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The James Merrill Digital Archive: Channeling the Collaborative Spirit(s)

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The James Merrill Digital Archive:
Channeling the collaborative spirit(s)

Shannon Davis, Digital Library Services Manager
Joel Minor, Curator of Modern Literature Collection/Manuscripts
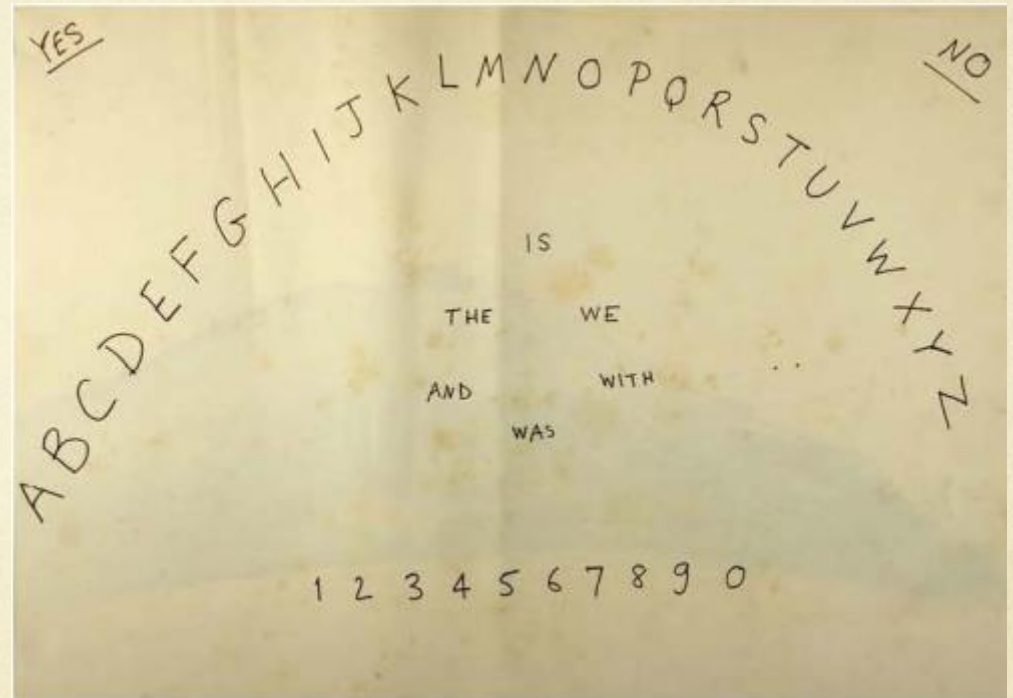Washington University in St. Louis

James Merrill – the poet

James Merrill Papers

The Ouija Board and "The Book of Ephraim"

Collaboration: faculty, students & staff

ARTS & SCIENCES | Washington University in St.Louis

Humanities Digital Workshop

Summer Workshops: Each summer, the HDW organizes a summer workshop

DIGITAL LIBRARY SERVICES

LIBRARIES DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Faculty

Initial direction for project

Help set priorities

Recruit undergraduate/ graduate students

Liaison with Merrill's literary executors

Students

Digitize transcripts, drafts, and other materials (1700+ pages)

OCR and transcription (Section A completed)

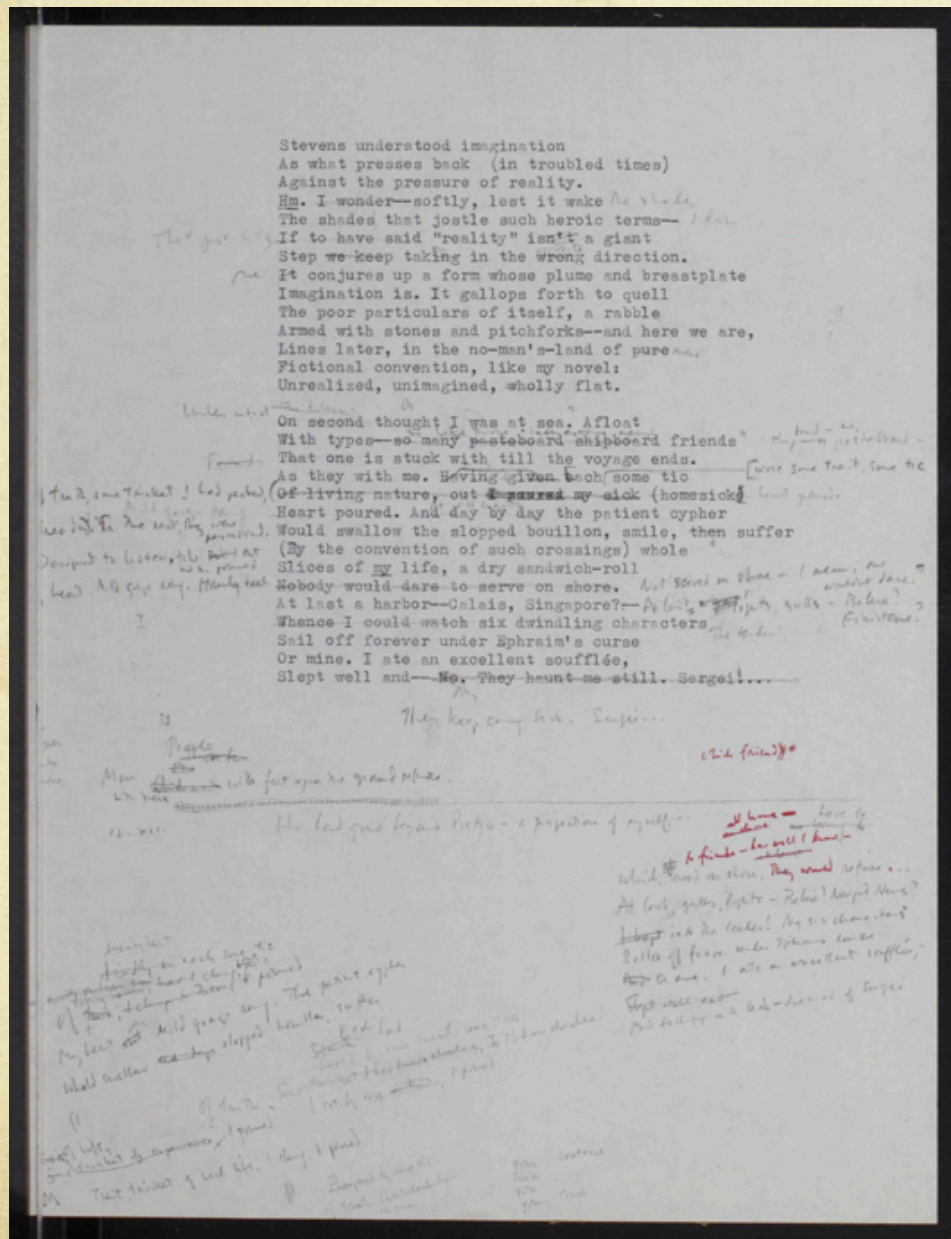Set up comparison of drafts using Juxta collation software

Staff

Organize and provide access to paper materials

Train students on scanning, transcription, and encoding

Create TEI XML document models

Oversee creation of Omeka digital exhibit – design, custom coding, configuration of plug-ins

Students: images + metadata

Manuscripts Digitized Items - MSS083

Title:
Divine Comedies - Typescripts/manuscripts - "The Book of Ephraim"

Creator:
Merrill, James

Contributor:

Publisher:

Date:
undated

Subject:
Merrill, James, 1926-1995--Divine Comedies

Description:
Typescript draft--recto only; Each leaf of draft has a holograph (page) number in the upper lefthand corner of recto; pencil is used for corrections to draft; Greek inscription in red pen by Merrill to Manos Karastefaris on title page, June 12, 1975.

☑ Insert item
Source:
James Merrill Papers (MSS083) folder 5394.2

Coverage:

Physical Format and Extent:
60 letter-size leaves of draft. Recto only.

Digital Format and Extent:
60 jpeg images. 600ppi

Genre Type:
Manuscripts

Format Type:
text

Language:
English

Staff: Omeka exhibit

The James Merrill Digital Archive:
Materials for The Book of Ephraim

Advanced Search

SEARCH

A | A | A/B | B | B | B/C | C | C | C/D | D | D | D/G | G | L | L | L | L/X | X | X/Z | Z | Z/0 | &

MERRILL IN PROCESS
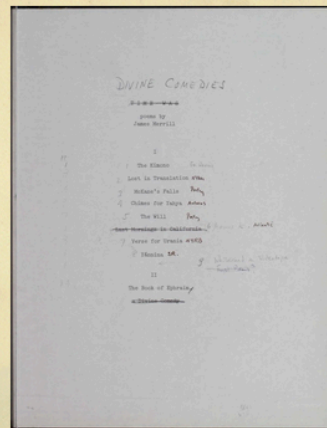
OUIJA TRANSCRIPTS

THE BOOK OF EPHRAIM

ABOUT MERRILL'S WORK

JAMES MERRILL RESOURCES
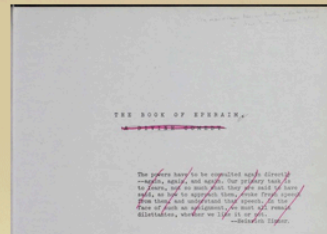
ABOUT THE DIGITAL ARCHIVE

CONTACT & CREDITS

A

The twenty-two selections of manuscripts and typescripts to which we link here are keyed to the alphabetically organized sections of *The Book of Ephraim*.

Gathered in this section are several groups of manuscripts and typescripts that illustrate several stages in the development of the poem, drawn from various sections of *The Book of Ephraim*, with a few relevant Ouija transcript materials. There are also a few materials at the end of this section of the archive which indicate early work looking forward towards *Mirabell* and *The Changing Light at Sandover*. We have used the letters that mark each section of *The Book of Ephraim*, e.g. "A" begins the first section with "Admittedly I err . . ." and B with "Backdrop," to indicate the relationship between the drafts in the archive and the finished poem, and to give shape to the portion of materials in Merrill's process archived here. Like Merrill, we have also drawn from other characters on the Ouija board to indicate other materials ("0" "&") where appropriate, usually reflecting either Ouija transcripts, or drafts from works that look outside *The Book of Ephraim*.

We have not sought to provide explanatory commentary on these manuscripts, although in a few instances we offer some orientation as to what stage in composition is witnessed by a given image.

THE BOOK OF EPHRAIM

Merrill's first epic poem, part of his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, Divine Comedies
Chronicles the Ouija sessions of Merrill and his partner conversing with the spirit, Ephraim

OUIJA TRANSCRIPTS

Merrill transcribed each Ouija session by hand, then typed the transcripts up later for use in his poetry
The James Merrill Papers hold over 500 leaves of transcripts, all available in the JMDA

MERRILL IN PROCESS

Notes, manuscripts and typescripts documenting the development of each section of the poem
Curated by Washington University graduate students – a work-in-progress

Staff: Omeka exhibit

Ouija Transcripts

Sections are labeled by archival folder number, which are arranged by format (bound, notebook, and looseleaf) and then chronologically within each group.

Folder 2955	1975:11 May - 1977: 3 November; 1990: 7 April
Folder 2956	1977: September 16 - 1987: February 22
Folder 2957	1977: May 19 - 1977: May 29.
Folder 2958	1978: July 28 - 1979: 16 March.
Folder 2959	1980: July 31 - 1986: 7 March
Folder 2960	1978: 1980: August 27 - 1994: 15 September.
Folder 2961	1980: October 19 - 1981: March 17, n.d.
Folder 2963	1983: 28 January - 1992: 3 September.
Folder 2964	1986: 16 December - 1991: 2 September
Folder 2965	1988: 13 January - 1990: 14 October
Folder 2966	1991: 5 January - 1992: 19 March
Folder 2967	1953: 14 November - 1994: 15 September
Folder 2968	1955: 2 September
Folder 2969	1961: 18 October - 1985: 25 August
Folder 2970	1953: 11 July -1979: September 2
Folder 2971	1935;1968: 22 July
Folder 2972	1935;1968: 22 July
Folder 2973	1975: 2 March - 1966: 11 September
Folder 2974	1979: 16 September - 1986: 7 March
Folder 2975	1979: 12 August - 1985: 1 March

Staff: Omeka exhibit

Ouija Transcripts

Sections are labeled by archival folder number, which are arranged by format (bound, notebook, and looseleaf) and then chronologically within each group.

Folder 2955   1975:11 May - 1977: 3 November; 1990: 7 April

View Folder 2955

Title
Ouija Material - Ouija Transcripts - pages 1-184

Subject Merrill, James, 1926-1995--Ouija Material
Subject Authority: LCSH

Description
Bound typescript manuscript; typescript on recto only; black binding; James Merrill Connecticut address in handwritten with purple pen on inside of front cover; red pen holograph notes also on inside of front cover; holograph corrections in pencil, red and black pen on recto and verso; holograph page numbers written in black pen in upper righthand corner of manuscript; yellow and pink highlighter used throughout manuscript; woman's facial image sketched on verso of manuscript; other images sketched on recto and verso; James Merrill letterhead with typescript and holograph corrections taped to verso of manuscript; newspaper clipping taped to verso side;

Creator
Merrill, James

Source
James Merrill Papers (MSS083) folder 2955

Date
1975:11 May - 1977: 3 November; 1990: 7 April

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Relation Series III Ouija Materials

Format
text
184 letter-size pages. Recto only.

11.v.75 LST MES CHERS I AM APPOINTED SPOKESMAN FOR THEM/ DO
NOT FEAR. NOW THE MESSAGE: WE MUST IMPROVE THE LINE FOR LIFE AGAIN
A T NINE. QUITE CLEAR THEY WANT THAT PAIR OF LINES/ AUTRE FOIS:
WE MUST IMPROVE THE LINE FOR LIFE AGAIN AT 9. (Where to put it?)
AT Z. THIS PAIR OF LINES: WE MUST IMPROVE THE LINE FOR LIFE AGAIN
AT NINE. LIFE AGAIN AT NINE/ FOUR WORDS. JM: That moment when Bob
calls--a bad connection--the telephone line--how to get thrugh a)
the connection b) the poem c) life, d) the stages below 9--all of
that. JM THAT IS YR GENIUS U HAVE JUST SAID WHAT THEY SAID U WOULD
EXACTLY/ D: We talked once about souls like Montezume returning from
9 into life. AND THAT TALK STOPPED ABRUPTLY. NOW I AM GIVEN THIS
HONOR THEY SUMMONED ME AND QUITE TOUCHINGLY SAID "WE PARALYZE THEM
WITH OUR DIRECT WAYS THEY TRUST U SPEAK FOR US" Ah, and they were
nice to you, we're so glad. STAR OF THE GARTER WRAPPED IN THOSE
GREAT BLACK WINGS AS AT MY MOTHERS BREAST QUITE THE BELLE I MUST
SAY   MM RATHER CONTEMPTUOUS JEALOUSY
MM: PRIDE SET GOETH U KNOW WHEN/ TONAKI MOU OK? (Dr says he has
bloodpressure of a child) AND TEETH OF A HAG. AG MADDENING I AM
REMINDED OF LA PETITE GIVING COMMANDS TACTLESS MAD FOR PRUNING. E
MUST CALM DOWN GS "INSUFFERABLE" THE FAVORITE WORD. Is GS there?
IN A WHILE what about M 7 Jackson? D is desperate. THINK HOW
REWARDING + HOW IN TIME SHORT Will it be short? VERY TOK TOK NO AIR
OF LIFE ABOUT THEM --so they'll suffocate? THEY DO IT NOW BUT HOW
GRATEFUL I AM THAT IT WAS SHORT FOR ME MINUTES THREE I KNEW, WAS
HORRIFIED THEN SAW THE JOKE Ah, my dear... JM MON ENFANT COMME TU
ES SAGE VERY PROUD MAMAN.INSUFFERABLE
MB: A TRIUMPH MY DEAR HOW I ENVY YOU THAT IS A GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENT
+ WE ALL GLOW
WS: IMPRESSED INDEED SO IT IS WITH A GOOD WORK WORTHY THEY ALL
WONDER WHY THEY DID NOT THINK OF IT (he redictates WORK WORTHY) SORRY
TO CORRECT PROOF I was sorry to put words into your mouth WE SAY U
TOOK THEM OUT   Can you tell me about the Scribe? ROMANTICALLY HAVENT
WE ALL HAD A MUSE? NOT SUCH A ROMANTIC IDEA AS IT TURNS OUT SCRIBES
SEEM TO BE ASSIGNED WHEN A WORK CLICKS (Shaw said all books worth
reading are dictated by the Holy Spirit) MAD THAT HE KNEW GBS EXACTLY
AND THERE IS NO ACCIDENT WHAT REMAINS IS IMMORTAL FOR THOSE R THE
SCRIBED WORKS IMMORTAL WORKS ARE IN ALL CULTURES + A SIGNAL CALLS THE
SCRIBE TO THE SIDE OF THE ARTIST OTHER TIMES NO CLICK NO SCRIBE NO
IMMORTALITY I CALLED THE SCRIBE IMAGINATION WHICH SHOWED MY LACK OF IT
I THINK IT IS AN ENERGY MY OWN SENSES DIM FROM TIME TO TIME AS IF I
WAS TAPPED Like a tree for syrup HERE I MEAN SOMEONETHERE IS WORKING
AT THOSE TIMES + NEEDS THAT PARTICULAR SENSE OF A POET IT IS LIKE A
TREE JM SAID SAP I SAY THE WHOLE THING GROWS IN HEAVEN + IS USED ON
EARTH SAP PULP TRUNK + BRANCH THE ROOTS REMAIN (in heaven) YES   AND
GIVES US OUR FIRES TOO. (Dj: It's all one process?) EVEN AS THE PULP
GIVES US THE PAPER WE WRITE ON Time is short. Can we have E Back? IF
HE DEIGNS   E: MY DAY IN COURT THALALA (you'd been so grim about Them
before) NOT AT ALL CHARMING WHEN YOU GET TO KNOW THEM (Is there any
truth in that funny remark?) ppp NO The cup slides silly off. We call
him back--I'm drinking a phial of Vivacidol. HEMLOCK? HA HA HA HA
THE PRACTICAL JOKER IS VULGAR--MM/ NOW WE WORK BON VOYAGE JM WE WILL
KISS U AS U FLY BY GRAND SUCCESS VINDICATED ALL DOWN THE LINE

Students & Staff: encoding + guidelines

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      <subst>
        <add place="superlinear">the very</add>
        <del rend="strikethrough"><unclear/></del>
      </subst> individuality</l>
    <l><del rend="strikethrough">The very personality I <unclear reason="illegible" quantity="2" unit="words"/></del></l>
    <l>I most <unclear reason="illegible" quantity="1" unit="chars"/></l>
    <l>longed to be free of. What I'd written</l>
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tion="#pink-marker"/>
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scend.</l>
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<unclear reason="illegible" quantity="3" unit="words"/></add></restore>
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    </subst><del rend="strikethrough" rendition="#pencil">I <subst rendition="#pencil">
      <add>wrote</add>
      <del>sketched</del>
    </subst>,</del></l>
```
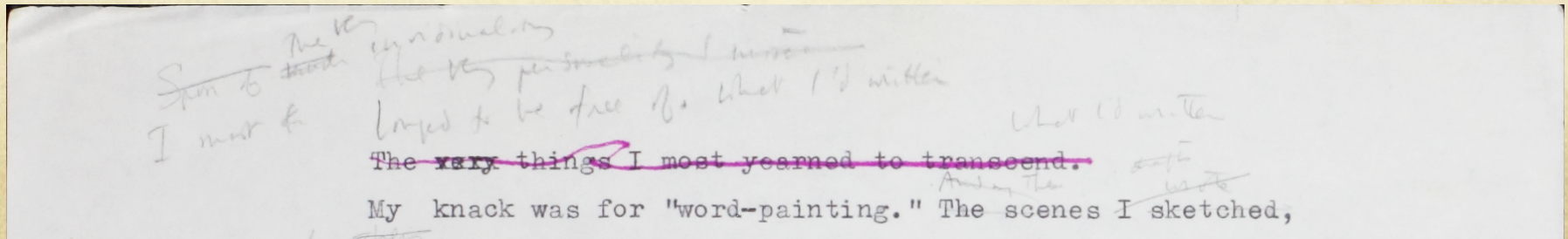
Faculty, staff, and students: next steps

XML encoding of all sections of The Book of Ephraim

Incorporating Juxta comparisons into website

Magnifying glass/zoom feature for images

Revising Merrill In Process to show Merrill's iterative writing style

James Merrill Symposium at Washington University, October 22-23, 2015

Questions?

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joelminor @ wustl.edu