Pole, recalls in gruesome details the loss of his parents in the bombing of their house, six years before:

“My old lady, she must’ve been fixing chow,” the other boy said, his voice muffled now, as if he were holding the laughter in. “Because when I come home from school, there was her arm sticking out the end where the kitchen used to be. A direct hit. Pretty neat for ’41,” he said. “I couldn’t get over to the gold bracelet that was hanging on her arm still. Funny as hell how the bracelet wasn’t twisted or nothing—”  
“Maybe gold don’t twist,” said Janos.  
“Maybe it don’t at that,” the other boy said. (531)

The colloquial phrasing comes across to the reader as shockingly casual compared to the horrific tenor of this story, which causes a fleeting moment of doubt about its reality. This effect is subtly devised to question the notion of “true”: faced with the brutalities of war, naïve (mis)conceptions about a child’s “normal” behavior collapse and are replaced by a sudden understanding of the boys’ frightening independence and maturity.

Not so surprisingly, the Polish boy refuses to comply with the rules and limitations of camp life. He chooses instead to hide in a nearby barn where he makes plans to leave for America. By vanishing from the camp, he becomes a sort of negative presence among the other children and literally writes himself off the official statistics and records:

But all day the others did not see the third boy. Wherever he was, he did not come in at the sound of the mess-hall bell at noontime and he was not in the empty classrooms or in the workshops, or the dormitories, and he was not outside with the children who played underneath the trees [...]. [H]ad he been there, he could have been seen at a glance, for he would have stood out as a stranger among them, perhaps lingering, handsome and sullen and contemptuous, on the outskirts of their activities. (522-23)

His incapacity to behave or talk differently from an active duty infantryman shows how utterly estranged he has become from his former origin or identity. Janos, who every night brings him what food he manages to salvage from the camp’s meals, is the only one he trusts

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<sup>9</sup> On the demographics of displaced children, see Zahra (“Lost Children” 51-53) and Nicholas (477).

enough to tell of his plans over black market cigarettes and a bottle of schnapps. In the darkness inside the barn, the boy's voice acquires a strangely disembodied quality:

My God-damn lighter's gone dry as a witch's tit," the boy said, and Janos could hear the rasp of the lighter's stone in his hand. "I got to get to a P.X. and get me some lighter fluid. I got to find me an American shoe-repair and get some soles put on my shoes. [...] "Have a swig, kid," he said, and the bottle was more than half-empty then when Janos drank from it. [...] "I got to get to a man's-size town where there's a P.X. quick," the boy was saying in the darkness. "I bet I got two weeks' ration of butts coming due." (527)

Furthermore, the boy's stubborn refusal to be renationalized and repatriated to his home country indicates his firm intention of making a fresh start overseas on his own terms: "I come from Poland once, but that don't mean I'm going back there. [...] I'm going where things is easier. I'm going where all my friends is doing business now" (524). The alien accent and rough soldier's speech thus jarringly contradicts the notion of an "unaccompanied minor" in need of relief and rehabilitation. Also voiced by the Italian boy, this contradiction is indicated by the pronominal confusion of original and adopted identities, which produces an even more painful effect on the reader:

"Where's you pick up you' outfit?" the tall boy asked, speaking quietly.  
"Anzio," said the youngest boy, looking up into his face. "My mom and dad, they was bumped off when we bombed the town. I join up Fourth Rangers and done the whole campaign with them," he said. (518)

Consequently, voice is the site of a process of dissociation: while voicing his own feelings and concern, each boy seems at the same time to "be spoken" by another voice emanating from a different place. This "ventriloquist effect"—which brings to mind Derrida's anguished "my language/not mine"—introduces an image of arrival that lacks a point of departure. In the historico-political context of the story, separation from "source" (language or country) raises the thorny question: who is to define the "best interests" of these displaced children? In other words: who is entitled to speak for them?

### **Unbridgeable gap**

The issue of "voice" as an untenable situation is reflected in the moral conundrum the camp's director faces in regard to the boys' future. Her role as a UNRRA relief worker is mainly to speak the voice of authority notwithstanding her own private understanding of trauma and rehabilitation. Indeed, as Pamela Ballinger has pointed out, "the organization's remit in regard to displaced persons provided only for repatriation, rather than resettlement" (Ballinger 129). This included answering the demands for the repatriation of displaced children on the part of European nations which wanted to recover their "lost children" for

purposes of national reconstruction. In particular, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia, “adamantly insisted that any non-Jewish unaccompanied child under the age of seventeen be forcibly repatriated” (Zahra, “Lost Children” 52). Acting in the name of postwar justice, the field worker (who is only called “the woman” in the story) is compelled to keep her emotions in check in order to do her job in an objective, dispassionate way.

Boyle’s inspiration for the physical description of the character came from Rachel Greene who ran the Aglasterhausen Children’s Center from September 1945 to the autumn of 1948: “She was big, and gray-haired, and matronly, and she held a flowered cotton dressing-gown around her as she looked down the landing at them though the steel-rimmed spectacles that rode her nose” (519). Her matronly appearance does not, however, facilitate contact with the homeless, motherless boys. On the contrary, it is ironically brought to bear upon her relationship with them as a way to reveal the unbridgeable gap between them. This negative dynamic emerges in her first conversation with Janos and the boy from Anzio. Through a very fine working of narrative voice, Boyle manages to have the reader participate, almost simultaneously, in each character’s experience of relating to someone else’s voice. Having taken the boys to her office—furnished with wicker armchairs and flowered chintz cushions which seemingly belie the sinister presence of a “paper-encumbered desk”—the woman starts asking them question about their language and country of nationality:

“And before that?” asked the woman, but she still did not write anything down.

“Czech,” the tall boy said.

The woman did not seem to hear his answer, for she went on speaking of other things, as if saying these things to herself, speaking of countries and peoples the boys had perhaps known once but which they scarcely remembered, and in whose present and future they no longer had a part. (520)

The woman’s mechanical response alerts the reader to the fact that she is actually performing a so-called “nationality screening” whose main objective is to persuade the boys to accept repatriation. In other words, her attitude and relation to them are colored by UNRRA’s policies and procedures, which can only lead to mutual alienation and misunderstanding. As she rambles on in what is perceived by the boys as pointless monologue, her body loses corporeality and she turns into a “disembodied voice”: “To the tall boy she was neither woman nor American, perhaps not human being even, but a voice—disembodied, quiet, direct” (520). The objectified voice produces a sensation of radical loss, but one devoid of any pathos. What is revealed instead, as the woman soberly realizes, is the boys’ complete disinterest in motherly—or any form of parental—care:

Mother or aunt, she thought as she knitted, knowing the look on her face in the glass; knowing it was neither mother or aunt any of them wanted, but the other things they

had learned to pronounce the names of—the name of a game of cards, or of a regiment whose insignia they had worn two years now, or the name of a city they had never known; or else the smell of a special beverage, or even the smell of car grease, or the turning motor of an Army car. (527)

The silent words “mother or aunt” resonate in the woman’s mind as an inner voice, a sort of “acoustic mirror” reflecting the conversation she cannot have with the boy as well as her own helplessness. A few days later, when she tells Janos that she has been officially notified that his people were killed, the boy, showing genuine emotion for the first time since his arrival at the camp, welcomes the news as the signal of his being free to start a new life overseas with the family of the G.I. who has offered to adopt him: “So, I can write Charlie Madden it’s all right about my coming over?’ he said, and he felt his own mouth shaking as he smiled” (532). The indifference displayed by displaced children toward reunification with families has been analyzed by historians<sup>10</sup> in relation to the dystopian fears among postwar humanitarian activists (including UNRRA’s personnel) that the family had been completely destroyed by the Second World War, and consequently that individual psychological reconstruction and rehabilitation lay in “the emphasis of the nation and the family as sources of individual identity and agency” (Zahra, “Lost Children” 50). One can further measure the divergence between Janos’s expectations and the woman’s understanding of his “best interest” when she tells him that the Italian boy has been repatriated to Naples where his grandfather was found to be still alive so that “he’ll grow up in Italy where he belongs,” and that she wished they “were all as easy as that” (531). Part of the story’s emotional appeal lies in her effort to address the boys’ needs and her failure to do so. Voice is the instrument that registers the intensity of this drama by directing attention to its subtlest variations.

### **Voice as displacement**

During one of his encounters with the Polish boy in the barn where he is hiding out, Janos tells him that he has learned from his friend Charlie Madden how the ancient Greeks “first started to measure time.” Before he proceeds to explain, in his own words, the mechanism of the clepsydra, the other boy exclaims “You can’t measure days and nights” in a voice that seems “inexplicably filled with sorrow” (525-26). As the word “inexplicably” suggests, what matters in this episode is less the potential portent of Janos’s story than the inherent bond between voice and measurement. Gesture or speech prove far less effective than voice at evoking the boy’s vulnerability behind his show of arrogant bravado. The same applies to the relationship between the field worker and Janos. In what constitutes one of the turning

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<sup>10</sup> See Nicholas’s *Cruel World. The Children of Europe in the Nazi Web*, Ballinger’s “Impossible Returns, Enduring Legacies: Recent Historiography of Displacement and the Reconstruction of Europe after World War II,” and Zahra’s *The Lost Children. Reconstructing Europe’s Families After World War II*.

points of the story, the woman steps down from her official role as UNRRA screener to ask him a personal question about Charlie Madden: “He’s colored, isn’t he?” (522). The sudden soft inflection in her voice produces a transitory moment of heartfelt, non-verbal communication, as her “gray eyes, that might have been aunt’s or mother’s eyes behind the spectacles, [loose] their anonymity, and [look] at him in inexpressible kindness” (522). Following that conversation, the woman and Janos develops a form of peaceful, trusting collaboration: at night, the boy is welcome to sit in her office where she helps him write letters to Charlie Madden in Chattanooga. Then comes the day when she tells him that Madden’s adoption attempt has failed:

“Over there, back home, in the States, there’s the color question.

“There’s what?” said Janos.

“There’s the color question,” she said in a dogged, quiet voice, and she did not lift her head to look at him. [...]

Janos stood there listening to the words she said, and, as he listened, the woman again ceased being woman, ceased being human being even, and it was merely a voice in the shed that spoke quietly and bitterly of the separate lives that must be lived by people of different colors [...]. The voice was troubled as it searched logic or history for justification of this nearly incredible story it told [...] and then the voice came to an end, and there was silence in the shed. (532-33)

Janos’s disbelief and incomprehension is paralleled by the woman’s sense of inner estrangement, confusion, and sadness. The return of the disembodied, disjunctive voice signals the failure of her effort to move from sheer humanitarian concern to real human bonding by affirming the integrity of voice and body. It sets off a disintegrating process which culminates in Janos’s decision to leave the camp. Before he vanishes, however, he leaves two letters for the woman, one “saying thank you and goodbye,” and the other to be sent on to Charlie Madden, saying: “Yessitdy I talk to the US consil Charlie and what to ya think now? Seems my famillys jus as good as they ever waz so Charlie I make up my mynd sudden to go back whar they waz waiting for me Im sure ya thinks its for the best Charlie so I says so long” (534). The translation of voice into written medium has several implications. First, by materializing into written form, Janos’s voice paradoxically comes to sound (even more) alien to itself. The maimed grammar and broken syntax mar the reader’s reception of the message. Spelling incongruities and clumsy phonetic transcription divert attention from its meaning—so much so that another reading may be necessary to fully grasp it. Furthermore, the physical presence of the written note intensifies the physical distancing introduced by voice, which involves the acknowledgement that the figure of the boy is but the residual presence of something that was irrevocably missing from the start. Besides, the incongruous and heterogeneous nature of the written message within the body of the narrative reads like a form of transliteration of Janos’s idiolect—itsself an imitation of Charlie Madden’s speech pattern—into English, thus pointing at its anomalous character as “event.” As a trace of

improvisation, invention and dispersion, Janos's letter challenges political authority and pronounces a deficit in cultural transaction. By bringing together residual casualties of war (Europe's missing children) and dysfunction at home (the "color question"), it signals a frontier that no amount of humanitarian goodwill or acts of charity can overcome, as is suggested by the woman's utter powerlessness at the very end of the story: "The woman sat there a long time, holding the two letters in her hands" (534).

Echoing Janos's absence in the woman's silence, Boyle's "The Lost" draws attention to the experience of listening to a voice as a form of "haptic aurality" relying on the importance of timbre, accent, and sound in the approach to the other but also to the self. As has been already suggested, the story moves the experience of hearing the other's voice beyond simply understanding what one hears to a sensory process that instantaneously puts self and other in resonance. For instance, it is through listening, understood as outer attentiveness involving the whole being, that Janos manages to win the Polish boy's trust. During their encounters, the tall boy's body serves as an echo-chamber, reflecting the fear and anxiety lying beneath the other boy's crude G.I. language. Mutual listening also takes Janos's relationship with the relief worker beyond mere hearing and understanding. It is related, as Jean-Luc Nancy explains in *Listening*, to "an intensification and a concern, a curiosity or an anxiety" that brings both characters "on the edge of meaning" (Nancy 5; 7) and produces a sort of vibration that persists long after they have stopped talking, as can be felt for instance at the end of their last conversation:

"If you put your name on our list, and if you were cleared for emigration, then it would be better if you went to another family, a white family. We'd explain to them about Charlie Madden, and all he's done for you over here," she said, "and he could come and see you, and you'll still be able to be friends—" and then the voice came to an end and there was silence in the shed. The gray-haired bespectacled woman sat on the wooden box, and the boy in his khaki clothes stood motionless between her and the last dismantled car, seeming not even to breathe. (533)

When language fails the characters, silence itself becomes "the place of resonance," as Nancy writes, "of its infinite tension and rebound, the amplitude of sonorous deployment and the slightness of its simultaneous redeployment" (Nancy 22). In this way, listening constitutes an active process that in turn endows the subject with dynamic motion.

The connection between voice and movement lies at the heart of "The Lost." From voice as ambiguous—or negative—presence to voice as spatialized absence, the story tells of a crucial displacement whose outcome is left for the reader to imagine. In this respect, the displaced person camp is but a transitory site through which the three boys' lives converge and then bifurcate again, leaving only the vocal trace of their fugitive presence. If the fate of the Italian

boy, which has been decided by the allied authorities, leaves relatively little space for individual choice, we are given to understand that that of the Polish boy, whose plan is to travel to Berlin or Munich, and then sneak on a “transat” plane to New York, is an escape from authority and an attempt to regain agency. The same is true of Janos whose final note to Charlie Madden brings ample evidence of his will to take full self-responsibility for his actions. His choice to leave the camp reads as liberation from cultural and political authority. In this shift from heteronomy to autonomy, as Mieke Bal has argued, voice acquires a new spatial dimension. In distancing itself from body, the displaced voice morphs, Bal writes, “the anthropomorphic question ‘who?’ into a spatial question ‘where?’” (Bal 47). This questioning brings the reader back to the crucial presupposition of “origin” which structured postwar renationalization politics. Furthermore, it undermines the mastery of the authorial voice and endows the reader with a new responsibility in the act of meaning-making by prompting him to ask “Where does meaning come from, where does it go, and which pathways does it follow?” (Bal 51). In this sense, the ending of “The Lost” stresses how finite and partial the knowledge of those in charge of deciding the future of European displaced children was, and how much it was related to the empirical world of experience and communication.

Boyle’s story challenges our readerly obsession with authorial judgment by using voice to emphasize the undecidable situation of “lost” children in postwar Europe and thus draw attention to the need for both subjective and collective attentiveness and responsibility. It is interesting to note that the story was rejected by *The New Yorker* on the grounds that “there was a good deal of doubt around here about whether such things could really happen. So enquiries were made at two agencies which deal with the European displaced persons, and the answers from those agencies tended very strongly to support the doubters here,” as *New Yorker* editor Gus Lobrano wrote Kay Boyle in June 1947. Boyle was incensed by his “insensate” rejection and wrote back that she felt “The Lost” “an important story (and so true that it breaks your heart)”:

I have written for a good many years, and it would be so far from my approach and my intention to present things as facts when they were not so that I cannot help but fear that the “doubters” on the *New Yorker* staff have done me a great injustice [...]. What in the name of God is the use in being a writer if it is merely to distort situations? The story “The Lost” happened. I had the photographs of the three boys before me all the time I wrote the story, and UNRRA report on the Anzio kid and the one who hid in the stables. I also had my first hand notes, taken down the day I lunched with Miss Rachel Green, who is the grey-haired lady in the story. Miss Green has never gotten over that incident; she said it was the hardest thing she ever did in her life, to tell the boy about the color situation. I don’t know what more I can say. [...] It leaves me wondering whether America is going to be able to comprehend what has happened over here.” (Kay Boyle 438-39)

*The New Yorker* editors' reluctance to accept a story from one of their accredited writers tends to show that, however crucial its importance in postwar international political strategies was, the "displaced children question" was a matter of transnational perplexity. It also suggests that in conflating the international and domestic situations, Boyle might have crossed the editorial lines of the magazine. Her choice to use voice—understood both as a marker and an operator of marginality and "out-of-placedness"—to call attention to the problematic nature of such notions as "origin" and "belonging" provides an interesting example of the articulation of fictional and historical experiences.

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