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An Introduction to Shorthand and its Study

As it stands, there is considerably more written *in* shorthand than there is written *about* shorthand. Over the past two millennia, shorthand has been used not only to take dictation and record speeches as they are uttered, but also for writing letters, diaries, marginal annotations, recipe books, sermon notes, calligraphical exercises, manuscript drafts, physicians' casebooks, students' lecture notes, and reporters' congressional and parliamentary records. However, only a charmed few of such manuscripts have ever been read, much less edited. Scholarly works that deal with shorthand as a research object are fewer still. Under these circumstances, it is little wonder that shorthand is so misconceptualised in both public and academic discourse, and that it lives on today primarily as a dead metaphor. In modern English parlance, to introduce a word or phrase as 'shorthand' for a larger concept implies a simplification of meaning – a means of referring to something nuanced and complex in a deliberately approximating way. Shorthand, in this metaphorical sense, is a shortcut to efficient communication. But shorthand, as a writing technology, has never been so simple.

Variously identified as an art, a technology, and a professional prerequisite, forms of shorthand have played a complex, important, and generally unrecognised role in far more contexts than the past century of scholarship has acknowledged. From the Tironian notes of the ancient and medieval worlds to the reinvention of shorthand in early modern England and its ensuing spread across Europe and beyond, shorthand has long occupied a nuanced and multifaceted position in a variety of manuscript cultures. Courts, parliaments, scriptoria, private homes, clerical offices, and classrooms are just some of the settings in which shorthand was likely to be practised. Its traces are likewise littered across the literary landscape: Fyodor Dostoevsky and Marcel Proust both wrote via dictation to stenographers, while Astrid Lindgren and George Bernard Shaw wrote in shorthand, themselves.[1] Here we have examples of shorthand used for Russian,

1 On Dostoevsky, see Kaufman 2021. On the wider stenographical practice in Russian literary production, see Andrianova 2019. On Proust, see the unedited letter addressed from Proust to Lucien Daudet (1911), described by Sotheby's in their catalogue of the *bibliothèque littéraire* Hubert Heilbronn (Lot 294, 11 May 2021). Six hundred and seventy of Astrid Lindgren's shorthand notepads are held at the Astrid Lindgren Archive and the Swedish Institute for Children's Books and form the basis of an ongoing, public-facing decipherment project: see Svenska Barnboks Instituet, 'About the Astrid Lindgren Code', <https://www.barnboksinstitutet.se/en/forskning/astrid-lindgren-koden/>. Shaw's short-

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French, Swedish, and English, but the list of languages for which a shorthand system has been designed goes well beyond the Indo-European. In the nineteenth century, shorthand circled the globe, with systems developed for East Asian languages such as Chinese and Japanese, artificial languages such as Volapük and Esperanto, and even non-linguistic writing such as musical notation.[2] In one rare case, shorthand was even adopted as the primary writing system for Chinook Jargon, a trade language developed in the nineteenth-century Pacific Northwest that for a time was written in a form of Duployan shorthand.[3] On the subject of languages, it bears noting that the publications of Ferdinand de Saussure, widely held to mark the beginning of linguistic structuralism, are partially compiled from his students' shorthand notes, and thus the modern field of linguistics is not only indebted to shorthand, but was developed with shorthand in the room.[4] In a similar way, shorthand played a crucial role in the political restructuring in the wake of the American and French Revolutions; it was widely viewed (and used) as a vehicle for the transparency and accountability that modern constitutions demanded, and it was deliberately built into congressional, parliamentary, and legal procedures in the United States, France, Germany, and elsewhere. The study of shorthand feeds back into our understanding of these contexts, because more often than not, the creation and framing of new shorthand systems has been embedded in wider discourses about not only linguistics and literacy, but the touchstone political, religious, social, and cultural topics of the day.

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hand manuscripts may be found in a number of special collections, a particularly strong example being the Bernard F. Burgunder Collection at Cornell University, which contains examples of Shaw's shorthand drafts of literary works, shorthand letters, and miscellaneous shorthand notes scribbled on scraps of paper and the backs of envelopes.

2 A sense of the multilingual spread of shorthand may be swiftly gleaned from the bibliography of shorthand materials held in the New York Public Library, compiled by Karl Brown and Daniel C. Haskell (1935). Assembled in the early twentieth century in partnership with the National Shorthand Reporters' Association, this is a central repository of ten major shorthand collections, each of which was curated with its own emphasis. As a result, it contains shorthand materials in an impressive range of languages: Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, English, Esperanto, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Malayalam, Maori, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, Volapük, Welsh, and Yiddish. On shorthand and music, see Brown and Haskell 1935, 400–401. For more on shorthand in Japan, see Jacobowitz 2015, 116–118 and Inoue 2011. For more on shorthand in China, see Hou 2019. We would like to thank Uta Lauer and Urs Matthias Zachmann for presenting on the development and use of Chinese and Japanese shorthand, respectively, at the two conferences from which this volume has developed.

3 Brown and Haskell 1935, 373–374; Poser 2011.

4 Engler 2004, 50–51. Little is made of this point in editions of Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, but see the editor's note in Saussure 1983, 39.

Yet despite the almost ubiquitous nature of shorthand, its role within various writing cultures and its entanglement in broader socio-political developments, modern scholarship on shorthand remains sparse. A great deal was written about shorthand in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some by collectors whose private libraries (now in public institutions) continue to serve as indispensable resources. The results of this peak in stenographical investigation include bibliographies, historical surveys, biographies of notable stenographers, and a vast quantity of short articles published by stenographical societies, some of which peer back – often sceptically, sometimes proudly – into shorthand's past.[5] While this body of literature falls short of developing an analytical approach to shorthand, it remains the primary point of departure for many technical details and factual information – though those facts and details must be carefully reviewed, particularly as they pertain to the early structure and chronology of shorthand systems. The vast majority of it was written by active practitioners of stenographic writing or by those personally invested in the industry, who frequently peddled a narrative of progress based on a modern view of shorthand's functionality, usually culminating in the shorthand system designed by the author himself.

And it was nearly always 'himself'. While women have long been practitioners, publishers, and sometimes even inventors of shorthand systems, men have dominated the landscape of stenographical invention and promotion: Isaac Pitman (1813–1897) in Britain, John Robert Gregg (1867–1948) in America, Émile Du-

5 There are numerous examples of all of these works, of which the following are merely a selection. The first major shorthand bibliography which strove toward comprehensiveness is that of Westby-Gibson 1887, while Carlton 1940 stands as a model of a narrower bibliography, describing a single collection in great detail (in this case, the books at Magdalene College, Cambridge assembled by Samuel Pepys, 1633–1703). See also Underhill forthcoming, an eagerly awaited revision and supplement to Carlton's still indispensable work. Havette 1906; Aliprandi 1956; Wedegärtner 1960; and Alston 1974 are concerned primarily with shorthand publications of French, Italian, German, and English respectively. An updated analytical bibliography of shorthand manuals published between 1588 and 1700 is currently in preparation by Kelly Minot McCay. Histories of shorthand may be found in Anderson 1882; Rockwell 1893; Navarre 1909; Johnen 1924; Melin 1927–1929; Schneider and Blauert 1936 and Butler 1951, which are of varying reliability but generally surpass the earlier attempts by Gibbs 1736; Lewis 1819; Pitman 1918 (1st edn 1852, in shorthand), and Levy 1862. For teleological histories of the standardisation of German shorthand (agreed upon in 1924), see Scheunig 1930; Lambrich and Kennerknecht 1962. Pocknell 1887 offers a good example of how individual shorthand inventors have been valorised, a tradition evident in biographies such as Gerber 1886; Reed 1890; Alteneder 1902; and Bonnet 1935, which lasted as late as Cowan 1984. The series of brief accounts of early inventors by Alexander Tremaine Wright (1896; 1898; 1904; 1907; 1909; 1911; 1919; 1926) is more heartily recommended.

ployé (1833–1912) in France, and Franz Xaver Gabelsberger (1789–1849) and Heinrich August Wilhelm Stolze (1798–1867) in Germany. It is only in the past hundred years that the stereotypical stenographer has become a female secretary, and it cannot be coincidence that during that same period, scholarship on shorthand plummeted.[6] Gendered prejudices meant that what had once been sold as a feat of linguistic ingenuity came to be seen as a mechanical skill, and interest in deciphering stenographical texts for their own sake declined alongside the wider practices of diplomatic history and textual editing. The fact that reading shorthand is often challenging and time-consuming does not help the matter. What is undeciphered remains unread, what has been deciphered and edited is too frequently read without realising the text's stenographic origins.

As a step forward, this volume is intended to bring shorthand into focus as both a research object and a re-emerging research field. It showcases some of the many lines of inquiry that shorthand prompts across a range of disciplinary and methodological perspectives, illustrating a small sample of the vast corpus of shorthand manuscripts that have survived. Some of the contributions are driven by arguments that speak to larger historiographical conversations; others present more focused case studies that delve deep into particular manuscripts. Still others provide syntheses of past scholarship or forward-thinking discussions of practical approaches to decipherment. For readers with a vested interest in shorthand, this volume provides a range of approaches to orient, substantiate, and inform their own work. More broadly, this publication invites scholars to consider ways in which historically overlooked or underestimated forms of writing facilitated and shaped a variety of writing practices in different cultural contexts, periods, and languages.

Beyond setting the stage for the following articles, the aim of this Introduction is to lay out a working definition of shorthand, to account for its uses, users and the evolving dynamics of each, and to discuss some of the problems and promises that shorthand manuscripts present. We have woven our description of each paper in this volume throughout, to both support our discussion and orient each article within wider themes in the history of shorthand. Our intention is to provide readers with a firm grasp of what shorthand can be and the fruitful ways in which it can inform broader fields of study. Such a goal is necessitated by a situation in which shorthand is rarely defined, its history is often recycled from secondary sources with little recourse to original materials, and its historiography is, for the most part, incoherent and diffuse. Our treatment is inevitably shaped by

6 On the correlation between the rise of female stenographers and the decline of shorthand studies, see Henderson 2008, 12–13 and Price 2008.

our own areas of expertise: the stenographic cultures of early modern England and modern Germany.[7] The use of shorthand (and the shorthand systems used) differed dramatically in these two settings, and for that reason we have opted to lean into the juxtaposition. While we do so at the risk of downplaying the distinctive dynamics of stenographical use in other periods and places, the contrast has sharpened our understanding of shorthand as an evolving writing technology. We hope that this Introduction – and the volume as a whole – inspires inquiry into the wider histories of shorthand that remain to be written both in these contexts and beyond.

1 The many names of shorthand and its definition

When the subject of shorthand is mentioned among non-specialists, many will consider their own note-taking practices, observe that they employ some form of abbreviation, and conclude that they themselves are 'writing in shorthand'.[8] This line of thinking is rooted in a misunderstanding of what shorthand is, a forgivable error given how inadequately 'shorthand' and its various synonyms are defined. We have yet to encounter a dictionary, encyclopaedia, or reference work that offers a description of shorthand that is equally applicable to both its premodern and modern manifestations – let alone its varied applications even within a single manuscript culture.[9] So, it is there that we begin: with a practical definition of shorthand and a discussion of its related terminology.

In contrast to the Germanic word *shorthand*, the more technical-sounding term *stenography* – from the Greek 'narrow + writing' – carries a meaning less clouded by colloquialism. It is tempting to default to the latter, particularly as our intention is to elevate the status of shorthand in scholarly discourse, and there are valid reasons to do so. Both words share the same basic compounds, and both

7 McCay 2021; McCay 2024b; Boeddeker 2023; Boeddeker 2024.

8 Not all abbreviated writing is shorthand, through all shorthand is arguably a form of abbreviated writing. For scholarly works that take the latter as their premise, see Tedesco 2016 and Frenz 2010, 41–53 and 141–143.

9 The definition offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary* emphasises the speed of shorthand, and names none of its further functions: 'A method of speedy writing by means of the substitution of contractions or arbitrary signs or symbols for letters, words, etc.; brachygraphy, stenography': *Oxford English Dictionary*, *s.v.* 'shorthand (*n.*), sense 1', <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4740449704>. Such an innocuous definition is admittedly preferable to those offered in more linguistically oriented accounts, such as Daniels 1996, which considers only the shorthand of twentieth-century professional settings.

have been used to refer to English shorthand systems since the early seventeenth century.[10] In fact, the Hellenised term *stenography* predates *shorthand* by three decades, though from the very start it was introduced as an inkhorn word, glossed more simply as a 'compendious Writing [...] expressed by a short Character'.[11] Shorthand has been given a number of names over its long history, many of which emphasise special qualities and/or refer to particular systems. *Nota* in Latin (used of the Tironian notes by Isidore of Seville in the seventh century)[12] and *character* in English (introduced in 1588, most commonly in the expression 'writing by character') highlight the unusual appearance of shorthand, and the principle of combining simple strokes to form more complex graphemes. In contrast, *brachygraphy* ('short + writing'), *stenography* ('narrow + writing'), and *shorthand* emphasise the compact, spatially efficient nature of the writing, a quality that hints at its speed but that does not stress swiftness to the same degree as *tachygraphy* ('rapid + writing'), yet another early synonym. By the third decade of the seventeenth century, all of these words had become regular and interchangeable terms for the same category of 'short-writing', while other seventeenth-century coinages (*radiography*, *radio-stenography*, *zeiglographia*, *semigraphy*, and *thoographia*) more properly refer to the specific systems of individual inventors.[13] This was initially true of *tachygraphy* and *phonography*, the first a seventeenth-century label associated with Thomas Shelton (1601–after 1659) and the second a nineteenth-century trademark of Isaac Pitman, who used the name to emphasise his shorthand system's attentiveness to English phonology. Both inventors marketed their systems so well, however, that by the late nineteenth century the names came to stand for shorthand in a more generic sense in and outside of the Anglophone world.[14] On the other side of the coin, inventors continued to develop new

10 Indeed, some form of the word *stenography* has been used in the titles of shorthand manuals for Danish, Esperanto, French, Italian, Polish, Swedish, Romanian, and Volapük (Brown and Haskell 1935).

11 Willis 1602, sig. A4^{r}.

12 Isidore, *Etymologies*, tr. Barney 2006, 51.

13 These particular systems are attributed to Bathsua Reginald (1600, d. in or after 1675), Theophilus Metcalfe (1610–1646?), Thomas Shelton (1601–after 1659), Jeremiah Rich (1630?–1667?), and Abraham Nicholas (d. *c.* 1690), respectively. For more on the terminology of early modern English shorthand, see McCay 2021, 5–6.

14 By all indications, *tachygraphy* seems to have been Shelton's own coinage. It appears as early as 1635 (written with a space, as 'Tachy graphy'), and continued to refer specifically to Shelton's invention throughout the seventeenth century. *Phonography*, in contrast, is a term that dates back at least as far as 1701, with the publication of John Jones's *Practical Phonography*, but Pitman more prominently applied it to his shorthand system beginning with the second edition of his manual (1840).

names for their systems that distinguished them from all who came before – a different tactic motivated by the same marketing mindset.

Terminological changes could also be instigated by pressures outside of stenographers' control. In nineteenth-century Germany, *Stenographie* and *Kurzschrift* ('short-writing') co-existed alongside *Geschwindigkeitsschrift* ('quick-writing') and *Redezeichenkunst* ('the art of speech signs'), the latter a neologism of Gabelsberger which emphasised the connection between shorthand and orality. By 1942, however, it was no longer Gabelsberger and his fellow shorthand inventors who would determine the 'correct' terminology for shorthand, but rather the head of the NSDAP Chancellery, who was asked which term was more appropriate: *Stenographie* or *Kurzschrift*. He brought the matter to Adolf Hitler, who evidently had a strong preference:

> Before the Führer makes a decision, he would like to know how other nations refer to shorthand in their languages. Incidentally, the Führer still considers the terms *Stenografie* and *Stenografen-Kongress*, *Stenografenwesen* etc. to be better than the use of the word *Kurzschrift*; this word, which is difficult to pronounce, sounds almost Polish.[15]

Soon after, the order was issued: *Stenographie* would be the only word used.[16]

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15 Berlin, Bundesarchiv, R1501/127148, 36: '*Bevor der Führer eine Entscheidung trifft, möchte er wissen, wie andere Nationen in ihren Sprachen die Kurzschrift bezeichnen. Nach wie vor hält der Führer im übrigen die Bezeichnung Stenografie und Stenografen-Kongress, Stenografenwesen usw. für besser als die Verwendung des Wortes Kurzschrift; dieses schwer aussprechbare Wort klinge schon beinahe polnisch*'.

16 Berlin, Bundesarchiv, R1501/127148, 30: '*Dem Führer ist berichtet worden, daß eine amtliche Anordnung die Bezeichnung Stenografie durch die Bezeichnung Kurzschrift ersetzt hat. Der Führer hat verfügt, daß diese Anordnung wieder aufgehoben wird. In Zukunft soll lediglich die Bezeichnung Stenografie Verwendung finde*' ('The Führer has been informed that an official order has replaced the term *Stenografie* with the term *Kurzschrift*. The Führer has decreed that this order is to be cancelled. In future, only the term *Stenografie* is to be used'). The Nazis' concern for shorthand went far beyond matters of terminology; it was used extensively for their obsessive bureaucratic record-keeping. Adolf Hitler alone kept eight shorthand writers at his *Führerhauptquartier* to record his briefings. Many of the shorthand writers he employed had previously served as parliamentary stenographers and continued to bear witness to the highest levels of political and military leadership – and eventually the collapse of the Third Reich. When the order was given to destroy those minutes at the end of the Second World War, two of those shorthand writers, Gerhard Herrgesell and Hans Jonuschat, contacted the American Counter Intelligence Corps to inform them about the burning of the files. When Counter Intelligence Corps and the shorthand writers arrived at the scene, they discovered that 1500 pages of shorthand notes (covering fifty meetings between 1942 and 1945) had survived the fire. The seven remaining shorthand writers spent the summer of 1945 transcribing those records in the service of the Americans, providing invaluable information pertaining to the

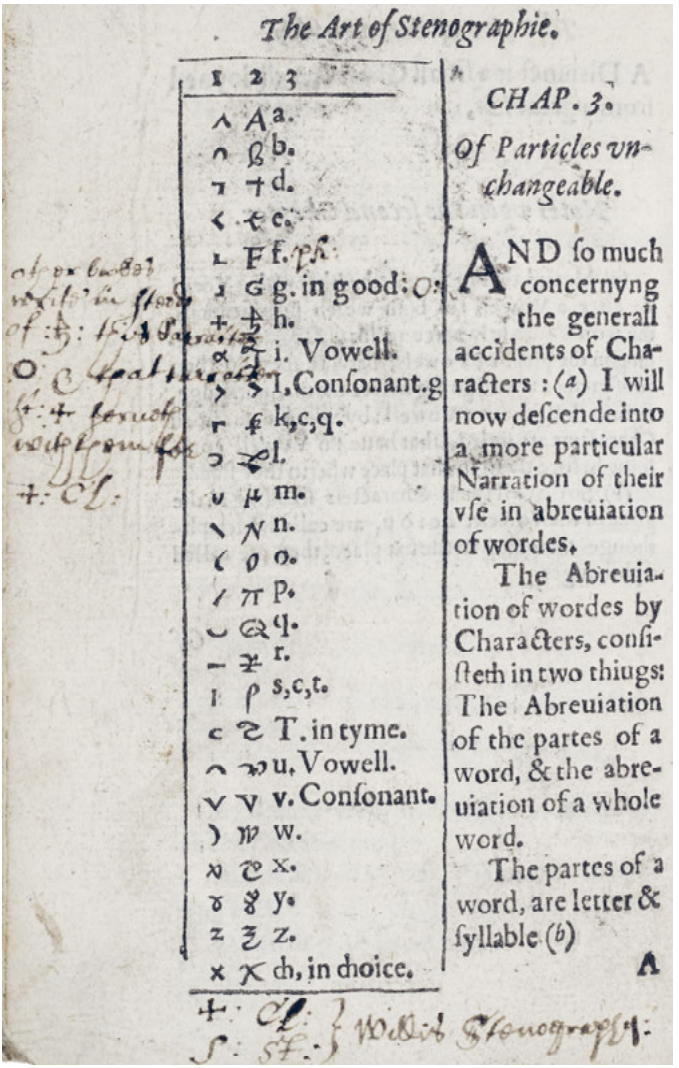

Fig. 1: The first shorthand alphabet of John Willis (column 1), alongside the corresponding longhand letters (column 3) and the graphemes from which the shorthand characters were ostensibly derived (column 2), as shown in Willis 1602, sig. A8^{v}. Washington DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, STC 25744a. Photo by the Folger Imaging Department.

military decision-making process during the war. Peitz 2014, 146–147; in general, the history of shorthand in the Third Reich still remains to be written, but see also Peitz 2015.

As this episode makes clear, each term comes with its own – often unpredictable – connotations. We have chosen *shorthand* as our default for the simple reason that it is the most generic term available in English. It was not coined by an inventor for a particular system, but instead seems to have developed organically as the preferred descriptor; a subtitle, rather than a brand. Even if non-specialist readers are unfamiliar with the specifics of shorthand, they will be familiar with the word itself, its metaphorical valence, and perhaps with some of the somewhat dismissive associations it has picked up over the past century and a half.[17] We aim to tackle these misapprehensions and potential prejudices head-on, beginning with a definition of *shorthand* that applies to the writing technology as a whole, irrespective of when it was invented or what name it was given.

Our proposed definition of shorthand is that of a fully-formed writing system, one developed to fulfil a set of functions seen to be missing from a writing community's traditional orthography. Consequently, the composition and logic of shorthand and longhand diverge significantly. Shorthand records language according to a set of orthographical rules and guidelines that are entirely distinct from longhand. It does not merely leave letters out; it operates with an entirely different set of characters or graphemes. Those stenographic characters generally bear no resemblance to the alphabet (Latin or otherwise) or other base writing system that the shorthand is meant to supplement, and the number of distinct characters in a shorthand system will often outnumber those found in alphabets or syllabaries by a considerable margin. Even when inventors ostensibly design their 'letters' (which are typically presented as phonological notation, rather than a replacement alphabet) from the corresponding longhand letterforms, the resulting systems bear little to no graphic resemblance to their longhand counterpart.

17 Take, for example, the term 'shorthand girl', popular around the turn of the twentieth century.

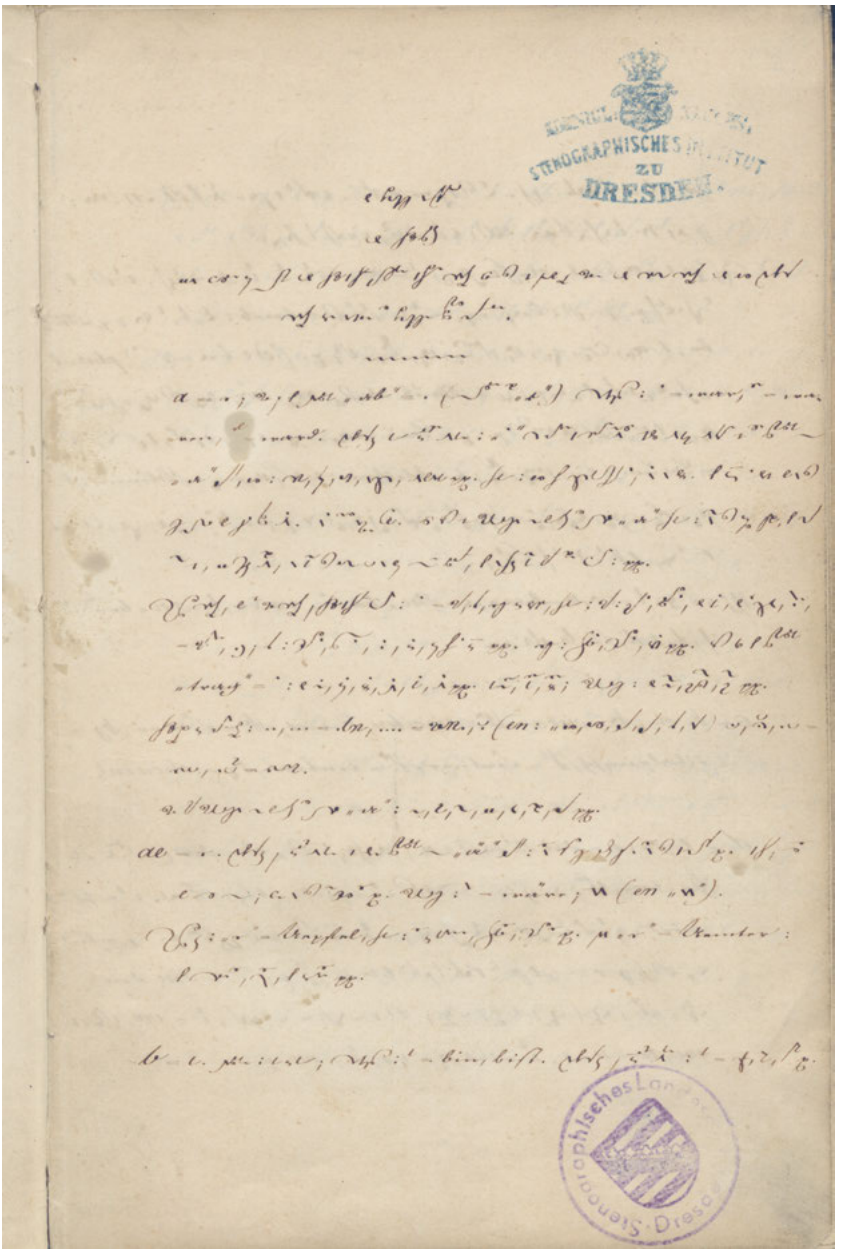

Fig. 2: A page from Franz Xaver Gabelsberger's 'Stenographischer Repetitor', in which he summarised some of the principal rules and abbreviations of his system. Dresden, Sächsische Landes-, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Stenografische Sammlung O b 0004.

While an effective shorthand system will ideally be developed in accordance with a particular language, shorthand systems have often been built upon earlier models rather than developed anew. In the seventeenth century, for example, some of the earliest shorthand systems adapted for Neo-Latin, Dutch, French, and German were based upon English systems (which all shared a common origin, in turn).[18] In the late nineteenth century, too, Japanese and Chinese shorthand systems drew upon historic and contemporary English precedents, and the earlier German system pioneered by Gabelsberger was translated into Czech, Danish, Italian, and Russian, among other languages. But even in shorthand systems that that shared a model or drew upon the same set of pre-existing notations, symbols, and conventions – as in the early modern English context[19] – the same character might represent an entirely different letter, sound, or lexical item in two different systems.

While there is no unifying structure of shorthand, there are overarching characteristics worth setting out in general terms. Perhaps the most basic tenet of shorthand is that it strives to be free of redundancies, unlike most traditional orthographies. Moreover, phonological, morphological, or syntactical information need not be represented in ways that imitate speech. In early systems, in particular, as much could be represented by the position of a grapheme as by the shape of the grapheme itself. While most shorthand systems will have a semi-phonetic alphabet that can be used to represent any word, shorthand systems generally represent common syllables, morphemes, words, and phrases in efficient and distinct ways, rather than forming them from smaller, phonetic elements. In other words, stenographic characters can be alphabetic, syllabic, as well as logographic in nature. Most systems are composed of a mix of these, meaning that a single word may be written in a number of possible ways, all of them ostensibly 'correct'. Correctness itself is determined by recognisability rather than an allegiance

18 While mainstream shorthand use in the seventeenth century was restricted to the Anglophone world, non-English systems were developed and published in London and abroad. Latin manuals were published under the names of the established shorthand inventors John Willis in 1618, Thomas Shelton from 1660, and Charles Aloys Ramsay (*fl.* 1670–1680) from 1681, who also championed manuals in German and French. A shorthand for Dutch was developed in the mid-seventeenth century by the language planner Francis Lodwick (1619–1694). It survives in manuscript (London, British Library, Sloane MS 897, fols 18^{r}–23^{r} and Sloane MS 932, fols 17^{v}–21^{v}), but evidently failed to go to press due to difficulties with the stenographical woodcuts (Henderson and Poole 2011, 37).

19 John Willis (1572?–1625) developed a partially-phonetic shorthand that pulled inspiration from Greek, Hebrew, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Arabic numerals, astrological signs, merchant's trademarks, and any notational conventions available to the writer, as described in his earliest manual, published in 1602, and those that followed.

to a prescriptive orthography: if the intended reader can understand what is written, then that is sufficient, which means that shorthand allows for considerably more customisation and adaptation than a standard orthography. Such personalisation, compounded with the growing number of shorthand systems available over the past four centuries, means that knowledge of one's own shorthand system does not afford literacy in another, and literacy itself is entangled with the many functions that shorthand has.

2 The uses and users of shorthand

2.1 Speed and the recording of speech

The function most commonly associated with shorthand, arguably its most defining characteristic, is speed. From its earliest to its most modern instantiations, shorthand systems have been designed to record language faster than any other written medium. In practice, not all shorthand systems could be written at the speeds advertised, and many early modern commentators agreed that recording speech 'verbatim' required not only a deft hand, but a slow speaker.[20] In the eighteenth century, however, the attribute of speed became prioritised above all else, not only in the marketing of shorthand systems, but in their very design.[21] By the turn of the nineteenth century, shorthand inventors cast their creations as the most useful tool for anyone who faced the increasing plethora of paperwork, and their intended audience – clerks, scholars, those working in business or the military – could indeed save 'time, effort and energy'[22] with the help of shorthand. In an age characterised by acceleration in almost all aspects of life, shorthand was a writing system perfectly suited to the modern world, a technology discussed in the same breath as railroads, steam engines, and the telegraph.[23] With sufficient train-

20 McCay 2021, 19–20.

21 Beginning with Gabelsberger, the inventors of German shorthand described their designs as *kursive Systeme* ('cursive systems'), actively distancing themselves from premodern counterparts, which they referred to as 'geometric'. This distinction was shared among Anglophone inventors, as well. In both contexts, shorthand inventors agreed that while the geometric systems were space-saving, the new cursive systems were time-saving, and they focused on designing characters that could be linked together in smooth, uninterrupted strokes of the pen. See Johnen 1924, 45–46.

22 '*Ersparung von Zeit, Muehe und Kraeften*' (Mosengeil 1799, [2]).

23 On the wider acceleration of handwriting in the nineteenth century, see Stein 2010, 279. On the connection between shorthand and accelerated travel, see Wagner 2024, 9, quoting Gantter 1904, 455

ing, stenographers writing in nineteenth-century systems could reach words-per-minute (wpm) rates that genuinely afforded live transcription. Speedwriting competitions in the early twentieth century tested speeds above 200 wpm (roughly double that of a proficient typist).[24] Consequently, shorthand was, for a certain period, the most efficient way to record the spoken word – at least until the arrival of technologies such as the stenotype machine, increasingly portable and affordable audio recording, and digital transcription programmes.[25]

Accuracy at speed was a layered attribute with rippling effects. The acceleration of shorthand did not only impact shorthand and its practitioners, but wider cultures of political accountability in the modern world. In these settings, speed was not perceived as a value per se, but as a tool that enabled the almost verbatim recording of even the most heated debates or rapid speeches. The use of short-

and Alteneder 1902, 355. The connection between shorthand and telegraphy was more than just rhetoric: in 1835, Gabelsberger and the physicist Carl August von Steinheil attempted to invent a *Stenotelegraphie* (Fischer 1887, 45–49). Although the project was abandoned, the idea was taken up again by the French inventor André Cassagnes in 1890 (Chenut 1890).

24 Mechler 1922 presents a survey of speedwriting competitions in the early twentieth century and the statistics of their victors, who were judged for their ability to keep pace accurately at different rates of dictation (ranging from 150 to 280 wpm). For a partial continuation of the story post-1922, see <https://www.ncra.org/home/the-profession/Awards-and-contests/national-speed-contest>. Average speech rates differ widely across languages, speakers, and situations, but even a comparatively fast speaker of British English is unlikely to exceed 200 wpm when delivering pre-prepared remarks, as in a lecture or a radio broadcast (Tauroza and Allison 1990, 101–103). In the German parliament, the speed of the stenographers, all of whom still write by hand today, is measured in syllables, and averages 500 syllables per minute: Deutscher Bundestag [2024], 'Stenograf', <https://www.bundestag.de/services/glossar/glossar/S/stenograf-868660>.

25 Stenotype machines, versions of which are still in use in American courts, are mechanical typewriters or electronic keyboards that allow the typist to press more than one key at the same time. Different combinations of keys, or 'chords', produce single syllables or common words, allowing for much faster writing speeds than with a standard keyboard. They are not to be confused with proposals for using stenography-inspired abbreviations to type more quickly on a standard typewriter, such as Quinn 1895. In 1930, when parliamentary stenographers in Germany evaluated new technologies that might render them redundant, such as the phonograph, they rated the risk from the stenotype machine as comparatively low, Ackermann 1930. Indeed, it was not the stenotype machine or the Dictaphone alone that spelled the decline of shorthand, but the development of multiple technologies that edged it out of multiple spheres. It was well into the twentieth century before any audio recorder could rival the portability that came with a pencil and a steno pad, for example, a function that stenotype machines have never filled. In 1895, Quinn had predicted that shorthand would fade into obsolescence only with truly portable transcription technology: 'Whenever a typewriter shall be invented that can easily be carried in the pocket (we hope to see it soon in the market), indeed, phono and stenography will be universally discarded as obsolete and unworthy of a progressive age' (Quinn 1985, [3]).

hand to take live dictation has forged a strong association between stenography and orality, placing it somewhere in the middle of the assumed binary between writing and speech.[26] Cornelia Vismann has coined the term 'action writing' for this phenomenon: when recording speech in shorthand, the pace of speaking and the pace of writing converge, and shorthand becomes a lasting witness to an otherwise ephemeral oration.[27] This, at least, is the impression that an onlooker may have and that a stenographer may cultivate, and it has compelling stakes.

From the late eighteenth century, especially, shorthand transcripts of oral procedures promised no less than a 'total recall' of what was said, becoming a tool to project accountability, objectivity, and trust.[28] Beyond summarising or synthesising the final verdicts, such transcripts catalogued the proceedings themselves, recording not only the final decisions, but the discussions that led to them.[29] This was the function of shorthand that led to its rapid dissemination and adoption throughout continental Europe, beginning in Revolutionary France and following the wave of constitutions in other European countries in the early nineteenth century.[30] This socio-political context speaks to the motivations behind the rapid dissemination of shorthand across the modern world. The question of why early modern shorthand had remained an essentially Anglophone phenomenon up until that point, however, remains ripe for conjecture.[31]

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26 On the relation between writing and orality, see the classic works of Ong 1982; Goody 1987; and Finnegan 1988. For model treatments of the subject with a tighter scope, see Clanchy 2013; McKenzie 1985; and Fox 2000.

27 Vismann 2012, 397–398. For an extension of this idea in the domain of literary criticism, see Kiséry 2024, 696–702.

28 Vismann 2012, 398. The association between shorthand and accountability applied particularly to parliamentary debates, but extended to court hearings as well. On the role of shorthand in modern court hearings, see Kienitz 2021. As ever, there were exceptions: cases in which shorthand transcriptions of political events were kept for reasons that were antithetical to public accountability and trust. In the German Empire between 1878 and 1890, social democratic meetings were banned under the so-called Socialist Laws, and even after the ban was lifted, state authorities kept a critical eye on such meetings, planting stenographers to record them in secret (Lengmann and Marek 2009).

29 As Niklas Luhmann has argued in his theoretic concept '*Legitimation durch Verfahren*', the legitimacy of proceedings such as parliamentary debates not only lay in their outcome, but in the proceeding itself (see Luhmann 1978,11); the verbatim reports should reflect that.

30 For the role of French shorthand before, during, and after the French Revolution, see Gardey 2008, 25–70. For the establishment of the stenographic service between 1789 and 1848 in France, see Coniez 2019; in German parliaments between 1815 and 1848, see Boeddeker 2023, 27–60. For an older overview on parliamentary shorthand in Europe and beyond, see Kramsall 1891.

31 This question is explored in Gardey 2010b. The nature and scale of public life in Britain and colonial America bore little resemblance to that of pre-Revolutionary France, and the fact that

Two of the contributions in this volume support recent work on this subject, shedding light on the ways in which shorthand has been perceived in different political contexts. In eighteenth-century America, as Theodore Delwiche shows in his article, the capacity for congressional reporters to keep notes verbatim was a given. Delwiche traces the considerable confidence that politicians and the politically-informed public felt for shorthand – confidence that many modern-day scholars who rely on modern decipherments of those same documents unwittingly share. Delphine Gardey traces a similar trend in both French and British parliaments in her contribution to this volume, taking a sociological and longue durée approach. Gardey highlights the plasticity of shorthand as it evolved from its early modern instantiations to its modern forms, becoming a vital and wide-reaching technology of modern democracy. This builds upon the earlier work by Linda Orr, who has traced the positivist thinking that came to view shorthand transcriptions as complete and objective reproductions of an event, collapsing the gulf between historical events and the historical record.[32] A similar public sentiment can be found in late Czarist and early Soviet Russia, as Stephen Lovell has shown in recent publications. Lovell has described the public demand for stenographic transcripts of speeches in the Duma – and outcry when such transcriptions were repressed – while also emphasising the extent to which so-called verbatim shorthand reports were edited and censored prior to publication.[33]

The perception of parliamentary shorthand accounts as a verbatim and trustworthy record of debates had repercussions even within parliamentary rhetoric. As Lovell has argued, the publication of stenographic transcripts in the decade leading up to the Russian Revolution sparked a rhetorical shift in the Duma, in which eloquent, scripted oration gave way to fiery, elliptical expression.[34] Another example may be found in the German Empire in the late nineteenth and

shorthand was used for political, legal, administrative, or journalistic purposes in Britain but not on the Continent goes some way to explaining why seventeenth-century shorthand remained an English phenomenon. See, for example, Henderson 2001; Henderson 2005; Mendle 2005; and McKenzie 2021a. Alex Beeton has recently discovered that clerks to the House of Lords used shorthand during the Long Parliament (a point for which we are indebted), though the precise nature of its use remains unstudied. Yet seventeenth-century English shorthand was neither restricted to nor defined by those political purposes. As will be explored in the pages below, early modern English shorthand was used for many categories of writing: personal, religious, bureaucratic, and scholarly, all of which had vibrant parallels on the Continent.

32 Orr 1987, 201 and 210.

33 Lovell 2015 and Lovell 2020. For the comparable role of shorthand reports in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Germany, see Boeddeker 2023.

34 Lovell 2015, 11–12.

early twentieth centuries, in which parliamentarians at the Reichstag used the official reports – which were recorded by shorthand writers – to confirm or deny what had previously been said: 'Let's get the shorthand report!' or 'No, he didn't say that; read the shorthand report, I paid very close attention'.[35] With the help of the minutes, members of parliament staged, defended and proved their credibility on the political stage, using the shorthand record to defend themselves and attack the integrity of their opponents.[36] Moreover, even when a record had been converted into longhand – indeed, even after it had been published in print – German parliamentarians continued to refer to it as a *Stenogramm* (shorthand note), highlighting the close connection between the writing technology and the credibility of those reports. In other words, a shorthand report became, in the metaphorical sense, 'shorthand' for credibility. Even when the report was challenged, it was seldom the shorthand writer who was blamed. In both the German and Russian contexts, accusations of tampered transcripts were usually lodged against the parliamentarians who had checked and authorised a given record for publication. The risk did not rest in shorthand as a recording technology, but in the disingenuous interference of the speakers.

Already in early modern England, before stenographic reporting had been formally incorporated into parliamentary procedures, shorthand was attached to the idea of capturing an oral event exactly as it happened. From as early as 1589 – around a decade before shorthand could feasibly be used for this purpose – printed sermons were published in England claiming to have been taken verbatim, 'by characterye',[37] a rhetorical trope that appeared not only in printed sermons (themselves a contentious genre, as many felt that sermons should be oral), but also in printed trials and scaffold speeches.[38] What began as a trope, however, became a reality. Shorthand was used to draft, deliver, transcribe, and verify testimonies, and shorthand manuscripts could hold legal clout as an authoritative witness to oral testimony.[39]

35 *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags* 1894/1895, 2436; *Stenographische Berichte über die Verhandlungen des Reichstags* 1890/1892, 4628.

36 Boeddeker 2023, 185–200. On the connection between writing practices and credibility of those reports, see too Gardey 2005. For one of few instances in which a shorthand writer was accused of altering a parliamentary transcription, during the first national parliament in Germany in 1848, see Burkhardt 2003, 513.

37 Tyrrell 1589, title page.

38 McCay 2021, 15–16. On printed sermons, see Hunt 2010, 118–129.

39 McCay 2021, 17–18.

Shorthand was by no means the first or only means of recording oral events – parliamentary or otherwise.[40] Nor has shorthand, nor the published reports pulled from shorthand transcripts, always merited the faith that it has been given. Indeed, one of the most enduring aspects of shorthand is that its formal capabilities need not align with its promises of functionality. There was power in the very potential of what shorthand could do, and the notions of accountability and access that it brought to parliamentary procedures – to say nothing of the wider sphere of journalism – could be true in perception even if untrue in practice.

2.2 Secrecy

The promise of shorthand extended well beyond speed and its side effects. Some users were drawn to shorthand by its air of secrecy – an unintentional benefit of its unusual and (to the uninitiated) inscrutable appearance. While stenography ought not to be conflated with cryptography – writing whose primary purpose is to encrypt a message so that it can be decrypted by the intended recipient – shorthand certainly offered a way of writing that was illegible to all but a select coterie. In seventeenth-century England, especially, shorthand was explicitly marketed as a secure writing system ideal for sensitive correspondence, keeping private diaries, and even disguising religious texts while travelling in foreign lands. Two of the most famous seventeenth-century shorthand manuscripts appear to have been consigned to shorthand for that very reason: a short confession by Isaac Newton enumerating his personal sins, written in 1662 during his student days at Cambridge, and Samuel Pepys's multivolume diary, which he kept from 1660 to 1669. Yet even in these two cases, the motivations for writing in shorthand are more complicated than confidentiality alone. Newton also used shorthand for innocuous material, such as 'A remedy for a Ague' and a meditation on the creation of whales, and when Pepys was committing his most heinous actions to writing, he did so with additional layers of linguistic obfuscation – writing in different languages, with nonsense syllables, or a combination of both.[41] While many who see, but do not read, shorthand inscriptions in premodern sources are prone to theories of secrecy and scandal, the verdict of those who have successfully deci-

40 See, for example, Clanchy 2013; Parkes 1991, 19–33; Burnett 1995; Blair 2010; Blair 2016.

41 On Newton, see Westfall 1963. On Pepys, see in particular Latham and Matthews 1971, xxvi–xxx and lvii–lxi; Stewart 2018, 264–267.

phered shorthand inscriptions is rather less exciting. Even in seemingly confidential documents, one actually often finds little written in shorthand that one would not expect to find written in longhand.[42] This said, so few private shorthand documents have been read that any decipherment is significant, whatever it may reveal.

A system of shorthand is secret, however, only if it is not widely used. In the Carolingian period, when Tironian notes provided a codified shorthand that was taught and shared across Europe, its potential to serve as a secret script was comparatively poor.[43] Likewise, modern inventors who sought to elevate shorthand from a somewhat niche, scholarly pastime to a general-purpose writing technology deliberately downplayed shorthand's prior connection to confidentiality. In the words of Gabelsberger, writing to a friend in 1828, shorthand could only succeed if it shed its cryptic associations and became common knowledge, because 'No government would then have to shy away from stenography as a kind of cipher; for there would soon be educated people everywhere who could read this writing as well as any other'.[44] Even in the modern age, however, there are still cases in which letter-writers and diarists opted to use shorthand for the sense of security it gave them on top of its other advantages.[45] After the Nazis banned the author Erich Kästner from working as a writer in 1933, he recorded his observations of everyday life in Nazi-Germany and the Second World War in his so-called 'blue books' – but as a cautionary measure, he wrote in shorthand.[46]

42 See McKenzie 2021b, 823; Powers (this volume); and the extended discussion in Delwiche 2022a, 319–324.

43 Ganz 2023, 156.

44 '*Keine Regierung hätte dann auch die Stenographie mehr als eine Art Geheimschrift zu scheuen; denn es würden sich bald überall Gebildete finden, welche diese Schrift ebensogut wie jede andere lesen könnten u.s.w.*', Fischer 1887, 91.

45 For an example of a nineteenth-century shorthand diary, see Dresden, Sächsische Landes-, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Stenografische Sammlung, O Autogr. Nr. 1027,1–12. For an example in literature, take Smith 1949, a novel written in the form of an amateur shorthand diary – a conceit that affords the protagonist privacy and the reader a sense of unguarded intimacy.

46 Bülow 2006, 297.

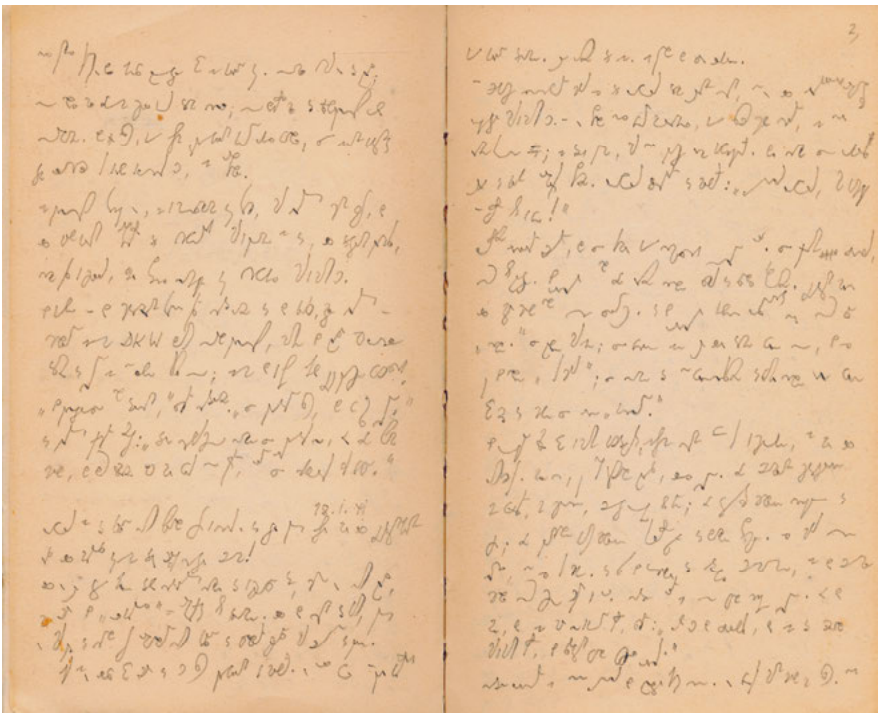

Fig. 3: An opening in Erich Kästner's diary from January 1941, Marbach, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, 005_Kaestner_BB_Ds_02, reprinted with the kind permission of the heir of Erich Kästner. Photo by DLA Marbach.

2.3 Spatial efficiency

Other users valued shorthand for its spatial efficiency. In a sense, speed was a product of shorthand's concision, just as secrecy was a product of shorthand's visual 'strangeness'. The advantages of writing much in little room were not principally economic.[47] As is now well known, the cost of parchment and paper in the pre-industrial world was less prohibitive than previously thought, with wide variations

47 Delwiche 2022a, 330 describes an eighteenth-century Harvard undergraduate who did crunch the numbers: he calculated that writing in shorthand saved him 32 cents a year on paper costs, a paltry sum in comparison to the twenty-six full days (at 75 cents per day) it saved him in time.

in quality and commensurate variations in price.[48] The more compelling advantage seems to have been in the ability to fit a lot of text into a marginal or interlineal note. This advantage may resonate little today but was so important in the pre-industrial world that it was the attribute that gave shorthand its name: as mentioned above, the 'short' of *shorthand*, as with the synonyms *brachygraphy* and *stenography*, refers not to the writing system's speed, but to its literal shortness. Carolingian scribes employed the Tironian notes for their size alongside their speed,[49] and shorthand works of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries stressed its smallness, assuring readers that what might take up a page in longhand would take up no more than a margin in shorthand. Early modern inventors made an exhibition of the same in their manuals, some of which featured examples of shorthand micrography and all of which were produced in small formats. As learners graduated from shorthand manuals to shorthand specimens – fully-engraved books featuring the New Testament or the Psalms – their reading materials shrunk to miniature proportions. The psalters published in the second half of the seventeenth century in the shorthand systems of Thomas Shelton and Jeremiah Rich, for example, were 6 × 4 cm in dimension and 64mo in format – small enough to be novelties, though not so small as to be illegible.[50] By the end of the seventeenth century, some shorthand inventors had begun to push back against the association between shorthand and smallness,[51] and by the nineteenth century the link had been all but severed. Even in the late eighteenth century, however, some manuals framed the time- and space-saving aspects of shorthand as two sides of the same coin – that shorthand was in every sense efficient.[52]

48 See, for example, Clanchy 2013, 330 (on parchment); Da Rold 2020 (on paper in the Middle Ages); Wolfe 2019 (on paper in early modern England).

49 Ganz 2023, 156; Walther (this volume).

50 McCay 2024b, Chap. 4; Hughes 2020, 401.

51 The first detractor seems to have been the shorthand inventor Abraham Nicholas (d. *c.* 1690), whose posthumous manual insisted that the objective of shorthand should not be 'Writing much in a little Room', but instead, 'Speedy-writing' (Nicholas 1692, sigs A3^{v}–A4^{r}).

52 Mosengeil 1799, 8–9.

Fig. 4: A detail of shorthand micrography from the engraved title page of Samuel Botley's *Maximum in Minimo* (1674?), featuring the Ten Commandments within a square centimetre. Cambridge, Houghton Library, Harvard University, GEN EC65.B6595.695m. Photo by Kelly Minot McCay.

Fig. 5: A page from a late-seventeenth-century Book of Common Prayer and New Testament written in shorthand, 12 × 8 cm. Washington DC, Folger Shakespeare Library, V.a.625. Photo by the Folger Imaging Department.

2.4 Curiosity, intellectual inspiration, and linguistic inquiry

For other learners, the curious nature of this new and unusual-looking art was selling point enough, and many gentleman collectors made room for shorthand books on their shelves (though the books were so small they required very little space indeed).[53] The fascination with shorthand sometimes aligned with an interest and experimentation in other aspects of language, literacy, and writing, as well. In seventeenth-century England, aspects of shorthand inspired forays in phonetic writing, philosophical languages, and even systems of finger spelling for communication with the deaf.[54] In that spirit, shorthand was generally appreciated as an art of creative abridgement.[55] In this same period, for example, when shorthand systems were not yet fast enough for live transcription, the stenographer was not merely a copyist, but a distiller of information.[56] The joke that a stenographer could jot down an entire speech on a thumbnail was less a celebration of shorthand's tiny proportions than it was a jab at the speaker's verbosity.[57]

The intersections between shorthand and linguistic experimentation endured well into the Enlightenment and beyond, facilitated by the fact that shorthand has always done more than simply record language quickly. It is no coincidence that many of the major research collections of shorthand materials were assembled not

53 The libraries of Belton House and Blickling Hall, now owned by the National Trust, contain seventeenth-century shorthand manuals or specimen books, as did the library previously amassed by the earls of Macclesfield, now dispersed. Seventeenth-century owners of shorthand manuals included the language-planner Francis Lodwick; Samuel Hartlib (1600–1662), an educational reformer; Thomas Plume (1630–1704), a clergyman; Seth Ward (1617–1689), a founding member of the Royal Society; and of course Samuel Pepys.

54 On Lodwick, see n. 18. Wilkins discusses shorthand on several occasions, in his grand opus, *An Essay towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (Wilkins 1668, sig. A2^{v}, 13) as well as in his earlier work, *Mercury* (Wilkins 1641, 97–100). George Dalgarno's plans for a philosophical language developed directly out of his study of shorthand (Dalgarno 1680, 100; Cram and Maat 2001, 353–356), and his manual alphabet designed to teach the prelingually deaf how to read draws upon many of the abbreviation strategies formalised in shorthand (Dalgarno 1680, 74–77). For more on the connections between shorthand and the language planners, see McCay 2024a, 163–164 and 174; McCay 2024b, Chap. 2; Underhill 2015a, 51–53; Underhill 2020; and Salmon 1988.

55 Even in modernity, when inventors simultaneously stressed the scientific nature of shorthand, this vision of shorthand as an art of distillation did not completely disappear (Albrecht von Kunowski and Felix von Kunowski 1895).

56 McCay 2021, 21–25.

57 In a satire of assembly men, the journalist and poet John Birkenhead (1617–1679) wrote: 'I admire the *Short-hand-men,* who have the patience to write from his [the odious assembly-man's] Mouth: had they the art to shorten it into Sense, they might write his whole Sermon on the back of their Nail' (Birkenhead 1682, 16).

only by practitioners, inventors, and scholars of shorthand, but by spelling reformers such as James Pitman (1901–1985), inventor of the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA), and by supporters of international auxiliary languages such as John Maben Warden (1856–1933), a leading Esperantist, and Charles Kay Ogden (1889–1957), inventor of Basic English.[58] For others, shorthand itself offered a unique intellectual benefit. As Alfred Cramer discusses in his contribution to this volume, shorthand was theorised in nineteenth-century Germany as a script that not only quickened the act of writing, but that consequentially quickened the mind, providing a lasting outlet for the instantaneous expression of one's thoughts.[59] Cramer's article argues that the linguistic relationship between stenographic penstrokes and the sounds of speech parallels and illuminates aspects of German Romantic music, offering a musicologists' perspective on how the technology of shorthand may have fed into new directions in the arts.

Shorthand not only inspired various language projects; it was itself a vehicle for linguistic analysis. Early English inventors may be viewed as erstwhile or accidental phonologists, morphologists, syntacticians, and semanticists, whose explorations of each domain were not necessarily motivated by an interest in language per se, but by a demand to exploit any and all linguistic features that might aid their inventions.[60] By the nineteenth century, the intersection between shorthand and the study of language was more explicit, not least because linguistics itself was coalescing as an academic discipline. In England, Pitman's shorthand was grounded in his work as a phonetician (which survives today in several characters in the International Phonetic Alphabet),[61] while in Germany, Gabelsberger boasted that he based his shorthand on 'purely linguistic [...] principles'. In the same sentence, he warned that his shorthand could not be learned 'without prior scientific knowledge and linguistic training',[62] and regularly employed terms

58 The collection of James Pitman, built upon the collection of his grandfather, Isaac Pitman, is now held at the University of Bath. The collection of John Maben Warden, former vice-president of the Esperantista Akademio, is now held at the National Library of Scotland. Ogden's shorthand books are now at University College London and the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley.

59 In this rhetoric we find the development of an earlier idea: that learning shorthand sharpened the memory (a promise of seventeenth-century shorthand manuals that was surely grounded in truth, given the amount of memorisation required).

60 McCay 2024b, Chap. 2.

61 On Pitman's importance for linguistic research, see Abercrombie 1937.

62 *'Da ich meine Stenographie, wie allgemein anerkannt, auf rein sprachwissenschaftliche, selbst den Mechanismus beherrschenden Grundsätze basiert habe, und die Kunst in ihrer scientivischen Entwicklung bereits soweit gesteigert ist, dass gerade die ergiebigsten Vorteile derselben ohne*

such as *scientivistisch* (scientific), *Forschung* (research), and *Methode* (method) to describe his system.[63] The effect was to eradicate any notion that his shorthand was merely a set of abbreviating marks, and to impress upon the learner that it was a logical, universally applicable writing system grounded in linguistic study. Gabelsberger's framing was part of a larger intellectual pattern in early-nineteenth-century German universities, in which a number of subjects – including philology and literary studies – were formalised as academic disciplines. In allying with linguistics, Gabelsberger sought to legitimise shorthand as a whole and his system in particular. He went as far as to have his system reviewed by the Academy of Sciences in Munich, repeatedly (and in vain) submitting petitions for a professorship in shorthand.[64]

Despite Gabelsberger's claim, training in linguistics is no more a prerequisite for learning shorthand than it is for learning how to read, write, or speak a living language. As with all of these experiences, however, studying shorthand is liable to affect the way a learner thinks about their language. The mental impact of learning shorthand has been explored with reference to one figure, in particular: Charles Dickens, whose early career as a court-reporter figures in his manuscripts and fiction alike – but otherwise it remains an open area of investigation.[65]

2.5 The users of shorthand

The earliest known use of shorthand dates back to the Tironian notes of ancient Rome, named after their alleged inventor, Tiro, variously identified as the scribe, secretary, and servant to Cicero.[66] Early testimonies describe the Tironian notes

wissenschaftliche Vorkenntnisse und sprachliche Durchbildung gar nicht zur Anwendung gebracht werden können' (Alteneder 1902, 377; see similar Gabelsberger 1850, 10 [X]).

63 Alteneder 1902, 170; Fischer 1887, 7 and 132.

64 Alteneder, 1902, 376. While Gabelsberger, in Bavaria, was denied the title of professor until the end, the situation was different elsewhere. One of Gabelsberger's first students, Franz Jacob Wigard (1807–1885) was in fact awarded the title of professor after moving from Bavaria to Saxony, where he also became head of the first German state-funded institute for teaching and research on shorthand. The social status of early-nineteenth-century shorthand inventors depended on the extent to which the state recognised shorthand as a beneficial invention and financially supported the technology's dissemination.

65 For an in-depth linguist's take on the matter, see Bowles 2019. For the perspective of a fellow court-reporter, see Vice 2018. For Dickens as a parliamentary reporter, see Hessell 2012, 129–166.

66 Prominent sources attesting to the early use of shorthand include Plutarch, who named Cicero as the originator of Roman stenography (Plutarch, *Cato the Younger*, tr. Perrin 1919, 289–291), and Isidore of Seville, who extended credit to Tiro and a number of subsequent improvers (Isi-

being used by notaries and secretaries to record public speeches and debates, often working jointly in teams (eight stenographers were purportedly present at the Council of Carthage in 411: four ecclesiastical and four writing on behalf of the Donatists).[67] In other words, shorthand appears to have been developed as a tool for professional scribes, and it continued to be used in those same circles in the Early Middle Ages and again during the Carolingian Renaissance, when the Tironian notes were revived as part of a wider movement to embrace and restore the intellectual and cultural ideals of Latin Late Antiquity.[68] Stenographic training became a default in centres of learning west of the Rhine, and at least a basic knowledge of the Tironian notes was shared by most Carolingian notaries.[69] This is the context that Christoph Walther discusses in this volume. Based on the surviving evidence of Tironian notes in legal manuscripts, particularly *formulae* and *leges*, Walther traces the many ways in which shorthand was used, identifying audiences for these legal documents that went well beyond the notarial class and suggesting a broader stenographic literacy than has previously been thought.

After the regression and eventual disappearance of the Tironian notes beginning in the tenth century,[70] interest in the Tironian notes saw yet another resurgence in the figure of Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516), whose historical account of the forgotten shorthand placed a preliminary interpretation of Tironian notes in the hands of scholars, rather than scribes, and shaped much of the early modern discourse that followed. This is the subject of Maximilian Gamer's article, which traces Trithemius's encounters with Tironian notes in Carolingian manuscripts and reconsiders the importance and subtlety of his attempts at decipher-

dore, *Etymologies*, tr. Barney 2006, 51). Tiro's role in fashioning the Tironian notes and his position relative to Cicero is a matter of ongoing discussion, relating to the vexed question of enslaved readers in Antiquity (on which see Howley 2020, 21–24).

67 Teitler 1985.

68 Bischoff 1990, 80–82; Ganz 1990; Ganz 2020; and Ganz 2023 offer concise, manuscript-based introductions to the use of Tironian notes from Antiquity through the Carolingian period. Extensive work on Carolingian applications has been done primarily in German scholarship, such as Mentz 1944 and Hellmann 2000. For a fuller bibliography, the reader is directed to Walther (this volume). For more general treatments on the evolving role of the scribe as amanuensis, see Beal 1998 and Blair 2021. For the point that Tironian notes were not a monolith, but evolved over time, varied in their use, and interacted with alternative forms of notation (including the hermetic), see Haines 2008; Haines 2014; and King 2001. For further reading on the ancient and medieval shorthand, including Greek *tachygraphy*, see Boge 1973.

69 Hellmann 2000, 1.

70 Certain graphemes derived from the Tironian notes continued to be used in various contexts, such as the 'Tironian et' (⁊) found in Irish manuscripts right into modernity, but wholesale use of the Tironian notes as a shorthand system had fallen into abeyance by the eleventh century.

ment. Trithemius's work represents a different approach to shorthand (one which modern scholars may relate to): that of a hopeful historian and decipherer of early systems, rather than a practitioner.

Less than a century later, a new fervour for stenographical writing took hold in England, extending to a broad and socially varied userbase quite different from any that had come before. These late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century systems claimed inspiration from the Tironian notes (about which the inventors knew little) and Chinese characters (about which they knew even less), promising a writing system that was not only 'shorte, swifte, and secrete' but potentially universal – a broad set of functions targeting a deliberately wide audience of prospective learners.[71] Early modern shorthand inventors could be found among physicians, clerics, clerks, merchant tailors, postmasters, booksellers, engravers, and schoolmasters, but the most common profession was that of writing master: the scribes of the early modern age, who now served as teachers of calligraphy, accounting, and a range of scripts to students outside of established grammar schools.[72] Unlike the Tironian notes of the Carolingian period, early modern shorthand systems were not incorporated into scribal or notarial training; rather, inventors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries appealed directly to the reading public, posting local advertisements, travelling to university towns to demonstrate their art, and self-publishing their manuals within an increasingly competitive market. It was a manuscript technology reborn in the age of print, and shorthand was disseminated through cheap, multi-media manuals produced often awkwardly and with difficulty, but nevertheless in quantity. These shorthand manuals found readers among secretaries, scholars, students, clerks, artisans and craftspeople, and the landed gentry – a disparate set of practitioners that cut across the usual social divisions and hierarchies of early modern literate society and was perpetuated by semi-formal teaching networks of families, friends, and robust community networks.[73] In a word, early modern shorthand is characterised by its sheer variety – of systems, of uses, and of users. This is precisely the point that Timothy Underhill presses in his article in this volume, which combs through a corpus of shorthand manuscripts written by girls and women between the late sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries. Underhill proves that early

71 Bright 1588, sigs $A2^{r-v}$ and $A3^{v}$–$A4^{r}$; McCay 2024b, Chap. 2.

72 McCay 2024b. For biographical surveys of early modern shorthand inventors, see Carlton 1940 and Underhill forthcoming. On early modern writing masters, see Heal 1931 and Christen 1999.

73 On shorthand learning and instruction, see McCay 2024b, Chap. 4 (on seventeenth-century England); Underhill 2008, 74–84; Underhill 2013 (on eighteenth-century England); and Delwiche 2022a (on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England).

modern shorthand was not just the province of men, and that assuming male authorship of anonymous shorthand manuscripts is not only pernicious, but unsupported by the evidence. For a field that has itself suffered due to gender bias, this is a welcome advancement indeed, and Underhill's warning must be heeded whenever one encounters an anonymous or unsurely-attributed shorthand manuscript, regardless of its time of composition.

From the late eighteenth century, as shorthand became formally incorporated into the domains of government, law, and eventually business, the demographics of shorthand users reconfigured around the swell of new opportunities for professional employment. As those opportunities grew, inventors such as Pitman, Gabelsberger, and Duployé supported their systems with robust programmes of education, publication, and promotion. To a degree, these were enhanced versions of the same strategies we see in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: establishing networks of deputy teachers and distance-learning, travelling to schools and colleges so that inventors could make their pitch in person, and publishing large numbers of manuals, workbooks, and specimen books for learners at various levels of proficiency. The burgeoning reality that shorthand was becoming a widely-attainable, certifiable, and desirable skill gave unprecedented energy to these efforts. Inventors, practitioners, and officials worked together to organise international conferences, stage stenographical competitions, establish societies, gazettes, and journals, and build formal partnerships with schools.[74] Professional and even state-funded programmes were established, such as the Königlich-Sächsische Stenographische Institut ('Royal Saxon Stenographic Institute') in Dresden,[75] and those organisations had international reach.[76] When Anna Dostoevskaya and her

74 Gardey (this volume).

75 The institute, which in 1906 was renamed Stenographisches Landesamt ('Stenographic State Office'), was for a long time the research and teaching nexus of German shorthand. In the 1990s, after its dissolution in 1966, its library and archive were transferred to the Saxon State and University Library (SLUB). The materials, known as the Stenografische Sammlung ('Stenographic Collection') today form one of the most comprehensive collections of shorthand materials in the world.

76 These stenographic associations were often organised around a particular shorthand system, such as the Stenographen-Zentralverein Gabelsberger founded in Munich in 1849. Others were established as professional societies, such as the Verein Deutscher Kammerstenographen ('Association of German Chamber Stenographers'), founded in 1908 for parliamentary stenographers. Its activities and outputs included lectures on chamber stenography, the history of shorthand, and the specifics of parliamentary writing; training courses on political parties and parliamentary affairs; and the specialist journal *Stenographische Praxis*, 'III. Mitgliederversammlung' 1911. There is otherwise very little on the organisations of German shorthand writers, but see also Rieger 2015, 124 and Morat 2017, 311. For a survey of the growing number of shorthand publications and organisations up to the late nineteenth century, see Westby-Gibson 1887.

husband travelled to Dresden in 1867, for instance, the stenographer from St Petersburg was given a warm reception by her German colleagues, united by their shared use of Gabelsberger shorthand.[77] Through printed works, social lobbying, and technical expertise, shorthand developed a complex, distinctive milieu, with practitioners whose identities were shaped by the social practices surrounding stenographic writing.

As the professional opportunities for stenographers grew, a hierarchy took shape. The invention of the typewriter in the late nineteenth century heralded the start of a new class of stenographer: the female secretary, trained in both stenography and typing.[78] But as women joined the workforce in greater numbers, female stenographers were funnelled into office work, which in turn took on a reputation as dull, mechanical, and less intellectually demanding. In both practice and etymology, shorthand is manual labour, but only in the twentieth century, with the rise of the female secretary, did shorthand fall victim to the pejorative, class-based prejudices that 'manual labour' connotes. In order to distance themselves from 'women's work', elite male stenographers – such as journalists and parliamentary shorthand writers – cultivated an identity in opposition to their female colleagues, casting their own stenographical practice as intellectual rather than rote. This rhetoric emphasised the skill of quick judgement (which was framed as a masculine trait) that enabled parliamentary stenographers to speedily distinguish between what was necessary to record and what was needless – such as filler words or a speaker's stutter.[79] Male shorthand writers not only framed their domain as intellectual challenging, but also as physically exhausting, furthering the argument (by their logic) that shorthand was unsuitable for women. In 1908, the German physician Robert Frost lent credence to this belief by publishing an article on the physical toll of parliamentary shorthand writing. He identified which regions of the brain were activated while writing in shorthand and recommended various means of caring for the stenographer's body and mind, recommending stretches for the wrists and prohibiting coffee and alcohol.[80]

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77 Kaufman 2021, 122–123.

78 On the symbiosis between the typewriter and shorthand, see Lyons 2021, 42–43. On the female secretary and stenographer, see Srole 2010, 129–160; Davies 1982; and Gardey 2001, 55–77.

79 Srole 2010, 98; Price 2005. This is, of course, a meaningless distinction; all stenographic work requires active interpretation and distillation at multiple levels (semantic and otherwise), whether one is recording a parliamentary proceeding, an office memorandum, or a literary opus. For a meditation on the latter, see Rowland 2010.

80 Frost 1908. On the implications of shorthand writing as a physical practice, see also Rieger 2015, 131. Parliamentary stenographers have been the subject of relatively extensive scholarship in recent years, including Gardey 2010a; Morat 2017; Coniez 2020; and Boeddeker 2023, 76–90.

Fig. 6: 'Women stenographers: never again'. A comic published in 1910 in Portland, ME depicting both the need for stenographers in the workplace and the perceived hazards of that stenographer being a woman. New York, New York Public Library, General Research Division, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/8c9d0092-cd38-a7af-e040-e00a180626d6>.

In Frost's vision, stenography was not merely a job, but a lifestyle, which required a particular – and distinctly male – mentality and physique to maintain. Even in his own time, this was a distorted vision of stenographic practice. Throughout the centuries, and certainly since the 1580s, shorthand was used by women and men alike – and the manner of use had far less to do with the gender of the writer than it did with the genre of the writing. In different contexts and cultures, it served as a professional prerequisite, a scholarly pastime, and even a source of social cohesion. As its uses varied, so too did its users, and nowhere is this more visible than in the piles of disparate documents united under the banner of shorthand manuscripts.[81]

3 Shorthand manuscripts and the challenges of decipherment

Shorthand manuscripts come in many shapes and sizes. Shorthand may be found written in miniature books and weighty folios, on tablets made of wood or wax, and on metre-long strips of narrow vellum rolled into a tiny scroll. It is written in gifts meant for a queen, on envelopes meant for a waste bin, and on spiral-bound steno pads designed specifically for shorthand transcription.[82] Some manuscripts are written exclusively in shorthand, while others feature only a few stenographical characters or annotations amongst a predominantly longhand text. Even in the latter case, just a few shorthand characters could serve a significant function: as Christoph Walther points out of Carolingian manuscripts, Tironian notes were sometimes used as a marker of authenticity, akin to a seal or a signature.[83]

81 For a glimpse into the volume and variety of shorthand materials that survive from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America, alone, see Delwiche 2022b and 2022c.

82 Steno pads were (and remain) specialised stationery developed specifically for stenographic use. With a hard back, top-ringed binding, handy proportions (6 × 9 in), and a red-ruled line struck down the middle of each page, they are ostensibly ideal for shorthand transcription: sturdy, portable, unobtrusively bound, and ruled so that the shorthand would be written in narrow columns with minimal horizontal movement of the hand. The Gregg and Pitman publishing houses trademarked their own versions of what were essentially the same product, the only difference lay in the spaces between the horizontal lines: Gregg-ruled steno pads were ruled at three lines per inch, while Pitman-ruled steno pads were ruled at two lines per inch. Even today, both types of steno pad are widely available for purchase, and the New York office of W. W. Norton continues to stock a stack of steno pads in their office supply cupboards. Our thanks to Emma Freund, editorial assistant for history books at Norton, for the verification.

83 Walther (this volume).

Fig. 7: A seventeenth-century folio binding with boards made from laminated shorthand notes. New Haven, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library, Horace Grant Healey Papers, MS 1027, folder 9. Photo by Kelly Minot McCay.

Also common are manuscripts in which shorthand and longhand are used in tandem, the more legible longhand for title pages, running heads, and proper nouns (presumably to help a later reader locate a particular passage) and shorthand for the remainder. Manuscripts of this sort were evidently designed as lasting bearers of text, while others were meant only as temporary placeholders, intended to be transcribed into longhand and summarily disposed of. Accordingly, shorthand manuscripts may be found amongst binding waste, laminated into cardboard, and repurposed to line the inside of a paper box. Shorthand inscriptions can be found in printed books, as well – in the margins, between the lines, and on interleaved pages. There are, of course, places in which shorthand rarely appears: in the main text of official documents such as charters, deeds, and contracts, for example – a self-evident product of shorthand's status as a supplementary, rather than a primary, writing system. The exception, however, is not the category of manuscript in which shorthand appears, but the category in which shorthand does not. Recognising shorthand as a vital part of many manuscript cultures also means shining a spotlight on this rich, varied, and enormous corpus of previously overlooked sources.

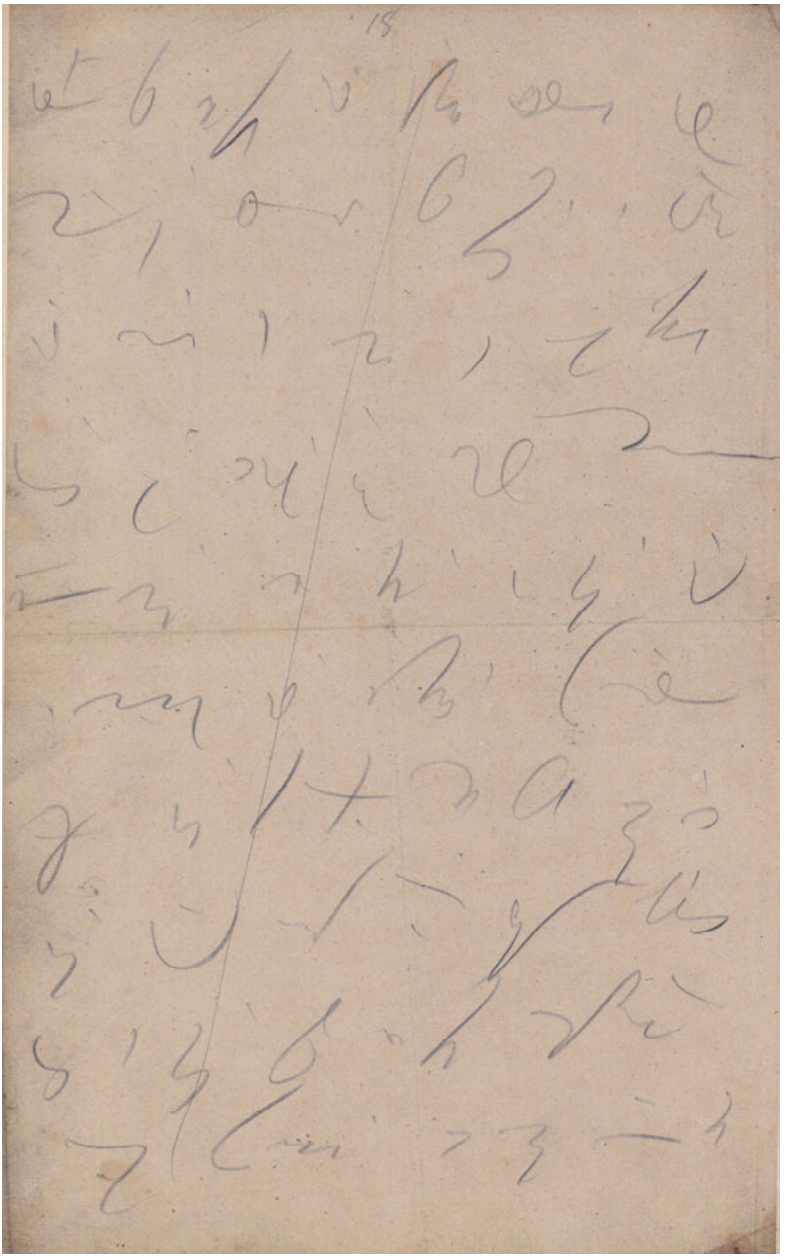


Fig. 8: A shorthand note from the first national parliamentary assembly in Germany in 1848, which was gifted to the Stenographic Institute in Dresden as early as 1898. Dresden, Sächsische Landes-, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Stenografische Sammlung, S p 1.

But for all of this range, the documents in which shorthand appears are united by one, non-negligible generalisation: they are manuscripts. Or, to put it more plainly: shorthand is by nature a manuscript technology. Because they are designed to be written by hand, shorthand systems commonly exercise certain graphic freedoms that pose considerable difficulty to a typesetter, whether operating in the seventeenth century or the twenty-first. While those impracticalities can and have been surmounted for didactic ends with non-typographical printing techniques (e.g. woodcuts, copperplate engravings, and lithography), such media are an approximation of shorthand – sometimes so poor an approximation that readers were warned against modelling their script too closely on the printed model.[84]

As with any text-bearing object, the very materiality of shorthand manuscripts can offer instructive insight into their production, life cycle, provenance, and status. But unlike many text-bearing objects, accessing the text itself is not only a matter of learning the language and practicing one's palaeography. Reading a shorthand manuscript can be an onerous, speculative, and often thankless task. Florian Coulmas has asserted that shorthand was built for writing rather than reading,[85] and the verb 'to read' is certainly less applicable to a shorthand manuscript than the more painstaking activity of 'deciphering'. More casual verbs such as 'to skim' are positively irrelevant, which means that it can often seem difficult to justify the time and effort a decipherment might entail.[86] Accordingly, projects of shorthand decipherment tend to be motivated by external interests: by an event (e.g. the Popish Plot or the Putney debates), by the anticipated value of the content itself (e.g. the shorthand notes from America's First Federal Congress), by association with a notable individual (e.g. Samuel Pepys or Charles Dickens), or by a combination of all three.[87] Whatever the instigating variable, any decipher-

84 Metcalfe 1669, 26.

85 Coulmas 1982, 42–43.

86 One can spend a week (and one of us has) deciphering a page of shorthand in a personal miscellany (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Houghton Library, MS Eng 991.1), only to discover it is merely the first Psalm written in an entirely different shorthand system from the rest of the manuscript – not quite the revelatory 'holy grail' the decipherer might have wished, but nevertheless furthering our understanding of the manuscript's contents.

87 McKenzie 2021a and McKenzie 2021b (Popish Plot); Henderson 2001 (Putney debates); Tinling 1961 (congressional stenography); Latham and Matthews 1971 (Pepys); Bowles and Wood (this volume; Dickens). As an example of triangulating motivations, see the transcription project on the diaries of Michael von Faulhaber (1869–1952), a significant figure within German Catholicism who recorded his meetings with the many of the influential figures in his acquaintance: *Kritische Online-Edition der Tagebücher Michael Kardinal von Faulhabers (1911–1952)* <https://www.faulhaber-edition.de/index.html>. A further example are the private diaries and notes of the German political and legal theorist Carl Schmitt (1888–1885): Carl-Schmitt-Gesellschaft e.V., *Steno-Transkriptionen*, <https://www.carl-schmitt.de/

ment project is a contribution to the study of shorthand, and may very well result in shorthand taking centre stage.

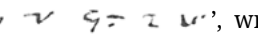
The significance of opening the door to never-before-read historical documents, whatever they may contain, should be self-evident. What is less so is just how difficult it can be to unlock that door in the first place. Anybody who attempts to decipher a shorthand manuscript must scale a wall of challenges, and while those who have done so successfully can point to a few useful toeholds, each new manuscript must be tackled on its own terms. Most of the scholars involved in this volume have engaged in such work, and each characterises it in their own way: as codebreaking, translation, or preparing a critical edition. From their accounts and past decipherments, three generalities rise to the surface. We set them out not as a guide for would-be decipherers, but for anyone who might encounter a text that was originally penned in shorthand, who would do well to understand the enormity of that endeavour and to be alert to the precarious interpretability of the resulting edition.[88]

For shorthand manuscripts written within the past four hundred years, the first barrier to decipherment lies in identifying the shorthand system in use. As we hope to have made clear by now, stenographers have had their choice of shorthand systems since the early seventeenth century, to the extent that describing a manuscript as 'written in shorthand' is about as precise as describing an utterance as 'spoken in language'. Just as there are families of languages, there are also families of shorthand systems: mastering one of them makes it easier to learn other systems in its particular family. But the knowledge of one shorthand system does not imply literacy in another. While many shorthand systems may share the same set of basic graphemes, inventors may arbitrarily accord them phonetic or semantic values that are wildly different from their immediate predecessors. Eight different shorthand systems published in seventeenth-century London, for

forschung/steno-transkription>. Of course, shorthand decipherments can (and to a certain extent must) be motivated too by an interest in the shorthand itself. In his current doctoral work, Julian Polberg is deciphering the shorthand manuscripts of the German philosopher Wilhelm Kamlah (1905–1976) and places the challenges of producing a critical edition of shorthand writing at the very centre of the project.

88 While what we offer here is a composite of lessons, we would particularly like to thank Timothy Underhill, whose work and whose dialogue advocates foregrounding, rather than obfuscating, the shorthand itself in any decipherment project and demonstrates just how this may be accomplished. See, for example, Underhill 2015b and Underhill 2020; Underhill and Peters 2018. Underhill delivered a paper on this very subject at our first stenographical conference under the title, *Towards New Shorthand Palaeography: Some Reflections on Deciphering and Decipherers Past, Present and Future*, and we are indebted to his arguments and his expertise.

example, had eight different uses for the curved stroke resembling the letter 'c', which could stand in for the letters *a*, *b*, *c*, *e*, *g*, *k*, *l*, or *t*.[89] Moreover, there is always the possibility that an individual writer might have modified or combined systems, or employed a shorthand that is otherwise unattested – undermining the very possibility (or profitability) of identification. Even the annotations in shorthand manuals – in which the shorthand is literally spelled out on the page – can prove frustratingly elusive if the annotator has not yet internalised how the shorthand is meant to be written (or simply prefers to write in their own way). In this volume, David Powers, who has deciphered the shorthand manuscripts of several individuals in early America, describes how a single writer could cycle through a number of different short-writing schemes over the course of a lifetime. In his case study of manuscripts left by the minister Adonijah Bidwell (1716–1784), Powers traces three evolutions in Bidwell's stenographical practice, some of which were informed by mainstream shorthand manuals, others of which were inspired by Bidwell's knowledge of Greek and his personal notation preferences. In more succinct terms, one does not decipher shorthand, one deciphers *a* shorthand. And *a* shorthand need not align with a particular shorthand *system*, but may in fact be the shorthand of a specific individual, at a particular time in their life.

The second point to emphasise is that the compressed nature of shorthand invites omission, and it is up to the reader to fill in what is left unwritten. What precisely is omitted depends upon the writer and the use to which shorthand is put, but the omission might range from just a few letters or phonemes to something far more extreme. The mid-seventeenth-century shorthand inscription '  ', written by the shorthand inventor and bookseller Thomas Ratcliff, can be deciphered with some confidence as 'direct your letters to me'.[90] But a transliteration of this passage – all that is actually written – would read something like: 'D*R*KT VR LT*R (*plural*) 2 m*' (where * represents a presumed vowel *e* or *i*).[91] It is up to the decipherer to decide if 'LT*R' implies 'letter', or any of a long list of words with the same sequence of consonants (e.g. 'litter', 'loiter', 'later', 'latter', 'liturgical', 'literature', 'latrine', etc.). Context is everything,

89 McCay 2024b, Chap. 2.

90 Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 5706 no. 39 (Wn 3688), fol. 14^{r}. For an extended discussion of Ratcliff and this unusual manuscript, see McCay 2024b, Chap. 4.

91 It should be noted that each contributor to this volume has chosen to represent shorthand decipherments in different ways, sometimes demarcating the decipherment with punctuation (square or curly brackets) or typeface (bold). As there is no standard across the wider literature, we have opted to embrace this volume-wide inconsistency.

but when the meaning of every mark is equally uncertain, context itself can be difficult to surmise. By and large, the faster shorthand was written, the more compressed it will be. Many German shorthand systems drew a line between writing fully and writing fast: *Geschäftsschrift* ('business writing') was intended for drafts, letters and dictations, while *Debattenschrift* ('debate writing') was explicitly designed for recording rapid-fire meetings, negotiations and speeches, occasions in which the shorthand transcription would be immediately expanded into longhand and the stenographers could rely on their short-term memory to fill in the gaps.[92] The stenographers for the 1920s German regional parliament Mecklenburg-Schwerin, for example, used *Debattenschrift* to record frequently-occurring words in the briefest way possible, writing only the stenographic characters for prefixes, suffixes, consonant clusters (e.g. *st-*, *kr-*, etc.) or vowels necessary to signal the spoken word. In one manuscript, for example, *Abgeordneter* ('parliamentarian') was represented by the shorthand characters for the prefixes *ab* and *ge*. A few lines down, the same character for *ge* and the character for the vowel *o* represented the word *Genosse* ('comrade').[93] As different words rose to prominence in political discourse, new abbreviations were developed. The term *Flüchtling* ('refugee'), was so commonly used at the German parliament in 2015 and 2016 that one stenographer came to record it with the character (from Gabelsberger's system) for '*f*' and '*l*'.[94]

These decipherment difficulties are compounded with the host of challenges that any manuscript may present. As with all handwriting, shorthand can be written legibly, with care and precision, or chaotically, with scribbles that make one stenographic sign indistinguishable from another.[95] And as with any palaeographical quandary, the more fragmentary the surviving witness, the more difficult it is to derive meaning from what remains – and there are all manner of reasons why a shorthand manuscript might be damaged, mutilated, or simply lost. Shorthand annotations in the margin of a book may be trimmed away in a rebinding, while those in the gutter may be squeezed out of sight if the book is sewn too tightly (the

92 For two of the many manuals on *Debattenschrift*, see Velten 1891 and Weigert 1882.

93 Schwerin, Landeshauptarchiv, 5.11–12 281, 87–88 (shorthand note); 5.11–12 298a, 4–5 (the corresponding transcription in longhand).

94 We would like to thank Detlef Peitz for this insight into the work of today's parliamentary shorthand writers and for generously sharing his knowledge and experience with us.

95 As one might expect, fine manuscripts are likely to be written with a careful, deliberate shorthand (such as Richard Hill's miniature and lavishly illuminated psalter of 1628: London, Lambeth Palace Library, Sion L40.2/E3), while shorthand manuscripts produced apace are likely to be written in a less meticulous, cursive hand (such as the nineteenth-century German parliamentary transcription, Marburg, Hessisches Staatsarchiv, 73 Nr. 268, shorthand notes 42–51).

smaller the book, the bigger the risk). The binder of a shorthand manuscript previously deciphered by David Powers struggled to identify even the direction the shorthand was written, binding the leaves not only in the wrong order, but sometimes in the wrong orientation.[96] The writing support and writing implements also affect later legibility (and indeed survival). Our earliest evidence of Tironian notes comes in the form of several wooden tablets from approximately 100 CE, though the most robust sources for both Latin shorthand and the yet-undeciphered Greek counterpart come in the form of commentaries, which survive in vellum fragments and codices.[97] Early modern shorthand manuscripts survive on parchment and paper of varying quality, and may also have been written on gesso-treated writing tablets wiped clean after each use. Ink could fade, or ink could not be used at all, in favour of metal styluses or graphite pencils, both attested in England in the seventeenth century.[98] In the case of shorthand manuscripts that were not intended to be preserved, longevity was rarely the criterion by which stenographers selected their writing materials. The significant variable was which pen and which writing support facilitated the speediest script, and parliamentary stenographers in nineteenth-century Germany had a heated debate over that very question. Earlier in the century, German stenographers had favoured waxed cardboard and lead pencils, with the intention of erasing each transcription after it had been transferred into longhand. Staunch defenders of the pencil claimed that pens, which had to be replenished with ink throughout the writing process, led to illegibility and wasted time. By the 1880s, however, stenographic notes from the Reichstag were written with a steel nib on small-format notebooks of blank or lined paper, a shift that corresponded with the modernisation of writing instruments in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[99]

From these material features, alone, one may say quite a lot about a shorthand manuscript without attempting to decipher its contents. But even accounting for the inherent difficulties involved, deciphering the shorthand itself is – in theory and often in practice – both possible and profitable. This is the point that Hugo Bowles and Claire Wood stress in the final contribution to this volume, which charts the arduous and decades-long process of unravelling the shorthand manuscripts of Charles Dickens. Beginning with the efforts of William Carlton in the

96 Powers 2017, 7.

97 Walther (this volume). In his current postgraduate work, Joshua Parker has renewed the effort to decipher – or, at minimum, recognise the prevalence of – Greek shorthand in Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

98 Stallybrass et al. 2004, 403–410.

99 Boeddeker 2023, 121–127. See too Wagner 2024, 19–80.

early twentieth century and culminating in the collaborative, crowd-assisted transcription project spearheaded by Bowles and Wood, the ongoing decipherment of Dickens's shorthand manuscripts highlights how shorthand decipherment (as with shorthand practice) can be the basis of social, didactic, and collective engagement. Bowles and Wood invite us to consider how collaboration and public engagement can stimulate decipherment efforts and shed new light on shorthand manuscripts that have historically eluded even the most dedicated specialists.[100]

Shorthand manuscripts and shorthand inscriptions should not be dismissed as unreadable texts or unfathomable scribblings. They should not be skipped on the basis of illegibility, nor categorically brushed aside as a *Mitschrift*: a medial, or temporary writing, drafted with the intention of being promptly rewritten in a more permanent orthography (a *Nachschrift*).[101] Even if a shorthand manuscript is genuinely a *Mitschrift*, why should that render it uninteresting or irrelevant to scholarly inquiry? Over the past few decades, the field of book history has demonstrated the value of ephemera, manuscript drafts, commonplace books, and other forms of writing that exist outside of a canonical corpus.[102] Marginalia are no longer marginalised, nor is their scholarly value for histories of reading a matter of debate.[103] Shorthand manuscripts offer a significant insight into the writing practices of different times and cultures, and the texts they contain can inform scholars' understanding of innumerable moments, individuals, and patterns throughout history. They should not be ignored, nor forgotten, nor masked by brackets, ellipses, or phrases like 'in a non-Latin alphabet'. They can be read. And, as the contributions to this volume demonstrate, they are worth reading.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this Introduction was simple: we aimed to show the many ways in which shorthand has mattered, to put it back on the map as a worthy research object and to offer a starting point for future study and decipherment. In a way, it is the type of text we both wished for in October 2019, when the two of us – both

100 Carlton 1926.

101 On these terms, see Blair 2008, 40; and, more recently, Eddy 2023, 281.

102 See, for example, Stallybrass 2008; Stamatakis 2012; Moss 1996; Spufford 1985; Trettien 2022.

103 From the classic work of Jardine and Grafton 1990 and monograph-length treatment of Sherman 2008, marginalia studies have become firmly incorporated into histories of reading, with an extensive enough historiography to allow for comparative treatments, as in Grafton and Sherman 2016.

early in our postgraduate studies – were introduced to each other by Ann Blair and Markus Friedrich. So welcome was the discovery of an interlocutor that we began seeking out a broader community of scholars, soliciting papers for what we called a Stenographical Studies Workshop, hosted virtually by the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Universität Hamburg, in February 2021. The workshop spanned two days and featured thirteen papers on topics related to shorthand and its use, with a chronological scope stretching from the eighth to the twentieth centuries and a geographical breadth encompassing England, France, Germany, Japan, and Russia. This conference concluded with calls for a second iteration and the suggestion of a related publication. We held our second virtual conference in March 2022, with some speakers expanding upon their earlier contributions and others joining us for the first time. The conversation included papers on the digital representation of shorthand, the rise of shorthand in China, and the majority of the studies now featured in this volume. Most of the authors published in this volume presented at one of the two conferences, some at both, and still others came to our attention at a later stage in the process. In all cases (in our opinion), the articles published here have benefited from this growing community of shorthand scholars. Many of those individuals have contributed immeasurably to this volume in ways that cannot be adequately acknowledged: by serving as peer reviewers, copy-editors, or simply interlocutors, one introduction leading to another, then another, and so on down the line. We owe all of them our deepest thanks and we hope that this vibrant community of shorthand specialists will continue to grow in the years to come.

As a final but vital remark, the overall content in this volume concerns shorthand as it was used in a fairly limited geographical and cultural span: primarily Latin-, German-, French-, and English-speaking areas in the West. There are many chapters in the history of shorthand that we have scarcely alluded to in this Introduction, others which we omit entirely due to our lack of expertise and the limitations of the available literature. Our working narrative is that after the decline of Tironian notes in the Latin West, reinvented forms of shorthand were largely confined to Anglophone contexts until the late eighteenth century, but this impression may well be nuanced, corrected, or proven to be entirely untrue by future researchers. We are confident that the pages to come offer studies of lasting utility, and while we hope the same can be said of this Introduction, we know that this will not be the last word on shorthand.

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