

Elizabeth Bishop and the Literary Archive
NEH Summer Seminar
June 12-30, 2017
Vassar College
Project Director: Dr. Bethany Hicok

“...alone in the Archive, in the counting house of dreams, the historian opens the bundles...”
--Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*

“The revised poem had been typed out on very thin paper and folded into a small square, sealed with a gold star sticker and signed on the outside, ‘Lovingly, Rose Peebles.’”
--Elizabeth Bishop, “Efforts of Affection”

“I am writing a poem about a litter of objects in a museum whose uses the spectator can’t make out.”

--Bishop to Ruth Foster, 1947

“How can anyone want such things?”

--Bishop, “Crusoe in England”

Seminar Description: In *Dust*, Carolyn Steedman defines the Archives “as a name for the many places in which the past (which does not now exist, but which once did actually happen; which cannot be retrieved, but which may be represented) has deposited some traces and fragments.” More poetically, it is “also a place of dreams”—a place “where the past lives, where ink on parchment can be made to speak.” Steedman reminds us that archives and the stories we tell about them are necessarily narrative reconstructions of the shards we have excavated from them. At the same time, the archive is a place where we bring our own desires, our “general fever,” as it were, “to know and to have the past.” Will the archive yield its secrets to us? For Elizabeth Bishop, there is no question that archival documents can be made to speak. But what do they say? This seminar positions us at the intersection of archival theory and literary study in order to explore the relationship between the poet and her archive, aesthetics and ethics, texts and *avant-textes*. The seminar will be organized around “case studies” in order to provide a model of integrative teaching and scholarship, helping us work through questions of ethics and aesthetics and to better understand the complex dimensions of authorship. As Iain Bailey has argued, we should think of the archive “as a place of work, rather than as a cache from which to draw certainties.” With this caveat in mind, we will act over the course of these three weeks as investigators, curators, collaborators, and inquirers in the workshop of literary production and its aesthetic products.

In order to maximize time in the archives as you work on your independent projects, the seminar will meet from 8:30 to 10 in the seminar room in the archives on scheduled seminar days. You will then be able to work in the archives on a rotation schedule in morning and afternoon sessions when the archive is open: 10-12 and 1-4:30. Special Collections closes for lunch from 12-1. I will be available for consultations on your projects as will our guest speakers when they are on campus with us.

Discussion Forums: In order to foster a more collaborative environment and in-depth discussion, I am asking you to post on the Discussion Forum that will be set up through the Vassar course page.

Goals:

- 1) To extend and deepen our knowledge and understanding about Bishop, her circle, and literary history;
- 2) introduce and develop new methods of interdisciplinary teaching and research in the humanities;
- 3) strengthen the academic discourse surrounding the ethics of archival research;
- 4) develop a deeper understanding of how social issues affect artistic expression;
- 5) and explore the implications and possibilities of digitization in literary studies.

Day-By-Day Syllabus

Week One: Case Study: The Poet and Her Archives

Monday, June 12

Class of '51 Reading Room: Opening Reception and Tour of Library with Ron Patkus: 2:00-4:00 p.m.

Tuesday, June 13

Introductions: We will be introducing ourselves and our teaching and research interests as they relate to the seminar topics. What project will you be working on during the three weeks? After these introductions, we begin with a discussion of Bishop as a poet. What makes her important? What poems do we value the most? Why? How do we teach her? This first day of the seminar is important to help establish the poet at the center of our study and to explore the different approaches that we might build on as we interrogate the relationship between the poet and her archives. Ron Patkus will join us during the last half hour of our session to talk about Bishop's papers, the history and contents of the Vassar archive, recent acquisitions, and holdings in other repositories. He will also review procedures for using the collection at Vassar.

Readings: Core readings that will inform our discussion about the poet and her archives include these primary sources—Bishop's poems, letters, and drafts, including *Poems, Prose, Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box*, and published letters (*One Art, Words in Air, Elizabeth Bishop and the New Yorker*) (see full list of core readings at the end of this document). Participants are expected to be familiar with Bishop's main body of work by the time the seminar begins.

Wednesday, June 14

Readings: Bishop as archivist: "Large Bad Picture," "Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance," "Brazil, January 1, 1502," "In the Waiting Room," "Crusoe in England," "Poem" (*Poems*); "The Museum" and "Inventory" (*EAP*); "Efforts of Affection" (*Prose*).

Rosenbaum, "Elizabeth Bishop and the Miniature Museum," *JML*.

In order to provide a theoretical framework for our discussions and consideration of the poet and her archives, we will also discuss the following: Derrida's seminal essay "Archive Fever,"

introduction and Chapter 4 of Steedman's *Dust*; Foote, "To Remember and Forget," 29-46, and O'Toole, "The Symbolic Significance of Archives," 47-72 in *American Archival Studies*; Stead, Introduction to *Boundaries of the Literary Archive*, and Van Mierlo "The Archeology of the Manuscript,"; Hyde, "Introduction: The Aesthetics of Archival Evidence"

Thursday, June 15: Editing

Here we move into a discussion of Bishop and the shifting landscape of the poet's reputation as new editions and biographies are published and new materials come into the archive. No scholar has defined this shifting landscape more thoroughly than Dr. Thomas Travisano, who will join us today and Friday for discussion on archival research, teaching Bishop and her circle, editing, and the art of biography. Dr. Travisano will also be available to consult with scholars on their projects today and tomorrow.

Readings: Travisano, "Editing 20th Century Letters: The Road to *Words in Air*," from *Letter Writing Among Poets*, Ed. Ellis; Cleghorn, Hicok, Travisano, "Introduction," Gray, "Postcards and Sunsets: Bishop's Revisions and the Problem of Excess," Goldensohn, "Elizabeth Bishop's Drafts: 'That Sense of Constant Readjustment,'" all from *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century: Reading the New Editions*; Hicok, "Elizabeth Bishop's Translations," from *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil*; and Bishop and Lowell, *Words in Air*.

Friday, June 16: Biography

Readings: Travisano, "Bishop and Biography" from the *Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*, edited by Cleghorn & Ellis (2014); Fountain and Brazeau, *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop*, Megan Marshall, *A Miracle for Breakfast*. You should also be familiar with Lorrie Goldensohn's *The Biography of a Poetry* and Brett Millier's, *Life and the Memory of It*, the first full-length biography of Bishop.

Friday afternoon: Dr. Barbara Page will join us at 4:30 in the Rose Parlor (Main) to talk about how the Bishop papers got to Vassar and the process of sorting through them; she will also give us a brief tour of important Bishop sites at the College.

Friday Evening

Group Dinner (Barbara Page, Thomas Travisano and Ron Patkus will join us)

Week Two: Case Study: The Ruth Foster Letters

During this week, we focus in on our primary case study: the ethics and aesthetics of Bishop's 1947 letters to her psychoanalyst. Here we bring together a set of documents in order to create a dialogue between the letters and Bishop's own poetic methods, archival and psychoanalytic theory, current scholarship on the subject, and ethical considerations.

Monday June 19-Tuesday, June 20

Readings: Primary: Foster letters, selections from Methfessel letters, Drafts of "At the Fishhouses," Drafts of "The Moose" (scans of some of this material will be provided to you before the seminar).

Other related Bishop poetry: "Cape Breton," "Varick Street," "The Prodigal," "A Drunkard," "Vague Poem," "Dear Dr—", "Dream" (These can be found in *Poems* and *EAP*).

Secondary: Treseler, “Dear Dr.” in *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century* and “One Long Poem,” *Boston Review* (see link in the core readings list); Goldensohn, “Approaching the Ruth Foster Letters,” *Yale Review*; Klein, “Love, Guilt and Reparation;” Rose, “Introduction” to *On Not Being Able to Sleep*; Hodson, “To Reveal or Conceal”; Marshall, “Queering Archives.”

Wednesday, June 21

Methodologies

Readings in Genetic Criticism: From *Genetic Criticism*: Deppman, Ferrer, Groden, “Introduction”; “Genetic Criticism: Origins and Perspectives;” Bellemin-Noël, “Psychoanalytic Reading and the Avant-texte.”

Thursday, June 22

Alice Quinn will join us for discussion on archival research, editing archival material, the controversy over *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box*, and her current work on an edition of Bishop’s journals from 1932-1979. We will focus on the role of editors and publishers in shaping a writer’s career both when she is alive as well as posthumously.

Readings: *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box*; excerpts from the notebooks

Saturday, June 24

Trip to New York City and Tour of Bishop’s New York with Alice Quinn

Week Three: Project Reports

We will meet Monday, Wednesday, and Friday this last week. Our last week will be given over primarily to reports from you about your own research projects, archival findings, and ways that you might integrate archival research into your teaching. I also want to spend a little time talking about Bishop’s archive and the digital humanities. Can the Bishop archives participate in the current revolution in the Digital Humanities? What ethical and copyright issues, as well as staffing and funding issues, would that raise? Ron Patkus will join us for part of this discussion. We will finish up before noon on Friday.

Here are a couple of sites recommended by Ron to help us think about digitization:

Cornell University Library. 2000–2003. “Selection.” In *Moving Theory into Practice Digital Imaging Tutorial*. <http://www.library.cornell.edu/preservation/tutorial/selection/selection-01.html>

Hazen, Dan, Jeffrey Horrell, and Jan Merrill-Oldham. 1998. *Selecting Research Collections for Digitization*. Council on Library and Information Resources. <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/hazen/pub74.html>

Farewell Dinner, Thursday June 29, 7 p.m.

An * indicates seminar materials that will be made available to you on the course page at Vassar.

- a) **Core Readings for Elizabeth Bishop and the Literary Archive**
Core Readings I: Primary Texts by Bishop and her Circle/Biography

- Bishop, Elizabeth and Robert Lowell. *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*. Edited by Thomas Travisano with Saskia Hamilton. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.
- Bishop, Elizabeth and The *New Yorker*. *Elizabeth Bishop and The New Yorker: The Complete Correspondence*. Edited by Joelle Biele. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
- Bishop, Elizabeth. *Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box: Uncollected Poems, Drafts, and Fragments*. Edited by Alice Quinn. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.
- . *One Art: Elizabeth Bishop Letters*. Edited by Robert Giroux. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994.
- . *Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
- . *Prose*. Edited by Lloyd Schwartz. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
- Fountain, Gary and Peter Brazeau. *Remembering Elizabeth Bishop: An Oral Biography*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.
- Marshall, Megan. *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle for Breakfast*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2017.

Core Readings II: Methodology, Archival Research, Theoretical Frameworks

- *Bellemin-Noël, Jean. "Psychoanalytic Reading and the Avant-texte." *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-textes*. Eds. Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. 28-35.
- *Deppman, Jed, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden. "Introduction: A Genesis of French Genetic Criticism." *Genetic Criticism*. 1-16.
- *Derrida, Jacques. "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression." *Diacritics* 25.2 (summer 1995): 9-63.
- *Foote, Kenneth E. "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture." *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*. Ed. Randall C. Jimerson. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000. 29-46.
- *Hay, Louis. "Genetic Criticism: Origins and Perspectives." *Genetic Criticism*. 17-27.
- *Hodson, Sara. "To Reveal or Conceal: Privacy and Confidentiality in the Papers of Contemporary Authors." *The Boundaries of the Literary Archive: Reclamation and Representation*. Eds. Carrie Smith and Lisa Stead. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013. 157-169.
- *Hyde, Carrie and Joseph Rezek. "Introduction: The Aesthetics of Archival Evidence." *J19: the Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013: 155-162.
- *Klein, Melanie. "Love, Guilt and Reparation." Vol. 1. *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-1945*. New York: Free Press, 1975. 306-443.
- *Marshall, Daniel. Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici. "Queering Archives: Historical Unravelings." *Radical History Review* 120 (Fall 2014): 1-11.
- *O'Toole, James M. "The Symbolic Significance of Archives." *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice*. 47-72.
- *Rose, Jacqueline. "Introduction: 'Shame.'" *On Not Being Able to Sleep: Psychoanalysis and the Modern World*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003. 1-14.
- *Stead, Lisa. "Introduction." *Boundaries of the Literary Archive*. 1-12.
- *Spoo, Robert E. "Copyright Law and Archival Research." *Journal of Modern Literature* 24, no. 2 (Winter 2000/2001): 205-12.

- *Steedman, Carolyn. *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001.
- *Van Mierlo, Wim. "The Archeology of the Manuscript: Towards Modern Palaeography." *Boundaries of the Literary Archive*. 15-29.

Core Readings III: Literary Criticism, Reassessment and Archival Research

- Cleghorn, Angus, Bethany Hicok and Thomas Travisano. "Introduction." *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century: Reading the New Editions*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012. Selected Chapters.
- *Goldensohn, Lorrie. "Approaching Elizabeth Bishop's Letters to Ruth Foster." *The Yale Review* 103, no. 1 (January 2015): 1-19.
- "Elizabeth Bishop's Drafts: 'That Sense of Constant Readjustment.'" *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century*. 104-116.
- Gray, Jeffrey. "Postcards and Sunsets: Bishop's Revisions and the Problem of Excess." *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century*. 26-40.
- Hicok, Bethany. "Bishop's Brazilian Translations." *Elizabeth Bishop's Brazil*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2016.
- *Rosenbaum, Susan. "Elizabeth Bishop and the Miniature Museum." *Journal of Modern Literature* 28.2 (Winter 2005): 61-99.
- *Travisano, Thomas. "Editing 20th Century Letters: The Road to *Words in Air*." *Letter Writing Among Poets from William Wordsworth to Elizabeth Bishop*. Ed. Jonathan Ellis. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015. 47-57.
- *----- "Bishop and Biography." *Cambridge Companion to Elizabeth Bishop*. Eds. Angus Cleghorn and Jonathan Ellis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 21-34.
- Treseler, Heather. "Dreaming in Color: Bishop's Notebook Letter-Poems." *Elizabeth Bishop in the 21st Century*. 88-103.
- "One Long Poem." *Boston Review*. August 17, 2016.
<http://bostonreview.net/poetry/heather-treseler-elizabeth-bishop-foster-letters>