The Yaddo Records: How An Institutional Archive Reveals Creative Insights

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On the afternoon of September 7, 1968, members of the Corporation of Yaddo, the reclusive artists' retreat located in Saratoga Springs, New York, met to pay tribute to Elizabeth Ames, Executive Director of Yaddo from 1924–1968 (see Figure 13). Ames was then 88 years old and had held her title since Yaddo first opened its doors to creative "guests" in 1926. John Cheever, whose relationship with both Ames and Yaddo was especially intimate, recognized Ames' 42 years of service by describing the tremendous creativity, which occurred at Yaddo during her tenure,

The forty or so acres on which the studios and principle buildings of Yaddo stand have seen more distinguished activity in the arts than any other piece of ground in the English-speaking community or perhaps in the entire world. As we all know, more than twelve hundred guests have stayed at Yaddo. The diversity, quantity and excellence of the work done here is staggering. There has never been anything like it. Many of the men and women responsible for the vitality in American art have done their major work in these rooms. Every sort of school of painting, music and literature has been represented and in some cases initiated here. (Six Decades 5)

Reference to Yaddo's guest list helps to corroborate Cheever's, seemingly, presumptuous claim. Since 1926, Yaddo has helped foster the work of Newton Arvin, James Baldwin, Leonard Bernstein, Elizabeth Bishop. Aaron Copland, Malcolm Cowley, Truman Capote, Langston Hughes, Jacob Lawrence, Robert Lowell, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, Clyfford Still, and William Carlos Williams.

However, despite its contribution, Yaddo has remained enigmatic, often referred to in biographical studies, but never itself the subject of critical inquiry. The reason is simple. Before October 2002, when The New York Public Library released Yaddo's archival record, focused study of Yaddo remained, essentially, impossible. While it is without question that the Yaddo Records will yield important insights, the composition of this archive raises critical questions about accepted modes of archival inquiry.

The Yaddo Records are comprised of family, institutional, and administrative papers. Not represented are manuscripts and typescripts of works composed at Yaddo. While these manuscripts (which are, in general, preserved by other archives) are important because they document the gestation of compositions which took shape amid Yaddo's environment of creative quietism, they have a finite value in terms of their critical importance. That is to say that there exists an essential moment when a creative manuscript no longer yields to critical interpretation and its value becomes, largely, artifactual. Institutional archives like the Yaddo Records document an essential, and overlooked, intersection between the critical importance of manuscripts and typescripts of creative works, and the material record which preserves the historical circumstances surrounding, and influencing, their development. As literary manuscripts exhaust their critical value, such moments of intersection become increasingly important, and the reward for the scholar who locates them, greater still.

Careful analysis of the Yaddo Records reveals two prominent moments of convergence. First, the Yaddo Records trace the origins of a community which, as Cheever describes, witnessed the creativity of many regarded artists. Secondly, Yaddo's archive reveals that during its most formative years an emerging group of intellectual and creative thinkers were responsible for shaping Yaddo's restrictive guest list, and that their decisions fused with Ames' administrative authority in ways which proved formative to regarded compositions.

For Cheever, Yaddo's record of fostering artistic development was deeply rooted in a combination of Elizabeth Ames' administrative genius,

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and the foresight of Yaddo's principal founders Spencer Trask, and his wife Katrina,

The combination in tandem of Mrs Trask's generosity and Elizabeth's profoundly intuitive grasp of what one needed seems providential. When Elizabeth undertook to open and manage Yaddo there was no precedent. She invented an administration so intelligent and comprehensive that at times—when one found seven writers of vastly different temperaments and interests working happily under the same roof—it seemed magical. It wasn't magic at all, of course. It was commonsense, hard work and giftedness. (*Six Decades* 7)

Fortunately, the archival record reflects Yaddo's bifurcated history and allows for analysis of Yaddo's creative continuum. A sensitive configuration of the Trask family papers reveals an important interplay between family and institutional archives which helps to reveal an influential cultural legacy.

Yaddo's foundation rests on the munificence and artistic sensibilities of its principle founders. Spencer Trask was born September 18, 1844 in Brooklyn, New York. Spencer's father, Alanson, had established his family financially by selling munitions, principally shoes, to the Union Army during the Civil War. In 1866 Spencer graduated from Princeton University and shortly thereafter joined the Wall Street banking firm of his maternal uncle, Henry Marquand. Two years later, Spencer co-founded his own brokerage house, Trask and Stone. The venture was a success. Two years later Spencer purchased a seat on the New York Stock Exchange for \$4,000.00.

In 1881 Spencer partnered with George Foster Peabody, and on May 7 of that year they established the financial firm Spencer Trask & Company, which was headquartered in New York City but which would grow to have additional offices in Albany, Boston, Philadelphia, Providence, and eventually, Saratoga Springs. The combined business sense of Spencer and Peabody proved formidable. Over the following 30 years, Spencer Trask & Company would make profitable investments in, among other interests, Thomas Edison's incandescent lamp, a venture to standardize the gauge of the Rio Grande Western Railroad, and support of *The New York Times* and its aspiring editor, Adolph Ochs.

Despite his financial success, Spencer Trask remained committed to Victorian proprieties and to Gilded Age expectations regarding the obligations of wealth. Among many other philanthropic gestures, Spencer founded the St Christina Home in Saratoga Springs, which served as a

summer hospital for ailing children from New York City. Spencer was also a great supporter of the arts, and in addition to serving on the board for both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Municipal Arts Society, he was a founder, and president of the National Arts Club.

While Spencer's financial success underwrote Yaddo's establishment, Yaddo's artistic culture is deeply rooted in Katrina Trask's life-long interest in creative development. Like Spencer, Katrina came from an established Brooklyn family. It is believed that she was born in 1852 and she was most likely 21 when she met Spencer in 1873. During that same year she was also introduced to George Foster Peabody, and for a short time the two business partners were romantic rivals. However, despite Spencer's marriage to Katrina in 1874, both remained emotionally intimate with Peabody.

In 1875, one year after her marriage with Spencer, Katrina gave birth to Alanson Trask, the first of the Trasks' four children. Two years later, the Trasks' second child, Christina, was born. In what would become a tragically familiar experience for the new parents, in April of 1880 Alanson died suddenly at the Trasks' Brooklyn home. Spencer, believing that distance would help to alleviate Katrina's emotional suffering, arranged to lease, "with the privilege of later purchasing", a large estate in the already familiar surroundings of Saratoga Springs.

The mansion that awaited the Trasks when they arrived in Saratoga for the 1881 season was of the Italian Villa Style. For Katrina, the surrounding estate offered detachment and isolated immersion in a setting which she immediately perceived to be distinct. In her *The Chronicles of Yaddo*, a privately printed volume, she recalls the Trasks' attachment,

How intensely Spencer and I had grown to love this deserted, enchanted place! Already it was home: I feel that I had never been so much at home, as in these beautiful wild haunts, overgrown and hidden from every passerby. (85)

Though they could not possibly have predicted, the seeds of Yaddo's creative culture had been planted in the Trasks' understanding that their estate was independent. The perception would project broadly into Yaddo's future. When she arrived in June of 1940, Katherine Anne Porter wrote, "This is a real monastery. I had not imagined anything so severely cloistered and delimited."

In the fall of 1881, Spencer returned to New York were he made final arrangements for the purchase of the Saratoga property. Shortly after, Katrina received a telegram. It read, simply, "Mrs. Spencer Trask, Saratoga Springs. All Hail, Mistress of Yaddo. Spencer." The Trasks had committed

to their estate, and the wording of Spencer's telegram anticipates that over the proceeding two decades the Trasks' belief that their estate was wholly distinct would provide for a relationship with their secluded grounds that would border on the transcendent, and that the Trasks would begin to recreate an interest in the medieval which would come to dominate their world view.

Once assured of possession, the Trasks began to transform their estate. An extensive garden and dairy farm was added, dams were built and trout hatcheries erected. In winter ice was cut from Yaddo's lakes and stored in a newly constructed icehouse. The result was that by 1886 Yaddo was essentially self-sufficient. Malcolm Cowley would later recall that in both appearance and function, the estate recalled a medieval manor,

In the days of its glory it had been almost a medieval manor, largely self-contained, producing its own meat and milk, its fruits and vegetables, with foodstuffs preserved over the winter in room-sized refrigerators cooled with ice cut from the Yaddo lakes. The manor had its own water supply, its own root cellars, its own large greenhouse, and its own extensive system of macadam roads, over which Spencer Trask drove his coachand-six to one of the three gates in the ornate iron fence that guarded it from the outside world. (*Six Decades* 13)

In the company of their children, Christina and now Spencer Jr. born in 1884, and surrounded by intimate friends, the Trasks enjoyed lives of quintessential Victorian leisure. Further, the Trasks began to fully indulge the isolation their estate offered, and they challenged assumed modes of Victorian restraint by enacting a dramatic representation of the medieval. The most extravagant expression of the Trasks' medieval interests occurred on Halloween eve in 1882, when Spencer orchestrated an elaborate ceremony, the purpose of which was to bestow upon Katrina the title of Queen of Yaddo. Over time the distinction between the theatrical basis of such pageantry and the Trasks' worldview would blur.

Amid such elaborate ceremony, the Trasks' second child, Christina, invented a neologism: *Yaddo*. Spencer and Katrina were convinced that Christina devised the word after hearing discussion that the Trasks' lives had been "shadowed" by the death of their first child, Alanson. The word was accepted as a synonym for light, and was quickly adopted as the name of the Trasks' estate. The shadows, sadly, returned. In 1888, tragic misjudgment resulted in the deaths of both Christina and her younger brother Spencer when a doctor permitted both children to visit their mother who was suffering from diphtheria but believed to be no longer contagious.

Both children contracted the disease and died within two days of one another. Katrina recovered and would later recall that "Like Dante—'I did not die, yet I alive remained not." The emotional consequence of these losses was exaggerated a year later when the Trasks' last child, Katrina, died only three days after birth.

More shadows followed. During the spring of 1891, Spencer developed a near fatal case of pneumonia. While he was lying near death in the Trasks' Brooklyn home, word was received that the mansion in Saratoga had been completely destroyed by fire. After considerable debate, and fearing that news of the fire might prove emotionally overwhelming, Katrina, in consultation with George Foster Peabody, decided to inform Spencer. As recorded by Katrina, Spencer's response was emphatic,

At last, in a faint and feeble voice, he whispered: "Telegraph at once for the photographer to go out to Yaddo and take plenty of photographs. I want to see the ruins: we shall need many pictures of the foundations when we make the plans for the new house and I shall not be able to travel for some time." (Trask 98)

Less than four months after the fire, a formal ceremony commemorated the laying of a cornerstone for a new mansion, which was completed two years later in 1893. Spencer was adamant that the new mansion would provide final escape from tragedy, and he commissioned Louis Comfort Tiffany to design a mosaic for the fireplace in the great hall which depicts a phoenix rising from its ashes, and which bears the inscription, "Flammis Inveecta Pair Ignem Yaddo, Resurgo Ad Pachem" (unconquered by flame, I Yaddo, am reborn for peace). The inscription makes emphatic the Trasks' conviction that Yaddo defined a culture wholly resistant to material destruction. Further, Spencer had made certain that this affirmation was permanently cast in the mansion's great hearth, the symbolic center of the estate.

While the further cultivation of Yaddo's culture provided distraction, Katrina found solace in creativity and she dedicated herself to writing. Spencer had made certain that the design of new mansion took into account Katrina's interest in composition. The most obvious feature of the mansion is a dominating tower, the prominence of which makes it impossible to escape its symbolic importance for a family so vested in recreating the medieval. Katrina pushed the tower's symbolism to its logical, and indeed architectural, extreme. The uppermost room of the tower became her private sanctuary and study:

In 1899 the Trasks decided to dedicate their collective legacies to preserving the culture which now defined Yaddo.

My high Tower was a consummation! O room of rooms, where my mountains and the spurs of three ranges may be seen; the glorious colours of the sunrise flush at Dawn, and at Even the vivid splendor of the sunset.... Although the Tower is a shrine to friendship, it is also a room for work! And I worked there! Ah, how I worked! (Trask 106)

Cloistered in her tower, Katrina composed numerous volumes of poetry, prose, and dramatic writings. The aesthetic sensibilities that Katrina's room embodied would leave future impressions. During successive generations, Katrina's room would witness the creative development of, among other works, Exile's Return, Other Voices Other Rooms, and Ship of Fools. As Katrina's commitment to writing deepened, Yaddo's culture began to coalesce around her creative temperament. During the 1890s, the principles of quietism, isolation, as well as fantastic license which had come to define life at Yaddo, aligned with Katrina's interest in writing, and a unique culture of community began to emerge. At Yaddo, the Trasks entertained Henry Van Dyke, Victor Emmanuel (soon to be King of Italy), Eastman Johnson, Louis Comfort Tiffany, and Booker T. Washington. Amid this evolving culture, the Trasks gave private consideration to how to bequeath their estate, and in 1899 they decided to dedicate their collective legacies to preserving the culture which now defined Yaddo, for the benefit of future generations of artists.

The Trasks' intentions however, were again challenged by tragedy. On December 31, 1909, amid New Years Eve celebrations at Yaddo, Spencer was called to New York. Near Croton, an express freight train collided with Spencer's New York bound train. Spencer's private car was crushed. Spencer was the only fatality. Katrina, characteristically, and by this time amazingly, persevered. While Spencer's loss cast a permanent shadow over the remaining years of Katrina's life, she found solace in her artistry, and in her friendship with George Foster Peabody. On February 5, 1921, Peabody and Katrina were married at Yaddo. Katrina's health was deteriorating rapidly and it is possible that the marriage was decided upon so that following her death the Trasks' hopes for Yaddo would be legally vested in Peabody. The marriage, however, would last less then one year. On January 7, 1922, Katrina died at Yaddo, and according to her wishes was buried at the point of Yaddo's highest elevation. While at the time of her death, Katrina could be reasonably certain that her vision for Yaddo was legally and financially secure, its fruition relied on the continued dedication of Peabody, and particularly, the tireless efforts of Elizabeth

Ames whom Peabody appointed to the position of Executive Director of Yaddo in 1924.

During Yaddo's early years, Katrina's creative sensibilities, which were deeply rooted in the Trasks' fervent dedication to Yaddo's detached and independent posture, united with Elizabeth Ames' administrative discretion in ways which would prove formative to Yaddo's creative environment, and as a consequence, to the artistic expressions it would help to foster. However, arranging the institutional records so that they reveal creative influence requires a sensitive configuration of the materials at hand. For the reader of the Yaddo Records, analysis of the administrative process Ames devised provides a valuable point of entry.

When Ames was appointed Executive Director in 1924, she was in the precarious position of having to establish an administration for an institution for which there was, essentially, no precedent. She was determined to maintain the principles which had come to define Yaddo. Foremost among these was maintaining Yaddo's independence while preserving Katrina's faith in a shared community. Ames shrewdly perceived that maintaining these perspectives required an admissions process which considered prospective candidates' artistry, but which emphasized their willingness to adhere to modes of decorum that had come to define Yaddo's cultural environment. Yaddo's institutional records document Ames' process of configuring Yaddo's creative culture around inherited traditions.

Under Ames' administrative control, Yaddo's integration into the intellectual and creative community was intentionally furtive. Ames adamantly opposed publicly advertising Yaddo's purpose, and favored a more guarded introduction in the form of personal correspondence with academics, publishers, and members of related cultural institutions:

Several persons who are interested in the work being done at Yaddo have urged me to tell you more of our plans and to ask for your cooperation in bringing Yaddo the creative workers who deserve to have residence here.

Under the terms of the agreement made by Mr. and Mrs. Spencer Trask during their lifetime, Yaddo with its spacious residence, parks and gardens, was opened in the summer of 1926 for creative workers. This term "creative workers" includes those working in the plastic arts, those engaged in scholarship, in musical composition as well as workers in imaginative prose and poetry.

No more than twelve or thirteen persons are in residence at one time. One has no social responsibilities. He may be as solitary and reclusive as he wishes. The length of each person's stay depends on his particular circumstances. Some come for the whole season or twenty weeks, others for only a portion of that time. The very nominal sum of one dollar a day is the only living expense.1

By the early 1930s Ames had shrewdly positioned herself as intermediary between contacts whom she trusted to provide recommendations, and a select group of "confidential advisors" whom she chose from an emerging generation of intellectual and creative thinkers. Over time, the relationships Ames established with her closest advisors would come to define, albeit loosely, an admissions committee.

Lewis Mumford was at the center of Yaddo's nascent admissions process as it evolved under Ames' scrupulous control. In April of 1928, Mumford wrote Ames and recommended for residence a young professor from Smith College:

Dear Mrs. Ames

Are the gates to Yaddo closed for the summer? If not I should like to recommend to you Mr. Newton Arvin. He is a very able young critic and scholar, one of the best in the country. He is finishing a biography of Hawthorne and Yaddo—I discussed last week with in Northampton, when I lectured at Smith, where he teaches—would mean a great deal to him. Could you possibly squeeze him in? I have always respected and admired Arvin's work: but I didn't call your attention to him before because I had never met him personally and knew nothing of his needs. (*YR* 270.32)

Within a week Arvin was in correspondence with Ames:

My dear Mrs. Ames:

Mr. Lewis Mumford has very kindly written me to say that there may be a possibility of my being admitted to Yaddo for a few weeks during the summer and has suggested that I write to you and explain when I could plan to be there. (YR 225.1)

Arvin arrived at Yaddo in June of 1928 and quickly earned Ames' confidence. In 1929, Arvin brought to Ames' attention Granville Hicks, another member of Smith's faculty. Like Arvin, Hicks would play an important role

1 The New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The Yaddo Records, Box 311, Folder 4. References to The Yaddo Records will hereafter be cited parenthetically as YR followed by the Box number, a period, and the Folder number—for example, (YR 311.4).

in Yaddo admissions. In January of 1928, Irita van Doren wrote a recommendation that would prove even more decisive:

Dear Bettie.

I haven't any candidates right off the bat, except one man, Malcolm Cowley, for whom Yaddo would be perfect. However, in view of his own domestic complications, it may be difficult to persuade him to go. I am going to try to do so, however, if you will take him in. He is a good poet of infrequent but distinctive verse, an excellent translator from the French (he did that remarkable translation of Valerie's "Variete"), and is now working on an account of the dramatic episodes which took place in the early years of slavers and slave running for Harcourt Brace. He is poor as a church mouse with no visible means of support, except occasional advances from publishers. He is in frail health, and is, I am afraid, destined to a long continuation of these circumstances on account of his wife. (YR 293.31)

Following his first residency in 1930, Aaron Copland brought to Ames' attention two young composers, Marc Blitzstein, "he is extremely musical in a general way – musical almost to a fault, by which I mean at times the music seems to flow almost too easily," as well as Walter Piston, "his work is extremely competent though not as original as Blitzstein's." By the summer of 1933 Newton Arvin, Aaron Copland, Malcolm Cowley, Granville Hicks, and Lewis Mumford, were all closely advising Ames, and the documentation of their very focused evaluations reveals a formative influence on the careers of many young writers.

A particularly strong recommendation from one of Ames' advisors often resulted in an invitation to Yaddo independent of any formal evaluation or broader consensus. In a letter dated April 24, 1933, a young John Cheever wrote to Ames:

Dear Ms. Ames.

Malcolm Cowley suggested that there might be a possibility of my being one of your guests for a short while this summer so that I could continue, under more comfortable circumstances the work that I have in hand.

Other than Malcolm's word and a few published stories, I have little to recommend me. I am planning to be a writer and have been working for the last year on apprenticeship prose. At present I am trying to write a handful of good short stories.

It is necessary to say that, after eight months in the city a short time in the country (and it is splendid country I understand) would be pleasant. (YR 235.11)

Ames' response was unfavorable: "Our plans for the early part of the summer are now made. I shall keep you in mind for any possible vacancies coming later in the summer or fall." Undeterred, Cheever wrote again the following year and further stressed Cowley's recommendation:

Dear Mrs. Ames,

Last year at about this time I wrote you, at Malcolm Cowley's suggestion asking about coming to Yaddo. The letter was pretty late in the season and there was no room, and Mr. Cowley suggested that I write again this year.

He wrote you, I think, about my work. What, or how much he said I don't know. The facts in the case are simple enough. I am twenty-two years old and have been writing for a number of years although I haven't published anything since 1932. I can vouch for the quantity if not the quality and promise of the work I would do if there were a vacancy at Yaddo. (YR 235.11)

Cheever's persistence in coordination with Cowley's recommendations resulted in an invitation which would prove formative. Yaddo would become arguably the most important institution in Cheever's young career, and particularly during the hungry days of the depression, Cheever's creativity would be influenced by administrative latitudes Ames assumed. During subsequent summers, Cheever was allowed to return to Yaddo only after he proposed, and Ames agreed, that he "work for the chance" (Cheever performed various "outdoor duties" in exchange for his residency). As it would for many subsequent artists, Ames' accommodation proved defining. During countless visits which spanned almost half a century, Cheever would develop at Yaddo many of his most regarded works including, Falconer, The Enormous Radio, and The Wapshot Chronical.

In February of 1933, Horace Gregory provided a recommendation which would prove of similar influence to a text that has come to define the proletarian movement in American literature:

Dear Mrs. Ames:

Here is my list of people for Yaddo. I've reduced it to three names, but I am certain all three would be able to make intelligent use of what Yaddo has to offer and all three have definite work planned for the summer months. The first of these is:

James T. Farrell, The Vanguard Press, New York City. Farrell is twenty-nine, has written two published novels and a number of short stories. His contribution, a short story "Soap" in "Americans Abroad" is the most effective piece of writing in that anthology—"Gas House McGinty" his second novel, published by Vanguard this spring is a considerable advance over the first which I praised highly in "The Nation". He is now at work on a third book which he hopes to finish this summer. (YR 250.14)

Like Cheever, Farrell's experience brings into focus the combined influence of Ames' "confidential advisors," (Cowley had arranged for Horace Gregory's acceptance to Yaddo) and Ames' consolidated authority over Yaddo's deeply rooted tradition of isolated quietism. Once at Yaddo, guests quickly realized that, while others may have provided for their invitation, Ames exerted profound control over the creative environment in which they were immersed. Invitations generally include reference to what Ames considered "social amenities of civilized living":

You will be glad to know, I think that there are certain traditions here having to do with every person's right to privacy and solitude while living in a group and to work with the assurance that he will not suffer interruption. About these traditions we shall give you specific information. Our guests are asked to observe them without exception. (YR 311.5)

Such "traditions" were deeply ingrained in the Victorian sensibilities of Yaddo's founders. Ames was quick to observe transgression, and she frequently left typed reprimands in full public view. In contrast, Ames frequently offered to prolong the residencies of guests who accommodated her moral proprieties and who demonstrated commitment to their creativity. In Farrell's case, Ames' beneficence proved defining.

Farrell's invitation to Yaddo made clear the terms of residency: "we shall be glad to have you as one of our guests from the first of August to the corresponding date in September." However, in a letter dated August 16, Ames recommended that Farrell extend his residency:

I am intending this for Mrs. Farrell also and will you, therefore, please forward it to her. I invite you and her to use a four room apartment at our farmhouse for four weeks beginning September 15. It is very simply furnished, far more like a summer camp than a real house. (YR 244.18)

In October, Ames agreed to further extend Farrell's stay and offered him residency at Triuna Island, an additional property owned by Yaddo and located at Lake George. Especially during the difficult days of the Depression such accommodation was regarded as providential. In a letter dated October 30, Farrell wrote to Ames, "Being up here and seeing Triuna and the environs, we doubly appreciate your having created the opportunity for our coming here." Farrell fully appreciated Yaddo's influence. He would later present Ames with a signed first edition of *The Young Manhood of Studs Lonigan*. The inscription acknowledges Ames' repeated accommodation and the creative opportunities she provided:

For the opportunity to have completed this book, I am indebted to you & to Yaddo—I hope it may have some merits in order to justify that indebtedness.

With affection James T. Farrell March 9, 1934 Yaddo

By the mid 1930s Ames, along with her carefully chosen advisors, were making subtle impressions on creativity at Yaddo which bore a larger cultural significance.

As Yaddo's influence continued to expand across the intellectual and artistic landscape, both the admissions procedures over which Ames presided and the creative environment she administered began to exert increasing influence over the gestation and formation of the creative thought which took place amid Yaddo's secluded grounds. In 1959, Newton Arvin, who had been Sylvia Plath's professor and later colleague on the Smith College faculty, wrote to Ames enthusiastically regarding her interest in Yaddo: "she is one of the two or three most gifted students I have ever had, as you can gather if you have seen any of her poems in the Atlantic, Poetry, the New Yorker, and elsewhere." Plath, along with her husband, Ted Hughes, spent two months at Yaddo during the fall of 1959. While such recommendations would continue to provide for invitations, most applicants were subject to the guarded opinion of Ames' advisors. In 1948, Flannery O'Connor's application was reviewed by advisors Newton Arvin, Malcolm Cowley, and Louis Kronenberger. Arvin wrote (see Figure 14):

A kind of writing I find it hard to like. Rather level and unrelieved, gray, uncolored. But as she is young and has good

sponsors—and seems to have serious purposes—I should not vote against her. The kind of application which it seems to me depends on the number of other really good possibilities. (YR 272.10)

Kronenberger observed,

The first few pages of the novel strike me quite favorably—they have talent and a certain humor. I'd say yes if the competition isn't too strong. (YR 272.10)

Cowley's comments observe Ames' insistence on decorum:

She seems to have talent. There's no time for a personal appraisal at these meetings, but I'd bet on her, on a hunch. Liked "The Geranium." (YR 272.10)

A photograph from 1942 finds Ames, in the company of advisors Arvin and Cowley, and surrounded by guests Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter, and Langston Hughes (see Figure 15). The image captures the posture of guardianship that Ames and her advisors assumed over the creative culture they inherited. The image then serves as a visual representation of the convergence of family and institutional papers that the Yaddo records comprise, and, when analysis is coordinated with manuscript evidence, direct creative influence is revealed. Like Cheever and Farrell before her, Carson McCullers also attracted Ames' beneficent attention (she would include in a letter to Ames, "Last night I dreamed I was at Yaddo, as I often dream when I am happy and peaceful. I remember writing certain passages in the Ballad and The Member of the Wedding and the afternoon I finished both these works"). While McCullers acknowledged the completion of works at Yaddo, further investigation reveals that McCullers' manuscript of The Member of the Wedding arrived at its final form after immersion in the creative crosscurrents of Yaddo's eclectic community. While Newton Arvin and composer David Diamond both read and provided commentary on early drafts, it was Elizabeth Ames who, after spending a sleepless night reading an advance copy, assured McCullers of its completion. Ames famously recalled handing McCullers, what the artist herself finally determined to be, *The Member of the Wedding* in final form:

Carson was watching for me to come into the dining room. At the time her nerves were so bad that her hand shook when she held a cup of coffee. I walked up behind her as she sipped her coffee, the cup rattling when she attempted to put it down. "You have done it, my dear," I said, handing her back the manu-

A photograph from 1942 finds Ames, in the company of advisors Arvin and Cowley, and surrounded by guests Carson McCullers, Katherine Anne Porter, and Langston Hughes.

script. As I spoke, she tipped over her glass of water and laid her head down up the table with a great sigh. It was all over. Her child, in a sense, had been born. (Carr 185)

Other artists acknowledge similar influence. Sylvia Plath wrote to Ames, "I have never in my life felt so peaceful and as if I can read and think and write for about seven hours a day." In 1948 Alfred Kazin, whom Newton Arvin had recommended and championed for admittance to Yaddo, described for Ames his development of *A Walker in the City*, and he recognized the influence of the creative environment, which was so deeply rooted in the sensibilities of Yaddo's founders, and over which Ames and her advisors presided: "So much of my real work forward in writing is associated with Yaddo that I have come to be almost superstitious about it, and like to put a little bit of its earth inside each book I write."

As creative manuscripts exhaust their critical value, the interpretation and evaluation of their gestation will increasingly rely on scholarship that is able to identify the material record of historical forces which proved influential to their formation. While the Yaddo Records are unique in that their bifurcated composition allows for two points of entry into critical discussion, the perspectives that such records provide make emphatic the value of institutional repositories to the evaluation of creative compositions.

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