



Charlemont Grant Report

Recipient Name:	Dr Eve Cobain
Discipline:	Humanities and Social Sciences
Amount and year awarded:	€1,600 in 2019
Title of Project:	The American Lyric at Midcentury: "griefs and music"



<p>Summary of findings:</p>	<p>My research trip to the Houghton Library and the New York Public Library allowed me to undertake manuscript research on US poets Robert Lowell and Randall Jarrell that would inform my book project, <i>The American Lyric at Midcentury: Griefs and Music</i>. Having completed a large part of the groundwork necessary to the completion of the manuscript – in terms of secondary (interdisciplinary) research, close reading, and manuscript research – the trip was timely and crucial to the progression of the project.</p> <p>During this four week trip (the first three weeks of which were spent at the Houghton) I was able to consult materials that were not available elsewhere – including diaries, correspondence, sketches, and typescripts – bringing these to bear on primary texts and gaining a more thorough understanding of Robert Lowell’s engagement with music and the lyric more broadly. The week that I spent at New York Public Library allowed me to discover yet more items of musical interest in the archives of another key poet in this study.</p> <p>The many letters between Lowell and the other poets that feature in the book – Jarrell, Berryman and Bishop – shed light on the musical interests of these mid-century poets. Unpublished poems were also discovered within these exchanges (ie John Berryman to Lowell). Some of the unpublished poems that I discovered in the archive contain musical allusion – such as “North Haven”, a poem which is in conversation with Elizabeth Bishop. This lyric demonstrates that, much like Berryman, Lowell’s discussion of music intersects with his musings on love. This was an important finding.</p> <p>The letters that I encountered around the time that Lowell taught at the Salzburg Seminar (1952) also provided valuable information on the poet’s musical enthusiasms. The ensuing</p>
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	<p>correspondence between Lowell and Giovanna Madonia, a music student whom he met in Salzburg, further depict Lowell’s mixing of music and romantic affairs. These letters make it clear that this relationship was of a greater significance and intensity than represented in Lowell’s biographies – and that it informed his understanding of and taste in classical music. These letters provide an important context for of my article on “Berryman and Lowell at the Opera.”</p> <p>Lowell’s profound relationship with European symbolism is another strand of this research that was enhanced through the consultation of these manuscript materials, which allowed me to more accurately assess Lowell’s understanding of poetry’s musical connections, and the role of the lyric poet at midcentury. Indeed, spending time at the archive gave me the chance to examine Lowell’s recourse to musically oriented writers (such as Baudelaire and Rilke) through schema, marginalia, and drafts of poems, particularly in Imitations.</p> <p>In a more general sense, my understanding of the political dimension (and origins) of Lowell’s poetry was reshaped as I consulted early drafts of Life Studies, Notebook 1967-1968, and History. In Life Studies, for example, the poems that are often considered to be the most personal have their origins in complex political thought. Lowell’s concept of music, likewise, emerged as politically charged – as seen in poems such as “Robespierre and Mozart as Stage” and “Piano Practice (for Adrienne Rich).”</p> <p>During my time at the Houghton I also began to think about avenues for new research on Lowell, particularly around his relationship with women poets. In consulting letters between Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop, Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath I have developed a new appreciation of the relationships that Lowell shared with female poets of his generation and the ways in which they influenced each other.</p> <p>Consulting the Randall Jarrell Papers in New York Public Library provided further evidence of the ways in which this generation of poets’ work converges around the subject of music. Since these holdings are not as crucial to the project as Lowell’s at the Houghton, I was able to see the materials I was interested in viewing in less than one week. There were still many treasures to be found. Among the collection were a number of lists of records that Jarrell was either listening to or purchasing. I also studied Jarrell’s translations of Rilke’s Die Stimmen (The Voices) – musical poems that had also formed the basis of Berryman’s Nervous Songs. There were myriad references to Orpheus (a figure of major import for both Rilke and Berryman) in manuscript poems and notebooks.</p> <p>Overall, this research trip afforded me valuable time to think about the shape and direction of my project and gave me access to a wide range of materials that have critically informed its development.</p>
<p>Plans for continuing collaboration:</p>	<p>During my research trip I met with Prof Calista McRae (New Jersey Institute of Technology Newark), who is in the process of editing, with Dr Philip Coleman, a volume of John Berryman’s letters with Faber and Faber. I have already collaborated with Prof McRae and Prof Coleman and meeting both in New York provided an opportunity to discuss future projects – indeed, both will be excellent sounding boards as I further develop my book manuscript.</p> <p>Prof Stephanie Burt was unavailable to meet during my research trip (which had to be rescheduled on account of archive refurbishment) but expressed a hope to meet when I return in the future. My correspondence with Prof Burt in the leadup to my research trip was extremely helpful and provided some useful context around the Randall Jarrell papers.</p>



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Publication plans:	<p>My co-edited volume Robert Lowell and Irish Poetry is currently being prepared for publication with Peter Lang. I have also contributed an essay to the volume entitled "The way we are living': Robert Lowell and Leontia Flynn."</p> <p>Having conducted the necessary archival research, I am now at work on an article on "Berryman and Lowell at the Opera", which I will submit to 'American Literary History' in 2020. I continue to work on The American Lyric at Midcentury, the progress of which has been advanced by this research trip and which I aim to publish in 2022.</p>
International dissemination:	<p>I hope to present my research on middle generation poetry and opera at the MLA Conference (Washington, 2022).</p>
National dissemination:	<p>I will continue presenting at local conferences such as the Irish Association of American Studies annual conference where there are many researchers who share an interest in Middle Generation US poetry.</p>
Outreach:	<p>After returning from the US I participated in a radio programme on poetry and music for Lyricfm. I spoke about my current research project, focussing particularly on John Berryman's collaboration with the Irish composer Brian Boydell.</p>