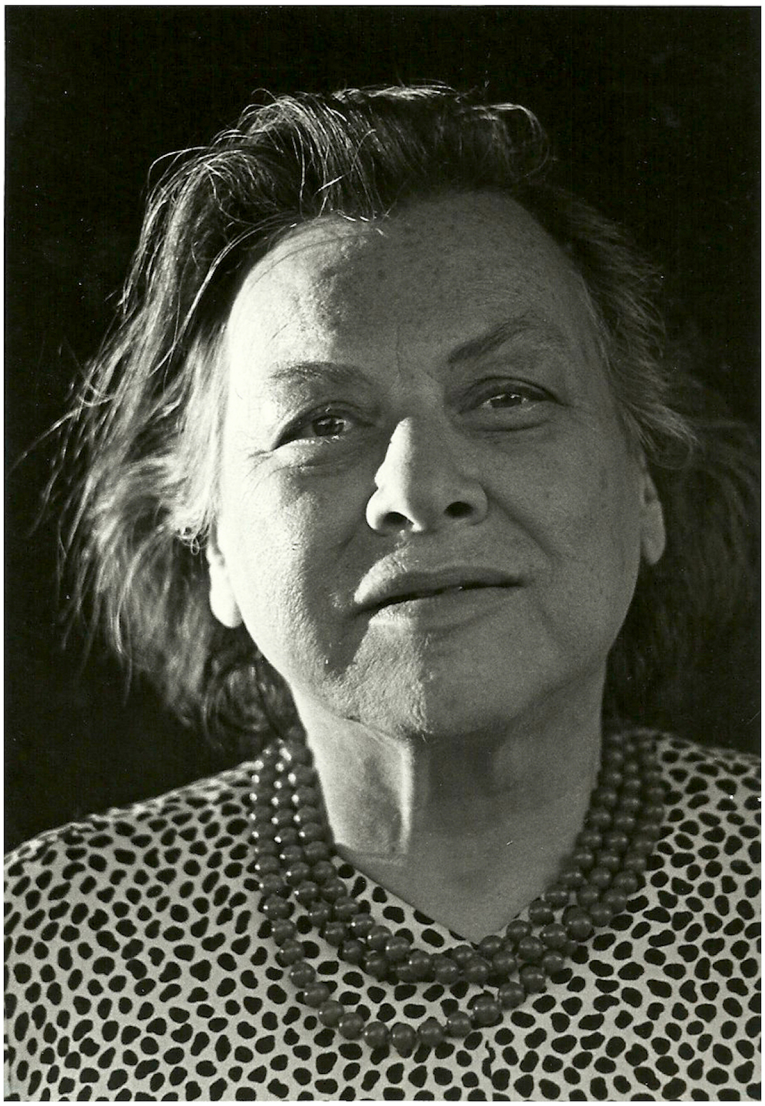
MURIEL RUKEYSER:

THE CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS, 1935-1980



EDITED BY VIVIAN R. POLLAK

Muriel Rukeyser: The Contemporary Reviews, 1935-1980

Edited by Vivian R. Pollak

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Muriel Rukeyser: The Contemporary Reviews, 1935-1980 is an open access bibliography with electronic links when available. It documents the reception of sixteen books of poetry and five books of prose, from Theory of Flight(1935) to The Collected Poems(1978). A set of "Additional Notices" includes reviews that are less tethered to individual publications, such as "Grandeur and Misery of a Poster Girl," which appeared in the Partisan Review in the fall of 1943. The bibliography excludes reviews of Rukeyser's children's books, of her 1945 play The Middle of the Air, and of her translations. Prominent reviewers include Horace Gregory, Louise Bogan, F. O. Matthiessen, William Carlos Williams, Alfred Kazin, Josephine Miles, May Swenson, and Langston Hughes. Overall, the bibliography clarifies Rukeyser's place in twentieth-century American literary history and revivifies her poetic presence.

MURIEL RUKEYSER:

THE CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS, 1935-1980

Edited by Vivian R. Pollak

DEDICATION

FOR EVERYONE WHO HAS OVERCOME THE FEAR OF POETRY
AND FOR EVERYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO

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I am enormously grateful to the many people at Washington University and beyond who made this bibliography happen. Some of the main players were Rose Miyatsu, a graduate student in the English Department, who gathered reviews and produced a rough draft of the entries. She offered judicious advice and technical know-how, as did Alex Mouw after her.

At Olin Library, Kris Helbling was invaluable throughout. Her detective work can't be beat! Micah Zeller, who directs the activities of the Scholarly Communications Center for Washington University Libraries, skillfully and sympathetically guided me through the thickets of copyright law. He quickly disabused me of the notion that because something was available online and old and obscure and of interest only to a select few, I would be free to use it.

Elisabeth Däumer was a strong encourager. The 2013 Rukeyser Symposium she organized at Eastern Michigan University to mark the centenary of the poet's birth was a wonderful opportunity to engage in spirited conversation. Her website, *Muriel Rukeyser A Living Archive,* shows what electronic publication can do for Rukeyser scholarship and for contemporary literary studies: http://murielrukeyser.emuenglish.org/.

It was at the EMU Symposium that I met the poet's literary executor, her son Bill, who has generously given permission for use of the cover image, which he took in Berkeley in 1976. The image is one of three that Muriel Rukeyser chose from that session. © William L. Rukeyser.

A special shout–out to Kate Daniels, who graciously invited me to Nashville to talk about Rukeyser and to view her amazing collection of Rukeyseriana. Kate sent me home with memories of the best cornbread I ever ate, plus a folder of reviews that led to my virtual acquaintance with Arthur A. MacGillivray, S.J., an almost forgotten poet and critic whom I describe in the introduction.

Many other warm-hearted fans of Muriel contributed, including Anne Herzog, Janet Kaufman, Eric Keenaghan, Louise Kertesz and Bob Pollak, whose willingness to participate in the bib project with eager listening and then some was amazing. Bob, thanks too for the laughs we shared while quarantined during Covid-19. I wonder what Muriel would have made of it.

A NOTE ON PROCEDURE

Whenever possible, page numbers refer to the printed version of a document. Page numbers on the electronic version of a document may differ.

When Rukeyser is part of a composite review, the page numbers refer to the entire review.

A NOTE ON THE LINKS

Although all free access and JSTOR links should work easily, we offer the following instructions for the ProQuest Links:

1. Click on the hyperlink you want to access.
2. The link will take you to a ProQuest login page, where you can input personal or institutional credentials.
3. Once logged in, you will be taken to a "basic search" page on ProQuest. In the search bar, enter the string of numbers that ends the hyperlink you originally clicked. For example, to access Horace Gregory's "A Page for Poets," enter the following in the ProQuest search bar: 90908514.
4. Click the title of the review.
5. Click "Page View——PDF" to see a complete scan of the pages on which the review appears. This won't always be necessary, but ProQuest occasionally cuts off material in its effort to isolate the relevant text.

TOTAL NUMBER OF REVIEWS: 273

Theory of Flight:	22
U.S. 1:	21
A Turning Wind:	17
Wake Island:	8
Willard Gibbs:	35
Beast in View:	14
The Green Wave:	15
Elegies:	6
The Life of Poetry:	9
Orpheus:	7
Selected Poems:	6
One Life:	10
Body of Waking:	8
Waterlily Fire:	14
The Orgy:	22
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The Traces of Thomas Hariot:	13
29 Poems:	1
Breaking Open:	6
The Gates:	8
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Additional Notices:	8

INTRODUCTION:

"THE SLANG OF FACT"

In a "Preface to the Reader," written for her 1978 *Collected* Poems, Muriel Rukeyser noted that there are two kinds of reaching in poetry: "one based on the document, the evidence itself, the other kind informed by the unverifiable fact, as in sex, dreams, the parts of life in which we dive deep" (*Collected* 597).

Clearly, this bibliography is based on the document, the evidence itself. It aims to recover what Rukeyser described as "the slang of fact" those accidentals of literary history that shape a writer's reputation (*Collected* 597). It also aims to enable a deeper and more nuanced critical conversation about a writer who deserves more space in literary history than she is usually accorded. That said, the reviews gathered here range from mere notices, some of them contemptuous dismissals, to detailed, thoughtfully constructed approaches to Rukeyser's ambitions, her influences, and her achievement. Not infrequently, she was grouped with other poets, and I was often surprised by the clusters. Although describing these clusters is beyond the scope of this introduction, I want to indicate the engaging diversity of Rukeyser's readership by describing the activities of one of its members.

The Rev. Arthur A. MacGillivray, S. J., was born in Boston in 1912 and attended the Boston High School of Commerce before entering Boston College. In his sophomore year, a "Personality Portrait" in the college newspaper described him as tall, handsome, and genial. There was more:

> He is one of those envious [sic] fellows who always appear clean-cut, not only in physical appearance and dress, but in thought and action as well. We believe that he will go far, and we hold that whatever he gets he will surely deserve. He has a host of friends,

and no enemies. In fact, he is everything we wish we were. More power to him! (*Heights* 2)

A prank, perhaps? Was Arthur the author? I wouldn't put it past him; he was on the news staff, which introduced him as "the A.A. MacG. of numerous book reviews," and one of the paper's "valuables, who has worked more in his two years than most men do in four" (*Heights* 2).

In any event, in February 1939, when he discussed "Communist Influence in the New Poetry" for *America: The Jesuit Review*, MacGillivray criticized proletarian verse for its lack of "form, technique, charm, humor, grace, any of the things that have traditionally made poetry valuable" (476). Taking his cue from the recently deceased Pope Pius XI, whom he quoted, he had no doubt about how "the Communistic machine proposes to establish itself": by revolution and through the "insidious attacks of Communism in the literary field" (475). When he listed "Leftists and Marxian idealists" in England and America, Rukeyser was among them (476).

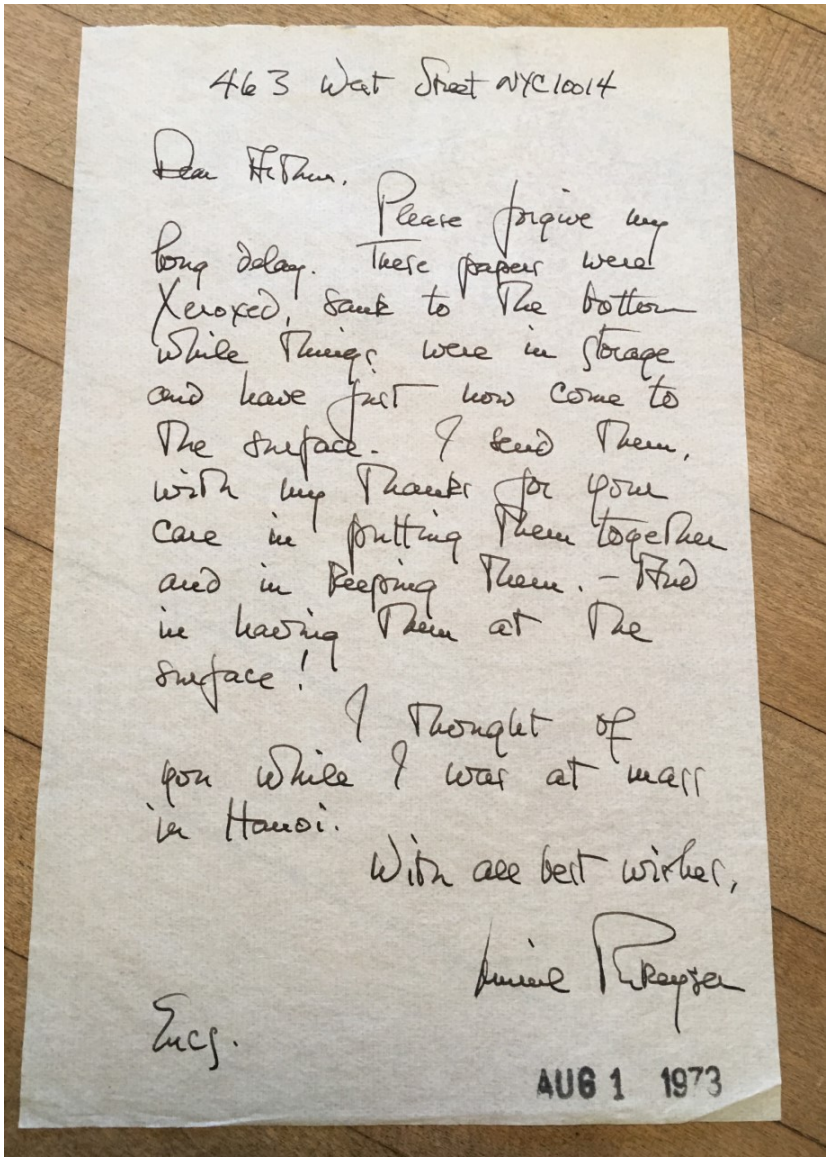
Arthur A. MacGillivray, the "A. A. MacG. of numerous book reviews," had a distinguished career teaching English for more than thirty years, mainly at Boston College but also at Holy Cross in Massachusetts and at Fairfield University in Connecticut. When he died in 2000, his *Boston Globe* obituary said that "he brought a distinctive style to his classes: a probing playful manner that evoked answers which often surprised the students who gave them" (*Globe* F15).

Despite his playfulness, his poetry, however, suggests that he was often lonely. When he read Rukeyser's "Elegy" in *Poetry* magazine in October 1939, he underlined the phrase "machinery of sorrow" (*Collected* 299). Perhaps that's why he began amassing a collection of writers he thought were important – to interfere with the machinery of sorrow. In the early 1970s, he sent Rukeyser a folder of reviews and related materials. She kept it for about two

years, and had the materials Xeroxed. When she wrote to thank him, she said she thought about him when she attended mass in Hanoi (she was protesting the Vietnam War). In 1991, 1993, and 1995, MacGillivray donated his collection of twentieth-century authors to Boston College. It includes "correspondence, clippings, photographs, and memorabilia of twentieth century literary figures, primarily poets," among them Yeats, Frost, and Sexton. But he had already sent his Rukeyser folder to Kate Daniels, who turned it over to me (see figures 1 and 2).

Mainly, MacGillivray's Rukeyser folder contains a wonderful mix of reviews from publications such as *The New York Times*, *The New York Herald Tribune, Saturday Review, The Atlantic Monthly, Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, and *The New Yorker,* together with a more personal document, summarizing what he learned in the summer of 1946, when he took a graduate course on modern poetry at the University of Minnesota with the American Renaissance scholar Kenneth Cameron. According to Cameron, Rukeyser was like Auden and Spender: "her manner was tortuous and obscure." Although he singled out "The Soul and Body of John Brown" as "one of the best of the social–revolutionary poems written," he felt that "she has slackened her pace since 1940, like Auden and Spender, in their declining revolutionary fervor" (MacGillivray Notes).

Despite what Kenneth Cameron had to say in a University of Minnesota classroom in the summer of 1946, Rukeyser had not slackened her pace, nor had her fervor abated. Rather, she had been down to Rotten Lake, through the trial of a disastrous marriage, and was diving deeper into herself and into the prophetic power of poetry, where there is a world to be discovered, "And all things glow" (*Collected* 329).



463 West Street NYC 10014

Dear Arthur,

Please forgive my long delay. These papers were Xeroxed, sank to the bottom while things were in storage and have just now come to the surface. I send them, with my thanks for your care in putting them together and in keeping them. - And in having them at the surface!

I thought of you while I was at mass in Hanoi.

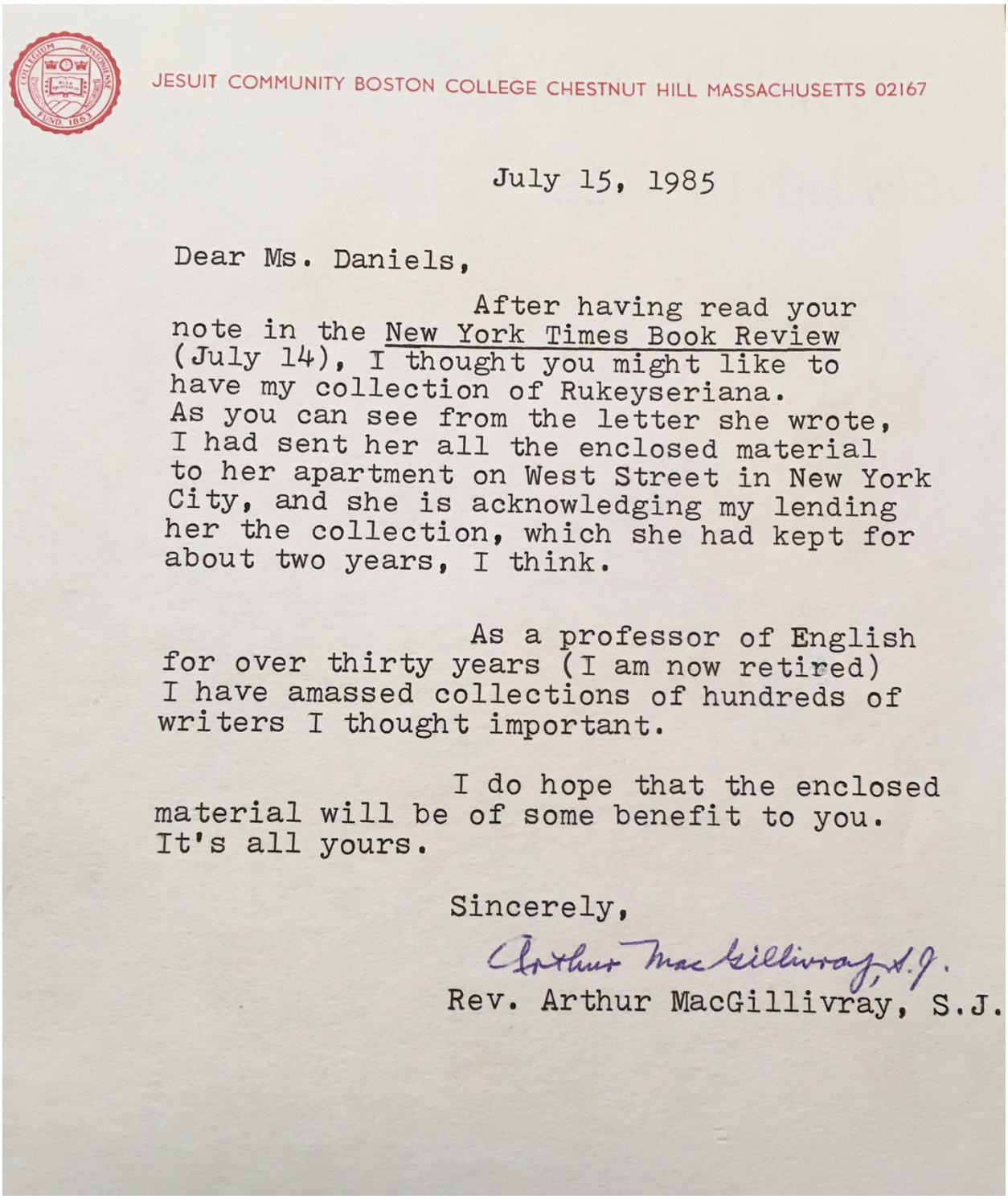
With all best wishes,

Louise Rukeyser

Encs.

AUG 1 1973

Figure 1. Rukeyser's letter to Arthur MacGillivray, S. J. The stamped date is his. ©William L. Rukeyser.



JESUIT COMMUNITY BOSTON COLLEGE CHESTNUT HILL MASSACHUSETTS 02167

July 15, 1985

Dear Ms. Daniels,

After having read your note in the New York Times Book Review (July 14), I thought you might like to have my collection of Rukeyseriana. As you can see from the letter she wrote, I had sent her all the enclosed material to her apartment on West Street in New York City, and she is acknowledging my lending her the collection, which she had kept for about two years, I think.

As a professor of English for over thirty years (I am now retired) I have amassed collections of hundreds of writers I thought important.

I do hope that the enclosed material will be of some benefit to you. It's all yours.

Sincerely,

Arthur MacGillivray, S.J.

Rev. Arthur MacGillivray, S.J.

Figure 2. Arthur MacGillivray's letter to Kate Daniels. Privately owned.

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Edited by Vivian R. Pollak

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EDITOR BIO

Vivian Pollak is a professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis, where she teaches courses in American literature and culture with an emphasis on the fiction and poetry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Recent courses include White American Masculinities from Poe to Fitzgerald; American Women Writers and Modernism; and American Women Poets and the Trouble with Normal. She has published six books: *Dickinson The Anxiety of Gender* (1984); *A Poet's Parents: The Courtship Letters of Emily Norcross and Edward Dickinson* (1988*); New Essays on Henry James's 'Daisy Miller' and 'The Turn of the Screw'* (1992); *The Erotic Whitman* (2000); *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson* (2004); and *Our Emily Dickinsons: American Women Poets and the Intimacies of Difference* (2017). She is a founding board member of the Emily Dickinson International Society and currently serves on the board of *ESQ: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture.* She met Muriel Rukeyser on a dark and stormy night in 1976 and has been thinking about her ever since.