Universiteit Leiden
The Netherlands

The tale of the Manx cat: recounting early modern authorship
Akkerman, N.N.W.

Citation
Akkerman, N. N. W. (2024). *The tale of the Manx cat: recounting early modern authorship*. Leiden. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3748339

Version: Publisher's Version
License: Leiden University Non-exclusive license
Downloaded from: https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3748339

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Prof.dr. Nadine N.W. Akkerman

The Tale of the Manx Cat:
Recounting Early Modern Authorship

Universiteit Leiden

Bij ons leer je de wereld kennen

The Tale of the Manx Cat:
Recounting Early Modern Authorship

Inaugural Lecture by

Prof.dr. Nadine N.W. Akkerman

on the acceptance of her position as professor of

Early Modern Literature & Culture

at Leiden University

on Friday 3 May 2024

Universiteit Leiden

Madam rector magnificus, dear faculty board, your excellency madam ambassador, ladies and gentlemen,

But, you may say, we asked you to speak about early modern literature and culture – what has that got to do with a Manx Cat? I will try to explain.[1]

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) developed two lectures she gave in 1928 at the two women-only colleges at Cambridge University, Newnham and Girton, concerning the state of 'Women and Fiction'. The publication of the lectures predated the first official awarding of degrees to women in Cambridge by some twenty years. (Cambridge had established a woman's college as early as 1869, the first in the country, but women were not allowed to attend lectures without prior approval of the lecturers, had no access to libraries or laboratories, and were not awarded degrees).

The lectures are presented as a story in which the narrator is referred to as Mary. It is often hard to distinguish one Mary from the next, as any early modern historian will tell you, but for all her protestations that her story is fictionalized, Woolf's Mary is a thinly-veiled version of the author (Fig. 1). In calling her(self) Mary, however, her experience becomes the experience of generations of women throughout the centuries.[2]

It is this female figure who experiences an epiphany brought on by the sight of a Manx cat sitting on a college lawn.

As with most religious or semi-religious awakenings, the individual must be in a suitably receptive state. While generally achieved through fasting or delirium caused by illness, Mary's state was brought on by rather more mundane circumstances, namely two encounters with forbidding male authority figures.

Let us consider her first encounter, which came as she walked through the university grounds, meandering along like the rivers of her fictionalised Oxbridge, a portmanteau of the

1. Photo of Virginia Woolf, June 1923. Artist: Lady Ottoline Morrell. Vintage snapshot print, 92mm x 61mm, Ax141310. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

university towns Oxford and Cambridge, contemplating her forthcoming lecture. Her train of thought was interrupted by the actions of a beadle, 'a curious-looking object', who started to wave furiously at her. 'His face expressed horror and indignation', she noted. She understood her transgression immediately. She had trespassed. She was, after all, a woman, and she was walking on the grass, a surface reserved for Fellows and scholars. The gravel was the place for her. Naturally, when she returned to her proper place, the beadle's arms lowered and his face 'assumed its usual repose'. Gravel made for a less comfortable walk than grass, but at least the

natural order had been restored. Frankly, 'no very great harm' had been done, other than her having lost her train of thought (p. 5).[3]

Her second encounter came as a result of her walking contemplation – she decided to let herself be inspired by a poet and essayist of the previous century, Charles Lamb (1775-1834) (p. 6). It is perhaps no coincidence that Mary, in her search for women authors to serve as role models, thought of this man: Lamb was most famous for a children's book *Tales from Shakespeare*, a prose-version of the playwright's works that he co-wrote with his sister, yet another Mary (1764-1847). Here the past tense suggests an equal partnership that in reality was not: as with two other books they would 'co-write', two-thirds had been authored by Mary (Charles worked only on the tragedies). Yet it was published under his name in 1807; Mary was not acknowledged as co-author until the 7th edition in 1838 – a delay likely relating not only to her womanhood but presumably also because she had killed their mother in a fit of insanity.[4] The invisible presence of the mentally unstable Mary Lamb, then, foreshadows the take on Shakespeare's fictional sister, Judith, that is found in *A Room of One's Own*: the social structures in place would have pushed any gifted woman who possessed such genius into insanity.

But I digress. It was not Mary Lamb's versions of Shakespeare's comedies that our Mary took as her inspiration, however, but Charles Lamb's essay on one of John Milton's (1608-74) manuscripts of the poem *Lycidas*.

As luck would have it, Mary's thoughts turned to Charles (or his sister) at the very moment she happened to be passing the very library in which Milton's holograph manuscript was held: it seemed that serendipity was knocking. Without thinking (and without herself knocking first), she pushed open the library door. Cue the second outraged male, a figure wearing a 'black gown' who appeared instantly, as if from the library's very walls. 'He waved me back,' she said, with the words 'Ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction'. There would be no possibility of a close reading that day. Nor, it transpired, would there be on any other day, as the incident led her to swear never to set foot in such a library again (pp. 6-7).

It was after taking a sumptuous luncheon, which we know must have been at a "normal" college,[5] that she spotted the 'little absurd, poor beast, without a tail, in the middle of the lawn' – the Manx cat (pp. 10-12).

But the topic of my talk is early modern literature and culture. Let's stop meandering alongside rivers. Cut, therefore, to the public British Library – still the undigitized British Museum at that juncture – where Woolf (or, at least, her narrator) reads selected works by the 17th-century female author Margaret Cavendish (1623-73; Fig. 2). Cavendish had fled England for the continent in 1644 due to the ongoing Civil Wars, married in France and thenceforth lived in Antwerp working on her books until her return home following the Restoration of 1660. She was nothing if not prolific, producing 24 plays, lectures, letters and essays, a series of narrative poems and stories (both realistic and fantastic), an autobiography, a biography of her husband, six philosophical tracts and a utopia. She was particularly proud of her natural philosophical writings, which included over 100 poems on atoms, and gave presentation copies of her collected works to the major libraries in Cambridge, Oxford, and Antwerp, as well as to our university library here in Leiden. It remains here still, its printing errors corrected by hand, and is one of my favourites of our holdings.[6]

Woolf's Mary, however, was not impressed. In fact, she considered Cavendish's work to be like the Manx cat: 'disfigured and deformed'; mutilated; lesser, laughable (p. 56). Mary's judgement was perhaps clouded by reading Cavendish's contemporary Dorothy Osborne (1627-95), whose correspondence she admired for its lucid literary style. In the *very week* she gave her two lectures in Cambridge,

2. Line engraving of Margaret Cavendish, late 17th century. Artists: Pieter Louis van Schuppen & Abraham Diepenbeeck. Paper, 274mm x 159 mm, D30185. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Woolf's review of the Oxford University Press edition of Osborne's correspondence was published in the *Times Literary Supplement*: she deplored the letter writer's later retreat into silence.[7] Following her marriage, Dorothy had slipped into the more traditional role expected of a diplomat's wife, supporting her husband's career: never again would she write letters containing the vivid characterisations that Woolf had so loved. In a later essay, Woolf would reiterate her lament.[8] It was in one of the letters from before her marriage, which Woolf cites in her 1928 review and again in that later essay, as well as in *A Room of One's Own*, that Osborne declared Cavendish to be no less than a model of that modern misogynistic trope, the cat lady. Cavendish was, she said, crazier than crazy. 'There [are] many more soberer People in Bedlam', she wrote. 'Sure, the poor woman is a little distracted, she could never be so ridiculous else as to venture at writing books, and in verse too'. (Charles Lamb 'loved' Cavendish, Woolf's Mary tells us, but we know he forgave women their insanity) (pp. 56-7).[9] Having dispensed with Cavendish, she explored the museum's collection further, and while she found that women 'were the most discussed animal in the universe' (p. 24), and whole libraries were written *about* them, she came to the conclusion that, in the early modern period at least, hardly any of them were what she called her predecessors, true *autors* (letter-writers did not count). Those handful she found, Cavendish amongst them, lacked a certain something. Their writings were 'quaint rather than beautiful'. 'It is strange,' Mary suggests, 'what a difference a tail makes' (p. 12); the phallic symbolism is at this point hard to miss. (It is no coincidence that 'Manx' is a genitive, meaning 'derived from Man').

Woolf's rather damning opinion of women's writing of the early modern period was the received wisdom for some 50 years – until the moment we literary scholars set foot in archives and university libraries – and is still the view that every course on early modern women's writing seeks to have fully discredited by the end of Week 1. I, too, start with *A Room of One's Own* in my MA Course 'Shakespeare's Sisters', reassuring my students that Judith Shakespeare did not kill herself in despair as Woolf imagined: there are hundreds of Judiths out there (and they are not afraid to behead their own Holofernes).

I have already hinted at it, but one reason for Woolf's blindness to those writers who preceded her in the 16th and 17th centuries was simply that their works were largely languishing within the very university libraries that refused her entrance, and that she subsequently refused to enter. Cavendish published in print but, in doing so, was an exception; most women authors of the period, Osborne included, did not. Their primary production took the form of manuscript, that is, handwritten documents. Such female-authored documents were rarely collected, properly catalogued, edited and published, unless, like Osborne's, they involved an important man (in her case, her future husband, Sir William Temple). When Woolf wrote her review of Osborne in 1928, she referred to the latest print edition of a correspondence first published in 1888. Neither she nor Mary mentions Dorothy's original letters which they could have perused in the British Museum (it had acquired them shortly after 1888),[10] if only they had been furnished with a letter of recommendation granting them access to the sanctity of the manuscript room.

Had Woolf had access to the Wren Library, Trinity College, in Cambridge, the barely-fictionalised library in which Mary had hoped to view Milton's manuscript of *Lycidas*, she might have discovered other, then unpublished treasures such as the richly detailed commonplace books of Anne Sadleir (1585-1670), or the Psalms begun by the great canonical writer Sir Philip Sidney (1554-86) and revised after his death by his sister Mary Sidney (1561-1621), Countess of Pembroke, now considered one of the more accomplished women authors of the period.[11]

Make no mistake, there she would also have stumbled upon many male-authored manuscripts, like Milton's handwritten *Lycidas*. Heaven alone knows what she would have made of it had she done so. We know Lamb's reaction: horror. Having previously been familiar only with a printed version, he had considered Lycidas 'a full-grown beauty […] till, in an evil hour, [he] was shown the original written copy'. He saw the library's continued holding of this and some of Milton's other manuscripts, 'like some treasure, to be proud of', as the greatest perversity. Years later he still regretted that he had not thrown Milton's scraps in the river Cam 'or sent them after the latter cantos of Spenser [1552?-99], into the Irish Channel'.

> How it staggered me to see the fine things in their ore! interlined, corrected! as if their words were mortal, alterable, displaceable at pleasure! […] as if inspiration were made up of parts, and those fluctuating, successive, indifferent!

Seeing the poem's handwritten form had ruined it. For him the 'written hand' was 'repugnant'. 'The text never seems determinate', he fulminated. 'Print settles it'.[12]

17th-century writers would have disagreed with Lamb's assessment. Many male authors *preferred* the handwritten medium. One of the period's most significant non-dramatic literary figures, Shakespeare's contemporary John Donne (1572-1631), to take but one example, considered the printed word vulgar, opting instead for what we call 'scribal publication', circulating his poems in handwritten copies: of the 4,000 or so individual examples copied from a corpus of 200 poems, only one verse letter and an epitaph are in his own hand.[13]

Incidentally, by now you must have realised that I am citing and referencing English authors only – I preserve that right and predilection as a woman whose degrees are in English Literature – but my general remarks to which we now arrive, while leaving the cat sitting on the forbidden grass, nevertheless pertain to literature produced in other languages as well.

Over a century after the invention of the printing press, many literary texts, and not only female-authored ones, continued to be produced solely in handwritten form. This was for a variety of reasons including discretion, political expediency, and a sense that manuscript was somehow a more elevated medium

than print. In fact, the increasingly wide availability of books allowed by the burgeoning print industries actually led to more texts being produced by hand rather than fewer: books such as almanacs included text boxes that were intended to be filled in by the reader, and even "normal" books were often augmented by copious notes written within their often very generous margins and other blank spaces – it is certainly the case that some authors encouraged readers to actively engage with their books in this manner.[14] The myth 'that paper was a scarce and expensive commodity' perhaps still exists because of a dominant focus on print: whereas the big piles of paper needed for a print-run were costly indeed, single sheets were also available, in differing qualities and thus within reach to most.[15] Before the advent of paper made from repurposed rags, writing generally took place upon parchment, a medium made from sheep or goatskin. Its expense made it largely the preserve of church and government. Rag paper, by comparison, was relatively cheap, and could thus be wasted or doodled upon – this meant that more people could, and did, start writing.[16]

Reasons to opt for the manuscript medium were gendered nevertheless. Printing one's work was deemed vulgar, for male and female authors alike, but for the 17th-century woman, the very act of writing was itself often considered unbecoming (as Osborne herself believed). Women were thus doubly constrained. The publication of Mary Wroth's (1587?-1651/3) prose romance *Urania* in 1621, for instance, attracted the praise of Ben Jonson (1572-1637), a major writer[17] but Lord Edward Denny (1569-1637), a courtier and member of parliament, took the opportunity to brand the author a 'hermaphrodite in show, indeed a monster', for by writing and publishing in print she had transgressed the boundaries of her sex.[18]

While drawn to, or perhaps pushed into, scribal publication, hidebound by strict moral and social norms,[19] women in general, it appears, rarely held a pen in their hands. Of course, some were simply incapable of writing. Around 1600, 70% of all men were still deemed to be illiterate.[20] The literacy rate amongst women was lower still: only about 10% of 17th-century women were literate in the sense that they could write their names, although amongst the elite and those living in London the proportion was much higher.[21] When the need or urge to write presented itself, the illiterate, whether male or female, were forced to dictate their words to scribes.

There were other, more enduring reasons that women rarely wielded a quill. Social custom also dictated some women be taught to read but not write: making ink was messy, sharpening quills was taxing, and both were best left to a male secretary. These women also relied on scribes. Others who could read *and* write regarded the physical act of writing as 'demeaning and incompatible with nobility', shunning formal business writing, although they still engaged in informal familial writing. They, too, often chose to work with scribes.[22]

Have I mentioned that scribes or secretaries, unlike today (and certainly unlike in Woolf's day), were mostly male? Working with a scribe allowed women to circumvent societal disapproval: after all, in that case, a man put pen down to paper to record the woman's words – in her own time, and within her own circle at least, this male hand legitimised her writing or her voice.[23]

In short, women's writing was often collaborative: the result of two or more people working on a single document. For a long time, this hampered the canonization of many women authors.[24]

With literary canons built on a post-Romantic conception of authorship constructed around stability, and thus print, women's texts and those on the margins of society were cast aside, their voices often unwittingly silenced, with manuscripts, the prime medium of publication for women and also the illiterate, seen as private documents. This changed in the 1990s, with Margaret J.M. Ezell and others demonstrating that such concepts as copyright, ownership, and the isolated author writing for profit were 19th-century inventions and

of little relevance to the early modern world.[25] Print, of course, was not entirely stable either, but in a transitional age during which manuscript and print forms co-existed quite happily, manuscripts were often meant for circulation and dissemination: fair copies, often produced by a scribe, were produced precisely because the author had an audience in mind.[26] Rarely the creation of one individual, collaboration was the very essence of manuscript circulation. The author, who acted as part of a literary circle, not only circulated his or her own work, often leaving it unsigned, but also corrected, amended and copied the works of fellow writers. Ezell terms it 'the opposite tradition from that of isolation, alienation, and competition'.[27] Early modern women could enter the literary field (and even, heavens forfend, sit on the grass) because authorship was a social act: male contributions legitimised rather than obstructed female authorship. Perhaps more importantly, scribes allowed the illiterate (or other marginalised groups such as the disabled) to write.

Indeed, many "male" literary texts were also the result of collaborative enterprises.[28] According to Henry Woudhuysen, 'Somewhere between a half and two-thirds of vernacular plays written for the popular theatre between 1590 and 1642 appear to have been produced by two or more men in collaboration'.[29] Shakespeare's work was no exception; the scholarly consensus is currently that he collaborated with a variety of authors on at least eight plays.[30] Male non-dramatic writers also made use of mediation in order to compose their texts. The poet Milton, to return to one of the great lone genius writers of the canon, employed his daughters and students as amanuenses so that he might finish *Paradise Lost* despite having lost his sight.[31]

(Perhaps uncoincidentally, the manuscript of *Lycidas* is one of the few manuscripts we have in Milton's own hand).

Scribes were not mere copyists, however; they had minds of their own. The person dictating a text was rarely the sole influence on a text's production: scribes might repurpose and adjust extracts from earlier literary contexts, while others commissioned such intermediaries to put their unfinished thoughts to paper, and those intermediaries might do more than silently correct grammatical errors, perhaps leaving their mark in the form of ornate flowery prose or even adjusting parts of the "original" text they considered beyond the pale.

Scribes could edit texts as they went along, intrusively as well as subtly. One scribe, for example, plainly felt that Donne was going a little too far in his poem 'To my mistress going to bed', and so added a few extra words implying that the voyeur and his mistress were, in fact, married.[32]

And this is the crux of the matter. We must take the cat by the tail and admit that we have for too long overlooked the most omnipresent, if non-conventional, authorial figure of the period: the secretary, the penman. This is primarily because we have no idea who they were, and this, in circular fashion, is because both their omnipresence in documents and their authorial agency has mostly been ignored. True, at first glance many of these intermediaries appear either frustratingly anonymous or, as members of a royal secretariat or court of law, institutionalised and thus indistinguishable. I never shy away from a challenge, however (says the woman who had to transcribe thousands of letters, break cipher codes, and travel the world to collect the correspondence of one woman. I wonder would I have jumped in so eagerly had I known what was in store?).

With the understanding that manuscripts conceal multiple possible authors becoming commonplace, we must find ways to make sense of these possibilities, and to isolate discrete voices. Just as we had (and continue to have) a responsibility to re-discover women authors, we have a responsibility to recover these and other invisible actors who, nevertheless, left so many fingerprints behind.

Sometimes literally.

In the last part of this lecture, I want to take you on a journey by explaining how my team of PhDs and postdocs, funded by an ERC Consolidator grant, is gradually overcoming these challenges, exposing the authorial fingerprints of scribes and breaking down the false dichotomy of creative author, non-creative scribe: first, by being truly interdisciplinary; secondly, by making use of "new" theoretical streams, such as the material turn; thirdly, and crucially, by refusing to forget traditional skill sets.

Just as I have always been interested in women's writing, I have always gravitated towards other disciplines such as history (some of you may consider me a closet historian). As Danielle Clarke recently suggested, '[d]espite the fact that most scholars of early modern women's writing are affiliated to literature disciplines, nonetheless, women's writings themselves have been presented in ways that ally them most closely with historical texts, documents and methods'.[33] Women's voices are to be found in letters, recipe books, legal texts, embroidery works, miscellanies, accounts, spiritual life-writing and other genres that Woolf would cast aside as un-literary, un-worthy (even though it is clear that she secretly enjoyed Osborne's letters). Casting the net wider thus comes naturally to me and, just as it allows us to recover women's voices, I believe it will also allow us to catch that most slippery of literary figures, the penman.

In his study *In Praise of Scribes*, Peter Beal noted that 'literary' scribes are notoriously difficult to pin down.[34] Fortunately, the literary scribe is a misnomer as scribes rarely limited themselves to one genre and they signed non-literary texts such as account books and legal documents. The ERC project therefore takes a multi-genre approach: it does not merely compare the hands found in those texts that Woolf would have immediately identified as literary, but also those hands found in historical texts such as letters, miscellanies and legal documents produced in various courts. We are not there yet, but cross-referencing may well make it possible to reveal the identity of hitherto anonymous "literary" scribes.

Interdisciplinary work reaps great dividends. A curator, Jana Dambrogio, taught me that a letter is a 3-dimensional object and introduced me to a new field that she was pioneering, letterlocking.[35] In the early modern period, she explained, there was no such thing as the gummed-envelope – the envelope, as we know it, is a modern, 19th-century invention: the early modern writing sheet was folded to become its own sending device. In the years that followed this first lesson, curators, imaging experts, computer engineers, and textual historians, including yours truly, came together to develop an algorithm to digitally unfold and read a letter that still had its seals intact.[36]

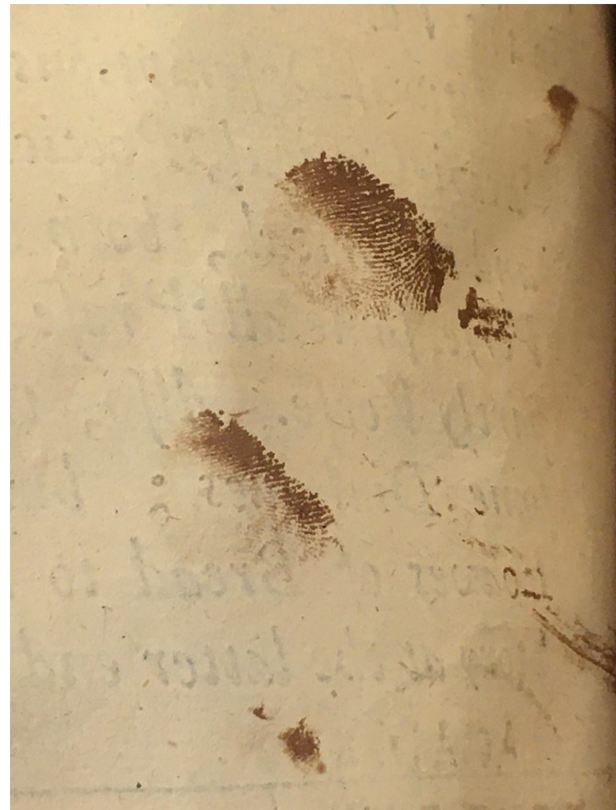
The folding of a document can be as telling as a signature when it comes to establishing the identity of the last person to manipulate the letter. Even ten years ago this thing called letterlocking was virtually unknown. Now we can follow in (some of) the footsteps of King Charles I, who said he could identify one of his correspondents 'by the fowldings'.[37] We, too, are beginning to identify individual secretaries by their letterlocking habits. What this shows us is the possibilities of team science and of understanding, and preserving, original documents.[38] Letterlocking can, of course, be seen as part of a theoretical stream, the material turn, which the project is embracing.

With the material turn comes a renewed need for enquiry into the processes of making, which 'tends to draw attention to a much larger number of collaborators and makers than a traditional focus on the sole master-genius.'[39] These are what Steven Shapin called 'invisible technicians' in the history of science; instead of solely zooming in on the proto-scientist (the 'genius'), we aim to see his helpers, the assistants who set up equipment, collected specimens to study, or – in the case of texts – cut the quills, mixed the ink or made the first drafts in a secretariat or scriptorium.[40]

Charles Lamb would despair: 'I will never go into the workshop of any great artist again', he declared.[41] Seeing the handwritten document, the process of writing in action, ruined what had for him been an almost religious experience. It did not sit comfortably with his 19th-century conceptions of authorship, of author as genius committing pure, crystalline prose to paper in one perfect, flowing motion; from inspiration to ink, with no mediation required. We, however, need to give ourselves permission to enter the workshop, to attempt to understand the making process, not merely to consider the final product. We need to allow ourselves to be shocked by the fact of its creation.

And it is exciting to use modern technology, such as algorithms, to analyse early modern material texts. Or to enter the laboratory.

Take for instance this archival find, a fingerprint that appears on verso of the title page of Margaret Cavendish's *Natures Pictures* as found in the University of Leiden's library (Fig. 3). The fact that Margaret herself appears to have written corrections to the text in her own hand leaves us with the tantalising possibility that this fingerprint belongs to her. It might also belong to a contemporary secretary as the presentation copies in Oxford and Cambridge seem to have been corrected by such an individual.[42] Comparing hands is a complex procedure, as writers might use several scripts, for instance – both an italic and a more formalised, secretary hand might actually be from the same pen. It is a little-known fact that fingerprints can show more than consistency of identity – they can also betray both the age and the gender of their creators.[43] The margin of error for such an attribution may prove problematic in modern law courts, but we "merely" stand in the court of academic opinion. With a little work, we may, therefore, be able to state with some certainty whether this print belongs to Cavendish or to an 'invisible technician', a (most likely) male secretary. In similar fashion, we can even analyse the sand that writers used to dry their inky scrawls and determine its origin.[44] This, too, has great potential – it may turn out that certain individuals or scriptoria used only a particular, and identifiable, sand (Fig. 4).



3. Fingerprints. Verso side title page of Margaret Cavendish's *Natures Pictures*, University Library Leiden, 1407 C 20.

But all that glisters is not gold.

There is a hidden irony to all this, and it comes wrapped in a very 17th-century formulation: 'opinion of plenty is among the greatest causes of poverty'.[45]

4. Blotting ‘sand’ on a letter, 1831. Paper, ink, & blue glass, microscopic, private collection. © Birgit Reissland.

Over the past quarter of a century, the big thing in academia has been digital humanities. Authorship attribution studies, too, have turned to computational stylistics to help separate the cacophony of different voices that can be present in one text. It works. But stylometry, ‘the quantitative study of writing style’, which counts function words, for instance, such as prepositions and articles,[46] *only* works with large datasets; a scholar working with a limited number of manuscripts would very quickly hit a wall.

AI-powered text recognition is promising too, of course, but it turns out that within our project the most important discoveries about ‘invisible technicians’ – or invisible agents, whether (women) spies or secretaries – have been made in the traditional manner: by painstaking and time consuming manual applications of techniques grounded in palaeography, i.e., forensic handwriting analysis also known as *scribal profiling*, and codicology.[47]

The survival of such traditional philological skills is crucial, it is the responsibility of universities, and it sits at the intersection between disciplines. Universities and funding bodies are interested in spies, of course, but the irony is that you can only catch those spies or other invisible agents with these traditional skills which we must continue to invest in alongside our efforts to advance AI and digital humanities. I am relieved, therefore, that Mariken Teeuwen has recently been made Professor of Script Culture of the Middle Ages by special appointment in the Leiden University Institute for History.

In addition to safeguarding traditional skills, we must remind ourselves that digitization is not necessarily a benign process. Preparing documents for digitization can erase features that might be of use to future generations of scholars – blotting sand that still adheres to the letter-forms is brushed off and papers folds smoothed out, for example.[48]

Digitisation, by ensuring access to all, promised to level the academic playing field. While in many ways it has been a godsend to academics of all kinds, especially during Covid, it has also produced a large carbon footprint and shifted the goalposts. It has entrenched traditional inequalities, as many vital databases that provide access to digitised documents – Perdita and The Cecil Papers, for example – are accessible only by those whose institutions can afford the fees. Class and wealth will likely remain the gatekeepers they are at present and have ever been, funding bodies the new beadles who refuse to allow a woman to walk on the grass. Denying access to original documents on the grounds that there are perfectly good digital versions available protects original documents but also prevents the discovery of previously unexpected features, just as digital tagging can make searching a document easy, but finding something rather more difficult.

What now of serendipity? Had Woolf not been a smoker, and had the college realised that smoking had become socially acceptable for women and thus provided her with an ashtray,

she would never have opened the window to flick her ash (p. 10), and she would never have seen the Manx cat, the star of our tale.

The Norton Anthology of English Literature [*NAEL*], the canon of English literature that we present to students, includes *A Room of One's Own.* Of course. But the latest edition no longer includes the passages in which Mary sees the Manx cat. The Norton, which has included more women authors over the years but only those who fit a certain mould and write 'true literature', has edited out the symbol that stood for the non-canonical author, those who can decolonize the curriculum.

But where Woolf thought the cat was mutilated, I challenge you to see its true beauty. While Woolf saw absence in the space where a tail might normally be, the Manx cat is not a cat missing a tail; rather, missing a tail is a primary indicator of the presence of a Manx cat. The tail is not the evidence we are looking for, its un-ness is. In similar fashion, just because we cannot immediately see women writers (or secretaries), we ought not assume that they are missing or lacking something. Rather than expecting them to present like the majority, or to fit the same moulds, we must be willing to look for them in unexpected places and present our students with conceptual letters of introduction that will open doors to a diverse and inclusive world of curiosity. This will allow them to find the fingerprints and think about authorship entirely differently (Fig. 5).

5. Manuscript, 11 March 1445. Cat paw prints in ink, 'Lettere e commissioni di Levante', volume 13, State Archives of Dubrovnik. © Emir O. Filipović.

Thank you to all who contributed to my appointment. In particular the Executive Board, the board of the Faculty of Humanities, the appointment advisory committee, the Management Team of the Leiden Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS), especially the former and current Scientific Director, respectively Prof.dr. Thony Visser and Prof.dr. Sybille Lammes.

Hooggeleerde Liebregts, dear Peter, dear colleagues from the BA English Language and Culture, the MA Literary Studies, and the Research Master, Arts, Literature and Media, it is a great pleasure to work with you. Your collegiality is unparalleled. My gratitude is not limited to the literature section, of course.

Over the course of an academic career many have ensured that I could walk on the grass or held my hand if I had to walk on the gravel. I am thankful that many of them are here in the procession or are sitting elsewhere in the lecture hall. My lasting love of manuscripts was instilled into me during my training at the VU Amsterdam, and was honed by working as a research assistant for the Donne Variorum Project, then still housed at the University of Southern Mississippi, under Prof. Gary Stringer and Prof. Richard Todd.

Here in Leiden, *zeergeleerde* Keblusek, dear Marika, I just know I will continue to learn from you and am proud that I could be your first PhD student.

Hooggeleerde Pollmann, dear Judith, *hooggeleerde* Sluiter, dear Ineke, I hope that I will always have as much time for younger generations as you do – you are an inspiring example and a reassuring presence in every room.

Mentors usually come from across the narrow seas, it seems. *Hooggeleerde* Murdoch, dear Steve, *hooggeleerde* Daybell, dear James – both of you have written more letters of recommendation for me than I care to admit. I am proud to call you my friends.

Some of my most important role-models are no longer here, but continue to be with me. Lisa Jardine's students and colleagues have turned into friends and kindred spirits and I hope that her sense of fun shines through in my work. Lisa, I promise to pass the torch onto my own students.

I am fortunate that I am part of so many other communities, both academic – Signed, Sealed, & Undelivered, The Memory of Scent, the Young Academy, All Souls College, Oxford – and personal. My family and friends in all of these mean the world to me. Thank you for being so patient and letting me ramble on about such obscure matters as women writers, old paper, spies, and a certain Scottish princess.

I am eternally grateful to my parents, for allowing me to study whatever I wanted, to follow my curiosity, even allowing me to take a degree without any job prospects. My mother died twenty years ago – I miss her presence today, and she would have loved every moment – but her voice still guides me on. I am thankful that my dad is sitting on the first row today. He is much wiser than I … after all, when I excitedly told him about the trunk of unopened letters we had discovered, he already knew of its existence.

Dearest Pete, my everything, thanks to you I no longer have to live only in the 17th century, but life itself has become more colourful. I feel blessed that I am able to share my love for research with you, and that we can laugh each day. Thank you for sharing your life with me, in Adderbury and Leiden.

Ik heb gezegd.

Notes

1 This is mimicking the opening of *A Room of One's Own*: 'But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction – what has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain' (p. 3). Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* was first published by the Hogarth Press in 1928. Page references within parentheses throughout are to the annotated edition published by Penguin Books in 1993, reissued by Penguin Classics in 2019, edited by Michèle Barrett.

2 The author Woolf distances herself from her text: she assures us that she is not the narrator, who might be called 'Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please', protesting, 'it is not a matter of any importance' (p. 4). The list of Maries given here is taken from a popular ballad, mostly likely no older than the 18th century, the "Four Marys":

Last night there were four Marys
Tonight there'll be but three
There was Mary Seaton and Mary Beaton
And Mary Carmichael and me

The stanza conflates two sets of historical women who all met sticky ends, namely exile or execution: two 16th-century ladies-in-waiting of Mary, Queen of Scots (Mary Seton and Mary Beaton) and two 18th-century ladies-in-waiting (Mary Carmichael and the unnamed speaker Mary Hamilton); see Rosalind K. Marshall, 'In Search of the Ladies-in-Waiting and Maids of Honour of Mary, Queen of Scots: A Prosoprographical Analysis of the Female Household', in *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-Waiting Across Early Modern Europe*, edited by Nadine Akkerman and Birgit Houben (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 209-30, at 210-11.

3 I wonder if Samuel Taylor Coleridge was truly as magnanimous as he suggested when his neighbour appeared for tea as he transcribed the dream that was Xanadu. But I digress.

4 Mary Lamb killed her mother in a fit of psychological illness: 'the accumulated strain of nursing a senile father and a bedridden mother, while also maintaining the family through her needlework, had exacerbated a psychological disorder subsequently categorized by her brother's twentieth-century biographers as a manic-depressive illness' (Jane Aaron, 'Lamb, Mary Anne (1764–1847), children's writer', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004, September 23), retrieved 17 April 2024).

5 Rather than such sumptuous fare, the two women's colleges served 'plain gravy soup', 'thin', 'transparent', that contained 'nothing to stir the fancy' (pp. 15-16), according to Mary our Oxbridge guide.

6 University Library Leiden, 1407 C 20.

7 For an insightful overview of the publication history and reception of Osborne's letters, which brought Woolf's review to my attention, see D.G. Barnes, 'Osborne, Dorothy (Later Temple)', edited by Suzanne Trill, in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Early Modern Women's Writing*, general editors Patricia Pender and Rosalind Smith (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 1-6. Woolf gave her lectures on 20 [Newnham] and 26 [Girton] October; her review ('Dorothy Osborne', *Times Literary Supplement* (1928): 777) was published in *The New Republic* on the 24th and in the *TLS* on the 25th.

8 Woolf expanded her 1928 *TLS* review in 1932 and concluded thus: 'though we honour the admirable ambassadress who made her husband's career her own, there are moments when we would exchange all the benefits of the Triple Alliance and all the glories of the Treaty of Nimuegen for the letters that Dorothy did not write' (Woolf, 'Dorothy Osborne's "Letters"', *The Common Reader (Second Series)* (1932; rev. ed. London: Hogarth Press, 1935), 59-66, at 66).

9 Osborne to Temple, 14 April and 7 May 1653, respectively Letters 17 and 20, in *The Letters of Dorothy Osborne to William Temple*, edited by G. C. Moore Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press [i.e. Oxford University Press], 1928), 37, 41.

10 Barnes, 'Osborne, Dorothy (Later Temple)', 2. They are now to be found under call number British Library, Add MS. 33975.
11 Anne Sadleir, commonplace books, R.13.74, R.5.5 and R.5.6; Mary Sidney, *Psalms*, MS O.1.51.
12 Charles Lamb, 'Oxford in the Vacation' (first published in the *London Magazine*, October 1820), part of the *Essays of Elia*, in *The Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Charles Lamb*, edited by R.H. Shepherd (London: Chatto & Windus, 1875), 6-11 at 8-9.
13 See Ernest W. Sullivan II, 'What We Know Now about Donne's Texts That We Did Not Know Before', *Text* 17 (2005): 187-96, at 188; Gary A. Stringer, 'The Composition and Dissemination of Donne's Writings', in *The Oxford handbook of John Donne*, edited by Dennis Flynn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 12-25, at 13.
14 Peter Stallybrass, 'Printing and the Manuscript Revolution', in *Explorations in Communication and History*, edited by Barbie Zelizer (London: Routledge, 2008), 111–18, at 111. Francis Bacon's idea of the aphorism directly encouraged this practice: see his *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (London: Haviland, 1623), in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, edited by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longman, 1870), iv.275-498 at 451.
15 Anna Reynolds, *Waste Paper in Early Modern England: Privy Tokens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 8-9.
16 Steven W. May, *English Renaissance Manuscript Culture: The Paper Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 21.
17 See Jonson's poem, 'A Sonnet: To the noble Lady, the Lady Mary Wroth' (1641), edited by Colin Burrow, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, general editors David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), vii. 142-3.
18 Josephine A. Roberts, *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 32-3.

19 Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 280; Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 54, 58.
20 David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 177.
21 Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order*, 41; Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56-8. These statistics are mere estimates, as the discussion about literacy is still ongoing. See Margaret Spufford's works: 'First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experiences of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Autobiographers', *Social History* 4, no. 3 (1979): 407-35; and *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). More recently, see Mark Hailwood, 'Rethinking Literacy in Rural England, 1550-1700', *Past & Present* 260, no. 1 (2023): 38-70.
22 James Daybell, 'Female Literacy and the Social Conventions of Women's Letter-Writing in England, 1540-1603', in *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, edited by James Daybell (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 59-76 at 64.
23 Women could also produce secretary-script, so in that respect handwriting was not gendered. Once a text was distributed outside the coterie, the hand became anonymous, and no-one could have determined whether a secretary's hand was male or female.
24 Just like universities today like to believe they promote team science but single out the individual attached to their own institution if they want to celebrate the output of a team, all too often we cannot look beyond the PI to the postdocs and PhDs and research assistants, sometimes located across the globe, whose contributions are key.

25 Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 38.
26 Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*, 53.
27 Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*, 57.
28 Stephen B. Dobranski, 'Milton's Social Life', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Milton*, edited by Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-24, at 20-1, 23.
29 Dobranski, 'Milton's Social Life', 33.
30 H.R. Woudhuysen, 'Shakespeare's Writing: From Manuscript to Print', in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, edited by Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 31-44, at 34.
31 Dobranski, 'Milton's Social Life', 19.
32 See the New York Public Library, Berg Collection, Westmoreland manuscript (Donne Variorum project NY3). I thank Daniel Starza Smith for this reference. For a different view, the view that scribes mostly corrected errors see May, *English Renaissance Manuscript Culture*, 52-3.
33 Danielle Clarke, 'The Early Modern Canon and the Construction of Women's Writing', *Textual Practice* 38, no. 2 (2024): 299-317 at 303. Clarke also cites Linda Woodbridge, who bemoaned that early modern writers were approached on different terms depending on their sex: 'men inhabit literature-land; women inhabit history-land'; Woodbridge, 'Dark Ladies: Women, Social History, and English Renaissance Literature', in *Discontinuities: New Essays on Renaissance Literature and Criticism*, edited by Viviane Comensoli and Paul Stevens (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 52-71 at 62.
34 Beal, *In Praise of Scribes*, 17, 58.
35 In the decade that followed she collaborated with Daniel Starza Smith, and the Unlocking History Research Group. Their book *Letterlocking: The Hidden History of the Letter*, with 500 illustration and diagrams, is much anticipated and will be published by MIT Press later this year.
36 Jana Dambrogio, Amanda Ghassaei, Daniel Starza Smith, et al., 'Unlocking History through Automated Virtual Unfolding of Sealed Documents Imaged by X-ray Microtomography', *Nature Communications* (2021) 12: 1184.
37 [Charles I] to D. [Henry Firebrace], 27 April 1648, British Library, Egerton MS 1788, fo. 21r; see also Nadine Akkerman, *Invisible Agents: Women and Espionage in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21.
38 The English plan to digitise all wills over a certain age and then destroy the originals (other than of "celebrities", a highly dubious selection mechanism in any case, as our long experience in the silencing of female and other marginalised voices ought to tell us) is thus revealed for the lunacy it is – these documents have features we simply cannot yet read, and of whose existence we may not yet be aware. See Jane Whittle and Harry Smith, 'Save our Wills', *LRB* Blog, 24 February 2024.
39 Susanna Burghartz, Lucas Burkart, Christine Göttler, et al., 'Introduction: Materializing Identities: The Affective Values of Matter in Early Modern Europe', in *Materialized Identities in Early Modern Culture, 1450-1750: Objects, Affects, Effects*, edited by Susanna Burghartz, Lucas Burkart, Christine Göttler, et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 23-48 at 34.
40 Steven Shapin, 'The Invisible Technician', *American Scientist* 77, no. 6 (1989): 554-63.
41 Lamb, 'Oxford in the Vacation', 9.
42 Liza Blake, 'Pounced Corrections in Oxford Copies of Cavendish's Philosophical and Physical Opinions, or Margaret Cavendish's Glitter Pen', *New College Notes* 10, no. 6 (2018): 1-11, at 7 n.28, suggests 'that the corrections [in the many presentation copies at Oxford] originate from a secretary rather than from Cavendish herself because the hand of the corrector is nothing like her own'. See also James Fitzmaurice, 'Margaret Cavendish on Her Own Writing: Evidence from Revision and Handmade Correc-

tion', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 85 (1991): 297-308.

43 Dzemila Sero, Isabelle Garachon, Erma Hermens, et al., 'Artist Profiling Using Micro-CT Scanning of a Rijksmuseum Terracotta Sculpture', *Science Advances* 9, no. 38 (2023): DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.adg607.

44 Birgit Reissland, 'Ich werde jetzt himmlischen Streusand nehmen', *Archiv, Theorie & Praxis, Originalerhalt und Digitalisierung* 77, no. 1 (2024): 24–6.

45 Francis Bacon, *Instauratio Magna* (London: John Bill, 1620), in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, edited by Graham Rees with Maria Wakely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), xi.2-25 at 11.

46 Maciej Eder, Jan Rybicki, and Mike Kestemont, 'Stylometry and R: A Package for Computational Text Analysis', *The R Journal* 8, no. 1 (2016): 107-21 at 107.

47 Imogen Marcus, *The Linguistics of Spoken Communication in Early Modern English Writing: Exploring Bess of Hardwick's Manuscript Letters* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). Marcus takes her cue amongst others from the creators of *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (LALME; 1986), Angus McIntosh, M.L Samuels and Michael Benskin. Her method combines analysis of a scribe's hand – such as signalling 'duct', that is, 'the distinctive features of the strokes in a particular hand' (Peter Beal, *A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology 1450-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 130) and noting allographs, that is, registering how that particular hand combines certain letters, the 'th', for instance – with questionnaires designed to capture orthography, that is, a scribe's spelling preferences. Scribal profiling thus finds its origin in palaeography, the study of and ability to read scripts that often bear little relation to modern letter forms, and in historical linguistics.

48 Reissland, 'Ich werde jetzt himmlischen Streusand nehmen'.

This inaugural lecture is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 864635, FEATHERS).

6. Close-up, cat paw prints in ink © Emir O. Filipović.

Prof.dr. Nadine N.W. Akkerman

Nadine Akkerman's research focuses on the 16th and 17th centuries, and encompasses the fields of women's history, (female) writers, court culture, diplomacy, scholarly editing, and manuscript culture. She has received various research grants from, amongst others, the Dutch Research Council (NWO) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), for projects exploring cryptology, women spies, undelivered letters, shipwrecks and 17th-century perfume recipes. She is currently the Principal Investigator of the FEATHERS project, which is exploring manuscript culture and mediated authorship in the early modern period, and is funded by a Consolidator grant from the European Research Council. The common thread in all these projects is the aim of making the unexpected visible through in-depth archival work. Her work has been disseminated in numerous publications, of which the best known are perhaps the multi-volume edition *The Correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia* (2011; 2015), the monograph *Invisible Agents: Women and Espionage in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (2018), and the biography *Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Hearts* (2021), all published by Oxford University Press.

The impact of her work has been recognized with a World Cultural Council Recognition Award (2017), the Ammodo Science Award in the Humanities (2019), a documentary about her and her work on national television (*Grote Vragen*, 2020) and the Dr Hendrik Muller Prize (2021). She has also been appointed to The Young Academy, KNAW, as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, London, and is a Member of the Academia Europaea.

She has spent considerable time in the UK undertaking research, including at the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters (CELL, then at QMUL, London, 2006), the Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Birmingham (2014), and most recently as a Visiting Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford (2018-19), and Visiting Senior Research Fellow at Jesus College, Oxford (2022-23). In addition to various administrative positions at faculty and national level (including the Advisory Council of Humanities, KNAW), she enjoys teaching a variety of courses from the BA English Language and Culture, the MA Literary Studies, and the Research Master, Arts, Literature and Media at Leiden. Her most recent work *Spycraft: Tricks and Tools of the Dangerous Trade from Elizabeth I to the Restoration*, co-written with Pete Langman, is forthcoming from Yale University Press in June 2024.

Nadine Akkerman studied English Language and Literature at the VU Amsterdam, where she was awarded her PhD in 2008 for her thesis on the correspondence of the Scottish princess Elizabeth Stuart. Since 2007 she has worked at Leiden University. In 2017 she was promoted to Reader through an Aspasia premium from NWO; in 2022 she was appointed Professor of Early Modern Literature and Culture.

Universiteit Leiden