

A Method of Verso Description

JOHN WOODROW PRESLEY

THE DESCRIPTION OF MANUSCRIPT ITEMS which exist only on verso sides has long been difficult for archivists, and the difficulty is compounded when the verso material happens to be unrelated to the recto side. How can an inventory or calendar efficiently locate and describe the verso material for users of the collection without destroying the order of the recto sides.

I faced this problem recently while compiling a descriptive inventory of the Robert Graves collection at Southern Illinois University. This collection includes prose manuscripts dating from 1922 to 1965, 524 pages of poetry manuscripts from 1964-1965, and letters from Graves's correspondents during the 1920s, including Siegfried Sassoon, T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, and others. Besides the collection's obvious appeal to the literary critic and historian, it presented a curious problem for an archivist, since almost half of the material in the collection is scattered throughout the collection, on the verso sides of other, unrelated prose or poetry drafts.

Apparently, Graves often wrote the first draft of a work on the back of a late draft (sometimes a carbon typescript or printer's copy) of his previous composition; occasionally, he even uses the back of letters for compositions. Since *Wife to Mr. Milton* (1943) is chronologically one of the first manuscripts so treated, I assume the thrifty habit was developed during the World War II paper shortage in England. Graves continued the practice, however, making the collection much more extensive than it would appear at first glance to be.

The collection remains in the order in which it was received from Graves, though often the recto sides, which he placed in consistent pagination, are less "important" than the unordered versos. For example, large fragments of three late typescripts of the collected *Poems and Satires* (1951) appear on the versos of pages making up the printer's copy of *The Cross and the Sword*, one of Graves's rather minor translations. Similarly, *Work in Hand*, consisting of Graves's poems along with those of Norman Cameron and Alan Hodges, exists only on 82 verso pages. Though the *Work in Hand* typescript is probably more important, since it is a revised late draft, it is in nonsequential order so that the rectos, typescripts of *Watch the Northwind Rise* and *Wife to Mr. Milton*, are sequential. Even though these novels are of lesser importance (as I think Graves's public statements about his prose and his poetry indicate), the collection maintains Graves's original order—the problem facing the compiler of an inventory is obviously to guide a scholar to this verso material *even in its nonsequential order*.

To describe the collection, I divided the manuscripts and letters into generic categories. Within these categories, manuscripts were listed alphabetically by published title; letters and multiple drafts were arranged chronologically under the title heading. Manuscripts edited or revised by Graves have been treated, for the purpose of categorizing, as if they had been written wholly by Graves. Verso entries were

included alphabetically among these recto entries, so that each manuscript in the collection was represented alphabetically, in the same list, for convenience.

The form of each descriptive entry was developed from the form used by Kenneth Lohf in his *The Literary Manuscripts of Hart Crane*. I added only a locator number which is a coded reference to the physical location of the manuscript within the collection. The locator number 20/11, for example, means that a manuscript is to be found in folder 11 of box 20. Further divisions within each folder utilize acid-free paper to separate discrete items such as chapters of prose works, single poetry drafts, or groups of related poetry drafts.

The form for each descriptive entry is as follows:

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Index number: | Published title. Type of item, number of pages, medium. Locator number. |
| Title: | the title as it appears in the manuscript, if a title appears. |
| First line: | the first line of the item, as it appears in the manuscript. |
| Collation: | description of the pagination, number of sheets, composites, etc. |
| Date: | a date is given when one appears on the manuscript. |
| Contents: | description of the manuscript, identification as early or late draft, notes, outline, worksheet, etc. Identification of handwriting and medium in which revisions are made. Any other information necessary to an understanding of the manuscript's content or precedence. |

The entries for verso manuscripts are noted by the word *Verso* appearing before the locator number and by expansion of the collation line to include multiple locator numbers. Since nearly all the verso material is in nonsequential order, and extends throughout several folders or boxes, a typical verso collation line looks like this:

Collation: 21/01: 12 pp. (1-7, 8, 11, 14, 17, 21).
21/02: 3 pp. (9, 12-13).

This line means that twelve pages of the verso material are on the verso sides of whatever manuscript is in folder 1 of box 21, and three pages are on the verso of the manuscript in folder 2 of box 21. The page numbers which appear on the versos are given in parentheses after the total number of verso pages. Occasionally, two or more separate drafts of one work with similar or even near-identical pagination will be found on the verso of a single manuscript. Since there are seldom more than twenty pages in each folder, close citation of page numbers and other descriptive details (medium, handwriting, titles, revisions, etc.) allow an investigator to sort out each discrete item.

Here are four sample verso entries, with two recto entries included for comparison:

1. *Proceed, Sergeant Lamb*. TMs, 60 pp., carbon. Versos 22/16-23/05.
Collation: 22/16: 8 pp. (216d-f, 217, 254-256, 256a).
23/01: 15 pp. (67-73, 75-77, 81, 84-87).
23/02: 21 pp. (46-64, 66, 245).
23/03: 9 pp. (244, 246, 246a, 247-252).
23/05: 7 pp. (237-243).
Content: part of a late carbon typescript, with corrections in ink. Rectos are AMs drafts of *Wife to Mr. Milton*.
2. *Pharsalia*. TMs, 146 pp., carbon. Versos 1/03-20/09.
Title: LUCAN / DRAMATIC EPISODES / IN / THE CIVIL WARS /
translated by / ROBERT GRAVES / 1955
Collation: 1/03: 1 p. (66).
1/09: 1 p. (247).
2/03: 27 pp. (130-135, 137-140, 142-144, 97, 99-102, 104-106, 108-112, 114).

2/04: 35 pp. (31-44, 48, 52-53, 55, 57-59, 61-65, 67, 69-70, 72, 122, 125, 127-129).

2/07: 3 pp. (241, 201, 124).

2/10: 20 pp. (206-209, 211-226).

2/12: 35 pp. (238, 240, 244-245, 247, 156, 163-164, 166, 169, 171, 172, 174-176, 178-182, 184-187, 192-195, 203).

2/14: 22 pp. (title page, 1-3, 5, 8-10, 12, 14-19, 21-26, 233-234).

20/09: 2 pp. (236-237).

Content: major portion of a late draft of *Pharsalia*, with Graves's corrections (ink). Editorial markings are in pencil. This is apparently the last draft before typing a fair copy; there are only a few minor differences between this draft, as corrected, and the published versions. Rectos are AMs and TMs drafts of *The Anger of Achilles*.

3. "Sappy Blancmange." TMs, 3 pp. black ribbon. Versos 2/08.

Title: (from the Uneconomist) / SAPPY BLANCMANGE MANAGEMENT NORTH OF THE TWEED / by Dr. Jeremiah McMareswame / (Fogo & Buck, 135 pp., 5 guineas)

First line: *Ceteris paribus*, Dr. Jeremiah McMareswame's latest survey is likely to

Collation: 2/08: 3 pp. (1-3).

Content: a late draft, with Graves's corrections (ink). Rectos are TMs draft of *The Anger of Achilles*.

4. *They Hanged My Saintly Billy*. TMs, 25 pp., red and black ribbon. Versos 9/03-22/11.

Collation: 9/03: 4 pp. (153-156).

9/05: 13 pp. (20-22, 35, 126-127, 158-161, 165-166, 167).

17/06: 6 pp. (144-145, 148, 150-151, one unnumbered sheet).

22/11: 2 pp. (142-149).

Content: a fragment of the printer's copy of *They Hanged My Saintly Billy*, with corrections in ink and printer's notations (red pencil). Rectos include a TMs fragment from *The White Goddess*.

5. *The White Goddess*. TMs, 2 pp., ink. 22/11.

First line: When recently I wrote on this subject to Dr. MacAlister, as the

Collation: 2 full sheets numbered 85-86.

Content: part of an early draft, with Graves's corrections (ink, red ink).

6. Chapter 3, *Wife to Mr. Milton*. AMs, 29 pp., ink. 23/01.

Title: How I First Saw Their Majesties, / and Another / Chapter III

First line: When / any girl loves her self so much that

Collation: 29 sheets numbered 1-17, 17a-b, 18-28, Page 7 is a cut slip.

Content: early draft of the chapter, with Graves's correction (ink, red crayon).

This system of cross-reference allows an investigating scholar to follow a verso manuscript easily, as sections of it appear first on the back of one manuscript, then another, throughout the collection, even though it may have been "shuffled" before Graves turned it over to write another work. Furthermore, the system allows for a standardization of entry form and a certain efficiency, since it does not require multiple entries for the verso items.

Control of manuscript groups is often complicated by the problem of scattered verso material, much of the material perhaps not apparent to users of these collections. The Graves collection at Southern Illinois may be unique in the amount of verso material it includes (and by the fact that nearly all the loose-leaf material was first placed in order by Graves himself); however, I think that inventories of collections which include this sort of material could be made simpler and more usable by including reference to physical location in each entry, and by planning the storage of each collection to facilitate such reference.