

Digital Mitford Paleography: Tips for Transcribing Mitford Letters

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MRM HANDWRITING & SEMANTIC MARKUP:

- MRM often does not pick up her pen between a capital letter I and the next word. “I am” may appear as “Iam.”
- MRM uses the long s as seen in pre-19th c. printed texts. These look like a lower case f. “necessary” may appear as “necefsary.” Procefs = “process.” Transcribe as two lower case s’s.
- Lower case t’s are sometimes not clearly crossed (the cross can sometimes be seen close beside the upright of the letter t and merges into it.).
- MRM’s capital B’s and M’s are pointy instead of rounded.

MRM PUNCTUATION, CAPITALIZATION, SPELLING:

- Record all dashes and punctuation. MRM often uses dashes instead of conventional end punctuation like periods. Record dashes as -- (two hyphens). Don’t leave space on either side of the dashes.
- Retain all capital letters used by MRM, even when they are non-standard.
- Retain MRM spellings in the transcription but you may add standard spelling (as “choice” tag) when you tag.
- EXAMPLE: MRM often spells “yours” with an apostrophe: “your’s.” Particularly true when signing letters. Transcribe as MRM spells, but tag as choice.

MRM SYMBOLS & METAMARKS:

- MRM often uses an ampersand-like symbol to stand for “and.” It looks like + or &. Code as &, using the tag for ampersands (Use &);).
- MRM often uses a caret symbol (^) to insert additional words above or below the main line of text.
- MRM sometimes uses a wavy line to represent a paragraph break or change of topic; she called these “jerks.”

SEMANTIC/STRUCTURAL MARKUP:

- Note paragraphing changes but do not note MRM line breaks (other than those for the opener and the closer of the letter, which need special coding).
- If MRM breaks a word between lines, do not transcribe the hyphen used in the break. Only transcribe MRM hyphenation when it occurs within a line and represents MRM's characteristic rendering/spelling of the word.

DECIPHERABILITY:

- Record obliterated words. Try to decipher the words or letters scribbled out. Minimally, decide whether it is a single letter, a single word, or more than one word obliterated.
- Note tears or blots in ms. and try to supply or decipher the words torn.
- Note any stray marks, numbers, or words written in a different "hand," (handwriting and/or different pen or pencil or crayon) from MRM's in the main text.

ENVELOPES, PAPER, POSTMARKS:

Often MRM folds the letter to mail and used the back page or part of it to address the letter, so there is no envelope.

Note how many times the paper was folded. Often, MRM's letters are folded in half then folded again in thirds.

Envelopes or address text blocks usually have more than one postmark and may have as many as three postmarks and a posting fee indicated.