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'By the vse of others penne': the collaborative production of Queen Elizabeth I's English scribal letters, 1581-90

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Conclusion

Scribal Influence in Elizabeth I's Letters

This thesis has shown that the discrete contributions made to Queen Elizabeth I's letters by different agents, both authorial and scribal, can be identified and differentiated. In Chapter 1, I reconstructed the collaborative contexts of epistolary production in the royal secretariat during the years 1581–90, Sir Francis Walsingham's sole Secretaryship, detailing the organisation and workings of its two key branches: the Signet Office and Walsingham's personal secretariat. Through a corpus-wide analysis of the material and palaeographic features of Elizabeth's English scribal letters, I established the patterns of scribal activity in the period and identified the key scribal agents involved in royal epistolary production. I reconstructed the rota of the four signet clerks (seven in total across the period 1581–90) and traced their attendance across the decade, with Nicasius Yetsweirt and Thomas Windebank, the senior clerks of that office (respectively), emerging as the most constantly present at court, often deputising for Walsingham during periods of Secretarial absence. I identified the hands of Walsingham's secretaries Thomas Lake, Francis Mylles, Nicholas Faunt, Laurence Tomson, and Lisle Cave in the corpus of Elizabeth's English scribal letters (CEESL), illuminating their attendance on their master in the period and their involvement by him in the production of the royal missives. Prior to 1587, the signet clerks were seen to be primarily engaged in the production of routine warrants, with scribal letters 'proper' and Instructions the preserve of Walsingham and his men. As Walsingham's health deteriorated in the latter years of the decade, this division of duties was seen to become increasingly blurred, with the clerks of the signet drawn increasingly into the work of epistolary production.

Close attention to the palaeographic data in CEESL unearthed a number of hitherto unacknowledged scribes, and connections between hands in the CEESL allowed these hidden figures to be connected to departments and specific members of the royal secretariat. I identified Scribe 4 and Scribe 5 as under-clerks of the Signet Office, figures who often remain invisible, and linked the former to Windebank, proposing that he may have been Henry Green, and the latter to the Yetsweirts (Nicasius and Charles). I identified Scribe 1, Scribe 2, and Scribe 3 as hitherto unknown secretaries of Walsingham's. The existence of such previously unidentified secretaries was not itself a surprise: Walsingham's secretariat is known to have expanded

significantly in the period, and the names scattered throughout his memorial book (BL Harley MS 6035) reveal the presence of numerous servants and assistants in his employ in the 1580s of whom little is known. However, the regularity with which Walsingham worked with these scribes in the production of the queen's letters, compared to better-known members of his secretariat, was unanticipated, and ultimately highlighted the need for closer attention to the hands in which Elizabeth's letters are written and a more detailed investigation of the organisation and membership of Walsingham's secretariat in this period.

In Chapter 2 I thus focused on Walsingham's secretariat more closely, reconstructing the attendance of its members upon their master at the itinerant court through close attention to the patterns of their hands in Walsingham's letters. Walsingham's better-known and longest-standing secretaries—such as Mylles and Tomson—were found to have contributed minimally to the production of Walsingham's letters in comparison to the previously unidentified penmen discussed in Chapter 1, designated Scribes 1, 2, and 3. I argued that these unknown penmen were junior members of Walsingham's secretariat, recruited to his inner circle to assist in the work of epistolary production as the careers of its more senior members advanced. Scribe 1, in particular, I posited as the most regularly present of Walsingham's secretariat in the 1580s, being responsible for nearly half (193) of Walsingham's extant scribal letters from that decade. Scribe 1's close attendance on Walsingham was observed to explain the frequency with which his hand occurs in Elizabeth's letters, and established him as a key collaborator of Walsingham's in the production of the queen's English scribal missives in the period. Through a detailed palaeographical analysis, I identified Scribe 1 as the obscured and overlooked John de Cárdenas, alias 'Cipiran': a secretary of Walsingham's who was recognised by his contemporaries as one of his master's chiefest and most trusted servants, yet whose existence fell into the shadows in the ensuing centuries. The son of the Spaniard Cipriano de Cárdenas, 'Ciprian' was likely a religious refugee who fled to England from the Low Countries to avoid persecution during the Dutch revolt against Spain. In identifying Cárdenas' hand in Elizabeth's letters for the first time, I revealed him to have been one of Walsingham's closest collaborators in royal epistolary production in this well-studied period of English history, with letters of considerable political and historical significance having come down to us in his hand. Cárdenas' hand thus emerges as a conduit of history, with the diplomatic relationships between monarchs and their states unfolded through the letters that he brought into material being. I thus argued for the importance of such anonymous, invisible figures of history whose contributions often go ignored, and for the necessity of an approach to early modern letters that attends closely to the hands in which they are written.

With the collaborative contexts of royal epistolary production established, and the key contributors to Elizabeth's English scribal letters in the period identified, the remaining chapters of the thesis moved to consider the influence of Elizabeth's scribes on the letters they penned for the queen in greater detail. In Chapter 3 I employed stylometric analysis to explore whether the scribes responsible for composing the initial draft versions of Elizabeth I's letters left traces of their personal writing styles in the queen's missives. Stylometry, the quantitative analysis of

writing style, is premised on the notion of the stylistic fingerprint: the idea that writers that ‘have an unconscious aspect to their style, an aspect which cannot consciously be manipulated but which possesses features which are quantifiable and which may be distinctive’.¹ My stylometric analysis found that the scribes working in the royal secretariat each had a distinctive stylistic fingerprint that left its residual trace in Elizabeth’s letters, cutting through the uniform style of the Tudor royal epistolary voice. Homing in on Walsingham, I identified a stylistic porousness between his personal letters and those that he composed for the queen, with the style of the royal letter moving into Walsingham’s own missives and—more significantly—Walsingham’s own ‘voice’ moving into the letters that he drafted for Elizabeth. The implication of this finding is that the same is true for other scribes involved in royal epistolary production, who were not included in the analysis. I therefore argued that the individual scribe responsible for writing any given letter of Elizabeth’s matters to that letter stylistically, and should be appreciated as an idiosyncratic presence in the royal epistolary text. Through this, I challenged the binary approach to authorial and scribal textual production that defines an originating and individual author against scribes as a stylistically homogenous collective.

When I attempted to identify evidence of Elizabeth’s mediated composition in letters thought to be dictated by the queen, the computational methods did not provide conclusive results. More sophisticated methods that might be used in future experiments—namely, machine learning methods focused on presence/absence tests—were briefly discussed. Using computational methods to identify Elizabeth’s mediated composition, and disentangle authorial and scribal contributions to the same letter, thus remained out of reach. In Chapters 4 and 5 I therefore adopted a close, qualitative approach, employing material and historical analysis, to unpick scribal and authorial collaboration. Having demonstrated that Walsingham’s style was both unique and readily identifiable against those of Burghley and Windebank in Chapter 3, I thus proceeded to examine Walsingham’s influence on Elizabeth’s letters in closer detail.

Shifting the focus to the social and material contexts in which Elizabeth’s letters were not only produced but also delivered and received, in Chapter 4 I demonstrated that determining Walsingham’s contributions to Elizabeth’s letters can often be facilitated by reading the queen’s letters alongside those of her Secretary. Through close attention to the interrelated nature of Elizabeth and Walsingham’s respective correspondences, packaged up and dispatched together in packets, I recovered Walsingham’s interventions into the queen’s missives. The chapter thus argued that reassembling the royal letter packet, and reading Elizabeth’s letters in dialogue with the Secretarial dispatches that they were sent alongside—and with which they often worked in tandem to achieve a shared communicative goal—can bring the collaborations of queen and Secretary, and Walsingham’s interventions in particular, to light.

1 David I. Holmes, ‘The Evolution of Stylometry in Humanities Scholarship’, *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 13.3 (1998), pp. 111–17 (p. 111), doi:10.1093/lc/13.3.111.

In Chapter 5, I employed epistolography, close reading, and historical analysis to explore Walsingham's influence on the language and interpersonal rhetoric of Elizabeth I's letters. Specifically, I explored Walsingham's involvement in the expression and construction of personal sentiment in Elizabeth I's letters of displeasure and reconciliation. Through this, I probed the assumption that authorial and scribal compositions exhibit contrasting textual characteristics: the former associated broadly with vivid, personal, and emotive language, and the latter with a formal and dispassionate style. I first disentangled Walsingham and Elizabeth I's respective contributions to a letter to the military commanders Sir John Norris and Sir Francis Drake dated 4 May 1589, which support the association of emotive language with authorial participation in the composition of a scribal letter and, in turn, a dispassionate and formal style with scribal composition. However, continuing to read Elizabeth's letters alongside Walsingham's own correspondence, I unearthed less visible instances of collaboration between Elizabeth and Walsingham that revealed the latter's creative capacity to move beyond the formal and dispassionate style associated with scribes and employ emotive language in his construction of the queen's epistolary voice. The first of these was a letter from Elizabeth to the earl of Shrewsbury, dated 23 May 1584, in which I identified Elizabeth's displeasure as expressed in Walsingham's, rather than the queen's, 'own words'. The second was a letter from Elizabeth to Sir Ralph Sadler, dated 31 October 1584: I revealed the reconciliatory tone of this letter to have been a rhetorical strategy developed by Walsingham. In recovering these hitherto unnoticed instances of Walsingham's intervention, I illuminated his creative agency in the construction of Elizabeth's epistolary voice, and argued that textual characteristics conventionally thought to distinguish authorial and scribal contributions cannot always be relied upon in disentangling the collaborative construction of royal scribal letters.

As a whole, the thesis has demonstrated that by taking a comprehensive approach, utilising different methods and triangulating them to provide a more well-rounded interpretation, the influence of Elizabeth's scribes can be detected in her letters. This, naturally, has ramifications for our conception of the queen's epistolary authorship. Does recognising Elizabeth's letters as the product of a collaborative interaction trouble their classification as Elizabeth's writings or constitute a withdrawal of agency from the queen? More problematically still, what are the gendered implications of a redistribution of agency that might, in recognising the contributions of Elizabeth's male scribes, detract from the queen's own status as a woman writer? This potential risk of loss as a side-effect of unpicking collaborative textual production has been noted by scholars working on early modern women's writing.² As Patricia Pender and Alexandra Day point out, acknowledging the collaborative nature of women's writing can be 'something of a critical double-edged sword', insofar as the identification of contributions made by other, male agents to

2 Rosalind Smith, 'Authorship, Attribution, and Voice in Early Modern Women's Writing', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Women's Writing in English, 1540–1700*, ed. by Danielle Clarke, Sarah C. E. Ross, and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 23–38 (p. 30), doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198860631.013.3.

women's socially constructed texts appears to threaten 'the hard-won legitimacy of the women writers we have already recovered' through de-attribution or the redistribution of textual agency.³

Some scholars have emphasised the need for greater historical specificity in considerations of collaborative authorship and textual production. Heather Hirschfeld, for example, argues that criticism 'must insist [...] on [the] specification of the precise mode or shape of a collaboration',⁴ and Rosalind Smith has argued that authorship 'has the possibility to be a generative site of new knowledge about women and their texts, if approached in ways that attend to the specificity and diversity of its use'.⁵ In attending to the specificity of the collaborative contexts in which female-authored texts, such as Elizabeth's letters, were produced, the potential loss of agency—which rests on a simplified view in which authorship can only be de-attributed from one figure and re-attributed to another—instead emerges as a reconfiguration of agency: one that is historically situated and thus ultimately more insightful. By identifying the contributions of Elizabeth's scribes to her letters, we gain new and nuanced knowledge about the queen herself, her collaborative working relationship with her Secretaries and the scribes at work in the royal secretariat, and our understanding of her epistolary authorship—as a construction that is collaboratively produced and incorporates the contributions of multiple authorial and scribal agents—is ultimately enriched.

It would be somewhat remiss to conclude a study of scribal influence on Elizabeth's letters with the implication that identifying scribal contributions only has value insofar as doing so provides us with new knowledge about the queen. By identifying the scribes at work in the 1580s secretariat and uncovering their influence on Elizabeth I's letters, I have revealed that there is no 'authentic voice' in Elizabeth I's letters: rather, 'Elizabeth I' emerges as a rhetorical persona constructed through the collaborations of the queen with her Principal Secretary and his various penmen. In addition to peeling apart authorial and scribal interventions, I have distinguished between the contributions of different scribes to illuminate that they shaped Elizabeth's letters not only as a collective—the royal secretariat—but also as individuals: providing counsel that was shaped by specialist knowledge or personal opinions; leaving idiosyncratic material traces in the form of characteristic palaeographic habits; articulating the royal will through recourse to their preferred phraseology and, less consciously, with the idiosyncratic stamp of their stylistic fingerprints. As such, I have observed Hirschfeld's call for the analysis of collaborative authorship to entail 'a recognition of the integrity of individuals participating in collaborative ventures—not as autonomous actors but as subjects with agency and motives in a field of cultural production'.⁶ The result is a richer understanding of the construction of Elizabeth's English scribal letters as a process shaped significantly and variably by all agents involved within it.

3 Patricia Pender and Alexandra Day, 'Introduction: Gender, Authorship, and Early Modern Women's Collaboration', in *Gender, Authorship, and Early Modern Women's Collaboration*, ed. by Pender (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1–22 (pp. 1–2).

4 Heather Hirschfeld, 'Early Modern Collaboration and Theories of Authorship', *PMLA*, 116.3 (2001), pp. 609–22 (p. 619).

5 Smith, 'Authorship, Attribution, and Voice', p. 38.

6 Hirschfeld, 'Early Modern Collaboration', p. 619.