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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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Summary in English

This thesis examines the role of scribes in the production of Queen Elizabeth I's (1533–1603) English scribal letters. Much scholarly work on Elizabeth I's letters has focused on her 'holograph' missives—those written in the queen's own hand—or has considered those penned by scribes only to the extent that Elizabeth I herself was personally involved in their production. By shifting the focus of enquiry onto the role of the scribe, and recovering traces of their influence, I reveal that there is no 'authentic voice' in Elizabeth I's letters: rather, the voice of the queen emerges as a rhetorical persona constructed through the collaborations of Elizabeth with her Principal Secretary and his various penmen. The result is a richer understanding of Elizabeth I's English scribal letters as texts shaped significantly and variably by all agents, authorial and otherwise, that were involved in their making.

The thesis focuses on letters produced in the period 1581–90: the latter years of Sir Francis Walsingham's (c. 1532–90) tenure as Principal Secretary (1573–90). I thus break new ground by reconstructing the workings of the royal secretariat under Walsingham's management and offer the first detailed examination of Walsingham's role as Principal Secretary in its most fundamental sense: as closely engaged, on a daily basis, in the delicate political-literary art of letter-writing. In providing the first detailed consideration of Walsingham's role in the composition of Elizabeth I's letters, I shed new light on this overlooked facet of Walsingham's career and contribute to a reassessment of Walsingham and Elizabeth I's working relationship.

Disentangling the various authorial and scribal contributions to Elizabeth I's letters requires a rigorous, and multifaceted, methodology. I therefore take an innovative, mixed-methodological approach that combines bibliographical (codicological, material, and palaeographical) methods with quantitative textual analysis and qualitative, close reading techniques, through which the key scribal contributors to Elizabeth I's letters in this period are identified and their respective contributions differentiated. In Chapter 1 I reconstruct the structure, workings, and personnel of the royal secretariat with focus on its two key branches, the Signet Office and Walsingham's personal secretariat. Through palaeographical and material analysis of my corpus of Elizabeth I's English Scribal Letters 1581–90 (CEESL) I identify the scribes involved in the production of Elizabeth I's letters in the period and their patterns of work, tracing the division of duties between the two groups of penmen and the activities, expertise, and contributions of individual scribes. In Chapter 1, I thus cast important new light on the roles of major figures, such as Walsingham and William Cecil (1520/21), Lord Burghley (1571), and reveal the existence of others who have hitherto escaped notice.

In Chapter 2, I home in on the role of one such unnoticed penman: an anonymous scribe identified in Chapter 1 as 'Scribe 1', not hitherto noticed by historians but whose contribution to the production of both Elizabeth I and Walsingham's letters in the period emerges as substantial. Through a detailed palaeographical analysis, I identify Scribe 1 for the first time as the obscured and overlooked John de Cárdenas (*f.l.* 1583–1619), alias 'Cipiran': a secretary of Walsingham's who was recognised by his contemporaries as one of his master's chief and most highly trusted

servants, yet whose existence fell into the shadows in the ensuing centuries. The son of the Spaniard Cipriano de Cárdenas (*fl.* 1564–1604), ‘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 I’s letters for the first time, I reveal 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. These include a letter from Elizabeth to Sir Ralph Sadler (1507–87), gaoler of Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–87), dated 3 December 1584. Displayed as part of the British Library’s 2021 exhibition ‘Elizabeth and Mary: Royal Cousins, Rival Queens’, this letter has come to be appreciated for the subscription that it bears in Elizabeth I’s own hand, in which the queen advises Sadler to ‘Vse but olde trust and new diligence’ in his dealing with Mary Stuart. The other, scribal hand that left its mark on the substrate of this letter has too long gone unnoticed, yet Cárdenas was an essential agent in this epistolary transaction. Cárdenas 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 argue 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.

In Chapter 3, I employ methods from computational stylistics 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. Computational stylistics 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’.⁵ That computational methods can capture latent patterns in language use that are distinctive and beyond a writer’s conscious control allows us to read against the grain of the scribe’s self-effacement through adherence to the formulaic ‘official style’ of royal letters. Through a stylometric analysis of a corpus of epistolary documents drafted by Walsingham, Burghley, and the signet clerk Thomas Windebank (d. 1607), I reveal that Elizabeth I’s scribes left traces of their distinctive stylistic fingerprints in the queen’s letters. Homing in on Walsingham, I identify 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 I. 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 argue that the individual scribe responsible for writing any given letter of Elizabeth I’s matters to that letter stylistically, and should be appreciated as an idiosyncratic

5 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/lle/13.3.111.

presence in the royal epistolary text. Through this, I challenge the binary approach to authorial and scribal textual production that defines an originating and individual author against scribes as a stylistically homogenous collective.

In Chapter 4 I take a material approach to Elizabeth I's letters, reading them in the context of the royal letter packet by which they were packaged up, dispatched, and received alongside letters from the Principal Secretary. Through close attention to the interrelated nature of Elizabeth I and Walsingham's letters, and the careful reassembly of the packets in which they were originally dispatched, I illuminate Walsingham's role as mediator of the interpersonal relationships between the queen and her correspondents and recover his interventions in the queen's missives. I demonstrate that, in order to fully recover their original meanings and functions, Elizabeth I's letters must be read today as they were by their original addressees: not as isolated texts, but alongside the letters of the Principal Secretary. Beyond this, however, I argue that approaching Elizabeth I and Walsingham's letters together is not only necessary to properly understand the meaning and function of Elizabeth I's letters in the contexts of their original reception, but also facilitates the unpicking of Elizabeth I and Walsingham's collaboration in textual production.

In the final chapter I employ epistolography, close reading, and historical analysis to explore Walsingham's influence on the language and interpersonal rhetoric of Elizabeth I's letters. Specifically, I explore Walsingham's involvement in the expression and construction of personal sentiment in Elizabeth I's letters of displeasure and reconciliation. Through this, I probe the assumption that authorial and scribal compositions exhibit contrasting textual characteristics: the former associated broadly with vivid, personalised, and emotive language, and the latter with a formal and dispassionate style. I first disentangle Walsingham and Elizabeth I's respective contributions to a letter to the military commanders Sir John Norris (c. 1547–97) and Sir Francis Drake (1540–96) dated 4 May 1589, which support the association of emotive language with authorial participation in the composition of a scribal letter and, in turn, dispassionate formality with scribal composition. However, by continuing to read Elizabeth I's letters alongside Walsingham's own correspondence, I unearth less visible instances of collaboration between Elizabeth I and Walsingham that, quite remarkably, reveal 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 is a letter from Elizabeth I to George Talbot (c. 1522–90), 6th Earl of Shrewsbury (1560), dated 23 May 1584, in which I identify the queen's displeasure as expressed in Walsingham's, rather than the queen's, 'own words'. The second is a letter from Elizabeth I to Sadler, dated 31 October 1584: I reveal the reconciliatory tone of this letter to have been a calculated rhetorical strategy developed by Walsingham. In recovering these hitherto unnoticed instances of Walsingham's creative intervention, I illuminate his creative agency in the construction of Elizabeth I's epistolary voice, and argue 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.

By identifying the scribes at work in the 1580s secretariat and uncovering their influence on Elizabeth I's letters, I thus illuminate their role as key agents in the formation of the 'voice' of the queen. Elizabeth I's epistolary authorship emerges as a political-literary construct, carefully negotiated through the collaborations of the queen, her Principal Secretary, and the various clerks and penmen at work in the royal secretariat.