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

Murphy, C.M.

Citation

Murphy, C. M. (2026, July 1). *'By the vse of others penne': the collaborative production of Queen Elizabeth I's English scribal letters, 1581-90*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4307302>

Version: Publisher's Version

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‘By the vse of others penne’:

The Collaborative Production of Queen Elizabeth I’s English Scribal Letters, 1581–90

Clodagh Murphy

1. Attending to the collaborative production of Queen Elizabeth I’s letters, and the contributions of the non-authorial agents involved, is essential to properly understand their meaning and function.
2. A letter drafted by one scribe would not be quite the same letter had it been drafted by any other.
3. The letters of Queen Elizabeth I must be read today as they were by their original addressees: not as isolated texts, but alongside the letters of the Principal Secretary.
4. Behind the epistolary expression of Queen Elizabeth I’s royal rage lay, not female irrationality, but an ill-tempered Secretary furiously brandishing his choleric quill.
5. Contrary to widespread assumptions in literary criticism, extracting individual contributions from collaboratively-produced texts is desirable and productive.
6. While ‘a rose by any other word would smell as sweet’, the relationship between a scribal hand and the name joined to it is often significant.
7. Unpicking early modern women’s collaborations with male scribes does not result in a loss of female agency, but its reconfiguration.
8. Computational methods reveal otherwise imperceptible facets of texts, but must be used alongside the close, qualitative methods that are the cornerstone of traditional humanities research.
9. Although the development of AI handwriting recognition tools should not (and will not) replace the need for strong palaeography skills, handwriting analysis must become computational.
10. Other countries, such as the UK, ought to give PhD candidates the employee status that is common in Dutch universities.