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Guide to the Lois Ames Collection of Sylvia Plath

YCAL MSS 1430



Elise Riley

February 2026

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	3
Requesting Instructions	3
Administrative Information	3
Immediate Source of Acquisition	3
Conditions Governing Access	3
Conditions Governing Use	4
Preferred Citation	4
Processing Information	4
Related Materials	4
LOIS AMES (1931-2022)	4
Scope and Contents	4
Arrangement	5
Collection Contents	6
Series I: Correspondence, 1966–1989	6
Series II: Research material, 1950–2001	9
Notes and files, 1966–2001	9
Sylvia Plath materials, 1951–1993	9
Writings, 1966–1973	10
Periodicals, 1957–1966	11
Books, 1959–1998	11
Ephemera, 1950–1967	12
Series III: Audiovisual material, 1971–1982	13
Selected Search Terms	14

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
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CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 1430

CREATOR: Ames, Lois , author

TITLE: Lois Ames collection of Sylvia Plath

DATES: 1950–2001

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 7.83 linear feet (13 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: Correspondence, writings, printed material, research material, photographs, and other papers compiled by Lois Ames in order to write a biography of Sylvia Plath.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.ames>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.ames>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from James Cummins Bookseller on the George B. Alvord Fund, Danford N. Barney Jr. Fund, and Extra Pound Archive Fund, 2025.

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Boxes 12-13 (audiovisual material): Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.

Conditions Governing Use

The Lois Ames collection of Sylvia Plath is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Lois Ames collection of Sylvia Plath. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

These materials have been arranged and described according to national and local standards. For more information, please refer to the Yale Archival Processing Manual.

Related Materials

Plath Family papers (YCAL MSS 1369); Janet Malcolm papers (YCAL MSS 935).

LOIS AMES (1931-2022)

Lois (néé Sisson) Ames (1931-2022) was a writer, poet, therapist, and social worker. She grew up in Massachusetts and graduated from Smith College with a bachelor's degree in English. She began writing when she moved to New York City after graduation and later enrolled in a social work program at the University of Chicago before marrying Robert Webb Ames. Ames continued to study social work and psychotherapy and became friends with Anne Sexton during a poetry workshop at Bread Loaf in Vermont. Ted Hughes named her as Sylvia Plath's first official biographer, and she spent years corresponding with Hughes and other people in Plath's life to research for the book which was ultimately never published. Ames wrote the biographical note for Plath in the American publication of *The Bell Jar*. She also co-edited *Anne Sexton: A Self Portrait in Letters* with Anne's daughter, Linda Gray Sexton, after Sexton's death. In her later life, Ames returned to Massachusetts where she practiced psychotherapy. She died in 2022.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains correspondence, photographs, writings, printed materials, and audiovisual materials created by or compiled by Lois Ames for a biography of Sylvia Plath. The bulk of the material was created and assembled during the decade after Plath's death in 1963 when Ames conducted her research.

The correspondence, notes, and audiovisual material capture conversations and interviews intended to deepen Ames's understanding of Plath's life. Included in the collection are materials created by Plath herself such as correspondence to Herbert Hitchen and progress reports for her novel *The Bell Jar*, which she submitted for the Saxton Fellowship. Also present in the collection are writings, periodicals, and books by or about Sylvia Plath, and her ex-husband, Ted Hughes.

Arrangement

This collection is organized into three series: I. Correspondence, 1966-1989; II. Research Material, 1950-2001; and III. Audiovisual material, 1971-1982.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1966–1989

1.08 linear feet (3 boxes)

This series contains correspondence files from Lois Ames's research to write a biography for Sylvia Plath which was ultimately never published. Correspondents include Plath family members, friends, publishers, and other Plath researchers.

Because the materials in this series maintain the original order created by Ames, the files contain a mix of incoming, outgoing, carbons, and drafts of correspondence. Of note among the correspondents are Sylvia's mother, Aurelia Plath, Ted Hughes, and Olwyn Hughes with whom Ames wrote to frequently about the content and progress of the biography.

Also included in this series is third party correspondence from Sylvia Plath.

Materials in this series maintain order found at time of acquisition.

b. 1, f. 1	Alvarez, Al	1966
b. 1, f. 2	Anderson, Karl	1966–1967
b. 1, f. 3	Baskin, Leonard	1967–1973
b. 1, f. 4	Blackwell, Julian	1966
b. 1, f. 5	Bly, Robert	1966
b. 1, f. 6	Bober, Bonnie	1966
b. 1, f. 7	Booth, Philip	1967
b. 1, f. 8	Bradley, Marcia Williams	1966 March 11
b. 1, f. 9	Chase, Mary Ellen	1966 February 24
b. 1, f. 10	Cook, Alison	1966
b. 1, f. 11	Corner, George	1966
b. 1, f. 12	Count, Ellen	undated
b. 1, f. 13	Davenport, Macie	1966
b. 1, f. 14	Davison, Peter	1966–1989
b. 1, f. 15	Degener, Claire	1968–1977
b. 1, f. 16	Donat, Brian	1966 January 20
b. 1, f. 17	Ellmann, Richard	1966–1967
b. 1, f. 18	Fisher, Alfred Young	1967
b. 1, f. 19	Friedberg, Martha	1967
b. 1, f. 20	Goldberg, Max	1967

b. 1, f. 21	Hall, Donald	1966-1967
b. 1, f. 22	Harper and Row	1971-1972
b. 1, f. 23	Harper and Row	1979-1984
b. 1, f. 24	Hitchen, Herbert	1966
b. 1, f. 25	Horder, John	1968-1974
b. 1, f. 26	Hornbeak, Katherine	1966
b. 1, f. 27-28	Hughes, Olwyn	1968-1976
b. 2, f. 1	Hughes, Ted	1965-1975
b. 2, f. 2	Krook, Dorothea	1966
b. 2, f. 3	Kunitz, Elise and Stanley	1966 March 7
b. 2, f. 4	Lameyer, Gordon	1970-1972
b. 2, f. 5	Levenson, Christopher	1966
b. 2, f. 6	Lowell, Elizabeth and Robert	1966
b. 2, f. 7	Mandel, Ann Safford	1966
b. 2, f. 8	McCullough, Frances	1966-1975
b. 2, f. 9	McCurdy, Philip	undated
b. 2, f. 10	Mensel, Mary	1966 February 16
b. 2, f. 11	Merwin, William	1968
b. 2, f. 12	Morgenthaler, Barbara	1966
b. 2, f. 13	Murphy, Richard	1968
b. 2, f. 14-15	Plath, Aurelia	1966-1974
b. 2, f. 16	Prouty, Olive Higgins	undated
b. 2, f. 17	Rage, Henry	1966
b. 2, f. 18	Ray, Gordon	1966
b. 2, f. 19	Robinson, Frances	1966-1967
b. 2, f. 20	Sexton, Anne	1965-1969
b. 2, f. 21	Stern, Richard	1966
b. 2, f. 22	The Tri-Quarterly	1966-1967
b. 2, f. 23	Williams, Edna	1967 January 24
b. 3, f. 1	Other correspondence	1964-1979

b. 3, f. 2	Inquiries regarding Sylvia Plath	1967-1973
b. 3, f. 3	Sylvia Plath correspondence to Herbert Hitchen	1959
b. 3, f. 4	Copies of letters from Sylvia Plath to Anne Sexton	undated

Series II: Research material, 1950–2001*5.42 linear feet (8 boxes)*

This series contains research material compiled by Lois Ames in the process of writing a biography of Sylvia Plath that was ultimately never published. Materials include notes, clippings, original drafts of Sylvia Plath's work, writings about Sylvia Plath, books, periodicals, and ephemera.

Materials in this series are arranged into six subseries: Notes and files; Sylvia Plath materials; Writings; Periodicals; Books; and Ephemera.

	Notes and files	1966–2001
	This subseries contains notes, notebooks, contact information, and other materials related to Lois Ames's research into Sylvia Plath's life in order to write a biography. Included in the material are Ames's requests and receipts for funding received to work on the biography project and as well as an outline for her research. Also included are written notes from conversations and interviews that Ames conducted.	
	Materials in this subseries are arranged chronologically.	
b. 4, f. 1	Index cards	1966–1974
b. 4, f. 2	Funding requests	1966–1971
b. 4, f. 3	Plans for research	1967–1974
b. 4, f. 4	Notes	1968–2001
b. 4, f. 5	Notebook	1971
b. 4, f. 6	Notebook	1972
b. 4, f. 7	Notebook	1974
b. 4, f. 8	Notebook	1982
b. 5, f. 1-2	Materials from Sylvia Plath: Local Roots, Legendary Writer event	1997–2001
b. 5, f. 3	Contact cards	undated
b. 5, f. 4	Notebook	undated
b. 5, f. 5	Notes	undated
	Sylvia Plath materials	1951–1993
	This subseries contains materials created by or related to Sylvia Plath collected by Lois Ames while working on a biography about Plath that was ultimately not published. Included in the materials are photographs of Plath and her family members and copies of her journal and correspondence with Gordon Lameyer. Also included in this subseries are the materials Plath submitted for the Eugene F. Saxton Fellow which feature progress reports for <i>The Bell Jar</i> .	
	Materials in this subseries are arranged chronologically.	
b. 6, f. 1	Photographs	1951–1962
b. 5, f. 6	German 12 notebook	circa 1954
b. 5, f. 7	Eugene F. Saxton Fellowship materials	1958–1967

Sylvia Plath materials (continued)

b. 5, f. 8	Clippings	1966-1993
b. 7, f. 1-3	Copy of Sylvia Plath's journal	undated
b. 7, f. 4	Copy of Sylvia Plath's thesis on Dostoevsky	undated
b. 7, f. 5	Xerox of Gordon Lameyer's letters from 1953	undated
b. 7, f. 6-7	Xerox of Gordon Lameyer's letters from 1954	undated
b. 8, f. 1-2	Xerox of Gordon Lameyer's letters from 1955-1956	undated
	Writings	1966-1973
	This subseries contains copies of writings by or about Sylvia Plath that Lois Ames collected while researching Plath's life.	
	Materials in this subseries are arranged alphabetically by author.	
b. 8, f. 3	"Sylvia Plath" by Al Alvarez	1966
b. 8, f. 4	"A Biographical Note" by Lois Ames	1971
b. 8, f. 5	Draft and notes on Plath by Lois Ames	circa 1970
b. 8, f. 6	"Toward a Life: Sylvia Plath" by Lois Ames	1974
b. 8, f. 7	"The Stress of Living, The Stress of Dying" by Lois Ames	circa 1974
b. 8, f. 8	Personal statements by Lois Ames	circa 1979
b. 8, f. 9	"To ReCollect: A Memoir for Retrieval, Preservation, Reflection, and Instruction" by Lois Ames	circa 1979
b. 8, f. 10	"Notes on the Chronological Order of Sylvia Plath's Poems" by Ted Hughes	1966
b. 8, f. 11-12	"Who is Sylvia?" by Gordon Lameyer	undated
b. 8, f. 13	"Sylvia Plath" by Robert Lowell	1966
b. 8, f. 14	"The Art of Sylvia Plath" by Charles Newman	undated
b. 8, f. 15	"Three Women" by Sylvia Plath	1968
b. 8, f. 16	"The All-Round Image" by Sylvia Plath	undated
b. 8, f. 17	"The Fifty-Ninth Bear" by Sylvia Plath	undated
b. 8, f. 18	"Landscape of Childhood" by Sylvia Plath	undated
b. 8, f. 19	"New Poems" by Sylvia Plath	undated
b. 8, f. 20	Series of poems by Sylvia Plath	undated
b. 8, f. 21	"A Closer Look at Ariel, Sylvia Plath: A Memoir, 1954-1955" by Nancy Hunter Steiner	undated
b. 8, f. 22	"The Poetry of Sylvia Plath" by Helen Vendler	1973

Writings (continued)

b. 8, f. 23	"The Schizoid Personality as Exemplified by the Life and Work of Sylvia Plath" by Judy Whiteley	undated
	Periodicals	1957-1966
	This subseries contains periodicals which contain published writings of Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and their contemporaries that Lois Ames collected while researching Plath's life.	
	Materials in this subseries are arranged chronologically.	
b. 9, f. 1	<i>The Grecourt Review</i> volume 1, number 1	1957 November
b. 9, f. 2	<i>American Poetry Now</i> number 2	circa 1960
b. 9, f. 3	Poetry at the Mermaid souvenir programme	1961
b. 9, f. 4	Handbook of the Cheltenham Festival of Literature	1962
b. 9, f. 5	<i>Critical Quarterly</i> volume 5, number 1	1963
b. 9, f. 6	Festival of Poetry at the Royal Court Theatre booklet	1963
b. 9, f. 7	<i>the Review</i> number 9	1963
b. 9, f. 8	<i>Encounter</i> volume XXI, number 4	1963
b. 9, f. 9	<i>Critical Quarterly Poetry Supplement</i> number 5, New Poetry	1964
b. 9, f. 10	<i>Critical Quarterly Poetry Supplement</i> number 6, American Poetry	1965
b. 9, f. 11	<i>Critical Quarterly Poetry Supplement</i> number 7, New Poems	1966
b. 9, f. 12	<i>Tri-Quarterly</i> number 7	1966
	Books	1959-1998
	This subseries contains books written by Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and their contemporaries which Lois Ames collected while researching Sylvia Plath's life. Also included are books of poetry written by Sylvia and Ted's daughter, Frieda Hughes, as well as fine press editions of Plath and Hughes's works.	
	Materials in this subseries are arranged alphabetically by author.	
b. 10	<i>Sylvia Plath</i> by Eileen Aird	1973
b. 10	<i>Sylvia Plath, method and madness</i> by Edward Butscher	1976
b. 10	<i>Poems</i> by Ruth Fainlight, Ted Hughes, and Alan Sillitoe	1971
b. 10	<i>Sylvia Plath: A Dramatic Portrait</i> by Barry Kyle	1976
b. 10	<i>Wooroloo</i> by Frieda Hughes	1998
b. 10	<i>Birthday Letters</i> by Ted Hughes	1998
b. 10	<i>Crow</i> by Ted Hughes	1971
b. 10	<i>Eat Crow</i> by Ted Hughes	1971
b. 10	<i>The Hawk in the Rain</i> by Ted Hughes	1959

Books (continued)

b. 10	<i>Wodwo</i> by Ted Hughes	1967
b. 10	<i>Ariel</i> by Sylvia Plath	1965
b. 10	<i>Ariel</i> by Sylvia Plath	1966
b. 10	<i>The Bell Jar</i> by Sylvia Plath	1971
b. 11	<i>Crystal Gazer and Other Poems</i> by Sylvia Plath	1971
b. 10	<i>Lyonnesse</i> by Sylvia Plath	1971
b. 10	<i>A Closer Look at Ariel: A Memory of Sylvia Plath</i> by Nancy Hunter Steiner	1973
	Ephemera	1950–1967
	This subseries contains ephemera Lois Ames collected while researching Sylvia Plath's life. Included in the materials are yearbooks from the schools Sylvia attended; Wellesley High School and Smith College.	
	Materials in this subseries are arranged alphabetically.	
b. 11	<i>Hamper</i> , Smith College yearbook	1950
b. 11	<i>Hamper</i> , Smith College yearbook	1951
b. 11	<i>Hamper</i> , Smith College yearbook	1952
b. 11	<i>Hamper</i> , Smith College yearbook	1955
b. 9, f. 13	Poetry International '67 program	1967
b. 11	<i>The Wellesleyan</i> , Wellesley High School yearbook	1950
b. 11	<i>The Wellesleyan</i> , Wellesley High School yearbook	1952

Series III: Audiovisual material, 1971–1982*1.33 linear feet (2 boxes)*

This series contain audiovisual material created by or collected by Lois Ames while researching Sylvia Plath's life. Included in the materials are interviews Ames conducted with friends, family members, and colleagues of Sylvia Plath such as her mother, Aurelia Plath, her ex-boyfriend, Gordon Lameyer, and fellow poet, Ruth Fainlight.

Restricted fragile. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.

Materials in this series are arranged first by carrier type and then alphabetically.

b. 12	Crockett / [Alfred Young ?] Fisher / [Anne?] Sexton	undated
b. 12	Ted Hughes / Richard Murphy / Boston College	1971 March 18
b. 12	Cambridge[?] / Wendy Campbell	1973 September 25
b. 12	Wendy Campbell II	circa 1973 September
b. 12	Ruth Fainlight	1973 September 24
b. 12	William Henry Hughes	1973 September 27
b. 12	Gordon Lameyer	1971 July 19
b. 12	#2 Gordon Lameyer	1971 July 19
b. 13	Interview [with] / [Philip] McCurdy / [regarding] Plath	1982 October 29
b. 13	Aurelia Plath	circa 1970s
b. 13	Plath Journals / 1+2 / [September] 26	circa 1973
b. 13	Plath Journals / 1+2 / [September] 27	circa 1973
b. 13	Plath Journals / 1+2/ 28 [September]	circa 1973
b. 13	Plath Journals / 2nd Day	circa 1973
b. 13	Plath Journals / 2nd Day	circa 1973
b. 13	Plath Journals / 2+1 / Late April/Early May 1958	circa 1973
b. 13	Plath Journals / 4+3 / 1958 (Jan?) Autumn Summer	circa 1973
b. 13	Plath Journals / 5	circa 1973

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Genres / Formats

Audiovisual material -- United States -- 20th
Century
Correspondence
Interviews
Photographs -- 20th Century
Research notes

Subjects

Biography
Poets, American -- 20th Century
Poets, American -- 20th Century --
Correspondence
Writers, American -- 20th Century

Occupations

Poets -- 20th Century

Names

Hughes, Ted, 1930-1998
Plath, Sylvia