New Approaches to Shorthand

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New Approaches to Shorthand

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Edited by
Hannah Boeddeker and Kelly Minot McCay

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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-

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111382692-001

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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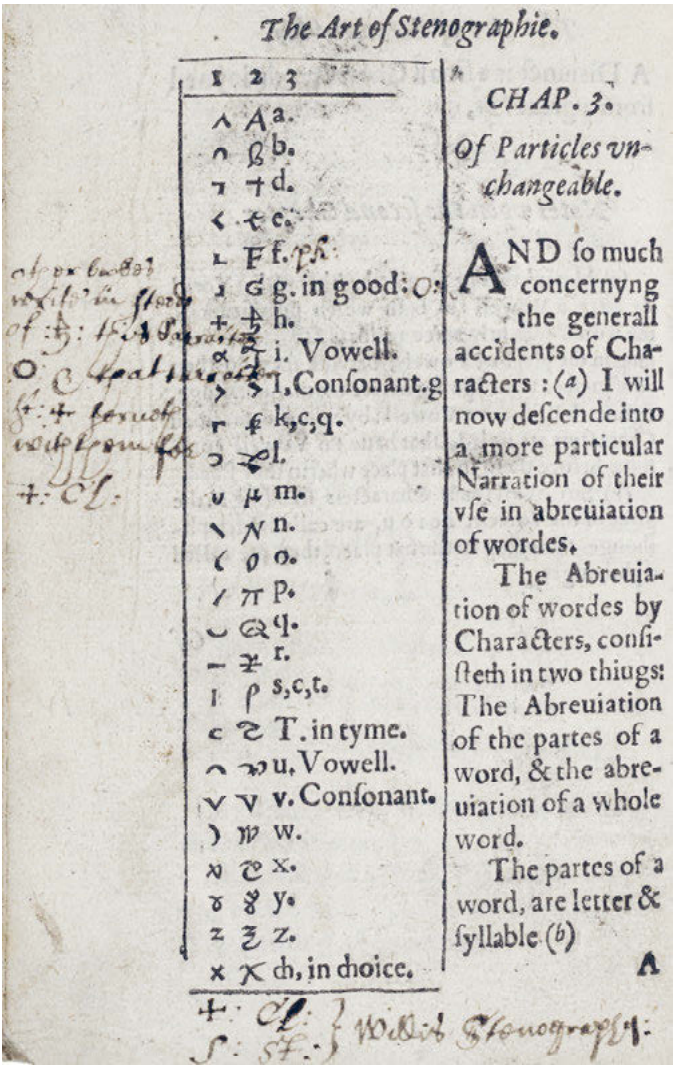
15 Berlin, Bundesarchiv, R1501/127148, 36: '*Bevor der Führer eine Entscheidung trifft, möchte er wissen, wie andere Nationen in ihren Sprachen die Kurzschrift bezeichnen. Nach wie vor hält der Führer im übrigen die Bezeichnung Stenografie und Stenografen-Kongress, Stenografenwesen usw. für besser als 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


The Art of Stenographie.

1 2 3

A a.
B b.
D d.
E e.
F f.
G g. in good:
H h.
I i. Vowell.
I, Consonant.
K, c, q.
L l.
M m.
N n.
O o.
P p.
Q q.
R r.
S, c, t.
T. in tyme.
U u. Vowell.
V v. Consonant.
W w.
X x.
Y y.
Z z.
Ch, in choice.

CHAP. 3.

Of Particles vnchangeable.

AND so much concernyng the generall accidents of Characters: (a) I will now descende into a more particular Narration of their vse in abreuiation of wordes.

The Abreuiation of wordes by Characters, consisteth in two thiugs: The Abreuiation of the partes of a word, & the abreuiation of a whole word.

The partes of a word, are letter & syllable (b)

A

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.

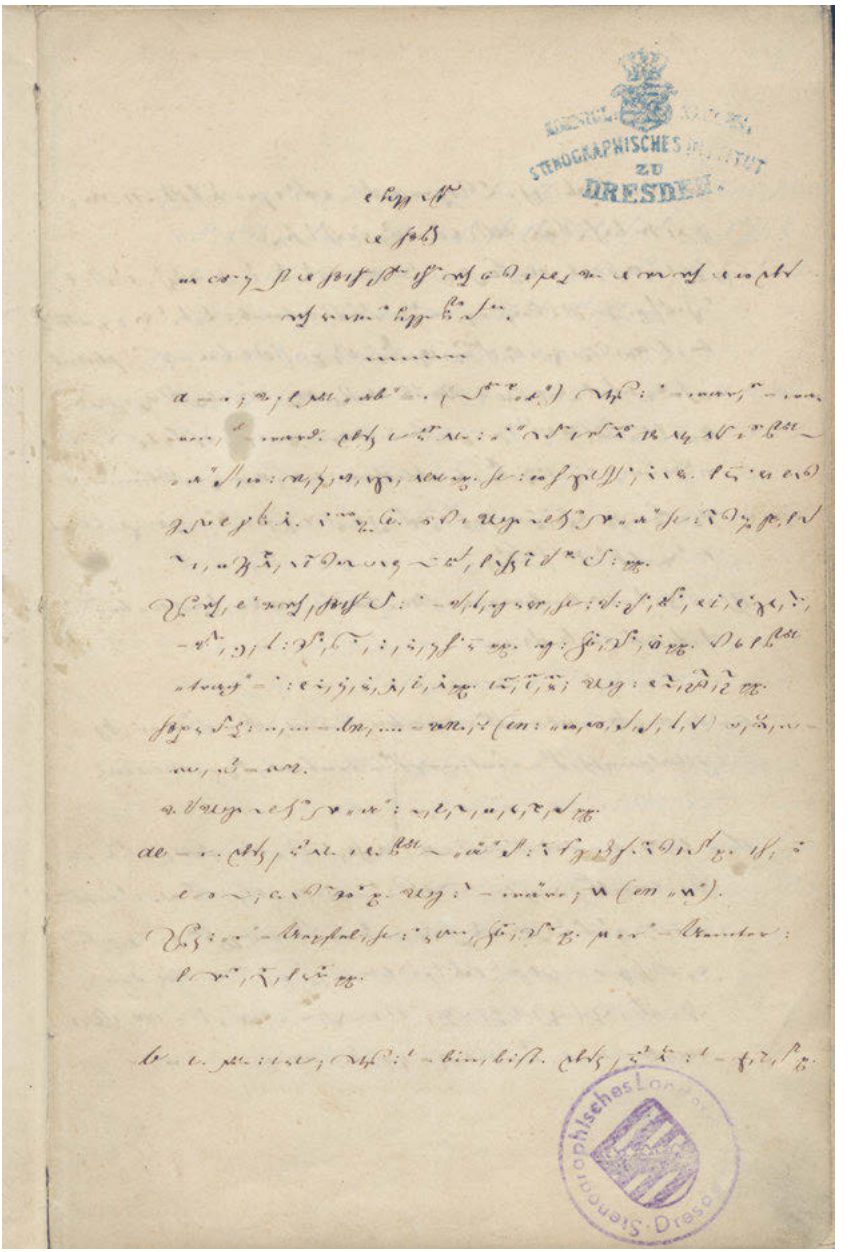


Fig. 2: A page from Franz Xaver Gabelsberger's 'Stenographischer Repetitor', in which he summarised some of the principal rules and abbreviations of his system. Dresden, Sächsische Landes-, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Stenografische Sammlung O b 0004.

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.

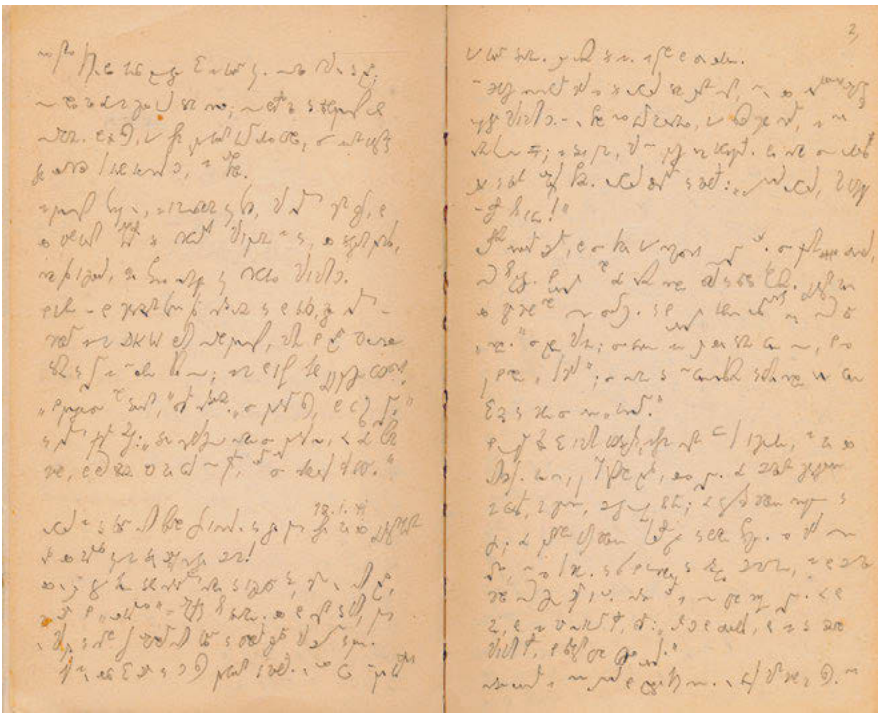

Fig. 3: An opening in Erich Kästner's diary from January 1941, Marbach, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, 005_Kaestner_BB_Ds_02, reprinted with the kind permission of the heir of Erich Kästner. Photo by DLA Marbach.

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.

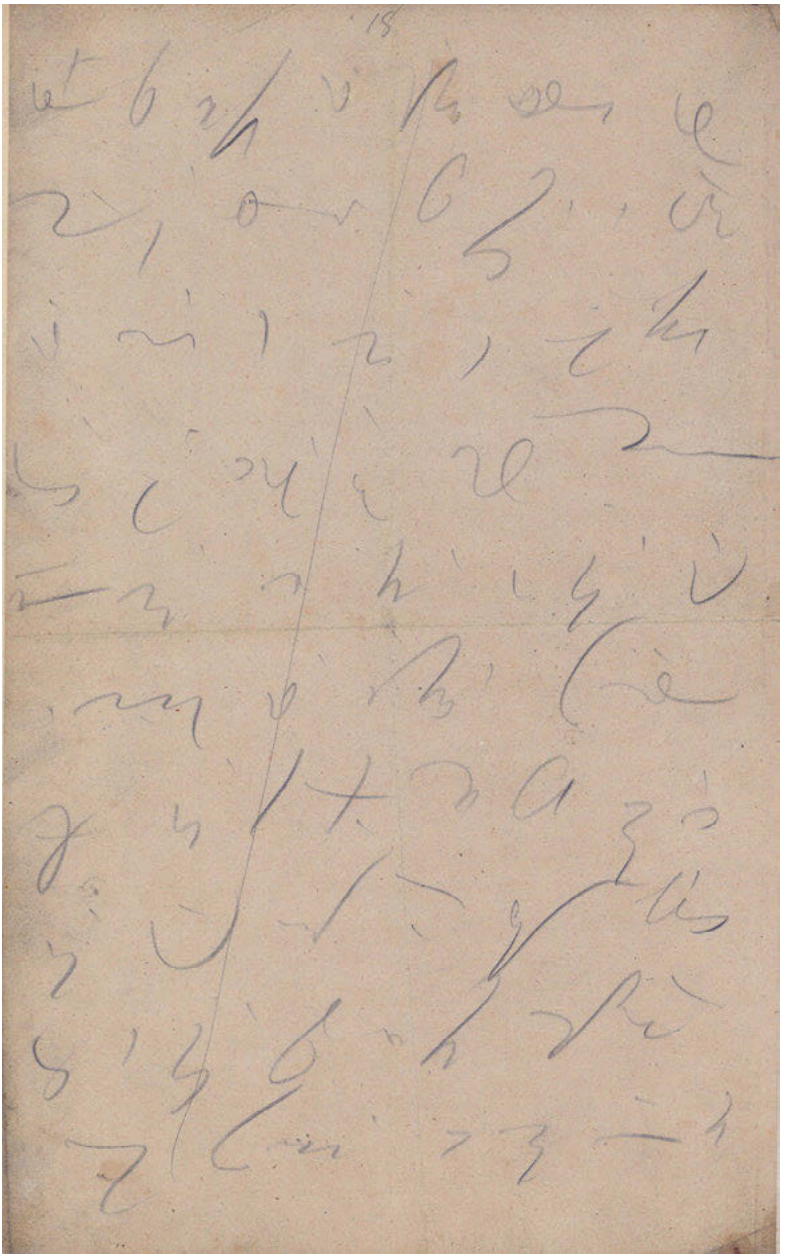


Fig. 8: A shorthand note from the first national parliamentary assembly in Germany in 1848, which was gifted to the Stenographic Institute in Dresden as early as 1898. Dresden, Sächsische Landes-, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Stenografische Sammlung, S p 1.

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.

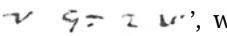
The significance of opening the door to never-before-read historical documents, whatever they may contain, should be self-evident. What is less so is just how difficult it can be to unlock that door in the first place. Anybody who attempts to decipher a shorthand manuscript must scale a wall of challenges, 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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Christoph Walther

Tironian Notes and Legal Practice: The Use of Shorthand Writing in Early Medieval Legal Culture

Abstract: In early medieval times, the Roman system of shorthand known as 'Tironian notes' (*notae tironianae*) played a significant role in legal culture. Derived from antiquity, Tironian notes had been used to authenticate charters at least since Merovingian times. The so-called 'Carolingian Renaissance' then emphasised learning and the use of shorthand even more. In the ninth century, as a result, Tironian notes took hold in the practice of correcting, annotating and even writing whole manuscripts, including codices with legal contents, especially *leges* and *formulae*. The use of shorthand within these legal manuscripts differs widely, from single notes with a purely ornamental purpose to complete texts or even collections written in shorthand. Tironian notes may appear alone or mixed with minuscule letters and words. They can be found as the main script, used in tandem with longhand, or appear between the lines or *in margine* to correct errors, fill gaps, or provide further information on the matter at hand. The notes and the respective context in which they are found provide a unique view of early medieval legal learning and legal practice, in which the ability to read and write Tironian notes played a small yet considerable role. These manuscripts were meant to be used by different people over an extended period. Especially the formularies, collections of *formulae*, i.e. anonymised charters, were intended to serve as enduring examples for scribes. Moreover, lay people and officials entrusted with the administration of justice also needed access to legal knowledge and thus also required a level of proficiency in shorthand, well beyond that which has previously been recognised.

1 Introduction

The ancient Roman system of shorthand known as 'Tironian notes' (*notae tironianae*), allegedly invented by Cicero's scribe, Tiro, outlived the fall of the Western Roman Empire.[1] While it was mentioned in sources from ancient Rome and

1 Mentz 1931, 369–371. Main witnesses for the attribution to Tiro are Isidore of Seville (d. 636) and Saint Jerome (d. 420). For a short history of the Tironian notes see Ganz 1990, 35–48 (for the an-

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spread in the Patristic Period,[2] only a handful of examples from antiquity have survived.[3] Today's knowledge of the Tironian notes is based primarily on early medieval use of shorthand, for written evidence of Tironian notes has been preserved almost exclusively in manuscripts and documents from the Early Middle Ages.[4] The vast majority of these books and documents come from the Frankish Empire, especially from the Carolingian Period. During the reigns of Charlemagne (d. 814) and Louis the Pious (d. 840) there was a period of vibrant cultural activity and an intensive study of the Latin culture of Late Antiquity, the so-called 'Carolingian Renaissance' or 'Carolingian *Renovatio*'.[5] Carolingian scholars studied (late) antique texts and aspired to bring Frankish culture closer to the ideal of Christian Late Antiquity. This renewal, or, more precisely, improvement, of the already highly developed Frankish culture particularly concerned education, the Latin language and literature, book production and architecture.[6] The use of Tironian notes saw a new rise in popularity, becoming a hallmark of the learned elites and actively encouraged by royal decree. As a result, Tironian notes were used to correct, annotate, and even write whole manuscripts in the ninth century. By the Carolingian Period, Christian scholars and Frankish scribes had expanded

tique sources see 35–37). The most comprehensive account of the history of Tironian notes to date is Mentz 1944.

2 Boge 1974, 65–67. For example, according to Eusebius of Caesarea's (d. 339) *Church History* VI, 23, the theologian Origen (d. *c.* 253) was always accompanied by seven ταχυγράφοι ('quick scribes') who recorded his thoughts, which were then transcribed by βλιογράφοι ('book scribes'). Rufinus of Aquileia (d. 411), who translated Eusebius into Latin, identified these 'quick scribes' for the Latin readers with stenographers or more precisely *notarios* ('users of *notae*'): Schwartz and Mommsen 1903–1909, 568–571. Eusebius's account shows how shorthand could be used in Christian Late Antiquity, even though Origen wrote in Greek and probably did not use Tironian notes. For the role of shorthand in the Patristic Period see Hagendahl 1971.

3 There is some evidence from Roman times: five wooden tablets from around 100 CE written in Tironian notes and a late antique inscription containing Tironian shorthand. For the tablets see Hellmann 2019, 140–141 (with plate 2); for the inscription see Mentz 1944, 123–125. Digital images of the tablets are available via the *Vindolanda Tablets Online* <http://vindolanda.csad.ox.ac.uk> (accessed on 6 February 2024).

4 Hellmann 2000, 6.

5 The term 'Carolingian Renaissance' was coined by the French historian Jean-Jacques Ampère in 1839. The use of 'Renaissance' is problematic because it suggests an analogy to the era of Renaissance humanism, which is essentially different from the Carolingian Period. In the late eighth and ninth century there was no 'rediscovery' of something lost or forgotten, but a renewed interest in late antique literature and culture. Alternatively, 'Carolingian *renovatio*' or 'Carolingian *correctio*' are therefore used.

6 Contrary to popular prejudice, the Merovingian Period was by no means a 'dark age' of barbarism and cultural decline.

the original number of notes well beyond those used in antiquity, adding new vocabulary and Christian terminology. In contrast to an alleged five thousand notes used in antiquity, the seventeen Carolingian manuscripts and fragments containing the *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum* (CNT) – the single most important source for Tironian notes – list some thirteen thousand notes grouped into six *commentarii*.[7] Each *commentarius* juxtaposes certain notes with their meaning in longhand.[8]

Although most commonly discussed in the context of biblical or theological texts and ancient poetry, Tironian notes can also be found in charters and in manuscripts with legal content, such as law and formularies. This paper does not claim to be a complete survey or analysis of all charters and manuscripts of legal content with Tironian notes, for there are too many.[9] The aim is rather to trace the role of shorthand in early medieval legal practice by means of selected examples. The use of shorthand within these legal manuscripts differs widely. Tironian notes may appear as single notes with a purely ornamental purpose or mixed together with minuscule letters and words. They can appear as marginal or interlineal corrections, additions, or clarifications. Or they can be used for a portion or the entirety of the main script – resulting in complete texts or even whole compilations written entirely in shorthand.

The use of Tironian notes in texts concerning legal knowledge and in legal practice touched a group of people far beyond those usually associated with shorthand: scholarly circles and learned elites. Charters and books of law were aimed at a wider audience than, for example, a commentary on the ancient Roman poet Persius.[10] Legal manuscripts were also meant to be used by different

7 Mentz 1944, 25–26. Of these seventeen, two are lost today. Ganz 1983, 59 speaks of 'twenty-two Carolingian copies' but does not give a list. Ganz 2020, 295, however, changes his count to fifteen. Wilhelm Schmitz edited the *Commentarii* in 1893; for the manuscripts see Schmitz 1893, 5–9. The number of five thousand *notae* from antiquity comes from Isidore, *Etymologiae* I, 22: *Deinde Seneca, contractu omnium digestoque et aucto numero, opus efficit in quinque milia* ('Finally Seneca, after having collected them, put them in order and increased their number, creates a work of five thousand [signs]'), Spevak 2020, 101.

8 The sixth *commentarius* of the *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum*, for example, deals exclusively with Christian vocabulary, such as *sanctificatus*, *Israhel* or *catholica lex*, Schmitz 1893, tab. 119–120; Berschin 1990. This vocabulary is one of the later additions to the original notes derived from antiquity.

9 According to the 118 volumes of the *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores* (1956–2019) there are about five thousand charters written before the year 900 that are still preserved today in the original. The number of legal manuscripts is also very high. For example, of the *Lex Salica*, the oldest Frankish code of law, eighty-eight copies still exist today; Coumert 2023, 13–18.

10 Hellmann 2000, 108–127.

people over an extended period. This was especially true of formularies, collections of *formulae* (that is, anonymised charters, which were intended to serve as examples for scribes drawing up new charters). Therefore, the ability to read and write Tironian notes exerted a considerable influence not only on a scribe's daily performance but also on the accessibility of legal knowledge in general. This paper aims to give an insight into the use of Tironian notes in Frankish legal culture and to address the extent to which knowledge of shorthand may have affected the availability of legal knowledge and a scribe's participation in everyday legal practice.

2 Tironian notes and literacy

The Tironian notes are a distinct system of writing that is fundamentally different from longhand. Tironian notes are not intelligible at all for someone who only knows the Latin alphabet and the usual Latin scripts. Without proper knowledge of the characters and a basic understanding of how the system works, it is almost impossible to guess the right meaning of a word or a text written in Tironian notes. They are neither an alphabetic nor a syllabic script. The *notae* consist of strongly reduced and abridged forms of (ancient) Roman Latin letters, which are highly abstracted and bear almost no resemblance to the letterforms from which they were originally derived. Simplified, the *notae* are parts of letters, which can be combined in certain ways to represent whole words or phrases. A Tironian note consists of one or more lines drawn without setting down the stylus or pen. More complex Tironian notes are often themselves composites of simpler Tironian notes, the resulting compound being still shorter than the word it replaces. Ulrich Friedrich Kopp in the second volume of his important *Palaeographica Critica* breaks down the notes into individual components: the capitalised main character represents a whole word; smaller elements express the inflectional ending. The *nota* for *charta* ('charter')  , for example, consists of two distinct characters: a large character looking somewhat like an elongated *a* represents the word *chart-*; the small character looking like a modern lowercase *h* indicates the ending *a*. The same character may have different meanings depending on context and the smaller by-elements. The Tironian note for *imperator* ('emperor')  , for example, looks just like *ergo*  , with a dot above the symbol.[11] Tironian notes therefore are sometimes hard to interpret, especially in unknown texts without proper context. Nevertheless, assuming a good state of preservation, texts written in

11 Kopp 1817, 185.

Tironian notes can be deciphered confidently by anyone who has an understanding or knowledge of how the system works.

Therefore, when discussing the medieval use of Tironian notes, a fundamental distinction should be made between two levels of 'literacy': some scribes appear to have employed individual memorised signs whose meaning was known to them by rote, while others demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of the system, enabling them to independently record and read complete sentences in shorthand. The use of a few *notae* should therefore not necessarily imply full mastery of shorthand.[12] In contrast, individuals who did not actively write shorthand may nevertheless have been able to read it.

3 Tironian notes in charters

The Western Roman Empire ended in 476 with the deposition of the last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus. It was replaced by the so-called barbarian kingdoms of the Goths, Vandals, Franks and others. Yet the Tironian notes outlived the transformation of the Roman world. We know little of the extent to which shorthand was used during the Migration Period. However, in Gallia, modern day France, using Tironian notes was still common long after the end of the Western Roman Empire. Bishop Gregory of Tours (d. 594), in his *History of the Franks*, reported the somewhat common use of *notae* in the late sixth century, writing that scribes used *notae* for drafting documents (X, 19).[13] Bishop Ennodius of Reims, for example, was convicted of treason when his secretary produced drafts of incriminating letters written in *notae*:

> *Post haec epistulae prolatae sunt, in quibus multa de inproperiis Brunichildis tenebantur, quae ad Chilpericum scriptae fuerant* […]. *Negavit se episcopus has epistulas* […] *misisse suo nomene* […]. *Sed puer eius familiaris adfuit, qui haec notarum titulis per thomus chartarum conprehensa tenebat, unde non dubium fuit resedentibus, haec ab eodem directa.*[14]

12 The Tironian note for *et*, for example, was regularly used in the insular Latin scripts of the Early Middle Ages. However, this does not imply a general, in-depth knowledge of shorthand among all insular scribes.

13 Krusch and Levison 1951. Gregory's book is also known by its traditional title *Ten Books of Histories* (*Libri Historiarum X*).

14 Krusch and Levison 1951, 511.

> Next, letters were produced in which many invectives were written against Brunichilde and which were addressed to Chilperich […]. The bishop denied having sent these letters in his name […]. However, there was a trusted servant of his present, who kept these letters copied in shorthand for his [*i.e.* the bishop's] files, and because of this, for everyone present there could be no doubt at all, that he had sent them.

Unfortunately, there are no surviving examples of such drafts or copies, but there are many examples of Tironian notes in Merovingian charters. Early medieval charters are in fact a highly formularised kind of letter. They are the visible expression of executed legal transactions and therefore form an important part of everyday legal practice in the *regnum Francorum*. Of the thirty-eight surviving original Merovingian royal charters,[15] twenty-nine contain Tironian notes.[16] The Merovingian royal chancery certainly relied upon an older custom of using shorthand in charters.[17] Tironian notes also appear in private charters from Merovingian times.[18] To what extent the Merovingian use of them was influenced by the *Commentarii* is still unknown. The style used in Merovingian times was not directly based on the forms of the *Commentarii*;[19] the notes are written differently and are very difficult to decipher, at least today. Maurice Jusselin has provided readings of most of the notes in Merovingian royal charters, which Arthur Mentz improved and supplemented.[20]

The earliest example of Tironian notes in the Merovingian royal charters can be found in a charter of Chlothar II (D Merov. 22) in favour of Saint-Denis from the end of the sixth or beginning of the seventh century (584–628). The charter Paris, Archives nationales, K 1, n° 4 is written on papyrus.[21] In line 9, there is a *subscriptio*: *Ursinus optul[it]* Chlothcharius (M.) in Chr[ist]i nomine rex hanc precep[tio]nem sub[scipsi]* ('Ursinus presented it, I, Chlothar, in the name of Christ,

15 Kölzer 2001, XIII.

16 DD Merov. 22, 28, 85, 89, 121, 122, 123, 126, 131, 135, 136, 137, 138, 141, 142, 143, 144, 147, 149, 150, 153, 155, 156, 157, 166, 167, 168, 170 and 173 of Kölzer 2001.

17 Mentz 1944, 178. Harry Bresslau suggested in 1889 that the use of notes was a genuine Merovingian innovation (Bresslau 1964, 541), but, as Mentz has shown, it belonged to an older Roman tradition.

18 For example, there are some Tironian notes in Paris, Archives nationales, K 2, n° 9, an exchange of property between a man named Magnoald and a certain Lambert from 691 (ChLA 563). There has not been any comprehensive study of the use of Tironian notes in private documents to date. However, most early medieval private charters are now accessible via the 118 volumes of the *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores* (1956–2019).

19 Ganz 1983, 59–60. For an in-depth analysis of structure and style of the notes from the charters see Mentz 1944, 175–178.

20 Jusselin 1907, and Jusselin 1913, 67–73; Mentz 1944, 166–171.

21 For a whole image of the *praeceptum* see ChLA 550.

King, signed this charter'). Right behind the abbreviated *optulit* there are some elevated Tironian notes, which, according to Mentz, mean '*Ursinus legit*' ('Ursinus read it') (Fig. 1).[22]

Fig. 1: […] *(C.) Ursinus optul[it] (S.R.)* $^{\text{Ursinus legit}}$ *Clothacharius (M.), in Chr[ist]i nomine rex, hanc precept[io]nem sub.; Ursinus legit* written in Tironian notes, Étrépagny (584–628), Paris, Archives nationales, K 1, n° 4.

This means either Ursinus re-read the document or, more likely, Ursinus read it aloud to the participants and witnesses. Ursinus was Chlothar's *referendarius*, who validated the charter and afterwards confirmed that the procedure had been duly completed – a confirmation authenticated with Tironian notes. Similar notes of royal *referendarii* are, for example, *scriptum relegi et praeceptionim recognovi Sigolenus; promi impuli* ('I, Sigolenus read the written text again and validated the charter; I had it recited') (Paris, Archives nationales, K 1, n° 7^1 / D Merov. 28) or *Chrodinus obtestatur* ('Chrodinus testified') (Paris, Archives nationales, K 2, n° 5 / D Merov. 89).[23] Like Ursinus, Syggolenus and Chrodinus are the validating *referendarii*.[24] The use of Tironian notes therefore served as an additional guarantee of legitimacy.

Another function of Tironian notes besides being a mark of validation, was the identification of the commissioner of a charter. In Paris, Archives nationales, K 3, n° 2^1 (D Merov. 131) the validating *Uulfolaec[u]s iussus optol[it]* is followed by the notion *ordinante domno concedente Berehario maiore domus* 'by order of the granting Maior of the palace Bercharius', again written in shorthand.[25] In Paris, Archives nationales, K 2, n° 12 (D Merov. 12) the notion *Droctoaldus iussus optul[it]* is supplemented by several Tironian notes reading *subscripsit; in nomine domine; ordinante Ebroino maiori domus* ('[he/Droctoald] signed it; in the name of the Lord; by order of the Maior of the palace Ebroin').[26]

22 Mentz 1944, 168.

23 Mentz 1944, 168; for Paris, Archives nationales, K 1, n° 7^1, Jusselin 1907, 488 just reads *scripsit Sigolenos*. For images see ChLA 552 and ChLA 560.

24 D Merov. 28: *Syggolen[us] optol[it]*; D Merov. 89: *Chrodinus optul[it]*.

25 Mentz 1944, 169; Jusselin 1907, 491 reads *ordinante domno et Berehario maiore domus*. For other readings see Kölzer 2001, 333–334, n. 2. For an image see ChLA 570.

26 Mentz 1944, 168 and Jusselin 1913, 71. For an image see ChLA 566.

Other remarks in Tironian notes confirm the correct completion of the document.[27] Tironian notes could indicate both authenticity and identity, together. In all cases, the shorthand characters added an extra layer of authentication. By adding Tironian notes, the royal *referendarius*, or the scribe, confirmed the lawful procedure in the issuance of the charter, making it even more valid in case of dispute.

For such kind of use, a proficient literacy of Tironian notes was not necessary. Knowing several, repeating characters by heart would suffice. This does not mean, however, that scribes could not have had a deeper knowledge of shorthand. There are, in fact, a few charters showing a higher degree of Tironian literacy, for they do not merely repeat certain phrases, but give information beyond the *referendarius* or who issued the document. Paris, Archives nationales, K 3, n° 13 (D Merov. 153) explicitly mentions the absence of the woman Adalgunde ('the woman was absent') in a *placitum* of Childebert III right before the remark of the *referendarius* Beffa (*mulier alibi fuerit; Beffa procurabam*). Paris, Archives nationales, K 2, n° 14 (D Merov. 123) repeats the toll exemptions for Saint-Denis already given in the charter (*damnat arbitros taxam requirantes*) and Paris, Archives nationales, K 3, n° 14 (D Merov. 155) even mentions that a certain cleric wished to attain a judgement (*clericus optat iudicio adsistere*).[28] Copying entire letters, as described by Gregory, required an even better command of shorthand.

By validating documents of legal contents, Tironian notes already played a crucial role in Merovingian legal practice. It was not only the scribes or *referendarii* who had to be able to write at least some Tironian notes, the other participants and the eventual reader of the document had to at least be able to recognise the characters. Several manuscripts with Tironian notes from Merovingian times provide proof of Tironian literacy outside the royal chancery, mostly in books that belonged to scholars.[29] Charters and everyday legal practice, however, affected far more people than just an intellectual elite. Some active skill in writing Tironian notes is shown by several witnesses in a charter of Chlodwig II from 654. In Paris, Archives nationales, K 2, n° 3 (D Merov. 85), three of the forty-eight signatories use Tironian notes in their subscription, none of them a bishop, cleric or monk.[30] The importance of Tironian notes for the authentication of charters is also evident in

27 Mentz 1944, 173–175.

28 Readings according to Mentz 1944, 169–170. For images see ChLA 568, 584 and 585.

29 Ganz 1983, 69–74.

30 See Kölzer 2001, 219–220 and ChLA 558; Mentz 1944, 168 identifies two additional remarks in notes; Ganz 1983, 65 counts nine subscriptions with notes but provides no readings.

signs that resemble Tironian notes but are not 'readable': in the subscriptions of Paris, Archives nationales, K 2, n° 10, a donation of a Chlothildis from 673, twelve signatories add signs to their subscription that strongly resemble Tironian notes, but in fact are not.[31] They are just so-called 'signs of hand'. Those symbols are clearly inspired by Tironian notes and were most certainly intended to enhance the weight of the signatory's name by imitating the validating symbols of the royal chancery.

The procedure of ensuring a charter's authenticity via Tironian notes persisted from Merovingian to Carolingian times and beyond. Even before Pippin III, called 'the Short' (d. 768), dethroned King Childeric III (d. *c.* 755) in 751, the chancery of the then still *maior domus* Pippin used notes to authenticate at least one charter.[32] The Carolingian royal chancery kept up the practice. The earliest surviving original charter of the now King Pippin, from 753, includes Tironian notes for that very purpose.[33] Tironian notes were used in royal charters throughout the Carolingian Period.[34] The surviving charters reveal some fundamental changes concerning Tironian literacy in contrast to the Merovingian times. An example of a very skilled use of Tironian notes is preserved in a document now kept in Munich (Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Kaiserselekt 1). On one side of the parchment is a 777 charter of Charlemagne (d. 814) in favour of Fulda (D KdG. 116), which employs Tironian notes to strengthen the document's authority. In the *subscriptio*, the aforementioned scribe, Wihbald (*Uuigbaldus advicem Radoni*) added Tironian notes meaning *domno rege ordinante Uuihbaldus recognovi* ('By order of my lord the king, I Wihbald checked [this]').[35] This, of course, corresponds entirely to the older custom of authentication. On the back of the charter, however, is a further inscription in shorthand that signals more than a memorised-knowledge of Tironian notes (Fig. 2):

31 ChLA 564; Ganz 1983, 65 mentions Paris, Archives nationales, K 2, n° 10 as another charter with Tironian subscriptions. He counts five notes but provides no readings; the *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores* do not record any readable Tironian notes. Levillain 1944 does not mention any notes. For the signatories see Levillain 1944, 23–41.

32 Paris, Archives nationales, K 4, n° 7 (D Arnulf. 22) from 20 June 751 has some notes right after *Uuineramnus recognovit et subscripsit*, which have been read as *Bacco rogatus recognovit* by Tardif 1866, 44 and *Braico fiere iussit* by Havet 1885, which Jusselin 1907, 505–506 correctly confirmed. For an image see ChLA 597.

33 ChLA 598. The charter is Paris, Archives nationales, K 5, n° 2 (D Pippin 6). Earlier royal charters of the first Carolingian king are only available in copies from the eleventh century.

34 Mentz 1903, 227.

35 Reading by Mühlbacher et al. 1906, 163. For an image see ChLA 539.

Et quia nos ancilla nostra nomine Sigradane per manus nostra iactante denario secundum lege Salica ingenuam

… because we freed our slave Sigradane with our own hand by the throwing of the coin …[36]

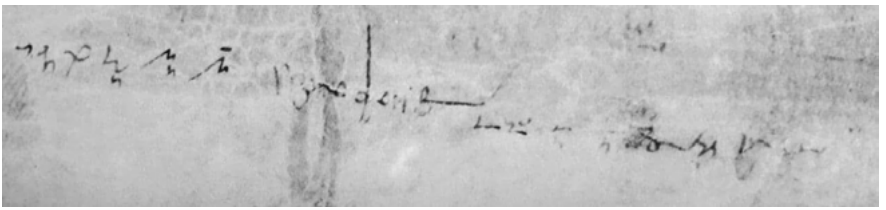

Fig. 2: ChLA 540: freeing of Sigradane; *Vorakt* written in Tironian notes, Herstal (?) (777), Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Kaiserselekt 1.

Those notes provide no information for Charlemagne's donation of the 'Hammelburg' to Fulda. In fact, they are not even an endorsement for the Fulda charter. The text on the back belongs to a completely different charter that is now lost to us (D KdG. 115). As Michael Tangl stated more than 120 years ago, this is what diplomatics used to call a *Vorakt*, a record of essential information of a legal transaction which was recorded for a future charter. It was usually kept during or immediately after the transaction.[37] The scribe laid down the important facts for a charter before writing the actual document. In this case, this included the former slave's name and the ritual of the 'penny-throw'.[38] This particular writing practice required some skill, as this *Vorakt* was certainly written during or shortly after the ritual. Here, shorthand was not used for authenticity, but for speed, so that the scribe could capture the information swiftly. The actual charter was to be drawn up later, based on the notes. The parchment used for the *Vorakt*, meanwhile, was reused for another charter – the donation to Fulda. The freeing of Sigradane had probably taken place shortly before the donation. One may assume that Wihbald was involved in both cases. Without the shorthand *Vorakt*, no one would know today that Sigradane became a free woman on behalf of the king.[39] While the Munich parchment is the earliest surviving example of a draft written in shorthand,

36 Reading by Tangl 1900, 344.

37 Tangl 1900, 347–348. See Bresslau 1964, 293.

38 For this rather obscure ritual involving an actual coin see Nitschke 1982, 244–246.

39 This led Tangl 1900, 350 to speculate that Sigradane might have been a mistress of Charlemagne.

the practice resembles Gregory's description in the sixth century,[40] and it is therefore not implausible to assume that (at least Carolingian) scribes commonly recorded legal acts in Tironian notes, prior to writing out the charter in full. The same may be said of preserved court documents such as *placita* or *iudicia*, which may also have been initially drafted in shorthand. The question arises as to whether there were protocols of these hearings created in shorthand even before a draft. The fluency in Tironian notes required for such a task would have been much higher than the proficiency needed for mere authentication with some recurring characters. The in-depth understanding and various uses of shorthand shown by Wihbald were typical for Carolingian learning.

Tironian notes saw a new rise in popularity in the Carolingian Period. Frankish scholars emphasised the learning and use of shorthand in the scriptoria of the *regnum Francorum* in the late eighth and ninth century. Charlemagne in particular pushed for this improvement in several cultural decrees.[41] In his famous *Admonitio generalis* from 789, Charlemagne ordered the priests to set up schools in which the pupils were to be taught *notae* in addition to the Psalter, chants, and grammar:

> *Sacerdotibus* [...] *Et ut scolae legentium puerorum fiant. Psalmos, notas, cantus, computum, grammaticam per singula monasteria vel episcopia et libros catholicos bene emendate.*[42]
>
> To the priests [...] And there shall be schools for the boys who read. Psalms, notes, chants, reckoning of time and grammar you shall improve throughout all monasteries, bishoprics and books of faith.

Manifestations of this increased interest in the notes are the *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum*, mentioned above, which provided long lists of Tironian notes with their individual meanings (Fig. 3).

40 Another example of the use of Tironian notes in drafts is a private charter from Metz from 848, Havet 1888.

41 Berschin 1991, 102–113.

42 *Admonitio generalis* 70, ed. Mordek, Zechiel-Eckes and Glatthaar 2012, 222–224; Hellmann 2019, 144–145. Some scholars take a broader view of the term *notae* and understand it to mean characters in general, but this explicitly includes shorthand; Mordek, Zechiel-Eckes and Glatthaar 2012, 225, n. 176.

Fig. 3: *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum*. Rather large notes followed by their meaning in Carolingian minuscule, western France (?) (first half of ninth century), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 190, fol. 2^{v}.

Another important resource for learning shorthand was the Psalter in Tironian notes.[43] With the use of a *Psalterium Tironianum*, one could familiarise oneself with the notes and learn the principles of their composition through a known text.[44] The *Commentarii* and *Psalterium* were used side by side.[45] As a result, Tironian notes took an even firmer hold in the practice of correcting, annotating and even writing manuscripts in the ninth century. Ecclesiastical schools and monasteries became the centre of shorthand learning. The school of Saint-Martin de Tours, in particular, was one, or perhaps the, centre of Tironian learning in the ninth century.[46]

The most representative of the manuscripts written using shorthand are commentaries on ancient poets, of which about fifty have survived.[47]

4 Tironian notes in manuscripts with legal contents

Tironian notes can also be found in 'books of law' in the broadest sense: ancient Roman law, barbarian *leges*, royal *capitularia* and the *canones* of church councils; often transmitted together and intermixed in one codex. Somewhere in between those and charters are the formularies. In addition to being examples for new charters, *formulae* also served as examples for everyday legal practice and supplemented the codes and councils in this regard. Formularies are often transmitted together with other legal texts and demonstrate a close relationship between normative texts and legal practice.[48] Together, the texts formed the written basis

43 For example Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 13160. A digital image is available via <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

44 Hellmann 2019, 145–146.

45 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 190 contains both the *Comentarii* (fols 1^{r}–42^{v}) and a *Psalterium Tironianum* (fols 43^{r}–57^{v}) from the same scriptorium from the first half of the ninth century (KFH 3965 and 3966). A digital image is available via <https://gallica.bnf.fr/>.

46 Hellmann 2000, 20.

47 Ganz 1990, 45–50.

48 The manuscripts Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 4409, Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 852 and Warsaw, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, 1 from Tours, for example, each contain the formulary of Tours and material from the *Lex Romana Visigothorum*. The Warsaw manuscript furthermore also contains a copy of the *Lex Salica*. The manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 4627 from Sens has *formulae* from Sens and the formulary of Marculf together with the *Lex Salica*; Fulda, Hochschul- und Landesbibliothek, D1 has the

of Frankish legal culture. The use of Tironian notes in these manuscripts is remarkable because the need for legal knowledge extended well beyond scholarly circles at the major centres of learning. Laymen as well as clerics on all levels of Frankish society were involved in legal processes and needed at least some legal knowledge.[49]

According to David Ganz, there are at least four legal manuscripts with annotations in Tironian notes from Merovingian times.[50] However there are some differences between the use of shorthand in Merovingian annotations and Carolingian legal manuscripts. A famous Merovingian legal manuscript with annotations in shorthand is Cologne, Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, 212, which contains the so-called *Collectio Coloniensis*, a collection of Gallic councils written around 600 in Gap.[51] It is one of the most important textual witnesses of ancient canon law. Some pieces of text survive nowhere else. The notes in the codex are especially difficult to read and have only recently been fully deciphered by Martin Hellmann,[52] who has shown that they highlight and paraphrase various passages in the main text but do not refer to the content of an entire *canon*. Instead, they concern only the following content-related subunits of the respective *canones*, and give a short summary of select regulations without offering further details or explanation.[53] It seems that someone with an interest in canon law worked with the manuscript and made some annotations for themselves.[54] The notes must have been placed in the eighth century at the latest, still linking them to the Merovingian Period.[55] The same seems to have been the case with Paris, Bibliothèque natio-

formulary of Angers with an epitome of the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* and Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, BPL 114 has a collection of *formulae* from Bourges and the *Epitome Aegidii*.

49 The number of people who could read was far greater than the number of people who could write (in a proper cursive or minuscule). Laymen borrowed manuscripts from ecclesiastical libraries and some even had libraries of their own; see McKitterick 1989, 244–266.

50 Ganz 1983, 73–74: Cologne, Erzbischöfliche Diözesan- und Dombibliothek, 212, Munich, Bayrische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 22051, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 12097 and Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. MS 886.

51 Licht 2018, 246–248. Tironian notes appear on fols 4^{v}, 9^{r}, 14^{v}, 15^{r}, 15^{v} and 16^{r}.

52 Hellmann 2015; Schmitz 1886, 118, who was the first to describe the Tironian notes, provides only incomplete readings.

53 Hellmann 2015, 68.

54 The Tironian notes on fols 14^{v}, 15^{r}, 15^{v} and 16^{r} clearly resemble an alternative chapter division as known from other manuscripts with the same contents; Hellmann 2015, 68–69.

55 Hellmann 2015, 71.

nale de France, latin 12097, which contains Tironian notes of an individual nature that testifies to intensive work with the manuscript.[56]

The Carolingian use of Tironian notes goes beyond individual annotations of learned men or women, for the Carolingian scribes used longhand and shorthand in tandem, as they were writing a manuscript. Sometimes, scribes would add single notes to highlight or just decorate the text, other times, they would write whole paragraphs or even whole pages entirely in shorthand. Short sequences of Tironian notes were used to cram long passages on a page, or – the reverse – to fill up empty space in a justified column. One example of this can be found in the manuscript Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, BPL 114, which was written after 805 in Bourges.[57] The codex contains the *Epitome Aegidii*, excerpts of the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* ('the roman law of the Visigoths'), and a collection of *formulae* from Bourges. On fol. 54[r] there are some Tironian notes (Fig. 4).

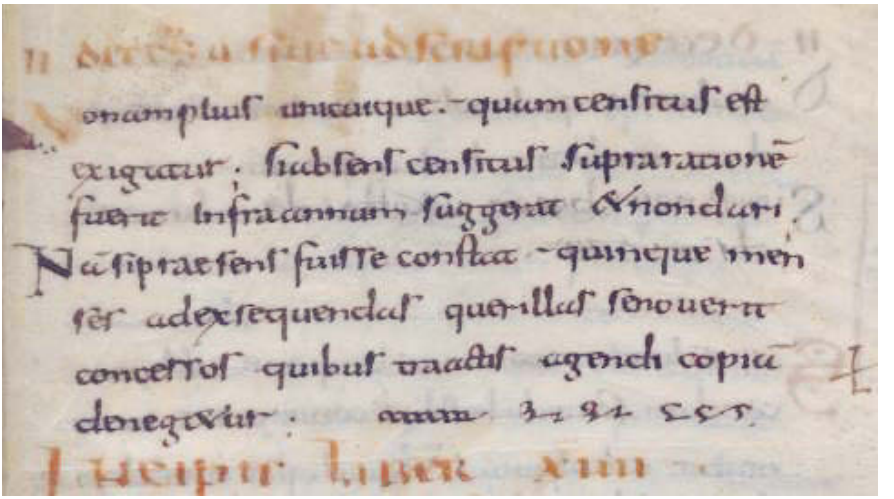

Fig. 4: Tironian notes used to fill the line, Bourges (800), Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, BPL 114, fol. 54[r].

56 There are Tironian notes on fols 1[v], 22[r], 36[r], 64[v], 89[r], 92[r], 141[v], 147[r], 173[r/v], 178[v], 185[v], 193[v], 195[r], 196[v], 204[v], 207[r], 210[r], 213[v], 220[r], 222[r], and 224[r]; Ganz 1983 also mentions fols 23[r], 35[r], 178[r] and 204[r], which have no Tironian notes; for this manuscript see also Martin Hellmann's *Index Tironianorvm*, <http://martinellus.de/index/indexti_2021_11_04.htm> (accessed on 15 September 2022).

57 KFH 2150. On fol. 163[r] the date is given as the fifth year of Charlemagne's reign as emperor: *in anno XXX[mo] IIII[to] regnante domno nostro Caralo* [i.e. *Carolo*] *rege, et ex co* [i.e. *quo*], *Christo propitio, sumpsit imperium, V anno incoante, gesta habita.*

In line eight, right at the end of the second excerpt from Book XIII of the *Lex Romana*, there are some *X*s followed by the notes *bene bene sic sic* and then *si* or *sic*. The notes bear no meaning and were added as a decoration and to fill the line in an aesthetically pleasing way. The end of the paragraph left much open space in the line, because the next excerpt was supposed to start in the next line. To give the reader the impression of a closed text block, the gap had to be filled. Rather than filling the space with a meaningless 'scribble', the scribe chose to use some common Tironian notes he was familiar with. The notes *bene*  and *sic*  are neatly done and indicate a scribe who was accustomed to the use of the characters. By selecting these very characters, the scribe also highlighted the contents of the excerpt as noteworthy. For the potential user of the manuscript, however, the reader's command of shorthand was mostly irrelevant. All of the essential information in the book was accessible, the notes added only a hint, if any, for the initiated.

Another example of the various ways in which Tironian notes could be used in legal books is found in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 10756. The modern codex consists of three discrete manuscripts from different places and periods.[58] All three, however, contain Tironian notes, albeit used in different ways.

The oldest manuscript (fols 62–69) was probably written in Bourges at the beginning of the eighth century and is clearly Merovingian.[59] On fols 62^{r}–64^{r} there are five ancient *formulae* from Bourges, accompanied by longer excerpts in Tironian notes on the bottom of fols 62^{r}, 62^{v}, 63^{r} and 63^{v} (Fig. 5). The Tironian notes presumably form a formula for a letter, as the beginning of the text suggests: *suggerendo conlaudando atque profitendo domno illo* …[60] Similar beginnings are documented in the formulary of Marculf, for example.[61] The notes are constructed somewhat differently from what can be found in the later Carolingian *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum* and show a high degree of fluency in shorthand. The very first word *suggerendo* does not use the usual note (CNT 122, 149), but is a custom composition of the root note *sugg** and the ending *-do*. The root *sugg** is not found in the *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum*, but can be derived from the documented notes *suggerit* (CNT 26, 67) and *suggessit* (CNT 26, 74). The scribe obviously had such a deep understanding of the notes that he was able to compose notes in accordance with the rules. Apparently, this formula for a letter was added later. Someone used the free space in the manuscript to write down

58 Rio 2009, 259–260.

59 CLA 604. The last part of Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 10756 belongs together with Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 611.

60 I would like to thank Martin Hellmann, who pointed out the reading to me and kindly provided me with his reading of the first words.

61 Marculf I, 7 and I, 34 both start with *suggerendo piissimo ac praecellentissimo domno illo* ('for the attention of the most pious an excellent lord N.'), Zeumer 1886, 47 and 64–65.

texts for their own studies.[62] In the original *formulae*, only one note refers to the legal texts at hand: on fol. 63^{v}, at the end of the fourth formula, after the word *stipulatione*, a note has been added that means *subnexa*, thereby completing the standard phrase *stipulatione subnexa* ('with confirmation given below'). The phrase *stipulatione subnexa* is fairly common in private charters, and it is therefore not surprising that a writer has learned the note for *subnexa*. It is reminiscent of the use of shorthand in charters, in which regularly recurring words and phrases at the end of a document were executed as notes.

The other two parts of latin 10756 are of greater interest, for they contain whole formularies, copied in Carolingian times. The first part (fols 1–45) is the formulary of Marculf copied at the beginning of the ninth century. On fol. 39^{v}, Tironian notes are used to supplement a missing word from the text being copied (Fig. 6). It is a formula from the formulary of Marculf (Marculf II, 22), an anonymised document dealing with the sale of a slave. The Tironian notes can be found at the end of the document in a sentence that outlines the consequences of either party violating the agreement, which include, among other things, a payment of some amount of gold. The original text reads *inferat tibi cum cogente auro tanto*, which makes no sense, because the reference word for the participle *cogente* is missing. Comparing the sentence with similar provisions, one notices that a *fisco* ('fisc') is obviously missing. Either the scribe himself or a proof-reader added the omitted *fisco* above the line with the characters *fisc** (resembling some kind of sickle or scythe) and the ending *-o* (roughly resembling a question mark). With the Tironian notes, the sentence now reads *inferat tibi cum cogente fisco auro tanto* ('let him pay you, the fisc compelling him, *n.* gold')[63]. On fol. 41^{r}, another Tironian note is used to correct a false *et petiticione*. Again, either the scribe himself or a proof-reader added the note *ad* / above the *et* to restore the correct reading of the passage to *ad petiticione*. More Tironian notes are used in a chapter list for the first book of the formulary. On fol. 1^{r}, notes for *-o*, *et*, and *patriciato* correct the title of formula VIII from *carta de docat aut comitatu* to *carta de docato et patriciato aut comitatu* ('charter concerning the office of a duke, *patricius* or count'); in the title of the ninth formula *indicolum ad alium regem, cum legatio dirigit et verbis suggerit, commendatium* ('letter recommendation to another king, when an embassy is sent and presents a verbal communication'), the note for *verbis* is used instead of the written word.[64] The note was even part of the original line and was not added later.

62 On fols 64^{v} and 67^{v}–68^{r} there are further additions in Tironian notes that were obviously added later to the manuscript. For the contents of the notes see Hellmann 2000, 248.

63 The exact amount of gold is unknown, because in *formulae* all specific details are replaced by placeholders like *tantus* ('this much').

64 Translation Rio 2008, 127.

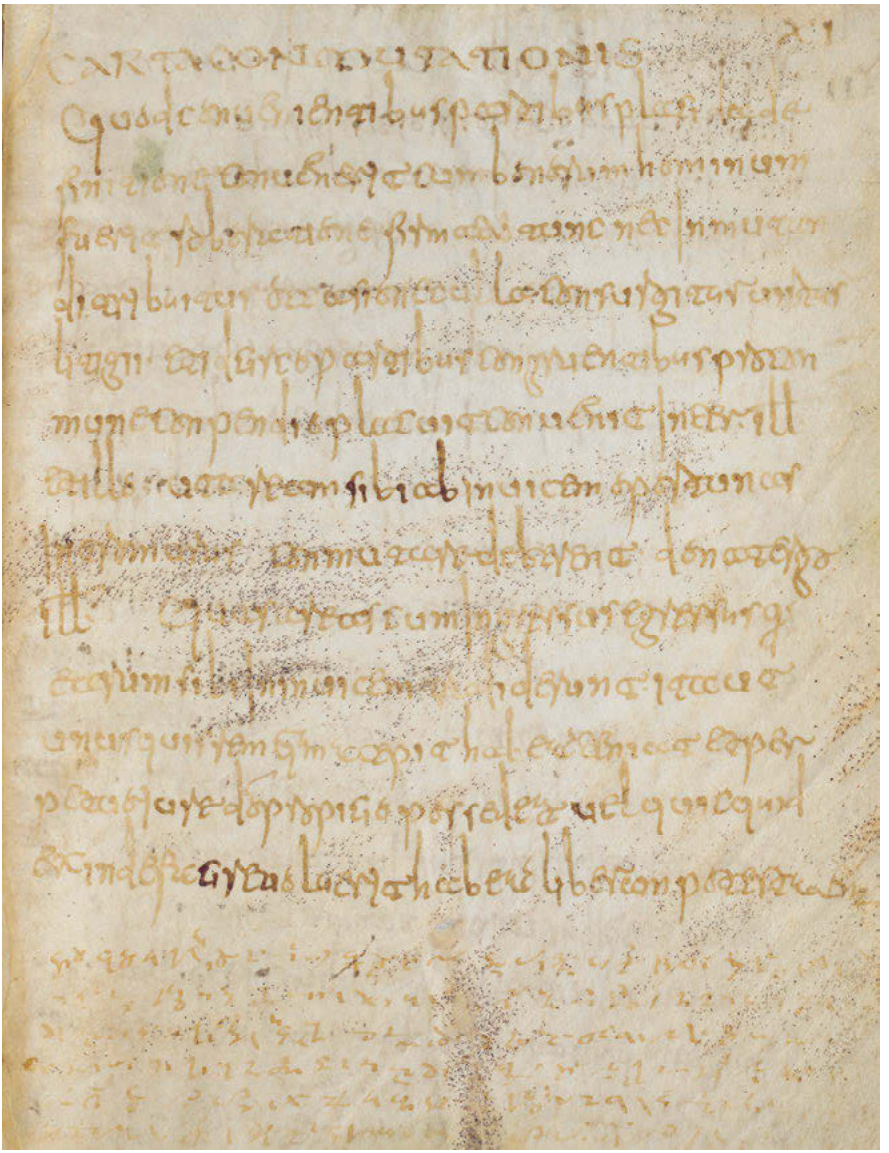

Fig. 5: A letter formula in Tironian notes (*suggerendo conlaudando atque profitendo domno illo* …) accompanying another formula in longhand (*CARTA CONMUTATIONIS* 'Charter for an exchange of property') from Bourges, written in a Merovingian minuscule, Bourges (beginning of eighth century), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 10756, fol. 62^{r}.

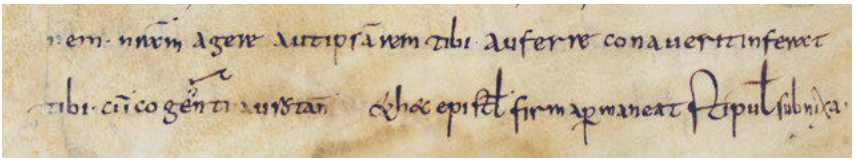

Fig. 6: Tironian notes used to fill in a missing *fisco*, northern France (first third of ninth century), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 10756, fol. 39^{v}.

The scribes used their knowledge of shorthand to ensure the quality of their product. However, in doing so, they assumed that future users of the manuscript would also be able to understand the corrections and additions. To use the formulary in the Paris manuscript for drawing up new charters in a proper way, future users would need to know how to read Tironian notes. Indeed, it was expected that they would, for formularies were aimed at inexperienced scribes or pupils in need of examples for new charters, as Marculf, the author of the collection, himself wrote: *ad exercenda initia puerorum, ut potui, aperte et simpliciter scripsi* ('I wrote openly and simply, as best as I could, to guide first efforts of youth').[65] In the very same manuscript there is a short text right at the end of the formulary (fol. 45^{v}):

> *ITEM ALIO DICTO AD IUUENIS NESCIENTES SCRIPTURAS*
> *Miror prorsus tam*[66] *prolixa tempora aut nullum me sermone pagene consecutum, cuius eloquia vestri, velut ad verbo dictancium, polluti mutuati ceras afferunt, currunt articuli falsitatis. Sed ubi venitur ad revolvendum,*[67] *delisse magis quam scripsisse, pro solicissimum referit. Quando sperabam capitula epistolae finisse, nec inciperat in primo.*
>
> ANOTHER TEXT, ADDRESSED TO YOUNG MEN WHO DO NOT KNOW HOW TO WRITE
> I wonder that, after such a long time, my speech has in no way been followed on the page, and the borrowed writing tablets which are brought back soiled with your text, as if from dictation, are filled with the wrong words; and when it comes to handing them over, he has erased more than he has written down, replacing one solecism with another. When I was expecting him to have finished the sections of the document, he had not even begun.[68]

What seems to be a teacher's cry of exasperation deals with a student unable to follow the teacher's dictation. The short text is perhaps a hint of how future legal scribes were trained using the formularies.[69] David Ganz suggests that the above-

65 Marculf, Praefatio, Zeumer 1886, 37; translation Rio 2008, 126.
66 Zeumer 1886, 32; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 10756: *miro prosortam*.
67 Zeumer 1886, 33; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 10756: *reuduendum*.
68 Translation Rio 2008, 241–243.
69 Rio 2008, 241.

mentioned mistakes in the transcription of a dictated text seem to be a result of an ignorance of Tironian notes.[70] Yet *notae* are not explicitly mentioned in the text. The headline, probably added later, just mentions *scripturas* ('writings' or 'how to write'). But no matter whether the teacher was complaining about a lack of mastery of shorthand or expressing dissatisfaction in general, Tironian notes played a crucial role in the history of this short text. The text was not part of the original collection drawn up by Marculf in the middle of the seventh century, yet it appears in all of the most important manuscripts of his formulary from the ninth century.[71] The reason might be that a teacher who at some point used a copy of the formulary made the remark *in margine*, which later became part of the transmitted text. This inscription was most likely done in Tironian notes.[72] Whoever copied this manuscript read the notes and added them to the text in minuscule script. If one assumes a comparable fluency for the corrector of the first part of the Paris manuscript, it becomes clear that the Tironian notes are not an insurmountable obstacle. A teacher able to vent his disappointment in Tironian notes most certainly would have been able to read shorthand corrections and guide his students in doing so.

Even more challenging for inexperienced users was the use of notes in the second part of the Paris codex (fols 46–61). This manuscript, written in Tours in the first or second quarter of the ninth century, contains solely a copy of the formulary of Tours from the second half of the eighth century.[73] The monastery of Saint-Martin in Tours was not only a centre of Tironian scholarship it was also an important centre of legal knowledge. Tironian notes in this manuscript appear in the formulary's list of chapters, which is partly written in Tironian notes (fol. $46^{r/v}$). The Tironian notes are used at the end of the page for longer title entries so that every title can keep to the planned line length (Fig. 7).[74]

70 Ganz 1983, 61.

71 Besides Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 10756 those are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 4627 (fol. 125^{r}) and Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, BPL 114 (fol. 97^{v}).

72 Zeumer 1881, 23.

73 KFH 4658.

74 Hellmann 2017, 270–271.

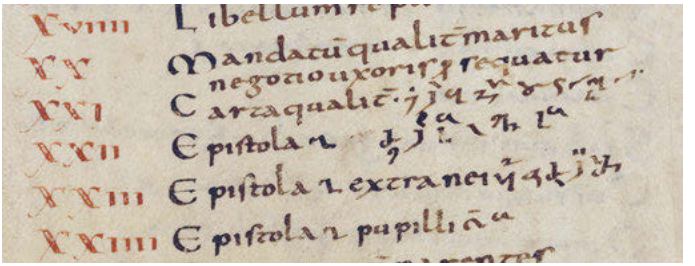

Fig. 7: Titles of different *formulae* concerning heritage and adoption. For numbers XXI–XXIIII all of the text except the type of document is written in Tironian notes, Tours (first or second quarter of ninth century), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 10756, fol. 46^{r}.

The very long title *Carta, qualiter pater filium vel nepotem de suis rebus meliorare potest* ('charter, if a father wants to support his son or his grandson with something from his assets') for example, is almost entirely written in notes. Only the words *carta* and *qualiter* are written out, *pater filium vel nepotem de suis rebus meliorare potest* is completely written in shorthand. The use of notes is similarly extensive in the case of the following '*Epistola, [qualiter] [in loco] [filiorum] [instituuntur] [ab] [auo] [instituuntur]*', the title '*Epistola, [qualiter] extranei [homines] [qui] [in locum] [filii] [adoptati]*' and '*Epistola, [qualiter] pupilli [recipiuntur]*' (everything written in notes is put in square brackets).[75] Less severely abbreviated, on the other hand, are some of the titles on fol. 46^{v}:

XXXVI Convenentia [inter] duas personas [de] [terris] [et] rebus [eorum]
XXXVII Mandatum [de] [causis] commendatis [ad] aliam personam
XXXVIII Securitas de omicidio [vel] [de] qualibet [causa]
XXXVIIII Iudicium iuxta [quod] [causa] continent
XL Breve secundum [ipsum] iudicium
XLII Vinditio de casa vel area [infra] [civitate]
XLIII Epistola, [qui] [se] [in] alterius [commendat] potestate
XLIIII Si monasterium [vel] sinodochium [de] [magna] [re] [construere] vult
XLV Carta, cum [filia] [cum] [fratribus] [in] hereditate [successerat]
XLVII Si aliquis servo [vel] gasindo [suo] [aliquid] concedere [voluerit]
XLVIII Cessio, qui mulierem [dotat] [secundum] nubtiis [sponsaliis][76]

75 From this point on, English translations are not given, as the Latin quotations are provided to demonstrate that which is written in full and that which is written in Tironian notes (a distinction that a translation would only obscure).

76 Karl Zeumer used a reading of the notes done by Wilhelm Schmitz for his edition of the formulary; Zeumer 1886, 132.

The notes had the function of shortening the lengthy sentences and saving precious parchment, but they created an obstacle for an inexperienced reader. So, whoever wrote the list of chapters assumed that the user would be able to read notes. Without knowing his notes, a young scribe looking for examples would not have been able to look up the contents of the formulary easily.

Likewise, the scribes of Reg. Lat. 852 from the Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana presuppose such knowledge of the reader. The manuscript containing some fragments of the formulary of Tours and again the *Epitome Aegidii* of the *Lex Romana Visigothorum* is written in a mixture of Carolingian minuscule and Tironian notes throughout (Fig. 8).

The manuscript was also written in Tours in the first quarter of the ninth century.[77] The scribes used Tironian notes like a regular book hand. This is typical for learned works from Saint-Martin, where the mixture of Tironian notes and minuscule script formed a kind of 'scholar's script' in the first half of the ninth century.[78] To study the excerpts from the *Lex Romana*, reading notes was a prerequisite. This applies even more to the *formulae* in Reg. Lat. 852. Take, for example, formula 18 (fol. 3[r]) from the formulary of Tours shown above (in this copy numbered as XVII):

XVII ITEM ALIO MODO
Igitur [ego] [in] [Dei] [nomine] [ille] dulcissima [coniux] /
[mea] [illa] dono [tibi] [per] [hanc] epistolam /
[co]ntulitionis [donatumque] [esse] [uolo] locello /
[re] [proprietatis] [meae] [nuncupante] [illo] situm in pago [illo] /
[cum] [terris] aedificiis accolabus [mancipiis] [libertis] /
uiniis [siluis] [pratis] [pascuis] [aquis] aquarumue /
[decursibus] mobilibus [et] inmobilibus [cum] [omnibus] /
adiecentiis [suis] [uel] [omni] supraposito /
[quidquid] [inibi] [praesenti] [tempore] [mea] uidetur [esse] [possessio] ea /
[uero] [ratione] [ut] [si] [tu] [mihi] supraestis [fueris] /
usufructuario [ordine] [haec] [omnia] [absque] [repetition] [heredum] [meorum] /
[hoc] [tenere] [et] possidere [debeas] [et] [post] [tuum] /
[quoque] [discessum] [cum] [omni] [re] emeliorata [uel] supra- /
posito [ad] legitimos [filios] [nostros] [qui] [ex] [nobis] pro- /
creati [fuerint] reuertantur similiter /
[ego] [in] [Dei] [nomine] [illa] dulcissimo iugali [meo] /
[illo] sequitur supradictum textum /
[et] [illud] [inter] [nos] inserere [placuit] [ut] [si] [fuerit] ullus /
[de] [heredibus] [nostris] [uel] [quis] [libet] [persona] [qui] [contra] has /
duas [con]tulitiones [uno] tenore [con]scribtas

77 Ubl 2014, 63.
78 Hellmann 2000, 20.

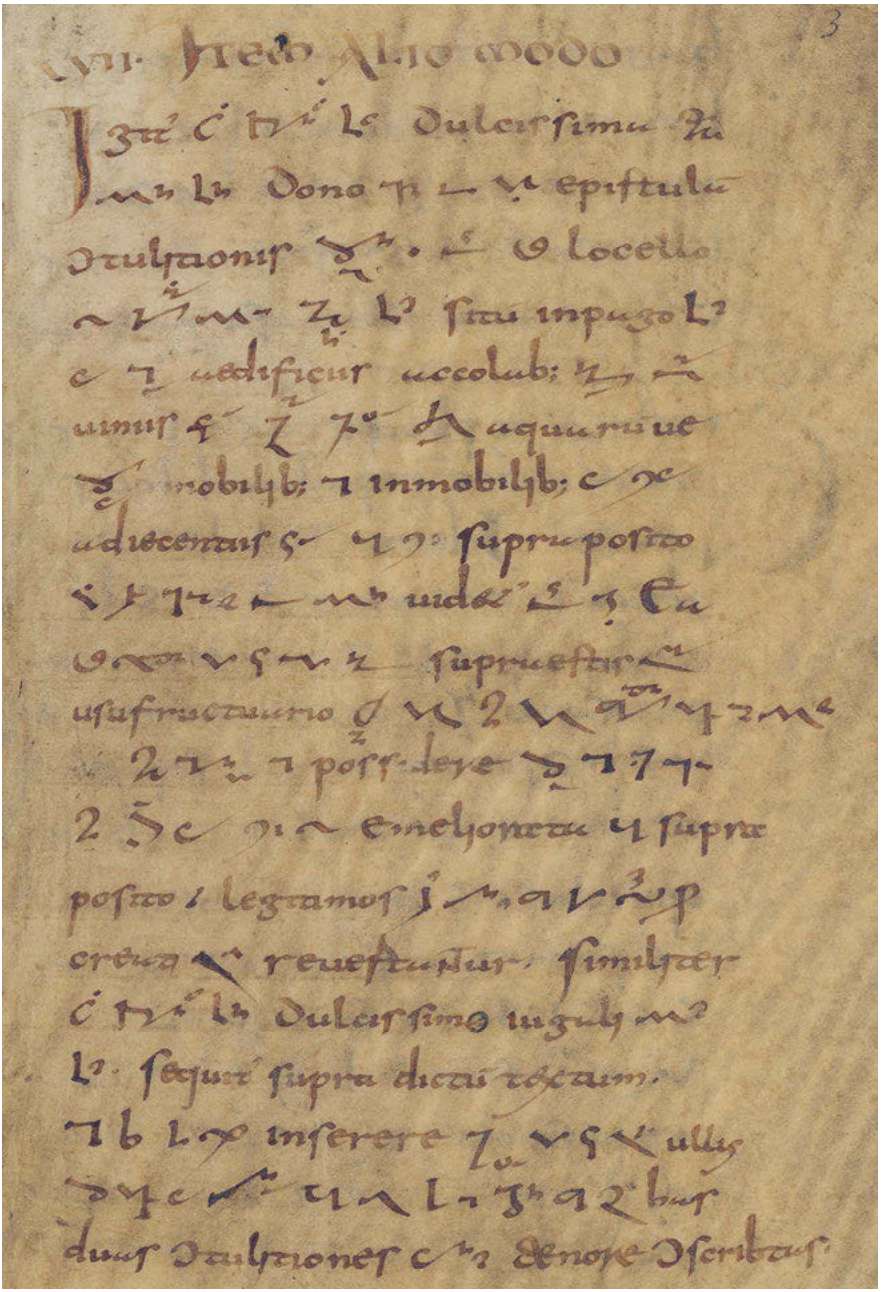

Fig. 8: Tironian notes mixed with Carolingian minuscule, Tours (first quarter of ninth century), Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 852, fol. 3^{r}.

The formula provides an example for a charter by which spouses could transfer their property to each other in cases of death. The proportion of shorthand in the text is very high: 106 of the 141 words in total on this page are written in notes (here placed in square brackets), amounting to three-quarters of the text! Given the sheer number of signs, a scribe needed to be proficient in Tironian notes, beyond mere rote memorisation to use this formula as an example for his own work. To everyone without proper knowledge of Tironian notes the text would have been cryptic. The proportion of notes in the *Epitome Aegidii* is similar. Access to the legal knowledge preserved in the manuscript therefore was limited to a presumably rather small circle of scribes and scholars, despite the fact that both the meaning and wording of the charter were legally significant. After all, the formula clearly proved that spouses could appoint each other as heirs, a fact that was contrary to the written law of the time.[79] If the spouse was to be the heir, agreements such as in this formula were necessary.[80] Often *formulae* such as this are the only attestation to certain legal customs that deviated from (and are thus unattested in) the *leges*. The same is true for the other *formulae* and the *Epitome*. With its combination of a formulary and Roman law, the manuscript written mostly in Tironian notes preserved valuable knowledge of both normative law and legal practice.

The so-called *Formulae Imperiales* (‘*formulae* from the emperor’), from the chancery of Louis the Pious, feature even more Tironian notes. The *Formulae* survive in one manuscript only. The codex latin 2718 from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, written in Tours around the year 830 contains a remarkable collection of theological treatises, royal capitularies – legislative or administrative acts emanating from the court – and fifty-five *formulae* using texts of imperial diplomas.[81] Apart from a few sprinkles in minuscule, the *formulae* are written entirely in shorthand. Readership therefore is restricted to only those who can read Tironian notes and have proper knowledge of the system (Fig. 9).

79 Early medieval inheritance law did not actually provide for the spouses as heirs, but for their children or, if no descendants existed, their relatives; Nonn 1972, 50–53.

80 Similar agreements can be found in, for example, Angers 41, Marculf I, 12 and Marculf II, 8 as well as Tours 17.

81 Mordek 1995, 422–430; Ganz 2004; Patt 2016, 73–82.

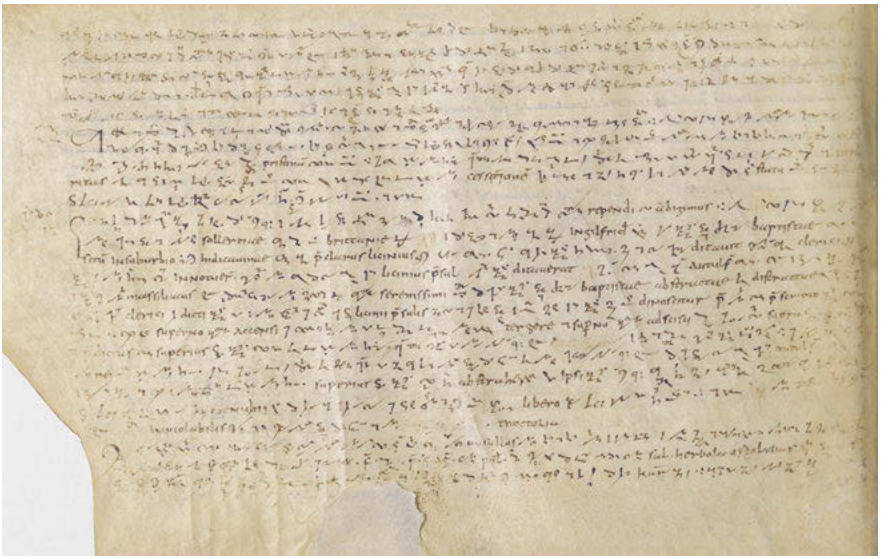

Fig. 9: *Formula Imperialis* 5 almost entirely written in Tironian notes. The beginning (l. 6) is marked by an enlarged *qui*, Tours (*c.* 830), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 2718, fol. 72^{v}.

On fol. 72^{v} there is, for example, *Formula Imperialis* 5:

> *[Qui<a>] [regiam] [et] [imperatoriam] [dignitatem] [nihil] [eque] [ac] [pietas] [et] [misericordia] [decere] [cognoscitur], [non] [solum] [tantum] [a] [regibus] [et] [imperatoribus] [sunt] [contumaces] [et] [legibus] [rebelles] [comprimendi], [quantum] [miseri] [et] [violentiam] [passi] [sublevandi]. [Idcirco] [notum] [fieri] [volumus] [omnibus] [fidelibus] [nostris], [praesentibus] [et] [futuris], [qualiter], [cum] [quidam] [homines] [de] [territorio] [civitatis] [illius], [de] [villa], [cuius] [vocabulum] [est] [illius], [coram] [nobis] [questi] [essent], [dicentes], [iniuste] [sibi] [ab] [illo] [comite] [ereptam] [fuisse] [libertatem], [et] [nos] [hoc] [ita] [verum] [esse], [fidelibus] [missis] [nostris], [illum] [et] [illum], [inquirentibus] [et] [nobis] [renuntiantibus], [comperissemus], [iussimus] [eos] [a] [iugo] [inique] [servitutis] [absolvendis] pristinam [reddere] [libertatem]. [Propter] [quod] [hanc] [nostre] [auctoritatis] [praeceptionem] [eisdem] [dari] [iussimus], [per] [quam] [decernimus] [atque] [iubemus], [ut] [memorati] [homines] [sive] [propinqui] [ex] [latere] [venientes] [vel] [posteritas] [eorum], [qui] [simili] [modo] [iniusta] [servitute] [oppressi] [esse] [noscuntur], [ab] [hac] [die] [in] [futurum] [per] [hanc] [nostram] cessionem [liberi] [permaneant] [et] [nullam] [a] [quolibet] [fidelium] [nostrorum] [deinceps] [super] statu [libertatis] [sue] [calumniam] [patiantur]; [sed] [liceat] [eis] [absque] [ulla] [iniusta] [inquietudine] [cum] [rebus] [propriis] [a] [nobis] [concessis] [perfrui] [libertatem]. [Et] [ut] [haec].*[82]

82 Text according to Zeumer 1886, 291.

In the manuscript, the text starts with the note *qui* ꝙ, which Zeumer corrected to *quia*. The scribe seems to have forgotten the ending *-a* to form a proper *quia* ꝙꝫ. The formula has 171 words, of which only three are written out: *pristinam* (l. 8), *cessionem* (l. 9) and *statu* (l. 9), which makes roughly 1.75% of the formula. Evidently these are the only words of the formula that the *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum* did not provide notes for.[83] We do not know what exactly the purpose of this manuscript was. Maybe it was a private copy or the result of some scholar's philological interest.[84] Nor do we know whether a scribe ever drew up documents on the basis of this codex or whether a teacher used the book to instruct students in writing charters. However, latin 2718 is the closest connection between Carolingian legal learning and the use of Tironian notes known today.

5 Conclusion

In early mediaeval times, Tironian notes played a significant role in different settings. One of these settings was, as this paper has shown, the legal culture of that period. But even within this context, the function of the notes varied. While the note served a validating function in charters, their purposes in legal manuscripts was completely different. In the case of the charters, a certain legal force was inherent in the characters themselves. The characters and symbols had an effect far beyond the circle of the scribes involved, and authenticated and validated a charter even in the eyes of those who presumably could not read or even write shorthand themselves. In the case of manuscripts, shorthand influenced how legal knowledge could be preserved and disseminated. It was a peculiarity of Carolingian writing practice to use shorthand like longhand. The greatest benefit of this was allowing the notes to present long statements or sentences in as concise a form as possible. The use of shorthand enabled the scribes to condense information, saving valuable parchment and maintaining the desired mise-en-page. Of course, all the examples given were written in an ecclesiastical or monastic scriptorium, where a certain fluency in Tironian notes was to be expected (at the latest since the *Admonitio generalis*). However, formularies and other legal

83 The *Index Alphabeticus* of Schmitz 1893, 70–117 mentions neither *(con)cessio* nor *pristinus* nor *status*, which is surprising, given how common at least the words *(con)cessio* and *status* are in the Early Middle Ages.

84 Maybe Abbot Fridugisis, his successor Theoto, or the deacon Hirminmaris were involved in the production of the codex, Ganz 2004, 151. Patt 2016, 74 considers the book neither a *Prachthandschrift* nor a *Gebrauchshandschrift*.

books were meant to be used by a far greater number of people than commentaries on Roman poets. The everyday legal affairs involved notaries, scribes, judges, counts and other honourable men and women, some of whom needed access to legal knowledge. We know for certain that lay people borrowed books from church libraries for their own use, and it is not unlikely that legal manuscripts were borrowed, too.[85] Using Tironian notes for such texts created an obstacle for at least some of its potential users. Nevertheless, the benefits of condensing a longer text were apparently considered to outweigh the problems of access restriction. To access the texts, a person would either need to read the notes themselves or appeal to someone else whom they trusted to interpret the notes on their behalf. Both required specialised knowledge. Laymen and clerics without the appropriate knowledge were therefore dependent on trained scribes or notaries who could convey the relevant information from the manuscript to the user. It is not unlikely that these could have been scribes of charters, who in turn needed knowledge of shorthand to validate documents correctly, take notes and access some examples in the formularies. Writing and reading the shorthand manuscript therefore played a small yet significant role in Frankish legal practice. There is therefore much to indicate that Tironian literacy in the Frankish Empire was even greater than accounts hitherto have suggested.

Abbreviations

CLA = Lowe, Elias Avery, *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, 11 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934–1972.
ChLA = Bruckner, Albert and Robert Marichal, *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, 49 vols [Series I], Dietikon: Urs Graf, 1954–1998.
CNT = Schmitz, Wilhelm (ed.), *Commentarii Notarum Tironianarum cum prolegomenis adnotationibus criticis et exegeticis notarumque indice alphabetico*, Leipzig: Teubner, 1893.
KFH = Bischoff, Bernhard, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen)*, 3 vols, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2014.
DD Arnulf. = Heidrich, Ingrid (ed.), *Die Urkunden der Arnulfinger*, Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2011.
DD Merov. = Kölzer, Theo (ed.), *Die Urkunden der Merowinger*, Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2001.
DD Pippin / DD KdG. = Mühlbacher, Engelbert et al. (eds), *Die Urkunden Pippins, Karlmanns und Karls des Großen*, Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1906.

85 McKitterick 1989, 261–266.

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Maximilian Gamer

Writing the History of the Tironian Notes in the Sixteenth Century: Johannes Trithemius and Roman Shorthand

Abstract: The first scholar to identify and discuss the Tironian notes since their decline in the eleventh century was the German Benedictine abbot Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516). His *De Notis* was widely read and highly influential, both in terms of the abbot's anecdotal information concerning his discovery and his attribution to particular inventors, namely Cicero and Cyprian. However, his cursory grasp of the principles governing Tironian notes had little impact among his more immediate readers. This paper argues that Trithemius developed a better grasp for the peculiarities of Tironian notes than he is usually given credit for. It does so by reconstructing Trithemius's work, his sources, his conclusions, and his effort to understand – even to recreate – a non-alphabetic writing system at the close of the fifteenth century.

1 Introduction

During the eleventh century, after a millennium of development, the systems of Roman shorthand known as 'Tironian notes' eventually fell into disuse.[1] Thereafter, the notes and to some extent the very idea of a distinctive shorthand faded into oblivion in the Latin West. It would appear that an ever more developed system of abbreviations provided a largely adequate built-in compression for regular Latin script and superseded the need for an additional system of shorthand.[2] At the turn of the sixteenth century, however, scholars began to focus on

1 Mentz 1944, 226–234. In some respects, the anonymous author of the *Ars Notoria Notarie*, a draft for an experimental shorthand system written in the twelfth or early thirteenth century, seems still well informed. The *Ars*, which survives in three manuscripts dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, includes a rare attempt to elucidate and categorise on the structure of the Tironian notes; see Haines 2014, 94–105. Cf. Burnett 2016.

2 See e.g. Burnett 1995–1996 on twelfth- and thirteenth-century note-taking at universities, and Johnen 1911, 290–300 on sermon transcripts from the twelfth to the end of the sixteenth century. Cf. Derolez 2003, 187, on the general usage of abbreviations in Gothic manuscript books. Experiments with dedicated shorthand systems met with only limited favour; see Mentz 1912. Shorthand

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the Tironian notes again out of antiquarian interest. This interest took on various forms: the discovery and study of Carolingian shorthand manuscripts and the collection of literary testimonies to the Tironian notes. The systematic analysis and 'deciphering' of the notes was accomplished only in the nineteenth century; but in the earlier pioneering efforts we find strategies to deal with an unwieldy system that, at the time, defied common conceptions of writing.[3]

This paper presents a case study of the German Benedictine Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516) and his observations regarding the Tironian notes.[4] It is widely acknowledged that he was the first to rediscover them and set in motion a discourse about them that gained momentum in the late sixteenth century. However, scholars' assessment of his contribution is usually restricted to this impulse, especially as he has been regarded as an unreliable author since the nineteenth century.[5] Yet, in regard to his comments on the Tironian notes, this assessment is unfounded. In fact, his reflections on their history are original, thoughtful and independently argued, not just a humanistic listing of testimonies. His conclusions regarding the origin of the Christian notes remained unchallenged for centuries to come. Those achievements, and his effort to understand the structure of Tironian notes, will be explored here accordingly.

2 Johannes Trithemius and the notes

In 1508 Johannes Trithemius completed the manuscript version of his *Polygraphia*. This was to become his most influential secular work, conveying his studies into

proposals in the Early Modern Period were largely limited to vernacular languages, which could make only limited use of the established Latin abbreviation system.

3 Most Tironian notes are defined in the Carolingian *Commentarii Notarum*, so deciphering in the literal sense was not necessary. To deal with the enormous amount of characters it is, however, necessary to understand how the characters themselves are structured. This was only fully achieved by Kopp 1817. Without this understanding the notes may seem as *scriptura realis* instead of *scriptura literalis*: Sickel 1861, 23–24; cf. Mentz 1944, 204–214.

4 This paper is an expansion of the observations in Gamer 2022, a critical edition of Trithemius's *Polygraphia*, and deals primarily with Trithemius's idea of the Tironian notes and their history. Therefore, the actual history of the notes will be considered in this paper only to the extent that it is necessary for an understanding of Trithemius's ideas. Mentz 1944 remains the most comprehensive account of the history of Roman shorthand until its decline.

5 Especially in a historiographical context, see Mentzel-Reuters 2015, 373–374. Studies of the notes have by and large accepted this judgement, e.g. Zeibig 1863, 59; Mitzschke 1875, 2–4; Schmitz 1877a, 197–198; Mentz 1916, 198–199; Mentz 1944, 237.

cryptography and steganography. As a renowned scholar of literary history and manuscript culture, his approach to these matters was a historical one, and this project offered him an opportunity to present his antiquarian discoveries on writing itself. As such, the preface introduces famous figures of history as *exempla* and alludes to their accomplishments in approximately chronological order. Among these, the Tironian notes are featured rather prominently and for the first time in the Early Modern Period. Veiled in metaphorical obscurity reminiscent of his earlier attempt at a handbook on secret writing, Trithemius laid out their history, as he understood it: the notes invented by Cicero were both a shorthand and, due to their complexity, a cipher. They saw broad adoption in the Roman Empire and were eventually adapted for Christian use by Saint Cyprian.[6] This was a concise portrait at a time when Roman shorthand was practically unknown. Within the manuscript version of the *Polygraphia*, aside from this *exemplum*, there is no further mention of the notes.[7] Yet Trithemius must have been aware of the importance of his discovery. Probably in 1515 he decided to rework the *Polygraphia* into something more suitable for publication.[8] He took this opportunity to greatly expand upon his history of writing, and added an *excursus* proper: *De Notis* ('On the notes'), which included the first depiction of some thirty examples of them.[9]

De Notis is largely anecdotal. Trithemius relates how he happened to come across two manuscripts written almost entirely in shorthand. He first encountered them in a Benedictine monastery in Mainz, probably St James, for which he was appointed *visitator* by the General Chapter of the monastic reform Congregation of Bursfelde in 1494.[10] There he discovered and managed to acquire a copy of the *Commentarii Notarum* ('Commentaries on the notes').[11] Nowadays it is as-

6 See Appendix below for the Latin original and an English translation.

7 I assume that the accompanying *Clavis Polygraphiae* further contextualised this paragraph, yet its manuscript version is not extant. Presumably, for this paragraph at least, it read similarly to the printed version, Trithemius, *Clavis Polygraphiae* (*Expositio in Prologum*), ed. Haselberg 1518b, sig. A3^{r-v}.

8 The *editio princeps* was published posthumously in Basel by Johannes Haselberg in 1518.

9 The history of writing within the *Polygraphia* is told twofold: first in a more general and abstract way; secondly focused on a 'national' level, tracing supposedly German scripts by means of actual samples, with the aim to 'prove' that the German people descended from the Greeks in a quasi-palaeographical manner: Gamer 2022, vol. 1, 188–190 and 47–49. *De Notis* does not fit neatly within this narrative. In addition to the depiction of thirty notes, it also contains a largely fictitious 'alphabet' of thirty-six characters. See Appendix for the Latin original and an English translation.

10 Volk 1955, 275.

11 At least fourteen complete or almost complete manuscripts of the *Commentarii* and three additional fragments had survived until the sixteenth century: Mentz 1944, 25–26.

sumed that Trithemius's manuscript was the present-day Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, 2° Ms. Philol. 2.[12] It is considered the oldest and best of the still extant Carolingian *Commentarii*.[13] Indeed, as Trithemius describes it, it is a 'sort of vocabulary' of some thirteen thousand characters and their meanings, subdivided into six eponymous commentaries.[14] This manuscript became part of Trithemius's famous collection in Sponheim, where it was initially left behind when he resigned as abbot in 1505 and opted for the abbacy of St. James in Würzburg.[15] This certainly explains the omission of a more detailed account of the Tironian notes in the manuscript version of the *Polygraphia* of 1508.[16] Yet Trithemius must have succeeded in retrieving his valuable manuscript from Sponheim around 1515, as it evidently became the template for the woodcuts of example characters offered in *De Notis*. Moreover, an estate inventory of his later place of residence, compiled a year after his death, lists a volume of *Note Ciceronis* found among the books in the abbot's rooms.[17] Another manuscript that apparently left a lasting impression on Trithemius was a Tironian Psalter. He saw it only once, while visiting the cathedral library in Strasbourg in 1498. He mentions its 'golden initials', in particular, and an erroneous identification as an 'Armenian Psalter'. Electoral Palatinate Councillor Michael Daniel Poland identified present-day Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 13 Aug. 4° as this

12 Brozinski and Wiedemann 1988; Bischoff 1998–2017, vol. 1, 373 (no. 1796) dated *c.* 800 CE.

13 Schmitz 1893, 5; Mentz 1944, 30–31.

14 *Libellus est antiquissimus in pergameno scriptus sine asseribus notas continens ciceronis ut sic* […] *est quasi uocabularius et note uel characteres uerba precedunt. es ist ein alt verruntzlt buchlin. eis non deseruit* ('the small ancient book is written on parchment, without book covers, and contains the notes of Cicero, such as […] it is thus similar to a vocabulary, and the notes or characters precede the vocables. *Es ist ein alt verruntzlt buchlin* ['it is a little old wrinkled book']. It is of no use to them'): unsent letter dated 1515, Vienna, ÖNB, Cod. 9045*, fol. 30r. *Librum scripsit notarum ad filium* […] *in modum scilicet dictionarii ubi secundum ordinem ponuntur primo characteres siue notæ, post ea dictiones per eosdem characteres designatæ, ita quod dictio quœuis per notam sibi significatur præpositam* ('He wrote a book of notes for his son […] in the manner of a dictionary, where first in order the characters or notes are set down, after these phrases represented by these characters, so that each phrase is signified by the note that precedes it'): Trithemius, *Clavis Polygraphiae* (*Expositio in Prologum*), ed. Haselberg 1518b, sig. A3r–v. This and subsequent translations are the author's.

15 Gamer 2022, vol. 1, 22–24.

16 The *Commentarii* were still in Sponheim in 1514: Konrad Pellikan (1478–1556) mentions that he saw the notes of Seneca, a reference to the manuscript's incipit, during his visit to the Sponheim library that year. See Riggenbach 1877, 49.

17 Arnold 1991, 71. The inventory itself was burnt in 1945; see Arnold 1991, 212, n. 53, but it had been transcribed by Fischer 1928, here p. 72.

Psalter in 1593 and added the relevant excerpts from the *De Notis* on one of its flyleaves.[18]

3 Johannes Trithemius on the Tironian notes

Trithemius's reflections on the Tironian notes initially focused on their history. In their heyday, the notes were usually known as just that: *notae*. Isidore of Seville even called them *notae vulgares*, the 'common notes'. In the tradition of the *Commentarii Notarum*, they were associated with Seneca. Trithemius's copy, Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, 2° Ms. Philol. 2, the *Casselanus*, so called after its library location, is no exception. Fol. 1^{v} begins with the heading: *IN CHRISTI NOMINE INCIPIVNT NOTAE SENECAE* ('In Christ's name begin the notes of Seneca').[19] Yet Trithemius chose to attribute the notes to Cicero instead.[20] Other early modern scholars made this connection too, usually following Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 23.3, without citing the most comprehensive of the few sources on the invention of the notes, the aforementioned Isidore.[21] In his *Etymologies* compiled before 636 (Isid., *Orig.* 1.22), Isidore offers a list of inventors and augmenters of the notes. This information is somewhat unwieldy, as he seems to report on two different abbreviation systems side by side:[22]

18 Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 13 Aug. 4° was written in the third quarter of the ninth century; Bischoff 1998–2017, vol. 3, 500 (no. 7294). In 1593 the Psalter was probably still in the cathedral library in Strasbourg, as Poland was also a member of the by then Protestant cathedral chapter; see Press 1970, 495. For Poland's excerpt see Lehmann 1885, 6. In addition to the golden initials, the manuscript still bears the inscription 'Psalterium Armenicum' criticised by Trithemius on its back cover; *Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel Manuscript Database*, 'Cod. Guelf. 13 Aug. 4°', <https://diglib.hab.de/?db=mss&list=ms&id=13-aug-4f&catalog=Westphal&lang=en> (accessed on 7 September 2022).

19 Schmitz 1893, 12.

20 Still, there are some Carolingian and post-Carolingian sources which also refer to 'Cicero' or 'Tullius', e.g. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 8779, Schmitz 1893, 6–7. The *Ars Notoria Notarie* does not refer to Seneca but to 'Tullius'.

21 In particular, Pietro Bembo and Pierre Hamon (on whom see below) and Adolph von Glauburg (1524–1555), the author of a commentary to the *Polygraphia* (Glauburg 1550), included in all editions save the *editio princeps*.

22 Isid., *Orig.* 1.22 according to Lindsay 1911. See Traube 1920; Mentz 1931; and Mentz 1944, 18–25. According to Mentz, Ennius (Isidore's first 'first' inventor) invented numeral signs; the tradition of the *notes* set in with Tiro (Isidore's second 'first' inventor), followed by a list of redactors ending with Seneca.

> *Vulgares notas Ennius primus* […] *invenit.* […] *Romae primus Tullius Tiro Ciceronis libertus commentus est notas,* […]. *Deinde Seneca, contractu omnium digestoque et aucto numero, opus efficit* […]
>
> Ennius was the first to invent the common notes […] In Rome, Tullius Tiro, a freedman of Cicero's, first contrived notes […]. Thereupon, after the total amount of notes had been brought together, set in order, and increased in number, Seneca completed this work […]

The reading of this passage has long been uncertain, as the two 'first' inventors caused confusion. Nevertheless, all medieval reflections on the development of the Tironian notes seem to depend on Isidore. Trithemius is no exception.[23] This was an obvious starting point, as an Anglo-Saxon scribal hand had added an excerpt of Isidore on the title page of the *Casselanus*, fol. 1^{r}.[24] In this excerpt, the conflict of the two 'first' inventors had been resolved by enumeration: '*notas uulgares Ennius primus inuenit* […]*, deinde Tullius* […]' ('Ennius was the first to invent the common notes […] thereupon Tullius […]'). Trithemius did not, however, reiterate Isidore's list of contributors to the notes. He knew that Seneca could not in fact have been the final augmenter, if only because of the numerous notes for Christian terminology within the *Commentarii*. Instead he opted for a condensed history, crediting Cicero with the invention of the Tironian notes and then Cyprian with the Christian expansion. The only ancient source to suggest that Cicero himself invented the notes is Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 23.3. There are, however, other explanations. Another of the few sources on their invention is Jerome's *Chronicon*. For the year 5 BC, Jerome records the death of Tiro, honouring him as the inventor: '*M. Tullius Tiro Ciceronis libertus, qui primus notas commentus est* […] *ad centesimum consenescit*' ('Marcus Tullius Tiro, a freedman of Cicero's, who first contrived the notes, […] grew old to the age of one hundred years'). Although it seems possible that Trithemius would have regarded the patron and not his secretary as the true inventor (an idea that seems to be recurring in his attribution to Cyprian), I would argue that this is just a misattribution, triggered by the truncated 'Tullius'. Trithemius was able to resolve the title of the *Casselanus* by recourse to Isidore and Jerome, but Tiro's name, shortened to the *nomen gentilicium* 'of the Tullii', led him to its most prominent bearer, Marcus Tullius Cicero himself.

23 This becomes evident in his erroneous quotation in the *Clavis*, where Isid., *Orig.* 1.25.2 is interpolated into Isid., *Orig.* 1.22.1; see n. 14.

24 During the restoration of the severely damaged manuscript, the first leaf was erroneously inverted. Fol. 1^{r} is present-day fol. 1^{v}. Ruess 1914 did not include the title page in his reproduction, which must have been barely legible by then; see Schmitz 1877a, 182.

The case is quite different with Trithemius's second attribution: that Cyprian edited the *Commentarii* and expanded them for Christian use. None of the sources from antiquity on the Tironian notes seem to support such a claim.[25] Yet it is far from arbitrary. It is a conjecture from Trithemius's quill, and not an unreasonable one at that, as he offers us not a mere transcription of sources but his own understanding of what they might indicate.[26] The use of Tironian notes was relatively common throughout Late Antiquity, and the Church made particular and extensive use of them.[27] A reader of the patristic authors must have been aware of this, especially if – like Trithemius – that reader had a distinct idea of what the mentioned *notae* had actually been. Moreover, while leafing through his precious manuscript, Trithemius must have noticed that the mostly pagan and secular Tironian notes of the *Commentarii* i–v are followed by a different kind of vocabulary in *Commentarii* vi. The last of the six commentaries deals for the most part with words and phrases useful in a Christian context. In light of this evidence (a Christian expansion of the Tironian notes and numerous references to Christian use of shorthand by authors from the fourth century onwards), Trithemius had to assume that an earlier, Latin-writing Christian author was responsible for this expansion. In the context of early Latin Christian literature, this essentially gave Trithemius a choice between Tertullian and Cyprian. This assumption is supported by Trithemius's catalogue of ecclesiastical authors, *De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis*. These two were the earliest Latin authors he could reasonably appraise during the Western Church's transition from Greek to Latin, as is evident from the quoted *incipit* in his catalogue.[28] Indeed, both Tertullian and Cyprian contributed to his assumption of Cyprian's responsibility for the Christian notes. For his short biography of Tertullian (*De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis* 195, ll. 9–11), Trithemius borrowed an anecdote from Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus* 53, in which Jerome mentions that he had met an old man who claimed to have been Cyprian's stenographer:

25 See Gamer 2022, vol. 1, 62–63. First doubts regarding Cyprian's alleged authorship were expressed in 1899 by Christian Johnen (described in Ohlmann 1907, 35), and culminated in the harsh rejection by Mentz 1916, 194–199, toned down in Mentz 1944, 130–131, 237. A dismissed proposal to identify the *Notae Cypriani* was put forward by Watson 1897 (see Lindsay 1899).

26 Tainted by his reputation as a forger of history, more positivist-minded scholars did not afford Trithemius the capacity for interpretation. This view has persisted, but completely disregards the extent to which inconsistencies simply arose from the scholarly abbot's methodology for dealing with the history of literature – or in this case, the not dissimilar cultural history of (secret) writing. Mentzel-Reuters 2015 offers a refreshing new approach in this respect.

27 See Hagendahl 1971 and, for a collection of sources, Teitler 1985.

28 Freher 1601, 195, ll. 5–42 and 198, ll. 27–57.

> *Vidi ego quendam* […] *senem, qui se beati Cypriani iam grandis aetatis notarium* […] *diceret*
>
> I met myself an old man […] who said that he had been Cyprian's stenographer when the latter was already very old […]

Trithemius shortened this as follows:

> *Huius* [*Tertulliani*] *scripta beatissimus martyr Cyprianus in tanta veneratione habuit, ut nullum sine eorum lectione diem praeteriret. Dicere enim ad notarium suum consueuerat* […]
>
> The most holy martyr Cyprian held the writings of Tertullian in such high esteem that he never went a day without reading them. For he used to say to his stenographer […]

Again, it seems to be the definitive authority of Jerome that led Trithemius in his assessment of the notes' history: to conclude that Cyprian employed the first Christian stenographer. Therefore, I consider it very likely that he would have regarded Jerome's testimony as proof of Cyprian's responsibility for the Christian additions to the Tironian notes. The decisive factor here is the interpretation of the Latin *notarius*, i.e. quick scribe, one writing *notae*. In the course of time, the meaning of this word expanded to include 'scribe', 'secretary', and later also 'notary'. This certainly applies to the time of Trithemius. Initially, however, it meant the person writing *notae*, the stenographer. Given Trithemius's knowledge of the Tironian notes, I think it is likely that he made this connection.

4 A 'non-alphabetic' writing system

The Tironian notes are neither an alphabetic nor a syllabic script, but rather a system of abbreviations.[29] Each note consists of one or more 'letters' deemed relevant for a given word that are condensed into a character. As a language, Latin is highly inflective and, if needed, this information is encoded in an accompanying separate character. Therefore, most Tironian notes consist of a larger character, or 'radical', and a smaller 'auxiliary', the radical indicating the stem and an auxiliary sign defining the termination. The meaning of a note may change depending on the position of the auxiliary, and the graphic elements defining the letters within the radicals can be combined or modified in a bewildering multitude. The *Commentarii* do not include an introduction to this system nor do they give a

29 Kopp 1817 was the first to systematically unlock this system. For a modern approach and a more in-depth introduction see Hellmann 2000, 54–73.

structural explanation for how the notes are formed. They merely list a set of characters and their meanings, but nevertheless seem to have been compiled with didactic considerations in mind. Did Trithemius perceive this underlying order? It would seem that to some extent he did. Evidence of this can be found in his condensed description of the writing system and, in particular, the editorial changes he made in his illustration of the thirty Tironian notes he presented as an example. For his readers who had no idea whatsoever about how the Tironian notes worked, Trithemius provided a rather basic introduction, but not necessarily in the most accessible manner. In the preface to *Polygraphia* (see Appendix below) he states that they are first and foremost a shorthand as they bestow an 'admirable swiftness' (*mirandam agilitatem*) on their user. This swiftness is further emphasised by metaphor. Its vocabulary – *minutia* and *momenta* as fractions of a *hora* – is borrowed from computistics and has also temporal connotation. This is presumably a nod to the basics of grammar (or metre, as *pedes* seems to imply), which measures written speech in periods of time, in letters, syllables, words and phrases, which all can be expressed by singular Tironian notes. As to how this swiftness is realised, a note can represent more than just individual letters or syllables. Indeed, a Tironian note can represent a whole phrase, and there are so many notes that almost anything can be expressed by a predefined character.[30] Some additional insight is given in the *De Notis* itself: '*quilibet character aut dictionem significat integram aut syllabam ultimam siue partem orationis aliquam ad compositionem totius idoneam*' ('each character represents either a whole phrase or the last syllable or any part capable of composing a whole phrase'). Examination of the illustration accompanying the *De Notis* (Fig. 1) in comparison with its source (Fig. 2) allows for a more comprehensive evaluation.

30 While *pedes* appears in the print version only, the rest of the metaphor reads the same in both versions of the preface; Gamer 2022, vol. 2, 40 and Haselberg 1518a, sig. a5^{v} (see Appendix). The swiftness of the *ars notoria* is a common trope in the ancient sources. Trithemius most certainly knew of e.g. Jerome's numerous statements on the matter (his descriptions included e.g. *velox* and *celeriter*); see Teitler 1985, 193–195, 'Anonymi 86'. In the manuscript version of *Polygraphia* 0.1.6–10, Gamer 2022, vol. 2, 40, Trithemius uses *compendiosum*, which may be a reference to Manilius 4.197–199 or Ennodius, *Vita Epiphani* 9.

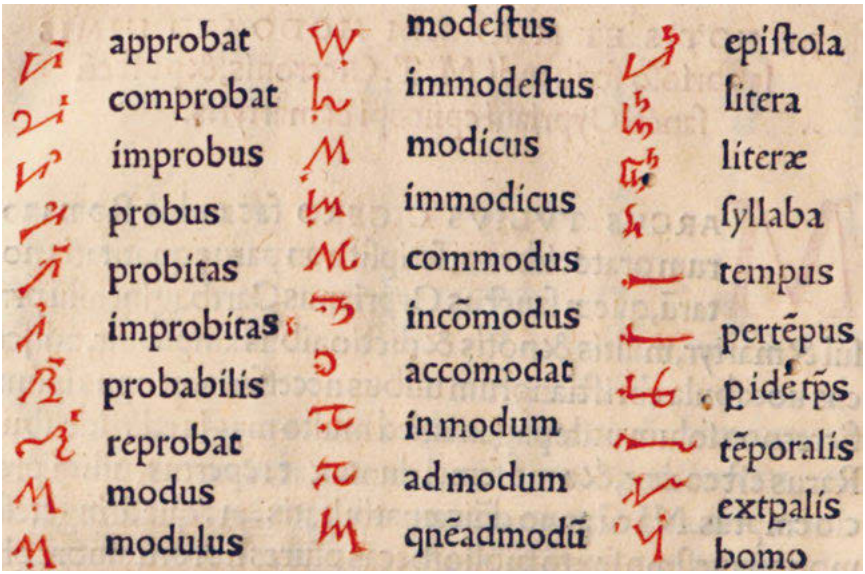

Fig. 1: *De Notis*. Trithemius, *Polygraphia*, ed. Haselberg 1508a, sig. q6^{v}. Illustration: Regensburg, Staatliche Bibliothek, 999/2 Philos. 3015.

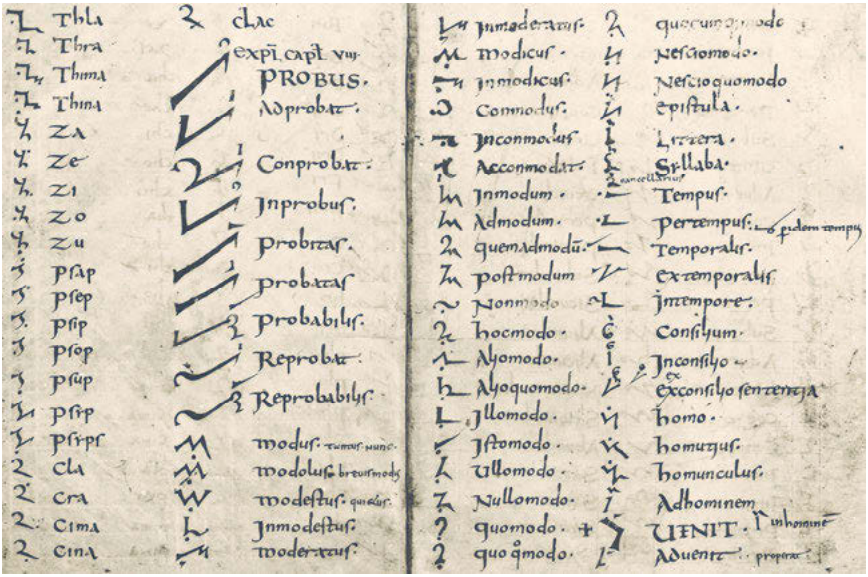

Fig. 2: *Commentarii* i.viii–ix, Kassel, Landesbibliothek und Murhardsche Bibliothek der Stadt Kassel, 2° Ms. Philol. 2., fols 19–20. Reproduction: Ruess 1914.

In the *editio princeps*, the Tironian notes are cut accurately enough to be recognisable to the modern reader in combination with their definitions (Fig. 1). Their template can be found in fols 19^{v} and 20^{r} of the *Casselanus* (Fig. 2). It is the beginning of *Commentarii* i.ix from *probus* down to *quemadmodum* – from the right-hand column on fol. 19^{v} and the left-hand column on fol. 20^{r}. A few more notes from the left-hand column of fol. 20^{v} have been added.[31] The shapes are somewhat distorted, as the unfamiliar characters were first copied by hand and then prepared for printing by a block-cutter. This may have caused minor alterations, such as the auxiliary to *adprobat*: a vertical sign in *Casselanus*, but a horizontal one to *approbat* in the *De Notis*. Several of the notes are erroneously defined, as their interpretations are shifted by two lines in comparison with the template. These are the characters defined as *modicus*, *immodicus*, *commodus*, *incommodus*, *accomodat*, *inmodum*, *admodum* and *quemadmodum*. In actuality, they are the notes for *moderatus*, *inmoderatus*, *modicus*, *inmodicus*, *conmodus*, *inconmodus*, *acconmodat* and *inmodum*. The radical for *reprobat* seems to be the one for *reprobabilis*, yet the auxiliary is correct. Another error due to a misplaced auxiliary is evident in *litera*, as it has appropriated the auxiliary *a* terminating *syllaba* below into its stem-note. *Syllaba*, on the other hand, is left bereft of a terminator. Considering these problems, the depiction of *De Notis* seems to be of little value apart from conveying a general impression of the Tironian notes. However, despite these problems, some of which may have arisen during production, this depiction is in fact indicative of Trithemius's studies.

Commentarii i.ix (*Casselanus*, fol. 19^{v}) starts with nine words sharing the lexeme 'prob'. These Tironian notes were deliberately clustered by the compilers or editors of the *Commentarii* for this very reason: the lexeme is the common and dominant graphical element, a wedge-shaped upward stroke, ending with a downward hook. In Kopp's *Lexicon Tironianum*, this is read as 'P'.[32] Three of those nine notes are the most basic case of a single-letter radical and differ only in the auxiliaries. The other six have additional prefixes attached to the radical. Accordingly, *Commentarii* i.ix reads:[33] *probus* [P us, 262], *adprobat* [A(d) P at, 27], *conprobat* [C(on) P at, 79], *inprobus* [I(n) P us, 186], *probitas* [P as, 262], *probatas* [P tas, 262], *probabilis* [P B L is, 268], *reprobat* [R P at, 324], *reprobabilis* [Kopp 315 reads R(e) B L is, but the redactors of the *Commentarii* probably read R(e) *P* B L is].

31 As a result of this selective depiction, Schmitz 1877a, 196–198 looking for an exact template was unable to identify any manuscript as such.

32 Kopp 1817, vol. 2. The *Lexicon* is structured after discernible letters within a given note. Majuscules indicate the sub-elements of a radical, minuscules the termination of the auxiliary.

33 Within the brackets are the resolutions and page numbers of Kopp 1817, vol. 2.

Trithemius changed this sequence to *approbat*, *comprobat*, *improbus*, *probus*, *probitas*, *improbitas*, *probabilis*, and *reprobat.* This order pairs the 'P-notes' without a prefix – and in Trithemius's interpretation the nouns, as he emended *probatas* to *improbitas*. By doing so, he switched from the perfect participle of *probare* ('to examine', 'to judge') to the noun *improbitas* ('wickedness', 'depravity'). Why did he do this? If one disregards the Tironian notes and reads only their interpretations, then *probatas* indeed seems somewhat odd compared to its immediate neighbours. It is a feminine plural perfect passive participle in the accusative case, whereas the surrounding words are given in a kind of citation form – the verbs are in the third person singular and the nouns are in the nominative singular unless a preposition requires a different declension. When working with manuscripts, scribal errors must be allowed for, and it would appear that this seemingly out-of-sequence form was considered as such by Trithemius.[34] An additional alteration supports this assumption. As mentioned, Trithemius moved the note for *probus* from the first line of Chapter IX down to the fourth line. By doing so, he paired it with its opposite, *improbus*. *Probitas* and *improbitas* mirror this arrangement. However, the note for *probatas* itself remains unchanged. Trithemius deliberately emended *probatas* to *improbitas*. However, his reasoning took place exclusively on the definition side.

The erroneously defined notes, on the other hand, are probably due to a simple copying error. In *De Notis* the definitions for *moderatus* and *inmoderatus* are omitted. The notes, however, were copied continuously from the template, which led to the aforementioned shift by two lines. The incorrect identification of eight notes is not the result of a deliberate editorial intervention.

More conclusive is Trithemius's final deviation from his template – and a rather ambitious one at that. It is not an emendation or misreading of existing materials, but an attempt to write, even more to 'create' a note not to be found within the *Commentarii*.[35] As already mentioned, the Tironian note for *littera* in the *De Notis* is quite mangled, as the auxiliary of *syllaba* was accidentally aggregated to its radical. To some extent, that is understandable. In the *Casselanus*, the spacing

34 Trithemius was not the only one confused by the ill-fitting *probatas*. Jan Gruter tried to resolve this in another way. In his edition of the *Commentarii* he first omits the note for *probitas*, then offers *probitas* for the note *probatas*: Gruter 1603, 32; cf. Kopp 1817, vol. 1, 301, §338. In the separate omissions Gruter 1603, 198 lists together with its note '*Probitas.* p. 32 c. 1. Ante *Probatus* [sic!]'. The explanations for the omissions sig. p5^{r} (following p. 200) offer no insight as to his reasoning ('*Pag. 32 col. 1 v. principe emendandum,* Probatas*, nam* Probitas *habetur in Omissis*'). Cf. *variae lectiones* Schmitz 1893, 17, 'Ad tab. 19,96'.

35 I think it is unlikely that he copied this single note from another source, since all the others can be found in his exemplar in one way or another.

between the notes for *littera* and *syllaba* is quite narrow. So instead of *littera* [L a, 202], the character in the *De Notis* reads more like 'L A a'. Regardless of this error, *littera* is a fascinating case because Trithemius attempts to create a Tironian note for the nominative plural form, *litterae*, on his own without a template. He was aware that he needed to change 'the last syllable' to achieve this. So he added a tilde-like horizontal stroke at the top that displaced the existing auxiliary to the right. His 'tilde' bears some resemblance to *re* – the thirteenth note he would have found on the first page of the *Commentarii*. For Trithemius, this seems like a reasonable choice, as he made no use of diphthongs and would not have spelled *litterae* according to classical orthography, but written *litere* instead.[36] Yet, as he did not delete the previous terminator, his character is encircled by auxiliaries and might more read something like 'L A re a'.

These findings suggest the following: Trithemius derived the sum of his knowledge from the definitions in longhand. Without actually analysing the characters themselves, he did not shy away from editorial changes solely based on the definitions. Nevertheless, he gathered some knowledge about the structure of the characters. He understood that there were characters for phrases, words, syllables and letters. Whether he fully grasped the functional difference between the radical and the auxiliary characters remains inconclusive. His *syllaba* without the auxiliary 'a' would argue against this, as would the fact that he combined his ending 're' in *litere* with the radical instead of replacing the auxiliary. What he seems to have recognised, however, is that a given note may comprise graphical elements indicative of 'parts', of morphological elements.[37] Unsure how to combine these elements, his effort to create a 'new' Tironian note was certainly not a success, but a remarkable attempt nevertheless.

36 These orthographic habits are consistent in all the autograph manuscripts I have examined. For the *editio princeps* of Trithemius's *Polygraphia* his orthography was somewhat adjusted and the diphthong restored by either the editor or printer.

37 Given that, in a way, such an observation is not too far removed from the late Medieval Latin abbreviation system, which also has characters for prefixes and suffixes and the option of an abbreviated inflection, I disagree with Schmitz 1877b, 227–228, who suggests that Trithemius's *siue partem orationis aliquam ad compositionem totius idoneam* should be read as composing phrases via syllabic stenography.

5 Writing the history of the Tironian notes: Observations of a bibliophile

The main source for Trithemius's study of the Tironian notes was the manuscript copy of the *Commentarii*, which was available to him between 1494 and 1505 and again from 1515 until his death in 1516. From his remarks we can draw some conclusions about his methods for dealing with this unfamiliar writing system. His key deductions were probably already fixed in 1498, when he discovered the Strasbourg Psalter and correctly identified it as written in Latin shorthand. These deductions primarily concerned the history of the Tironian notes, but by then he knew them well enough to recognise the shorthand, even though he could not read it. That the Strasbourg Psalter is indeed a Psalter can be ascertained from its preface and its headings in longhand. Trithemius's analysis of the *Commentarii*, on the other hand, took place both on the macro- as well as the micro-level. The *Commentarii*, especially the *Casselanus*, offer little in way of context: 'In Christ's name begin the notes of Seneca' summarises the introduction, followed by headings for 'end of commentary' or 'end of chapter'. The rest is just a list of characters and their definitions, although a later hand had added the excerpt from Isidore on the *notae vulgares* on the outer leaf. Trithemius must have thoroughly examined the individual commentaries – thoroughly enough to recognise that parts of the *Commentarii* were roughly structured into grammatical categories as well as historical layers. The latter is evident in his attribution of a Christian expansion of the Tironian notes to Cyprian. As mentioned above, *Commentarii* vi is largely concerned with phrases that are useful in a Christian context, but there are Christian insertions even before, such as in *Commentarii* ii.vii. His observations on the functional subdivision of the *Commentarii*, on the other hand, are less visible. Nevertheless, this subdivision can be recognised by just a cursory examination of the first commentary alone. For example, in *Commentarii* i.i there is a focus on prefixes and prepositions, in i.vi on endings for conjugating verbs, and in i.vii on additional endings for declining nominals. Surely Trithemius also noticed the like during his study, although he then went on to use a prefix of all things to change the declension of his note for *litterae*.

6 Conclusion

Trithemius's achievements in the scholarly history of the Tironian notes should be reappraised. Instead of seeing him as an unreliable author, whose sole contribution to stenographical scholarship was being the first to point out extant witnesses of

Roman shorthand, we must acknowledge the series of well-thought-out assumptions that he deduced from the material available to him. The fact that he did not distinguish between tradition-based information and his own conjectures is hardly surprising for an author who still was strongly rooted in medieval thought patterns. Undeniable, however, is his tendency to over-condense. Trithemius quite often made the unrealistic assumption that his readers shared his reading experience and knowledge of the manuscripts. As a consequence, his remarkable insights were poorly or rather one-sidedly received. This was true with his study of the Tironian notes, just as it was with some of his other discoveries. Then, as now, a reader who was not familiar with the Tironian notes and their history would find it difficult to categorise or resolve the details from Trithemius's account. What contemporary readers did take from Trithemius's work, and what remained a truism until the beginning of the twentieth century, was that Cyprian was responsible for the Christian expansion of the Tironian notes. His identification and description of the two Tironian manuscripts also met with interest, especially the Tironian Psalter. Further manuscript witnesses of the *Commentarii* were discovered as early as the second half of the sixteenth century. The discovery of actual shorthand texts, especially Christian ones, proceeded more slowly, but Trithemius provided evidence that such books existed.[38] Moreover, Trithemius's illustrations were frequently reprinted and became the prototypical image of the Tironian notes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[39] By contrast, his explanations of how the notes are structured remained incomprehensible and correspondingly unappreciated. Trithemius understood that they are characters for phrases, and as such a single character comprises morphological elements, of root words, prefixes and suffixes, and inflections – 'any part capable of composing whole phrases'. This level of detail compares favourably with other early attempts to 'read' the Tironian notes, such of those of Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), Pierre Hamon (*c.* 1530–1569), and of the anonymous work edited by Bonaventura Vulcanius (1538–1614).[40] Most likely, even Jan Gruter (1560–1627), the eventual editor of the

38 Other Christian texts in Tironian notes were, as far as I know, discovered only by Pierre Hamon (*c.* 1530–1569); Bibliothèque nationale de France, français 19116, fol. 2^{r} (dated 1566). On the other hand, several copies of the *Commentarii* had become known. Claude Dupuy (1545–1594) acquired both Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 8777 and Bibliothèque nationale de France, latin 8779 for his collection, Bischoff 1998–2017, vol. 3, 145 (no. 4560), 145–146 (no. 4562). Three other known copies have been lost, see below.

39 See Gamer 2022, vol. 1, 61–62 for the reception of the *De Notis*. Its success was due to that of the *Polygraphia*. See Gamer 2022, vol. 2, 14–23 for the edition history.

40 Bembo offered his evaluation of a manuscript *notis perscriptus cum vetustissimis* ('written in full by the most ancient notes'), Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, M. 12 sup. in a letter to Pope Julius II dated 1 January 1513 (ep. fam. 5.8, published posthumously in 1552). As he was unable to read the

Commentarii, remained unable to analyse the notes himself; he certainly did not even attempt to decipher passages written in Tironian notes.[41] In all likelihood, Johannes Trithemius never concluded his study of the notes. The fictitious 'Tironian' alphabet that concludes *De Notis* is certainly not indicative of a serious attempt to find the Tironian letter-notes.[42] And without the opportunity to collate his copy of the *Commentarii* with an actual shorthand text, he would have been unable to examine his assumptions in the way that Pierre Carpentier (1697–1767) was eventually able to do.[43] Nevertheless, he remains not only the most prominent rediscoverer of the Tironian notes, but also a most diligent reader and – in a manner of speaking – aspiring writer of the shorthand manuscript.

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Tironian notes, he too extracted information from glosses in longhand, accordingly identifying the last section of the manuscript as Hyginus's *Astronomica* and the notes as the lost Ciceronian shorthand, based on Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 23.3. Bembo claims to have deduced some Tironian notes by collating the *Astronomica*: ep. fam. 5.8, Gualteruzzi 1552, 185–190; Chatelain 1909, xiii–xviii; Bischoff 1998–2017, vol. 2, 162–163 (no. 2645); Pierre Hamon's excerpts in Bibliothèque nationale de France, français 19116, fols 1^{r}–2^{r}. Vulcanius 1597, 16–30 acted as editor of a short treatise of unknown provenance by an unknown author, *On the Lombardic Notes*. According to the anonymous author, the *Commentarii* were supposedly a manual of Lombardic for Gothic envoys. The author offered a reproduction of parts of a lost copy of the *Commentarii*, assumed that each Tironian note began with a letter, and tried to compile those letters into an alphabet. Vulcanius commented on the anonymous author's assumptions on sigs *6^{r}–*7^{v}. See also Schmitz 1878.

41 Gruter 1603. It was published in Heidelberg using his own manuscript, now lost, collated with the manuscript discovered by Johann Pistorius the Younger (1546–1608), later lost in 1870. See Schmitz 1877c and 1877d. Schmitz rules out the possibility that Gruter's manuscript could have been the *Casselanus*. Trithemius's copy of the *Commentarii* probably became part of only the younger Palatine Library, arriving from Würzburg after the sack of Heidelberg in 1622. Gruter reprinted Trithemius's *De Notis* and Bembo's ep. fam. 5.8 as references for entire books written in Tironian notes, and the letter dated 1597 of Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) to Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623) as a general introduction. The letter was originally published in Lipsius 1602, 23–28 (ep. 1.27). Gruter also had heard of (Gruter 1603, sig. P5^{r}) Jacques Bongars's (1554–1612) manuscript, Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 451 with an excerpt of Curtius in notes on fol. 147^{r}, see Bischoff 1998–2017, vol. 1, 128 (no. 598).

42 The alphabet claims to be extracted or inspired ('*trahere*') by the notes, yet bears little semblance to later attempts to extract a basic Tironian alphabet, e.g. Vulcanius 1597, 20–21.

43 Carpentier 1747, especially ix–ci.

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Appendix

For the convenience of the reader, I give here the essential passages from Trithemius concerning the Tironian notes in the Latin original and my English translations. The corresponding section of the *Clavis*, which essentially repeats the same points as the *De Notis*, is not included. For the relevant section from Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 9045*, fol. 30[r].[44]

Johannes Trithemius, *Polygraphia*, manuscript version, 0.1.6–10

Marcus tullius cicero romanus orator ingeniosissima usus adinuencione, quo iter suis et tutum pararet et compendiosum ad omnia clymata mundi; maximam spirituum multitudinem sibi fecit esse familiarem, quos ab inferis auctoritate propria suscitauit. His miram natura contulit agilitatem, ita ut preter consuetudinem ceterorum omnium spirituum non per momenta neque minuta sed per gradus integros et horas ducatus sui perfecte implerent officium. Eorum fuit uniuersum perlustrare imperium et sub peregrino schemate ministerium facere domesticorum. Nemini autem prestabant obsequium, nisi quem preceptoris fecisset institucio dignum. Cyprianus ille carthaginensium antistes et martyr christi sanctissimus prefate institucionis librum ciceronis non aspernatus; meliorem amplioremque reddidit, et christianorum ritibus mancipauit.[45]

The Roman orator Marcus Tullius Cicero used a particularly ingenious invention, by which he made the road to all regions of the world both safe and abridged for his familiars; he made a very large number of spirits serviceable, which he summoned from the netherworld by his own might. Their nature gave them admirable swiftness, so that, contrary to the habit of all other spirits, they did not only fulfil the tasks of their leader for moments or minutes, but for whole paces and

44 See n. 14.
45 Gamer 2022, vol. 2, 40.

hours. It was given to them to roam the whole realm and to provide the task of familiar servants under strange appearance. To no one, however, did they pledge obedience, except to him whom a teacher's instruction had made worthy. Cyprian, the famous bishop of Carthage and most holy martyr of Christ, did not disdain the just mentioned book of Cicero's teachings; he improved and expanded upon it and transferred it to the use of Christians.

Johannes Trithemius, *Polygraphia*, print version, 'Preface'

Marcus Tullius Cicero facundus orator, ingenio usus & arte, phraseos minutias commutauit in signa, & thelematos sui philergiam siue characterem pro usitata phrasi locauit. Tanta uero in hac ipsa nouitate usus est copia, ut rebus pene cunctis in mundo, eius sufficere possit inuentio. His autem mysteriorum prænunciatoribus artis institutio mirandam contulit agilitatem, ut præter naturam omnium solidis utantur gressibus pedum: & non per minutias uel momenta, sed gradibus integris bonæ magistri subseruiant uoluntati. Quorum rex tutissime uti semper potest obsequio, quamuis non sine magno labore, manifestaque bucaceorum suspicione.
Cyprianus uero Carthaginensis ecclesiæ sanctissimus præsul & martyr, ipsa Ciceronianæ institutionis documenta, christianorum uolens prouidere utilitati, haud mediocriter ampliauit: & quæ nostris defuerant moribus adiunxit.[46]

Marcus Tullius Cicero, the eloquent orator, used natural talent and art and transformed the small phrases of speech into signs and paced the industry of his will, meaning a character, instead of the normally used phrase. But so great is the abundance he used in this novelty that his invention is able to suffice for almost all things in the world. The instruction of this art, however, bestowed admirable swiftness to these foretellers of the mysteries, so that, contrary to the nature of all feet, they use massive paces and serve the good intention of the teacher not with small parts or instants, but with complete strides. A master can always use their obedience in a very secure manner, even if not without great efforts and the obvious suspicion of malicious people.
Cyprian, however, bishop and martyr most holy of the Carthaginian Church, since he wanted to open them to the use of Christians, expanded upon these documents of Ciceronian instruction considerably and he added those that were missing to our customs.

46 Haselberg 1518a, sig. a5^{v}.

Johannes Trithemius, *Polygraphia*, print version, 'On the notes'

De notis et mirabili modo sed nimis laboriosi scribendi Marci Tulii Ciceronis, & post eum sancti Cypriani episcopi & martyris
Marcus Tullius Cicero facundus Romanorum orator librum scripsit non paruę quantitatis notarum, quem sanctus Cyprianus Carthaginensium prœsul & martyr, multis & notis & dictionibus ampliauit, adiiciens uocabula christianorum usibus necessaria, ut opus ipsum fieret non solum utile paganis, sed multo magis etiam fidelibus. Rarus est codex, & a me semel duntaxat repertus, uilique precio emptus. Nam cum anno dominicœ natiuitatis .m. quadringentesimononagesimo sexto bibliothecas plures librorum amore perlustrarem, reperi memoratum codicem in quodam ordinis nostri monasterio, nimia uetustate neglectum, proiectum sub puluere atque contemptum. Interrogaui abbatem doctorem iuris quanti illum estimaret. Respondit. Sancti Anshelmi parua opuscula nuper impressa illi præferrem. Ad bibliopolas abii, quoniam in ciuitate res contigit metropolitana, postulata Anselmi opuscula pro sexta floreni parte comperaui, abbati & monachis gaudentis tradidi, & iam prope interitum actum codicem liberaui. Decreuerunt enim pergameni amore illico radendum. Biennio ferme post hœc eques Argentinam in causis ordinis mei ascendi, admissusque per Ioannem Keisersbergium insignem loci concionatorem in bibliothecam maioris ecclesiœ, psalterium repperi totum hisdem Tullii & Cypriani notis exaratum, aureisque capitellis decentissime scriptum. Superscriptio autem ab ignaro mysterii talis fuerat extrinsecus posita, Psalterium in armenica lingua. Doctorem adhibui, falsitatem ostendi, ita rescribendum admonui, Psalterium notis Ciceronianis descriptum. Quod fecerit nec ne, incertum habeo, quoniam ad eam bibliothecam postea non sum reuersus. Vt uideas lector formam Ciceronis notandi, paucas subiicere notas statuimus. [See Fig. 1 for illustration.]
Memoriam postulat iste modus scribendi magnam, & laborem legendi penitus ingentem, ubi quilibet character aut dictionem significat integram, aut syllabam ultimam siue partem orationis aliquam ad compositionem totius idoneam. Obmissis igitur notis omnibus, alphabetum trahamus ex paucis.[47]

On the notes and the marvellous yet most laborious way to write of Marcus Tullius Cicero and after him Saint Cyprian, bishop, and martyr
Marcus Tullius Cicero, the eloquent Roman orator, wrote a book of a not insignificant number of notes, which Saint Cyprian, bishop of Carthage and martyr, expanded both with numerous notes and phrases, adding necessary vocabulary for

47 Haselberg 1508a, sig. q6$^{r–v}$.

the use of Christians so that this work would be useful not only to the pagans but even more to the faithful. There is a rare codex; I have only found it once and bought it for a low price. In the year 1496 after the birth of the Lord, when I was browsing several libraries for the love of books, I found the aforementioned codex in a monastery of our order, where, due to its great age, it was unnoticed, lying under dust and disregarded. I asked the abbot, a doctor of law, how much he estimated it. He answered: 'I would prefer the small works of Saint Anselm that have recently been printed to this one.' I went to the booksellers, since this matter was going on in the metropolitan city, acquired the requested small works of Anselm for the sixth part of a guilder, handed them over to the abbot and the rejoicing monks, and thus liberated the codex that was almost doomed to destruction. For they had decided to erase it for the sake of its parchment. About two years later, I went on horseback to Strasbourg on behalf of my order, and after being introduced by the famous local preacher Johannes of Kaysersberg into the cathedral library, I found a Psalter written entirely in the same notes of Tullius and Cyprian, beautifully inscribed with golden initials. However, the following inscription had been placed on the outside by someone ignorant of these mysteries: 'Psalter in Armenian'. I turned to the scholar, pointed out the error, and asked him to rewrite as follows: 'Psalterium written in Ciceronian notes'. Whether he did this or not, I am uncertain, since, subsequently, I did not return to this library. So that you, reader, can see the figure of the Ciceronian notation, I decided to add some notes below. [See Fig. 1 for illustration.]

This way to write requires a good memory and an almost unspeakable effort to read since a character sometimes represents either a whole phrase or the last syllable or any part capable of composing a whole phrase. Then, having passed over the totality of the notes, I extracted an alphabet from a few.

Timothy Underhill

The Use of Shorthand by Women and Girls in Early Modern England

Abstract: Early modern women and girls have been conspicuous by their near absence from English shorthand studies hitherto. This survey's underlying argument is that automatic presumptions of male scribal identity are to be guarded against when it comes to examining anonymous shorthand of the time. It is offered as a starting point towards the further manuscript-centred exploration needed to establish how and why women and girls deployed shorthand in times long before they came to dominate office-centred shorthand in the twentieth century. As well as considering their use of print manuals, it contextualises a range of written examples, from the calligraphic (in the case of a fine presentation manuscript of 1588) to the more cacographic (in exercises penned by an 8-year-old girl in a notebook in 1730), and includes a case study of the shorthand used by Mary Hawker within a book of recipes in the early 1690s. A conclusion points to the necessity for further work in the area to be a collaborative endeavour.

1 Introduction

'Future research needs to continue to investigate the varied handwritten worlds of early modern England that are revealed through material analysis and to situate women in those worlds.'[1] So ran a call nearly two decades ago for more heed to be paid to the physical characteristics of seventeenth-century English women's manuscripts, one made by a co-founder of the Perdita Project which has brought so many of them into prominence. The so-called 'material turn' within early modern literary scholarship has considerably aided the endeavour, anticipating even 'a third wave of early modern marginalia studies' to increase our knowledge of women's reading practices and their ownership of handwritten and printed books.[2] Yet the overlapping, but far larger, field of early modern shorthand studies remains one in comparative infancy, despite the prominent role shorthand once played in writing cultures.[3] Here is a highly significant 'handwritten world',

1 Burke 2007, 1677.

2 Stewart 2019, 264.

3 See e.g. McCay 2021; Underhill forthcoming.

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of which we are still in a first wave of study, with relatively little explored beyond isolated manuscripts of some individual users, still less the extent to which women and girls contributed to it.

Recent work on early modern women's literacy and readership has moved away from conceptions of their being isolated and passive, cowed and defined by cultural constraints, to understand them more as 'collaborative agents': 'we see in their bookscapes [...] networked patterns and habits of reading, linking them with family, community, and the world of ideas'.[4] To this we must add active habits of *writing* too. The account which follows is prompted by a conviction that shorthand was a far from insignificant part of that activity.

2 'Her Booke': Evidence from manuals

Women were using shorthand centuries before it became an important skill for office workers, by which time a presumption of a *female* scribal identity came to be the default for most shorthand-bearing documents – a time within living memory, if recalled by an ever dwindling few.[5] Until new archaeological evidence emerges, Hapate (before fifth century CE), 'notaria Graeca', a probable (freed) slave, is the first female stenographer for whom we have a named identity.[6] But women have been almost invisible in traditional 'inventor'-centred and print-based scholarship on early modern English shorthand history, which presents near total male hegemony.[7] Before the nineteenth century, the sole known exception is Bathsua Reginald, later Makin (1600–1681?) who as a teenager devised or was involved with an 'Index Radiographia', dedicated to Anne of Denmark, queen consort. Next to nothing is known of this 'Invention of Radiography [...] a speedy and short writing wth great facility to be practised in any languag, in far less tyme, than the learning of the two first Secretary le[tte]rs do require'. Some 'MS lines of hers [...] of dots, commas and curves. Dated 1617' were recorded in the late nineteenth century, but if they have survived, their present whereabouts is not known.[8] All

4 Ezell 2018, 276, 278.

5 For more on shorthand and gender in the rise of women's professional life in secretarial office culture see Davy 1986; Gardey 2001; and Srole 2009.

6 Orlandi 2016, with an image of her memorial tablet.

7 Carlton 1940; Alston 1966.

8 Westby-Gibson 1887, 188.

we have of the 'Index' is a simple diagram adjoining its description on an ornately engraved card plate, showing it to be a rudimentary 'stave' system.[9]

But in a newer, more 'open, multiple and heuristically volatile' model of book history, the privileged (and perhaps too automatically assumed singular) inventor is merely one feature of the shorthand bookscape.[10] By bringing extra-authorial functions such as patronage and marketing more into view, women start to become more visible – even if, to give examples linked to four significant systems, much remains to be established about the role of the printer Mary Simmons (née Symons) (d. 1686/7) in Thomas Shelton's posthumous success; the significance of Mary Rich (née Boyle), countess of Warwick (1625–1678) as patron to Jeremiah Rich; or, in the next century, the labours of female Byroms and Gurneys in informing and promulgating their better-known relatives' products. Besides, the market for these manuals and for shorthand tuition was hardly a male preserve.

If it was to the 'Sager sort of Men' that the stationer Thomas Heath looked for encouraging shorthand's wider flourishing, when it came to a new manual of his system he hoped 'by little Industry a Man, or Youth, yea Women and Children may (if but able to Read) in a short time need no further help'.[11] Simon West, 'professor' of shorthand, observed that the burden on the memory of arbitrary symbols in rival manuals meant that 'not one man or woman of many attain unto it', suggesting that he found nothing unusual about female use of shorthand (and ready abandonment of it) in the 1640s.[12] The better-known Theophilus Metcalfe claimed that his *Short-Writing* allowed the recording of 'any Sermons or Speech being treatably spoken, word for word, as many hundred men, and women, in this City of London, which have learned onely by the booke can worthily manifest'. Compositorial updating at some stage between 1645 and 1652 adjusted this to 'as many hundred Men and Women, […] Which have learned onely by the Booke, worthily manifest.'[13] Deliberated or not, that act of repunctuating makes the fact of women's stenography no longer parenthetic and ancillary, nor unusual; rather, it is just in the normal course of things.

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9 Reginalda [1616?], surviving in William J. Carlton's collection, London, Senate House Library, [C.S.C.] 1615 [Reginald] SR (Box 3). It was very likely connected with a method taught at her father Henry's grammar school in London for taking sermon notes, bringing the young Reginald, better known for publications under her married name, into contact with a wider intellectual world of educational reform: see Malcolm and Stedall 2005, 37–38. See also Alston 1966, 5; Teague 1998, 35–38; Pal 2017, 183–184.

10 Pender and Smith 2014, 3.

11 Heath 1664, 5.

12 West 1647, sig. A4^{r}.

13 Metcalfe 1645/1652, 6 (i.e. sigs A3^{r}/A2^{r}).

The idea of women learning shorthand became more embedded in its marketing by the turn of the century. In the 1690s, William Mason taught 'All young Gentlemen, or Ladies that desire to Learn the most Exact and Shortest *Shorthand* ever before Invented [...] on Reasonable Terms' at his London writing-school, as well as at 'their own Habitations'.[14] Appropriating Metcalfe's alphabet at the same time as claiming the mantle of stenographic prominence from Mason in the 1720s, the combative shorthand 'master' James Weston made it clear from the outset of a protracted press campaign that women were amongst his clientele. He recycled his promotional copy on the very title page of his revamped *New Method* of 1746, claiming that 'any Gentleman, or Lady may Learn the art perfectly by this Book alone'.[15] A simultaneous campaign for the 'anodyne necklace' (a teething ring), one probably aimed more at women at men, became linked with the shorthand inventor and teacher Francis Tanner, who seems to have written copy for spin-off pamphlets distributed with it as a purchase incentive. Reworked versions of Tanner's 1712 *Method* were provided gratis to those who bought his nostrums, and an abridgement was dispensed to general enquirers. In the early 1750s a new promoter of the necklace revived this shorthand incentive:

> This PRETTY ART, which is so highly Usefull, for | GENTLEMEN AND LADIES | MEMORANDUM BOOKS | LADIES, Will PRESENTLY Learn it, It being made Here on Purpose, so Particularly EASY for THEM to Learn, for *Their* Use, and very Useful They will Daily Find it.[16]

Finely-dressed (though by the 1740s hardly à la mode) women can be glimpsed in two of the plates by John Cole within Weston's manuals, illustrating stenographers at work in law court and church settings, but those women are mere spectators to the acts of writing, outnumbered by the men around them. By contrast, the less ornate frontispiece of the manual of one of Weston's competitors, Aulay Macaulay's *Polygraphy* (1747), makes the marketing of shorthand to women central. In this engraving, a woman in a congregation takes notes as the preacher delivers his sermon. A man seated near her does the same, while a younger man gazes over her shoulder to inspect her notebook.

14 Mason 1693.

15 Weston 1746, title page. Title pages were sometimes distributed in advance or displayed separately as advertisements.

16 Doherty 1992, 79, quoting *The Penny London Post*, 9–11 January 1751.

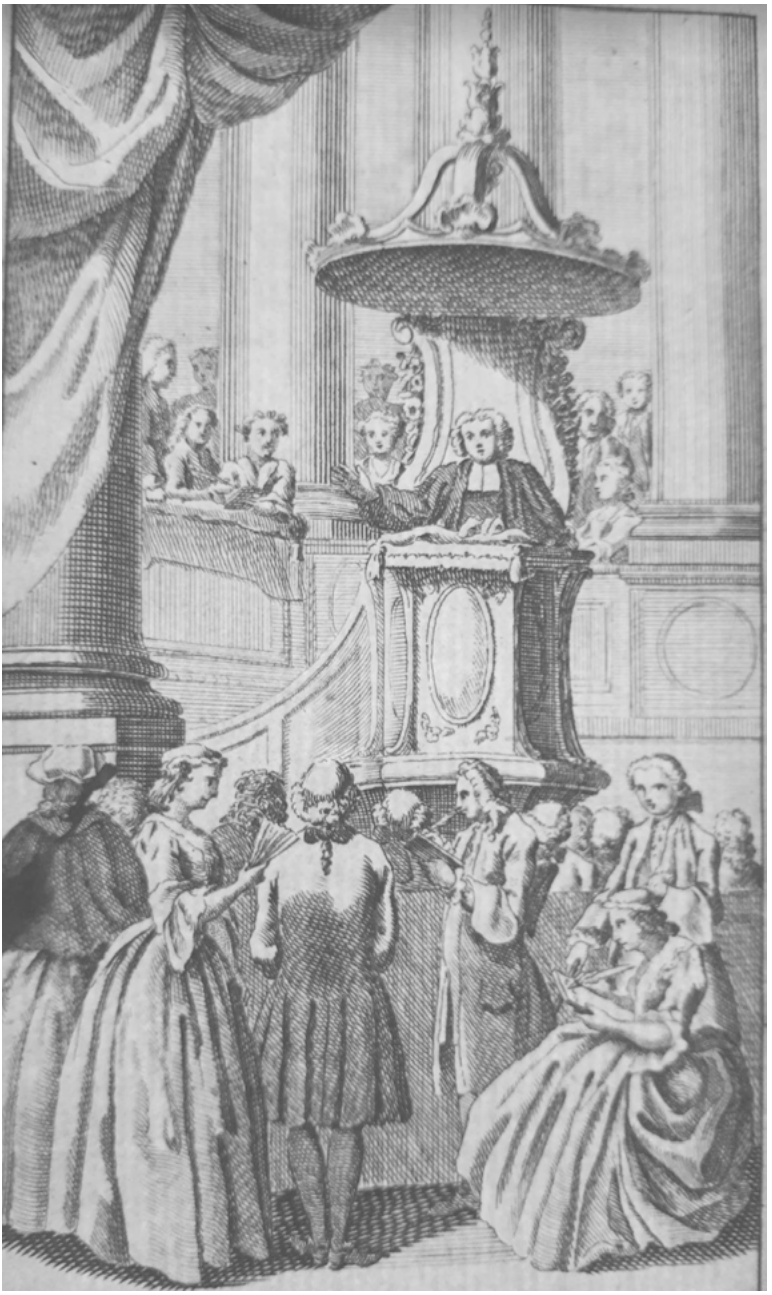


Fig. 1: Sermon-taking in church, frontispiece to Aulay Macaulay, *Polygraphy* (1747); author's collection.

Rather than a depiction of stenographic rivalry, we might see this as a scene of collaborative transcription in action.[17] That using shorthand might facilitate more secretive, secular collaborations is hinted at in Macaulay's later advertising: by using *Polygraphy* 'Gentlemen and Ladies may, in the size of a Card, communicate their thoughts to each other in a very extensive Manner'.[18]

Examining published manuals is not to stray unduly from a manuscript studies focus. The shorthand characters within both the main body text and illustrative tables of a number of published systems of the era were often painstakingly supplied in pen rather than by engraving or woodblock, a practice persisting long into the eighteenth century. It rendered manuals in effect letterpress-manuscript hybrids; any subsequent annotation is a further dimension of the manuscriptal, with the published print book functioning as substrate. But what of their actual *use*? Can we look to them as sites of evidence of shorthand's take-up by women? Ownership marks certainly seem one source of evidence of female interest, even if it is impossible to establish much, if anything, about a writer's identity beyond her name, when spelled out. By themselves, however, they seldom prove that a manual was actually studied by those owners. Even when accompanied by underlinings, marginalia, or scribblings that indicate some degree of learner engagement, we should not assume that these annotations belong to the same hand as the signatory. Unless connected to a reasonable amount of longhand, such signs of active readership, especially when in lead rather than ink, can seldom be linked so conclusively. Furthermore, in the course of its working life a manual might pass through several owners' hands, male and female, in and outside the family. Take the example of one Marie Blackbeard's copy of a 1645 imprint of Shelton's *Tachygraphy*: her inscription bears a date of 1658, so she probably acquired it second-hand or from old bookseller's stock; a marginal annotation dated 1688 shows it subsequently belonged to one Ralph Dixson. We cannot be confident in attributing its assorted traces of learner practice to either, and the presence of a '{Thomas Straker grocer}', in beginner's unconnected tachygraphy on another page, only adds to the mix.[19] Here Blackbeard and Dixson clearly indicate their respective ownerships, but in other cases a name on its own within a book may not actually do that, given the widespread practice of utilising blank areas in books for pen trials and doodles by their multiple handlers, often down the gen-

17 It was made a point of pride and reliability when published sermons claimed to be derived from a comparison and conflation of multiple shorthand transcriptions.

18 Macaulay 1756a, 4. Cf. Macaulay 1756b, XXII.

19 London, Senate House Library, Graveley 20. My transcriptions from shorthand in this article are presented in {angled braces}.

erations.[20] The 'Fany James' in a copy of one slightly earlier *Tachygraphy* imprint may have had absolutely nothing to do with the practice annotations, or indeed the book.[21] On the rear endpaper of another copy, below scrawled practice of the system, the inscription of 'Mary Holdernes' is clearly in the same neat print-hand as an annotation on its title page saying the system was endorsed 'Espesialy by Cambridge'.[22] I once assumed that here was an intriguing instance of a woman's recognition of seventeenth-century university usage of shorthand (by men). But consideration of a similarly neat print-hand inscription appearing in a later manual now makes me reticent about making such a claim in the absence of clear evidence of Holdernes's hand elsewhere. The 'Hepzibah Hervey | Underbarrow | 8 ber 1784' on the front endpaper of a copy of Thomas Hervey's *The Writer's Time Redeemed and Speaker's Words Recalled* (1784), turns out not to have been written in the hand of Hervey's daughter Hepzibah (b. 1771) herself, as might be assumed from the manual alone, but by one Thomas Lowry of Underbarrow, where the Herveys lived, on the basis of evidence of the same hand used in separate manuscript dictionaries of this complex system.[23] Mary's name might similarly have been written by someone else. Rather than a signature of ownership, the appearance of 'Lidia Bouden' twice inside a 1660 copy of Metcalfe's *Short-Writing* might constitute nothing more than a daydreaming linking of first name (written a third time as 'Lydia') with another's surname.[24] Even where a clear female ownership marking does survive, it tells us little in itself about the use of shorthand beyond

20 Perceptions of such annotations as annoying, embarrassing or even compromising defacements must have caused the destruction of many manuals.

21 London, Senate House Library, C.S.C. 1642 [Shelton] (10) Copy 1 (*pace* the current cataloguing as 'Jany Tomes').

22 London, Senate House Library, C.S.C. 1642 [Shelton] (1). Her identity has not been established, but there are Lincolnshire baptism records for this name in 1624 and 1635. It seems likely she was connected with or knew one William Hickman whose name also appears twice.

23 Cambridge, author's collection (acquired from John Drury Rare Books in 2012 [stock no. 23569]). The extent to which Hepzibah herself was involved in scribal promulgation of her father's system needs further investigation.

24 London, British Library, 1043.b.53, on reverse of engraved blank facing p. 21. Cf. Puxley 2022, responding to the discovery (Hodgkinson and Barret 2022) of eighth-century scratchings of the name 'Eadburg'. The positioning – and handwriting – in the Bouden instance is at a clear remove from the female ownership inscriptions shown in e.g. Pearson 2021, 44–50. Pearson 2021, 49 shows a coded writing technique by Joyce Swingfield *c.* 1654. This strongly resembles one used in correspondence *c.* 1668 by Mary Butler (née Stuart), countess of Arran (1651–1668): Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, V.b.333 (29). Such cases should not be seen as shorthand, but they are similarly relevant to further study of manuscript evidence of early modern women's secret writing practices.

the rudimentary stage: Jane Sampson's ornately flourished announcement in her copy of a third edition of Nathaniell Stringer's *Rich Redivivus* that she 'Began The 13th 9br 1689'[25] implies she was a student with worthy intentions to proceed. But whether she went on to deploy the system after working through 'Her Booke' we do not (yet) know.

A census of surviving early modern manuals recording such annotations is still a desideratum, and when we have it more will emerge than the examples noticed above.[26] But any insight into usage that a census affords will remain inevitably limited, given the low survival rates of all manner of publications known to be highly popular in the early hand press period. As *manuals* – publications designed for regular handling – shorthand books were especially vulnerable, with many 'literally thumbed out of existence'.[27] Fundamental methodological problems besetting provenance-based work are raised by the fact that many (most?) people never wrote in books they owned. And in many cases where they did, subsequent ruthless removal of boards, ploughing of pages, and replacement of endpapers in the course of rebinding will have destroyed much of the evidence.[28]

3 'Let […] your girle learne Short-hand': Some pious practices

One reason for acquiring a manual was to become more skilled in taking sermon notes. A 1641 report by Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius) has become a *locus classicus* on the popularity in England of sermon-taking by 'Juvenum & Virorum bona pars' ('a good part of the youngsters and men') assisted by '*Tachygraphiae* ars, quam ille *Steganographiam* vocant' ('the art of tachygraphy, which they call steganography'). It seems worthy of remark that in his Latin the 'youngsters' who

25 New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, 2004 544 (not handled); inscription digitised at <https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/2011367>. One 'A.G.', who came to own this copy in 1721, emulated Sampson's inscription ('began ye') but did not insert a date thereafter, perhaps an indication of an intention to learn never put into practice.

26 Hence McCay forthcoming is keenly awaited.

27 Carlton 1948, 408. On survival rates cf. Barnard 1999 and Farmer 2016.

28 Cf. McElligott 2019. On women's book ownership and provenance evidence see also Hackel 2005, 138–141, 204; Pearson 2021, 35–66. See Satterley 2023 on a copy of Sidney's *Arcadia* (London, Middle Temple Library, shelf L[C]) with an interesting page busy with pen trials, multiple female and male names, and John Willis's shorthand alphabet. It is conceivable, but not readily provable, that the latter was penned by – or for – one Dorothy Greaves in the 1650s.

used it to do so are not of a specified gender.[29] Better known for her manuscript 'My Booke of Rembraunce', Elizabeth Isham (1607/8–1654) recorded in rough personal memoranda that she 'proposed to take more heed to remember sermons' in 1639, and the following year she began 'to wrigh[t] what I could at Church of the sermon in my [tablets?] and so since and to writ it better out the weeke after'. Three years after Comenius's comment she mentions 'r[?] B[ook?] of Caracters', conceivably a manual acquired to enhance her practice.[30] Isham's shorthand can be glimpsed in an annotation by her to a letter the same year, and more extensively, if intermittently, in the course of devotional and penitential notes she made around the same time. Shorthand appears to have been used here for convenience of speed and space-saving, rather than for any added secrecy it might have afforded.[31]

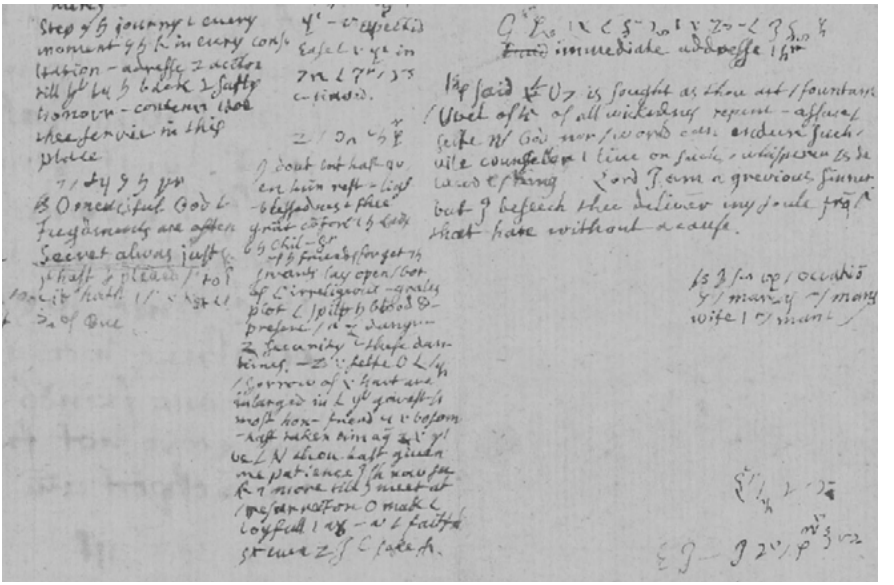


Fig. 2: Devotional note-taking by Elizabeth Isham (*c.* 1644–), Northampton, Northamptonshire Archives and Heritage, IC/249/2, detail; by permission of Northamptonshire Archives Service.

29 Comenius 1641, sig. A2^{r} (italic/Roman reversed). The inclusion of Comenian material in Latin editions of Shelton's *Tachygraphy* published in 1660 and 1671 is highly significant.

30 Quotations are as presented in Millman 2007.

31 Northampton, Northamptonshire Archives and Heritage, IC/4336 and IC/249.

A reference to 'great Ladies'[32] who used shorthand in church in the early 1640s might function partly as sarcasm at youthful insubordination just as much as it gestures to the higher status background of the women in question. Whatever the case, it is one against which we might read the politician Sir Ralph Verney's injunction in a letter to the father of Ann Denton (later Nicholas) (1641–1700):

> Let not your girle learne […] Short hand […] the easinesse […] may be a prejudice to her; for the pride of taking Sermon noates, hath made multitudes of woeman most unfortunate.

Verney's sexism is all the more pronounced in light of his family having around this time acquired '1 Shelton in blew paper to teach y^e^ boyes to write short hand', the boys in question being Nancy's cousins, destined for legal training.[33] The date of Verney's letter is unclear, but Nancy, his god-daughter, seems to have been 9 or 10 at the time. The idea of learning shorthand at such a young age was not unknown: Katherine Fowler (later Philips) (1631–1664), famed as the 'matchless Orinda', was said to have been 'very religiously devoted when she was young ^little^, and tooke Sermons verbatim when she was but ten yeares old'.[34] Compounding Verney's scripturally-justified patriarchalism – 'Had St. Paul lived in our Times […] hee would have fixt a *Shame* upon our woemen for writing (as well as for theire speaking) in the Church' – were a raft of religio-political outlooks and prejudices lasting long after civil war sectarianism.[35] It is fear of nonconforming factionalism that underpins Sir Roger L'Estrange's depiction of sanctimonious 'Revelation-girle' Peggy, '[a] *Shorthand-Book* still at her *Girdle*, and a *Crumms of Comfort* at her *Bed's Head*'.[36] His mocking prose was turned to verse by a High Church Tory the following decade in ridicule of 'The Female Hypocite: or a Girl for the Times': 'A Friday-Face for ev'ry Day she wore, | A Short-Hand Book still at her Girdle bore'.[37] Girdle books were (usually) small manuscripts attached by a chain to the waist, and if we take them as more utilitarian (e.g. notebooks or tablets) than ornamental (e.g. a jewelled Book of Hours) then 'Peggy' is a threat to misogynists. Her book shows she is a writer, every bit as much as a reader, one with the

32 Quoted in McCay 2021, 32, n. 74, also citing the hostility of 'water poet' John Taylor.

33 Quoted in Verney 1894, 72, 69 (I have not been successful in tracing the originals in the Verney papers at Claydon House, Buckinghamshire). Having close kin studying at an Inn of Court would likely have exposed the women in the family to shorthand, as well. Isham's family had strong links to the legal world. The web of personal connections linking the Denton family, the Ishams, and the Reginalds might not be irrelevant.

34 Aubrey 2015, vol. 1, 602.

35 Quoted in Verney 1894, 72.

36 L'Estrange 1699, 87.

37 Pittis 1708, 21. Cf. the bawd Mother Griffin's sarcasm in Bullock 1715, 14.

power of being able to capture men's words.[38] Alternatively, should we imagine Peggy's 'Short-Hand Book' more as an *objet de virtu*, the couplet furnishes a context for thinking about some of the calligraphed manuscripts discussed below, with Peggy ostentatiously displaying the fruit of her writing talents.

Two Whig commentators were more sympathetic to the stenography used by actual 'great Ladies' of the time. Anne Greville (later Hoby, née Dodington) (1642–1691) was praised for having 'used her short-hand in taking the edifying Parts of Sermons, which she went over in private afterwards with her Children'.[39] The skill ran in the family: her granddaughter Elizabeth North (née Greville) (1669–1699)

> having the advantage of a Tenacious Memory [...] could easily Command, not only the general Heads, but likewise all the material Passages in a *Sermon,* which she committed to Short-Hand before Dinner, and afterwards digested more Regularly, in order to ruminate on them the succeeding Week.[40]

These references highlight that shorthand sermon-taking is not to be equated with verbatim transcription, and furthermore that North's stenography was not conducted at the same time as actual sermon delivery. They appear within eulogies of female piety, in which shorthand, a tool for greater spiritual good, is used for privacy, as distinct from secrecy.

Shorthand occurred in other 'interior' forms of women's religious writing too, in manuscripts long vanished. Started the year before she died, the '*pondering* and *meditation*' of Mary Bewley (d. 1653) 'being in short-hand writing can hardly be read, some of the Characters being of her own invention'. It was not just those materials which her shorthand rendered elusive: 'sundry other Manuscripts she hath left, which could they be read, might be proposed as a spurre to Gentlewomen, how to improve their much spare time'.[41] As Sara Heller Mendelson observes, 'there is no knowing how many female diaries may be lost to us because family members were unable to break the code', citing the example of Elizabeth Lawrence (later Lloyd, then Bury) (1644–1720), who started a spiritual diary in shorthand aged 20.[42] According to her second husband, she 'conceal'd her Accounts in *Short Hand*, which cannot be recovered by me, nor, I believe, by any other, be-

38 Cf. Steele 1712, 286 on reactions to the 'Readiness in Writing' by 'the *Phantom*' at church. On girdle books see Smith 2017.

39 Burnet 1691, 24.

40 Horneck 1699, 19–20.

41 Reynolds 1659, 9.

42 Mendelson 1985, 183–184. Mendelson also mentions the example of Sarah Henry (later Savage) (1664–1745) whose lack of ability to write shorthand, and hence keep material private, discouraged her for a while from keeping a spiritual diary.

cause of many peculiar Characters and Abbreviations of her own'.[43] Her wide-ranging learning and accomplishments were acquired largely through self-tuition, but in the case of shorthand may very well link to her family's clerical and dissenting connections. Similar contacts likely led to early acquaintance with shorthand by her contemporary Elizabeth Dunton (neé Annesley) (d. 1697), who requested her manuscript journals be 'burnt, though [...] much of what she writ was in a *Short-hand* of her own Invention'.[44] It is at least conceivable that the 'invention' was connected with the still undeciphered shorthand symbols in manuscript meditations by her younger sister Susanna Annesley (later Wesley) (1669–1742), subsequently famed as mother to two founders of Methodism.[45] At the end of the century, another Methodist figure, Hannah Kilham (née Spurr) (1774–1832) missionary, linguist and anti-slavery campaigner, deployed a 'a short-hand of her own' to record 'thoughts and feelings'. But without the 'loose papers' on which she did so, we cannot know what she removed, embellished, or rewrote during her subsequent transcription of this shorthand into longhand. This process was in turn exacerbated by her stepdaughter's editorial mediation in transforming that longhand into print.[46]

These examples of disappearance (and destruction) highlight fundamental obstacles for evidence-gathering within shorthand studies. Fortunately we have more in the way of surviving evidence for the phenomenon of another type of religious manuscript of which some women were active makers: testaments, psalters, and prayer books copied into shorthand. These belonged to a calligraphic tradition sometimes used as a promotional tool by system-makers, and one influencing and influenced by engraved shorthand psalms and Bibles published in the second half of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth.[47] This still under-investigated specialist category within devotional manuscriptology can be broadened to embrace the likes of hymn collections transcribed in shorthand in the eighteenth century and beyond. While their degree of calligraphic, and sometimes micrographic, accomplishment varies widely, such manuscripts are achievements of sustained, meticulous acts of piety, and it is easy to understand why some came to be preserved in bindings that were above standard quality.

43 Bury 1720, 11.

44 Rogers 1697, sig. e5^{r} (italic/Roman reversed).

45 Wallace 1997, 320, 323, 331, 353 (and respectively 333, n. 2, 335, n. 24, 337, n. 72, 362, n. 108). Shorthand use was sometimes inter-generational in clerical families of the era; it is tempting to speculate that as well as a spiritual influence, she exerted a stenographic one on her sons, as well as influencing the short-writing of her daughter Kezia Wesley (1709–1741); see Underhill 2015, 30.

46 Biller 1837, 29.

47 For a little more on this see Underhill 2013, 46–48.

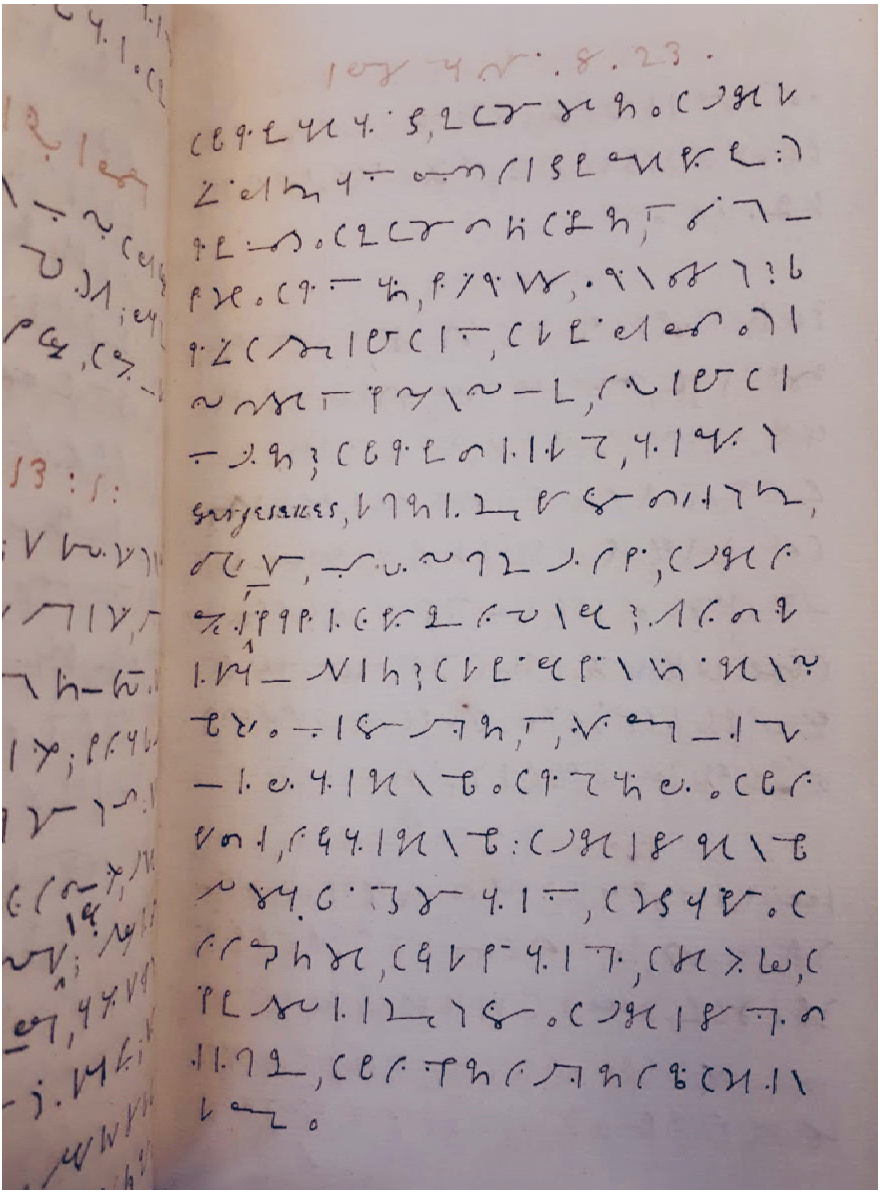


Fig. 3: The gospel for the fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, transcribed by Isabella Aspen (*c.* 1755), London, Senate House Library, Carlton 11/5; by permission.

One example by a woman is a never-finished book of devotional content, scribed in black and red ink using Addy's method (which helps to date it to probably the early eighteenth century); her identity emerges only in a marginal longhand inscription 'Elizabeth Hitchcock her Hand'.[48] That Hitchcock (as yet unidentified) had planned to write more than she did here is shown by the continuation of her rubricated margins on subsequent pages that are otherwise blank. A fine and more accomplished example is a pair of Books of Common Prayer transcribed by Isabella Aspin (née L'Estrange) (1709/10–1790), preserved in red goatskin Harleian-style tooled bindings, again neatly scribed in red and black ink, this time in John Byrom's shorthand.[49]

At the time she created them, Byrom's system was still unpublished and its circulation largely controlled by its inventor. Using it effectively made Aspin part of a wider scribal community,[50] her manuscripts linked to a wider network. Each book has a front page inscription of '{Isabella Aspin her book | written by herself}'. She presented one copy to a female relative '{in 1755}'. The other copy, which is fuller in its content coverage and more considered in the planning and conception of its page layouts, was probably written earlier and for her own use. It is a pleasing irony that the writer was the great-niece of the aforementioned Sir Roger, mocker of Peggy with her shorthand girdle book.

The full semantic content of such manuscripts should not be assumed to reflect merely laborious copying, and my suspicion is that there is far more to uncover in a closer internal study of them than might be assumed: choice of source text, principles of selection, indeed any omissions or variations might yield insight into religio-political sympathies, for example, with seemingly bland transcription potentially tantamount to a statement of subversion[51] (it should be noted, however, that this is not the case with Aspin's loyally Hanoverian Books of Common Prayer). I suspect too that women's contribution to the tradition is a significant one, but as yet no comprehensive census of examples has been undertaken to establish its size. However, such a census would not surmount the difficulty of establishing that a manuscript is written by a woman if it is not clearly signed or if there are no clues outside the shorthand, or indeed beyond the manuscript itself. Generally, the presence of particular longhand handwriting styles more associat-

48 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng.e.2775, fol. 13^{v}. In the nineteenth century this was owned by the bibliophile Thomas Weld (who possessed the Luttrell Psalter), but I have not established any family connection.

49 London, Senate House Library, Carlton 11/5 and 11/8.

50 On this term see Love 1993, 180.

51 Cf. Cooke 2021, item 36 (recently acquired by John Rylands Library, Manchester), drawing on my work on Charles Goodier's shorthand Books of Common Prayer.

ed with women might offer some good pointers, particularly in earlier seventeenth-century cases,[52] but this is evidence that needs handling with particular caution since there is no intrinsic distinction between male and female hands, notwithstanding misguided over-reading or fundamentally graphological descriptions sometimes made to the contrary (as opposed to appropriately palaeographical ones).[53] We could not know, for example, whether the 'A. Perry' who carefully stenographed Isaac Watts's *Hymns and Spiritual Songs In Three Books*, was a man or a woman, were it not for a letter from the writer's descendant to its twentieth-century purchaser identifying her as Ann Perry (*fl.* 1785–1799), a Baptist apparently once noted for her lacework.[54] Stamped with just her initials, its binding, along with the labour and neatness of the shorthand within, probably accounts for how it came to be preserved, and the writer's accomplishments remembered, within the family down the generations.

Fig. 4: Decorated cover of Jane Segar's 'Treatis', presented to Queen Elizabeth (*c.* 1589), London, British Library, Add. MS 10037; by permission.

52 See Wolfe 2009.

53 How we might best distinguish and describe differences in the ways individual writers deploy the same system raises numerous technical issues for future shorthand palaeography to establish.

54 London, Senate House Library, Carlton 15/1 and accompanying letter.

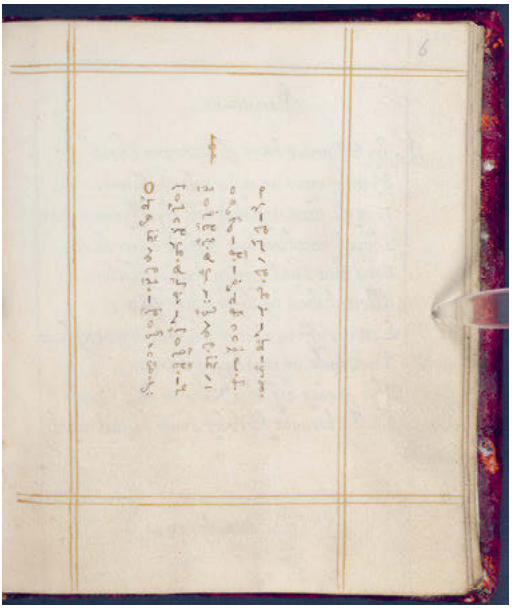


Fig. 5: Prophecy of Europæa written by Jane Segar (*c.* 1589), London, British Library, Add. MS 10037, fol. 6^{r}; by permission.

The finest examples of these religious manuscripts possess jewel-book qualities, almost like *objets de virtu* to be gazed at rather than handled. In certain respects the same might be said of the second most famous of all surviving early modern English shorthand manuscripts (the first being Samuel Pepys's 1660s journal volumes), though its semantic content is not scriptural. Created by Jane Segar/Seagar (*fl.* 1589) at what is conventionally claimed as the start of English shorthand history, this was a gift book presented to Queen Elizabeth in the form of a 'Treatis' of 'the divine prophesies of the ten Sibills (Virgyns) upon the birth of our Sauiour Christ'.[55]

55 London, British Library, Add. MS 10037, fol. 1^{r}. To the bibliography of secondary work accompanying the British Library's digitisation of this must be added those who explore Segar's Charactery in its own right: Carlton 1911, 94–98, deciphering the mottoes, and Kraner 1931, treating Segar's deviations from Bright.

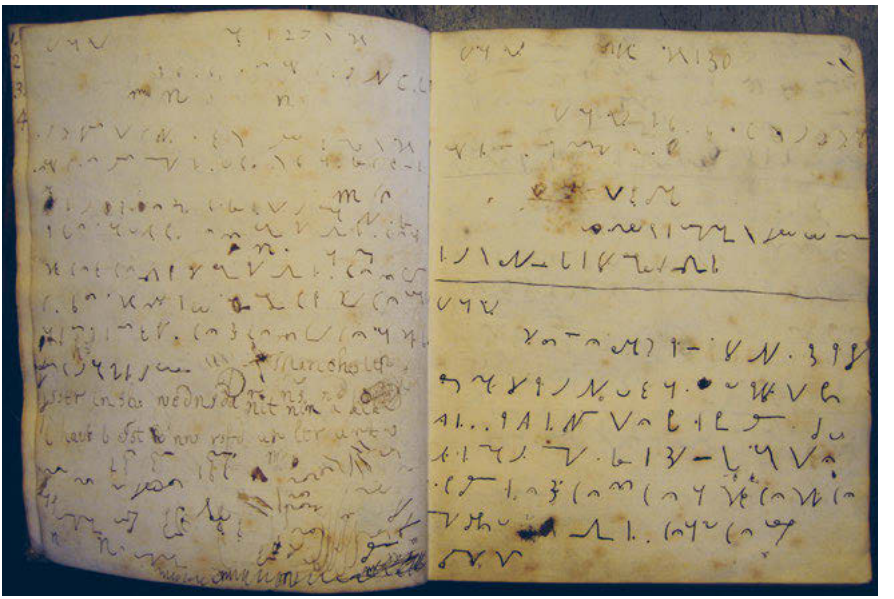


Fig. 6: Elizabeth Byrom's practice letters to her aunt (1730), Manchester, Chetham's Library, Mun.A.2.167, fols 14^{v}–15^{r}; by permission.

Each of its ten dizain/octet 'prophesies', together with a final poem in Segar's own voice, is scribed in a formal italic on a verso page, with even more remarkable five- and four-columned transformations of them on the facing rectos, '[g]raced both wth my pen and pencell, and late practise in that rare Arte of Charactery' (fol. 1^{r}). The 'art' in question is that of Timothy Bright's *Characterie* (1588), traditionally regarded as the first English shorthand system, though it could never have been remotely quick to write, whether on a parchment substrate like Segar's or on paper. Here is high quality, luxury craft: within gilt bordering on each page, the calligraphy of both longhand and shorthand commences in gold illumination too. Segar's work as 'Characteres' (fol. 11^{v}) must have extended to the royal mottoes prominently centred on the front board of the fine red velvet and gold lace-embroidered binding, set under enamelled and gilt glass.[56] While there is no evidence to my knowledge that Elizabeth herself ever touched it, the manuscript's key purpose was to promote Bright's method at her court soon after its printing. 'The Treatis' is a superlative exemplification of

56 Only part of a matching cartouche on the back board survives, with merely a small fragment of a character visible, but just enough to show it bore a different meaning to the Charactery of the front.

why a manuscript is far more than a vehicle for semantic content. This should be remembered when it comes to other far less aesthetically accomplished shorthand documents that have survived, because, as Mark Bland puts it, 'manuscripts are always witnesses to something other than the texts they preserve'.[57] In the perfectly understandable impetus to prioritise shorthand's deciphering over all else, we must never lose sight of the fact that conversion from shorthand to longhand and print is even more of a remediating process than that effected by any digitisation.

An example to illustrate this is a notebook used mainly by the stenographer John Byrom to make jottings from patristic and devotional texts, in which 8-year-old Elizabeth Byrom (1722–1801) also practised reading and writing shorthand under his supervision.[58] Her father was no Verney when it came to girls and young women learning shorthand. That is emphasised by records within this notebook of several women outside the family paying him shorthand tuition fees; in some cases this tuition was delivered by Elizabeth's aunt, Phebe Byrom (1697–1785).[59] Once she had got to a reasonably (and perhaps, given her age, remarkably) proficient stage in the course of her instruction, Elizabeth attempted shorthand copies of collects from the Book of Common Prayer, probably from dictation or from memory, along with drafts of simple letters to female relatives more adept in the system. No standard transcription can adequately capture the manifold jottings surrounding her shorthand outlines, nor all the slips and malformation of her characters, nor, conversely, the progress in her writing as she gains confidence in sizing and shaping and starts to adopt more advanced abbreviations. Nor can it convey the sense of slow enunciation (spoken or internal) as she writes, nor the hand-to-hand dialogue with her father – the 'orality' of the manuscript pages. These are all things we can truly appreciate only by learning the system ourselves. Of course, the significant distancing of today's reader from the experience of writing-in-action (and reading-in-action too) affected by transcription into print text applies to all editions of manuscripts, whatever the hand. But in the case of shorthand, even more distancing arises than it does with a longhand equivalent – for, at least with a system such as Byrom's, the editorial work of transcription/expansion begins to move into areas more akin to translation than transliteration. For example, the system's quasi-phonetic basis, omission of internal vowel dots,

57 Bland 2010, 9.

58 Manchester, Chetham's Library, Mun.A.2.167, fols 10^{r}–17^{r}, 23^{r}. For transcriptions of parts see Bailey 1882 and Ward 1895, but they contain numerous slips and errors, not to mention silently interpolated punctuation, often misleading. I am preparing a fuller edition of this and related manuscripts.

59 In this respect he had far more in common with Cotton Mather, to give an example from New England (see Mather 1912, 153). Two other prominent eighteenth-century male enthusiasts for young women's learning of shorthand were Charles Wesley (see Underhill 2015, 50–51) and Erasmus Darwin (see Darwin 1797, 44, 125). For more on Byrom's system and its users see Underhill 2008.

and principles of truncation dictate that sometimes there is no choice but to employ a consistent, standardised orthography that, certainly in Elizabeth's case, is not borne out by her inconsistent longhand.

4 'Attain this art': Contextualising Mary Hawker's receipt-book shorthand 1691/2

In the mid seventeenth century, a Hartlibian educational reformer recommended that the curriculum of the ideal academy for gentle youth should include 'the best and most perfect way of short writing' for males and 'especially the best and most exact way of Short-writing' for females.[60] Whether this is akin to a 'Pitmans for the girls and Gregg for the boys' demarcation in a less idealised twentieth-century learning centre seems unlikely, but differentiated purposes for shorthand on gender lines do seem envisaged: for boys it was 'to take out sermons', whereas for girls – and note the 'especially' in their case – it is linked to a domestic setting of household accounts and so forth, a setting to which we now turn.[61]

Verney asserted that his god-daughter's needs – perhaps thinking more of her future husband's – were better served by concentrating on the Bible, Book of Common Prayer and French books (rather than the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew to which she aspired), and 'Stories of illustrious (not learned) Woemen, receipts for preserving, makinge creames and all sorts of cookeryes, […] in Breif all manner of good housewifery'.[62] He might just have reconsidered his strictures about girls learning shorthand had it occurred to him that it might have applications in 'housewifery'. London, Wellcome Collection, MS.9304 features shorthand in just such a context.[63] Signed twice, the second time fairly ornately, 'Mary Hawker | Her Book | Ano Dom | 1691', the manuscript has a title/section heading in neat block hand, 'Instructions for Pastery and Cookerry'; and on pages starting at the back, Hawker began, but never got far with, a non-culinary section, with tips about treating fabric stains. So far nothing has been established about the writer's identity beyond the evidence of the manu-

60 Speed 1650, 11, 12. The recommendations for the male youth, but *not* female, appear in [Hartlib] 1652.

61 Coe 2004, 52, quoting the novelist B. S. Johnson recalling his time at Kingston Day Commercial School aged 14.

62 Quoted in Verney 1894, 74.

63 Acquired by donation in 2019, it is now digitised at <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/vwwqzc5n>. For a transcription of its shorthand see Underhill 2021.

script itself, but it seems at least possible that she was the Mary Hawker (1670–1760) whose husband was one Richard Hawker, perhaps connected with a dynasty of dyers and clothiers in the Stroud area of Gloucestershire.

What survives of this manuscript (several pages were at some stage ripped out) contains over 140 concise sets of instructions for preparing a wide variety of fare. While more modest in content and appearance than better-known examples, it is fairly typical of household receipt (recipe) books assembling culinary and medical instructions and advice that were kept at that time in higher status families. These often turned into accretive, collaborative productions, with multiple subsequent hands evincing passage through wider circles of kin and acquaintance down the generations.[64] Unprepossessing in its limp stab-stitched cover, pierced by pinned-in material and containing looser inserts, it carries the evidence of much handling over many years. Several longhands feature in it: Hawker's own maturer hand(s), and, later on in the manuscript, those of others, assumed to be her descendants. Hence, like the notebook in which Elizabeth Byrom wrote, it fits into a broad category of manuscripts which Margaret Ezell usefully terms 'messy'.[65] Its originator would have resented such a categorisation: the flourishing of her title page along with the deployment of scribal longhand abbreviation indicate a striving towards what writing masters termed 'command of hand'. Recipe compilation manuscripts 'sometimes served as draft pads where rudimentary writing skills could be tested, perfected, and/or exhibited', to quote one authority on them.[66] What distinguishes Hawker's compilation from most that have survived is the fact that the pad contains shorthand.

The system she used was a long-established one: Metcalfe's Short-Writing. Metcalfe was long deceased, but his system's popularity is reflected by his manual having gone through over ten editions/reprintings by this time; it continued through more editions into the second decade of the eighteenth century.[67] The vast majority of Metcalfe users would have been quite unfamiliar with its origins, very likely seeing the system as synonymous with an essentialised 'shorthand'.[68] Conceivably, Hawker learned the system by consulting just such a manual, of which the most recent 'last Edition' had appeared in 1690; as noted earlier, its publishers aimed it at female as well as male learners.

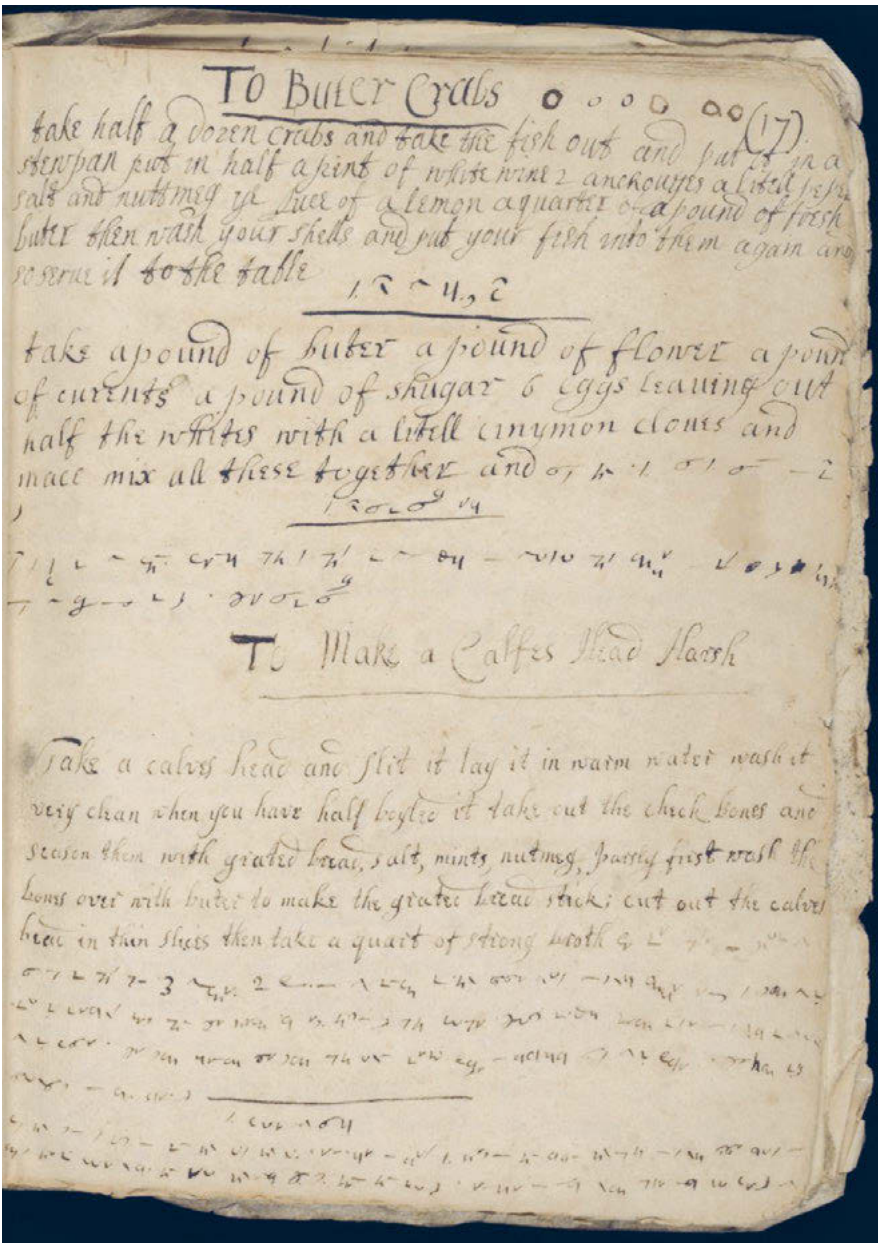
64 See Field 2007; Kowalchuk 2017; Leong 2018; and Wall 2016.

65 Ezell 2009, 55.

66 Wall 2016, 126.

67 Carlton 1940, 48–55. The complex bibliography of early shorthand manuals, particularly those of Thomas Shelton, highlights why 'edition' is a term to be treated with caution.

68 There are parallels to be drawn here with, say, the longevity of 'Pitman' as a brand name well into the twentieth century.



To Buter Crabs (17)

take half a dozen crabs and take the fish out and put it in a stewpan put in half a pint of white wine 2 anchouyes a litell salt and nuttmeg ye Juce of a lemon a quarter of a pound of fresh buter then wash your shells and put your fish into them again and so serue it to the table

take a pound of buter a pound of flower a pound of currents a pound of shugar 6 eggs leauing out half the whites with a litell cinymon cloues and mace mix all these together and

To Make a Calfes Head Harsh

take a calues head and slit it lay it in warm water wash it very clean when you have half boyled it take out the chick bones and season them with grated bread, salt, mints, nutmeg, parsly first wash the bones over with buter to make the grated bread stick; cut out the calues head in thin slices then take a quart of strong broth

Within her recipes, shorthand first occurs in a centred heading – '{to make a god's cake}' – below which are four lines in her longhand, detailing the ingredients and quantities needed to prepare what turns out to be a basic, if rich, currant-filled confection. This recipe concludes in shorthand, but for anyone hoping that might conceal something remarkable or private, this comes as disappointing bathos: a mundane instruction, '{put them into [a] patty-pan and bake it}'. The entirety of the following simple recipe '{to make puff pastries}' – more accurately, a filling for one – is in shorthand. Below that comes one for a fancier 'Calfes Head Harsh', begun in longhand, but completed with two half-lines and four full lines of shorthand concerning the composition of a broth in which the 'harsh' (i.e. hash) is cooked, its subsequent thickening, and the dish's garnishing. The next three recipes are briefer – headings followed by two or three lines of writing under each – and completely in shorthand: '{to collar a pig}', '{sauce for a hare}', and '{sauce for a roast pig}'. The final appearance of shorthand is merely the heading – '{a plum cake}' – for the longhand below it.

To those used to more cursive stenography, gaps between many of the characters makes Hawker's appear rather slow in its formation, though there is nothing to indicate that was any more so than her longhand. A superficial glance gives the impression of an almost 'naive' letter-by-letter transliterator at work. In this regard it is a little reminiscent of the way that Katherine Packer (later Gell) (*c.* 1624–1671) wrote unconnected characters within a far more extensive manuscript compilation started in 1639 or 1640. This book, which Packer began as a teenager, bears the title, 'A Boocke of Very Good medicines for seueral deseases wounds and sores both new and olde' and a subsequent section headed 'Preservueing and Coockery | Katherine Packer | her boocke'.[69] Packer later married into a prominent Derbyshire parliamentary gentry family; other manuscript evidence shows her strong links with the culture of Richard Baxter's puritan circle. The vast majority of this manuscript's entries are in longhand, but shorthand is used to record eleven remedies for a range of ailments of varying degrees of complexity and severity, as well as for a quince marmalade and quince paste in the culinary section. Others' hands feature in Packer's 'Boocke' too, but consideration of matters such as ductus and aspect, as well as the placing of these sections within a sequence, establishes that the shorthand was written by Packer herself, and in tandem with her longhand. The same is the case with Hawker's. From an attribution perspective, these are fortunate contrasts with a manuscript receipt book inscribed by Elizabeth

69 Washington, Folger Shakespeare Library, V.a.387 (digitised at <http://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/7nzq1i>), [iii], 176. The main title page also bears the details 'Katherine Packer | anno 1639 Dominie' (which could be an old style dating).

Lindsey, neé Northey (baptised 1648), in which Zeiglographia, the second, now lesser-known shorthand system of Thomas Shelton, is used to record the making of a type of cheese. This manuscript was compiled over decades, and its multiple longhands complicate any attempt to identify the stenographer.[70] Similarly, in a domestic notebook from the 1650s compiled by members of the Cartwright family of Aynho, Northamptonshire, a 'Katherin Cartwright' is one of the ownership signatories and contributors, but it is difficult to establish whether the shorthand, which appears sporadically amongst its miscellaneous longhand content of recipes, poems and other texts, is hers or that of a male relation.[71] Even if such instances were not written or read by these women, both manuscripts at least afford evidence that a woman *saw* shorthand in use. Moreover, the use of shorthand in such domestic contexts could be more typical than we might suppose in the light of a turn-of-the-century reference by Daniel Williams to 'the very Girls and Cook-maids, that have learned to write Short hand without Vowels'.[72] The 'serviceable' assistance for which Ann(e) Downer (later Greenwell, then Whitehead) (1624–1688) was summoned by the gaoled founder of the Quakers George Fox, wasn't just to do with preparing food, but the fact she could 'take things well in *Short-hand*'.[73]

Identical and near-identical alphabet symbols used across several early-seventeenth-century published manuals are one headache for anyone now attempting to identify the use of a specific system from the period. Several of Packer's symbols accord with those used in two or more of those manuals, but closer examination soon shows that other symbols (notably those for what turn out to be used for the letters *p* and *s*) bear little or no relation to anything in either of them. Overall, Metcalfe's comes closest (or is the closest known): half of his alphabet is identical or near-identical to Packer's.[74] This can hardly be mere coincidence. Conceivably Packer had misremembered some rudimentary learning of Metcalfe, or maybe just borrowed from it, deliberately introducing some of her own variants. Alternatively, her alphabet may even be evidence of a circulating system distinct from Metcalfe which never reached print. But her deployment of these symbols resembles a rudimentary substitution cipher, one soon decrypted, as the

70 Saffron Walden, Gibson Library, MS H269. As well as for the cheese recipe (fol. 67^{r}), some shorthand, as yet undeciphered, occurs on fol. 1^{r}; it is written vertically to the right of the signatures of Elizabeth Lindsey, from a London gentry family, and Jabez Wyatt, an unrelated Quaker maltster of Saffron Walden, and at a different time and with a different pen to those signatures.

71 Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Don.e.6.

72 Cooper 1700, sig. B3^{r}.

73 Fox 1694, 187.

74 For a key to Packer's alphabet see Thompson and Winard 2017.

letters in each word are merely converted *literatim* into the corresponding letters in the shorthand alphabet. There is next to nothing by way of further contraction, the symbols are not joined together, and the writing's size exhibits none of the space-saving advantages that shorthand normally bestows. For these reasons, some might not even count it as a shorthand at all. Nevertheless, the simplicity of the symbols, especially in comparison with a secretary hand equivalent, might well have made writing somewhat faster (and saved ink too), and arguably makes it a contender to be classed at the very least a type of 'speed hand'. From the reader's perspective (and Packer herself would be one of those readers), the cipher, once mastered, arguably has the advantage of being even more legible than the manuscript's longhand.

Hawker's shorthand, by contrast, represents a more than rudimentary grasp of Metcalfe. To a modern viewer of the manuscript not familiar with the conventions of such systems, a lack of connectedness and lack of cursivity in her writing might seem to indicate the complete beginner's slowness. However, much of that stems from the practice of indicating internal vowels by means of relative positioning of consonant characters. Hawker's observation of this, together with deployment of some more advanced features of Metcalfe – such as using suffix symbols rather than spelling-out those suffixes *literatim* – indicates that by the time she wrote her recipes she had more than a beginner's level of shorthand proficiency. She also adopted some personal variations, such as using the character for *f* on its own to indicate the word 'of'. Analogies arise with personal tweaks made to 'given' recipes: how far does the writer/cook need to go with any such adaptations before the result effectively constitutes a new system/recipe?

The juxtaposition of shorthand and longhand within the same recipe text is intriguing: looking at Hawker's manuscript today, it is tempting to infer *something* is being deliberately kept from prying eyes, but, as noted above, the content is quite mundane: no advanced techniques, no fine precision of quantities, no unusual ingredients the cook might prefer to keep to herself are being guarded here. In fact, content-wise there is nothing distinguishing this material from countless equivalents in longhand and print receipt books of the era. I have not yet established if any of her recipes directly match anything in those. But some bear close or loose resemblances to many in part or whole, inevitably so given their relative simplicity. Maybe, though, matters are less a matter of our contemporary inference, and more to with her deliberate implication: using shorthand as a ruse to pretend to family and friends there was more to her recipes than was actually the case. Keeping a receipt book was an opportunity not just to practise a recently acquired skill in stenography, but to draw attention to it. The downside was that, in a domestic context, if it could not be read by later family members it would

soon be seen as unusable, and hence discardable. In its earlier life at least, it was Hawker's longhand, not her shorthand, that secured its retention.

Similar juxtapositions of shorthand and longhand within an individual text occur in an earlier 'little manuscript recipe book' of over three hundred recipes kept by Hester Fleetwood (née Smyth) (d. 1714), wife of the regicide George Fleetwood,[75] and in a collection of household remedies and recipes, mainly for sauces, compiled slightly later by Jane Mosley (later Soresby) (1669–1712), daughter of a prosperous Derbyshire farmer.[76] Mosley used Metcalfe's system too, but it seems easier to establish why she was doing so. She used it mainly for high-frequency words, incorporating Metcalfe's inclined downward stroke for 'the' and horizontal stroke for 'and' into her handwriting, instances of easily and rapidly formed time-savers for which countless (longhand) writers over the years have adopted equivalents. When used for a heading, Mosley's shorthand was conceivably designed to conceal the nature of what her ingredients were intended for, even if this turns out to be nothing particularly remarkable: '{To whiten the face}', '{To make the hands white and soft}'.[77] Other examples of shorthand's deployment within prevailing longhand contexts appear in medical receipt books compiled by Margaret Boscawen (née Clinton) (d. 1688) and her daughter Bridget Fortescue (1666–1708), members of a gentry family in Cornwall and wives of MPs.[78] These have not yet been fully deciphered but are noteworthy because they are clearly linked to both these women's first-hand observations of the role of plants in health and their gathering of others' knowledge; one purpose of this shorthand seems to have been to do with cross-referencing the receipts to the work of the herbalist Nicholas Culpeper.[79]

For shorthand studies, perhaps the most interesting passage in Hawker's manuscript is one which has proved far more challenging and elusive to decipher than her recipes. As it occurs directly below a longhand 'Bill of Fare', anyone looking at this page unable to read Metcalfe might reasonably assume that the content has a direct culinary relation to this 'Bill'. But this micro-text[80] turns out to be an

75 Lewin 2004, who observes 'She was adept at shorthand, which she occasionally used to complete a recipe'. I have not inspected this manuscript, which is in private ownership.

76 Matlock, Derbyshire Record Office, D770/C/E2/394. See [Sinar] 1979, with the plate on Z showing some of the shorthand.

77 These are my corrections to Sinar's transcriptions 'To [?clean] the [?silver]' and 'To [?keep] the hands [white] and [?] like' ([Sinar] 1979, P).

78 Exeter, Devon Heritage Centre, 1260/M/0/FC/6, 1260/M/0/FC/7.

79 See Leong 2014, 568–573.

80 On this term, which I find usefully applicable to pieces of shorthand occurring in larger macrotexts (whether manuscript or print books), see Kornexl and Lenker 2019. A longer example is

expression of more general pious sentiment. It is not in prose, as the layout implies, but in loosely iambic verse: either a couplet followed by what seems to be an abab-rhymed stanza, or perhaps a single piece. My tentative transcription (spelling modernised) is as follows, with assumed line breaks indicated |:

> {attain this art and you shall find | it will inrich your righteous mind
> continue in religious ways | all times to walk therein | depend[?] [*two(+) words unclear*] God all your days | do you refrain from Eve's sin}

It has not been subjected to any forensic scrutiny, but this shorthand passage appears to have been written with a sharper quill point. Some more complex formations and shaping render it more assured and accomplished than that elsewhere in the manuscript. The possibility arises that it was penned by a different person altogether, somebody who taught Hawker her shorthand in the first place. For the 'art' to be attained in this injunction is, surely, not the art of cookery but the art of shorthand itself. Whoever the writer was, its presence epitomises how, for all the secular, culinary content of Hawker's macrotext, when it comes to the world of early modern women's shorthand, a context of godly living never seems far away.

5 In(-)conclusion

The foregoing survey is hardly comprehensive or conclusive. If it has an underlying argument, though, it is this: when faced with shorthand in an early modern English document of whose writer's identity we have no clue, we cannot assume a male hand. The once default position of 'the presumption of male scribal identity', criticised by a scholar of centuries-earlier manuscript copying by women, is something to be guarded against.[81] But for shorthand to be more securely incorporated within scholarly understanding of post-medieval script systems, 'only a laborious prosopographical approach will be proof against misleading generalisations'.[82] As well as a palaeographical endeavour, uncovering the place of women and girls in such prosopography might be seen as a fundamentally archaeological one – and a great deal more spadework remains to be done. It is especially Margaret Ezell's

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the eight lines of Rich's shorthand on fol. 1 (and other pieces on fol. 3^{r}) of London, British Library, Harleian MS 2031, a devotional miscellany by Anna Cromwell (later Williams) (1623–1687/8); see Ezell 2012, 285–287, 298.

81 Beach 2004, 5.

82 Brown 1963, 377–378.

category of 'messy' manuscripts – and ones even messier than those – that we need to quarry in order to explore more about the quotidian nature of shorthand use in early modern England. It is splendid that Jane Segar's presentation volume will receive wider appreciation and examination following its recent digitisation by the British Library, even if such essentially two-dimensional remediation cannot adequately replicate the experience of handling and turning its binding and its leaves. But such treasure is far from typical or representative, and the fate of far less obviously attractive ephemeral scraps has rarely been as privileged. Fortunately, the move to adoption of lighter-touch conservation practice in many archives and libraries means that now 'Cinderella keeps her rags even when she is rehoused in the palace', but there is still more to do to understand and put such rags on show.[83]

Until relatively recently, the shorthand within manuscripts and printed books in many institutional hands (not to mention private ones) has seldom been fully or adequately described in cataloguing, if noticed at all. One key reason is the difficulty of ready recognition of the system used, and thereafter the complex, onerous, and often thankless task of actually deciphering it.[84] Sometimes the seeming impossibility of starting, let alone accomplishing, this task has been deterrent enough. But the hurdles need not be as insurmountable as they once might have seemed, in view of developments in digital technologies which are making group transcription projects ever more viable and productive.[85] Even if, or when, significantly more material becomes discovered and duly transcribed, the evidentiary value from it will of course remain only partial, and the conclusions reached tentative, given inevitable losses, sometimes even wilful destruction, of shorthand-bearing manuscripts, as well as the necessarily conjectural aspects to the decipherment of those which have survived. But all this hardly negates the value of such an endeavour, and it will only be through attempting it that we can move beyond print-source dependent accounts, or those concentrating on isolated transcribed texts, and towards more informed conclusions about what manuscripts might teach us in the aggregate about how and why shorthand was used in early modern writing culture by women, men and children alike.

83 Sutherland 2022, 45.

84 Women's unsung role in the history of shorthand deciphering merits full treatment in a study of its own.

85 The burgeoning of academic attention to receipt books owes much to collaborative initiatives such as the Early Modern Recipes Online Collective <https://emroc.hypotheses.org>. The longhand sections of Mary Hawker's manuscript were subject to an EMROC 'transcribathon' in November 2022. The Dickens Code project <https://dickenscode.org> is one encouraging model of the sort of collaborative work to which we need to look when it comes to future work on shorthand in this period.

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David M. Powers

The Three Codes of Adonijah Bidwell (1716–1784)

Abstract: This article focuses on the notes left behind by a western Massachusetts minister, the Rev. Adonijah Bidwell (1716–1784), which reveal the concerns that occupied him, the worries he experienced, and the themes he chose for his preaching. It describes the two methods of abbreviated writing that Bidwell employed in his notes: one using various symbols, including some of his own invention; and one loosely based on a shorthand system devised in seventeenth-century England. As well as identifying Bidwell's theological perspective, analysing examples of his messages, and evaluating the impact of his rhetoric, the article suggests that Bidwell's use of figurative and symbolic language might be seen as a third 'code'.

Introduction

'Housatonic Township No. 1' sat on high ground between Beartown and Hunger Mountains in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts. In spite of some initial settlers who may have come in 1735, records report that the land was 'purchased' (in the English settlers' view) from indigenous people only in 1737. On 2 September that year a major developer of western Massachusetts, Ephraim Williams, along with his fellow entrepreneurs bought a large tract of high country from John Pophnehonawah and his colleagues for £300.[1] The whole zone was divided into four sections, with Tyringham being 'No. 1'.[2] To that remote outpost the Rev. Adonijah Bidwell (1716–1784) came in 1750 to serve as minister – and farmer – for the rest of his life. Bidwell was probably ordained in 1744, before taking a position as chaplain on the expedition of William Pepperell to Louisbourg, Nova Scotia in 1745. His notes indicate that he served as guest preacher in various locations over the next four years, including Cherry Brook (Canton), Newington, Groton, New London, and Saybrook in Connecticut, and Kinderhook in New York.[3] After his

1 Wright 1905, 139–140.

2 Field 1829, 278. The three other sections were New Marlborough, Sandisfield, and Beckett.

3 Boston, MA, Congregational Library & Archives, MS5153 Adonijah Bidwell sermon booklets, Booklet B, 1, 23. The dates Bidwell recorded are from 1746 to 1748. See the 'Manuscripts' section below for more information about these sermon booklets, which are referred to in this article as

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first wife Theodosia Colton died in 1759, he married Jemima Devotion in 1760. They raised their four children on the Bidwell farm in Tyringham: Adonijah Jr, Barnabas, Jemima, and Theodosia. While much of the village disappeared long ago, Bidwell's legacy continues in the Bidwell House Museum in Monterey. Standing in his former home, a saltbox house built in the 1760s, the Museum holds numerous manuscripts written in his own hand – or, as this article will investigate – hands.[4]

What was Bidwell's ministry like? Other than his surviving sermon manuscripts, we have little knowledge of his career. He does not seem to have played a role in the life of the wider church, or the religious innovations of his era. There is no evidence about his views regarding the itinerant preachers who fostered the 'Great Awakening' in the 1740s, or the growth of the Episcopal Church movement in New England, or the evangelical outreach to Native Americans that occurred during his lifetime, which included the Stockbridge, Massachusetts mission just a few miles away.[5] He has not been named or considered in the works of historians. Only genealogical data,[6] his diary from the 1745 military expedition to Louisbourg, Cape Breton,[7] and his surviving manuscripts offer information and insights about the nature of his life.

Since Bidwell composed his notes in a shorthand which has not hitherto been transcribed into longhand, most of the claims about his ministry cannot be substantiated from primary sources. Until now, these shorthand manuscripts have remained undeciphered, but that has not prevented assumptions about why the shorthand was used and claims about what it might say. Wikipedia currently proclaims, without citation, that Bidwell 'often centered his sermons around freedom, penning them in a cryptographic code to disguise the language to potential readers'.[8] Another, crowd-sourced site adds, 'Reverend Bidwell's sermons often dealt with love or forgiveness, however his shorthand code is too complex to gain

'Bidwell Booklet A' and 'Bidwell Booklet B'. The first contains thirty-one pages of short-writing; the second has forty-four out of a total of fifty-six pages, some of which are blank.

4 Bidwell House Museum, 'The History of the Bidwell House', <https://www.bidwellhousemuseum.org/history/> (accessed on 14 May 2022). See also the 'Manuscripts' section below.

5 Gaustad 1966, 61–63, 112–116; Smith, Handy and Loetscher 1960, 310–315, 335.

6 Bidwell 1884, 60–61

7 Bidwell 1873.

8 Wikipedia, 'Adonijah Bidwell', <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adonijah_Bidwell> (accessed on 18 September 2021).

more than the basic feel of a sermon'.[9] As we shall discover, both of these conclusions are false.

Such vivid assessments of Bidwell's ministry derive from mistaken assumptions about his use of shorthand – presumed to be safeguarding his thoughts from prying eyes. In actually reading the shorthand notes, however, it appears that Bidwell's use of shorthand was not motivated by a desire for secrecy. Quite the contrary, in fact. Except for some pages of random brief notes, the surviving Bidwell manuscripts are longer treatises of several pages which are labelled with scripture references and dates. They are thus unlike many instances of shorthand as used by his contemporaries, being entries in commonplace books, which contain records of various readings in memorable snippets, as resources for possible use. Bidwell's manuscripts, by and large, are texts for sermons, perhaps used by Bidwell on the pulpit as he delivered his sermons.[10]

1 Bidwell's two short-writing systems

There are two distinctive systems of short-writing in the manuscripts left by Adonijah Bidwell. It is possible to read both.

1.1 The first system

The first is a code-based system in which symbols stand for complete words. Only frequent words were so treated, and a list of those terms can shed light on the vocabulary of a clergyman of that time. A pictogram of a heart stood for that same word. A cursive capital 'D' represented 'death', and a lower case 'b' stood for 'body'. One symbol stood for 'heaven' – and written upside down, for 'hell'. Another stood for 'judgement', and written backwards, for 'righteousness'. Bidwell devised others, for 'angel', 'man', 'power', 'Satan', and dozens more. These meanings have been established through much trial and error.

In a practice he shared with others of his era, he made use of abbreviations of the final letters of common pronouns, including 're' meaning 'there', 'ey' for 'they', and 'ir' for 'their'. Some of his code deployed Latin: '*ei*' meant 'to him', '*sine*' meant 'without', '*ubi*' meant 'where', and a block capital 'D' meant '*Dominus*', for 'Lord'.

9 Fandom Military Wiki site, 'Adonijah Bidwell', <https://military.wikia.org/wiki/Adonijah_Bidwell> (accessed on 24 September 2021).

10 For the role of commonplace books, see Sharpe 2000 and Darnton 2000.

And some symbols were based on Greek: a Greek letter *theta* stood for '*theos*' (for 'God'); a 'P' written as a squared box with descending line represented 'spirit', most likely standing for on the Greek '*psyche*', or 'soul'; a *nu* or *v*, for instance, stood for '*nomos*', or 'law'; and an *alpha* surmounted by an aspiration mark stood for '*hamartia*', or 'sin'. Bidwell may have taken pride in the distinctive status that knowing Greek and Latin gave him in the Tyringham community.

Fig. 1 shows a typical example of part of a Bidwell manuscript using his first code, followed by a transcription (in this and subsequent transcriptions, the meanings of the symbols are indicated by **bold** letters. Missing letters are indicated by *italics*, as are words in Latin):

> **angels** fell Rev 12, 4 – Some suppose y^t about y^e same
> numb*er* of y^e race human were elected as fell **angels** &
> those to fill y^e seats & vacancy y^t was made in **heaven**
> – but certain 'tis *th*ere were many of *th*em, legion; **Mark**
> 5,9=13. if not multitudes of *th*em how could *th*ey alway
> be present with every individual person in **earth**
> what person upon y^e face **earth** is not attended & followd
> by a tempt*ing* **devil** *ubi* [where] ever he goes, and somet*imes* swarms
> of *th*em Mary Magdalene had 7 – **Mark** 16, 9 /. **when Jesus** was [...][11]
> if so *th*ere must be vast numbers of *th*em *th*ey are fi-
> nite spirits cant be in 2 distant places *eodem tempere* [at the same time].[12]

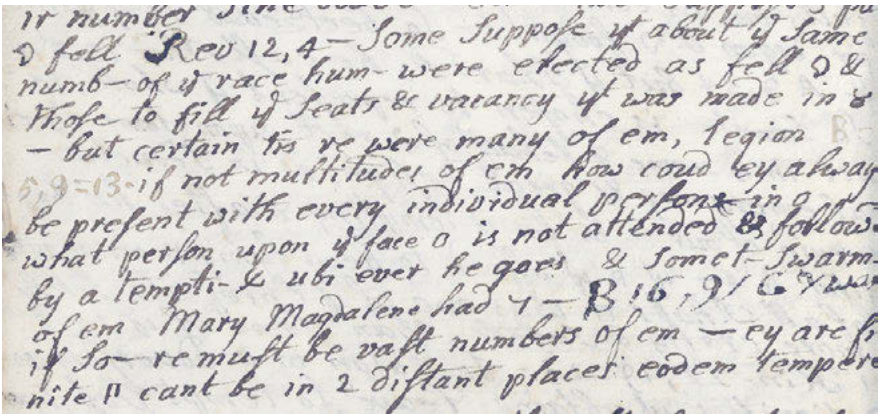

Fig. 1: Bidwell Booklet A, 14.

11 The biblical reference to Mark 16:9, and possibly 5:9–13, seem to have been added at a subsequent date in his later cipher.

12 Bidwell Booklet A, 14.

In this manuscript, the symbols for 'angels', 'heaven', 'devil', and 'spirits' are readily visible, as well as abbreviations for common pronouns. The handwriting is clear, even if his message is not, because Bidwell spelled out most words in full. The resulting combination of a limited number of symbols amid many complete words makes this first code easier to read than the shorthand that Bidwell developed later in his life.

1.2 The second system

For some unknown reason, at some point in the 1750s Bidwell changed most of his symbols dramatically from his earlier code to his later cipher. A short-writing cipher strings together the sounds of a word in sequence, which enables the shorthand user to write anything. It is much more adaptable than using a single symbol for every word. However, it is much more difficult to unravel. Short-writing systems relied upon simple characters for consonants, around which the vowels were indicated at specific points. The letter 'a' might be represented by a point at the top of the initial letter (12 o'clock), and then in descending order on the right of the letter, 'e', 'i' (at 3 o'clock), 'o', and 'u' (at 6 o'clock – the bottom). The subsequent consonant, connected at that point, would thus create a syllable.

The abbreviated form of writing that resulted had been particularly commended to ministers like Bidwell, long before his time. Henry Dix wrote in his 1633 *A New Art of Brachygraphy*, 'bee very perfect in the practice of this Art, before you beginne to write sermons'.[13] The appeal of shorthand to Bidwell was probably not because such systems were 'speedie', to borrow a word from the title page of Thomas Shelton's 1650 *Zeiglographia*. While some clergy may have listened to and made notes of what others said, Bidwell's notes seem not to be from oral presentations. At the top of the first pages of his sermon manuscripts, Bidwell listed the biblical text and the various years he gave that sermon – never the names of a speaker or source. Rather, short-writing saved paper, and that was a necessary commodity for the minister, and a valuable one, especially on the frontier.[14] On occasion, Bidwell even jotted his notes on the empty backs of printed pages, such as a legal form or Yale graduation list.[15] As Shelton remarked in his

13 Dix 1633, 57.

14 McCay 2021, 22: '[T]he emphasis on writing a lot of text on very little paper' was a major selling point for short-writing until the end of the seventeenth century.

15 Bidwell Booklet A, 2 and 35; Booklet B, 21, 22, 24, 55, 56.

famous *Tachygraphy*, by using shorthand 'as much may be written in one Page, as otherwise in six, and as much in the Margin as the Page'.[16]

Bidwell had a bewildering array of shorthand alphabets to choose from. In the 1870s, William P. Upham catalogued twenty-six distinct shorthand alphabets developed just between 1602 and 1753, and thus available to Bidwell.[17] Fig. 2 shows the first twenty-four.

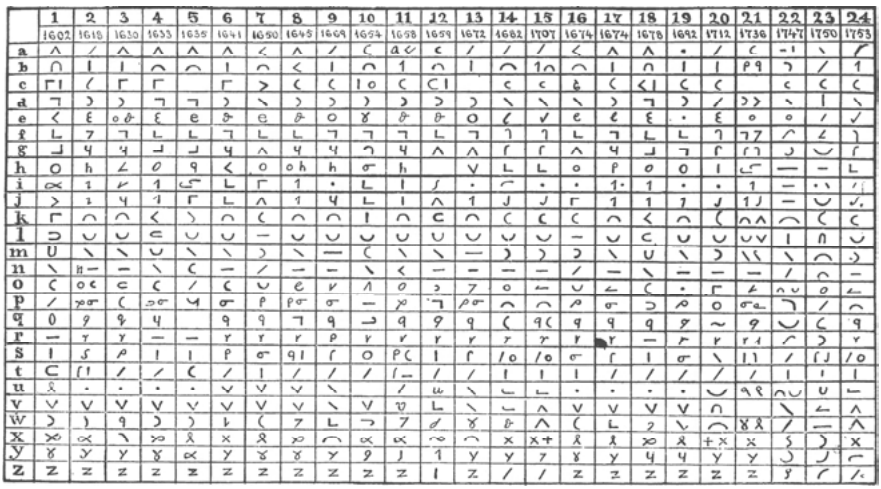

Fig. 2: Alphabet comparison table from Upham 1877, 46. Digitised by Google Books.

All these systems consisted of simplified alphabets, each letter of which was formed by a single stroke (or at the most, two). Variations may seem quite slight, with the same symbols frequently used for different letters in different systems. For instance, many systems used a symbol resembling a Greek majuscule *lambda* to represent a particular letter. In nine of them it represented the letter 'a'. But others used the symbol for 'g' or 'j' (the same sound), 'o', or 'w'. In seventeen systems a straight up-and-down line stood for 't', while in ten that symbol indicated 'b', and, in others, 'd' or 'j'. Anyone who used a system simply had to know what the character indicated in that system's alphabet.

Most of Bidwell's later writing consists of a combination of longhand words, many of them abbreviated, and a little short-writing. Some early modern stenog-

16 Shelton 1635, sig. A2^{v}. I am indebted to Kelly Minot McCay for this reference.

17 Upham 1877, 46–47.

raphers criticised such a hybrid approach. As Thomas Heath put it in 1644, mixing shorthand and longhand 'will be ridiculous'.[18] But it certainly worked for Bidwell!

When approaching the task of transcribing Bidwell's second cipher, I was able to decode some but by no means all of Bidwell's hybrid of English longhand and stenographic notes. Next, I identified a brief sequence of words which stood out as quite atypical for Bidwell. I subjected this phrase to an internet search, which often resulted in hundreds of examples of the distinctive phrase. When all results pointed to one published work, I readily discovered the printed source on which Bidwell's written text was based. The initial letters (and everything else in Bidwell's notes) could now be deciphered. When those letters were then compared with Upham's chart, I identified the specific code. It soon became clear that Bidwell's 'cryptographic code' was a relatively straightforward version of Thomas Shelton's second printed system, his Zeiglographia, published in 1650. This cipher was much later and totally different from his better known Tachygraphy – as used by notable figures in England such as the naval official and diarist Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) and Bishop William Lloyd (1627–1713). The alphabet from Shelton's published explanation can be seen in Fig. 3.

Some words in Bidwell's manuscripts are written fully in this system, and he used Shelton's characters for many, though not all, of the biblical books. Generally, however, Bidwell wrote only the opening letter of a word. Just as he had previously used a Greek '*theta*' to represent the Greek word '*theos*', Bidwell now used a *lambda*-like symbol – Zeiglographia's 'g' – for the word 'God'. As many as twenty other Zeiglographia characters served as first-letter indicators. By this abbreviation system, one symbol could stand for multiple words. The 'Pr' symbol, for example, followed by a dash, could mean 'Proverbs', or 'prince', or 'principle', or 'providence', or 'profit', or 'proof'. A symbol resembling the numeral '6' stood for many words beginning with 'wh' – such as 'who', 'which', 'what', 'why', or 'when'– depending on context. The character for 'm' represented 'man', 'men', 'make', 'may', 'more', 'means', etc. A character resembling the letter 'b' represented words beginning with 'th', such as 'thing', 'think', 'these', 'those', 'this', and so forth. Only the context would clarify the intended word. With enough context, however, the script is not onerously difficult to decipher. Only a couple of symbols link Bidwell's first code with his later cipher: he used ampersands for 'and' in both systems, and an 's' on its side to indicate either 'happiness' or 'obedience'.

18 Heath 1644, 9. Thanks to Kelly Minot McCay for this reference.

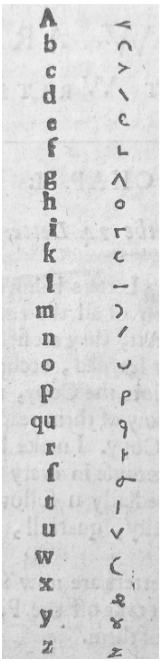

Fig. 3: The twenty-four letter alphabet of Shelton's *Zeiglographia* (1650). New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Shorthand 41 Sh5 1650, 2. Photo by Kelly Minot McCay.

Fig. 4 shows some of those initial symbols:

ADONIJAH BIDWELL SHORT-WRITING SYMBOLS
WORDS IDENTIFIED BY INITIAL SOUNDS OR LETTERS (1750–)

A		Acts, according, actions, actuate	K		Kings, know, knowledge
AF		affliction, affection	L		lapsed
B		blessed, body, believe	M		man, may, make, means, more
C+R		Corinthians, creator	O		of, our, own
CO		conscience, council	P		Peter, Paul, power
F		for, favour, flow	PL		please, place
FR		from, friend, free	PR		Proverbs, prince, principle, providence, proof
GR		grace, great, granted	R		Revelation, righteous, religion
H		Hebrews, honour	S		saviour, said
I		iniquity, ignorance	TH		thing, think, these, those, this
J		Jeremiah, judges, judgment	WH		why, when, what, who, wish, with

Fig. 4: Selected short-writing symbols used by Bidwell.

A page from the conclusions or 'Applications' which would have been offered towards the end of a sermon is shown in Fig. 5.

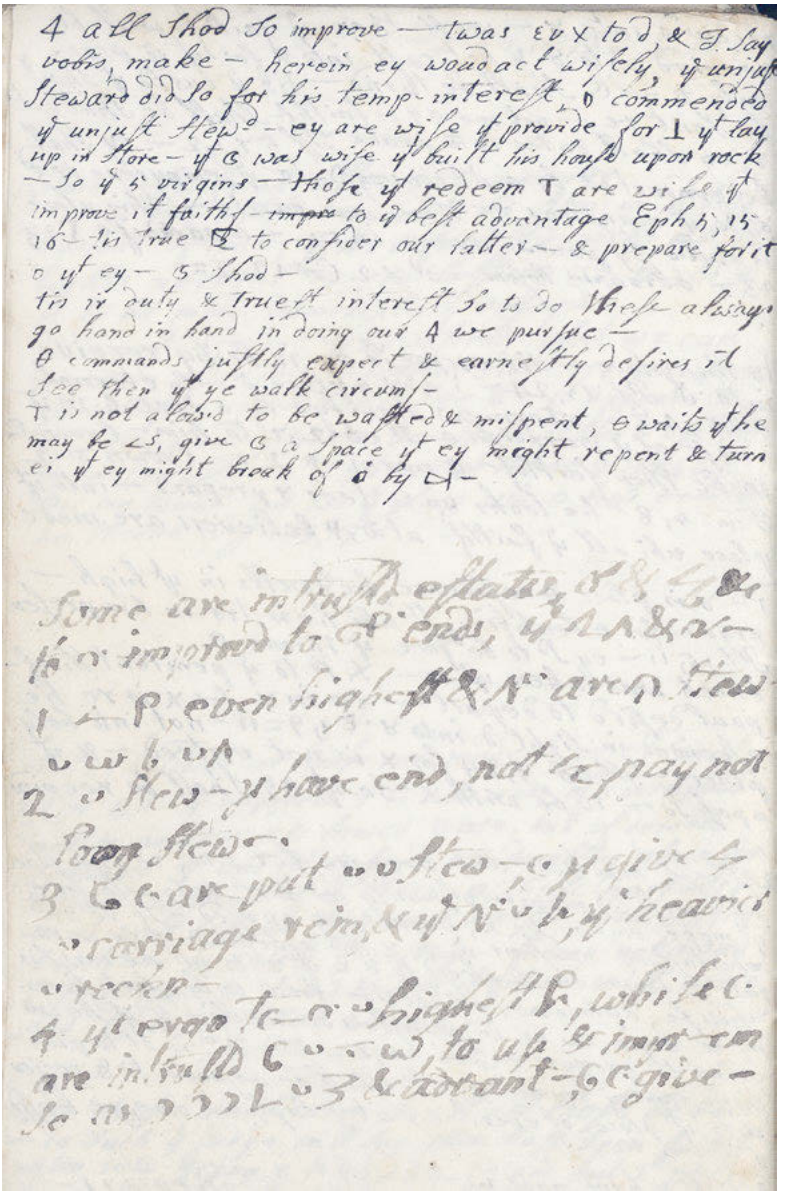

Fig. 5: Bidwell Booklet B, 52.

In this specific case, Bidwell used both the earlier code and the later cipher on the same page. The subject, in both cases, is responsible stewardship. In his earlier hand Bidwell wrote, 'herein *th*ey woud act wisely, y^{e} unjust steward did so for his temp*oral* interest, **he** commended y^{e} unjust stew*ar*d – *th*ey are wise y^{t} provide for **future** y^{t} lay up in store – '. In his later hand he wrote, '1 **all people**, even highest & **greatest** are **but** stew*ards* **of good things of God**'.

Assuming that the slanted, scratchier, darker, and generally briefer sections in his manuscripts betray a more mature hand (compared with the careful, lighter handwriting of so many other pages), we may identify the heavier notes as later thoughts inserted into his manuscripts.

In any case, his second method, in his later hand, looked like the example in Fig. 6.

> hatred, pride, self-**love** …
> inimical & injur*ious* to us *Venenum [Serpentis Diabolici* [poison of a diabolical serpent]*]*
> sting & poison, **soul** & **spirit** of Apost*ate* nature.
> Obj*ection* 2: **Christian's duty** disco*vered* i.e., not to yield **but** resist
> & oppose, **we must** eith*er* resist or **be** taken captive –
> nev*er* get rid **of him but** by resist*ing*; if **we** parley & treat
> **we must** expect to **be** triumphd over & trampled –

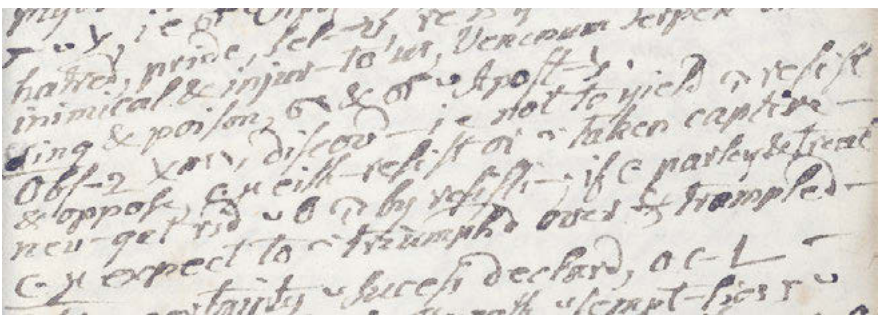

Fig. 6: Bidwell Booklet A, 19.

Symbols for 'soul,' 'spirit', 'of', 'duty', 'but', 'we', 'must', and 'be' are all squeezed into this segment.

The alterations Bidwell made to Shelton's system offer a prime example of one important fact about short-writing: each user was free to adapt any shorthand system to their own needs. As an eighteenth-century stenographer (who in turn was referring to John Locke's views about shorthand) put it: 'remember that in this (as every other) Short-hand, a Liberty is allowed you of varying the Charac-

ters, to suit it more to the Business you would employ it in.'[19] Rarely, it seems, did writers follow a system without enhancing it, honing it, amending it, simplifying it, reshaping it to fit their own circumstances. Each practitioner's shorthand is unique, and each manuscript presents its own challenges. Moreover, Bidwell demonstrates that a single writer might cycle through a number of different cipher-cum-shorthand systems over a lifetime, so that even the manuscripts of a single writer might require multiple rounds of decipherment to read.

2 Bidwell's messages

As noted in the Introduction, it has been supposed that 'freedom' was a major motif in Bidwell's preaching. But his surviving manuscripts contain very little on that subject. Far from being a central theme, 'freedom' as a word occurs only in one sermon, referring to the human 'freedom' to choose sin, and the word 'freed' or 'free' (in the sense of 'free from sin' or 'free grace') occurs in only six sermons.[20] The two times the word 'liberty' occurs it seems to mean 'license' or 'individual irresponsibility'.

Furthermore, Bidwell's language is not notable for talking about 'love' or 'forgiveness'. Instead, it is rife with references to conflict. He spoke often of rebellion against God. He spoke of sin and judgement and condemnation and destruction. He was worried about guilt – not only guilt over one's own sins, but guilt for partaking in the sin of others. He was concerned with human frailties in the face of Satan's underhanded deceptions. He was keen on battling the unseen forces of evil which cruelly beset God's people. He parsed the ranks of the fallen angels, the devil's minions. His messages are chock-full of death, a subject that surfaces in well over half of the deciphered pages.

Bidwell's texts were generally derived from the New Testament. Of the seventeen more or less complete sermons among his manuscripts, six are linked with Old Testament texts, four with Psalms, four with synoptic Gospels – none with the Gospel of John – and six with New Testament Epistles.[21] Bidwell presented his hearers with lively images to help them to see the unseen. He urged them to

19 Gibbs 1736, 60. I am indebted to Timothy Underhill for this reference.

20 In addition to the thirty-one pages in Bidwell Booklet A and forty-four pages in Bidwell Booklet B, this is based on thirty-four pages of manuscript sermons at the Bidwell House Museum on Daniel 5:23 (1769); Isaiah 48:18 (1777); Matthew 5:3 (1759); Galatians 4:19 (*s.a.*); James 4:6 (1759, 1761, 1783); 1 Peter 3:15 (*s.a.*); 2 Peter 2:9 (*s.a.*); and 2 Thessalonians 1:12 (1753).

21 Several are linked with more than one text.

glimpse the snares and pitfalls all about them in their hilltop village. In Monterey, he preached in what has been called 'a cheerless building, situated in a very bleak place'.[22] His congregation was comprised of struggling farmers on a site so unpromising – maybe harassed by demons! – that by the 1840s the population moved to a valley a little farther to the south.[23]

In Bidwell Booklet A, eleven pages deal with a perennial theme, keeping the Sabbath (24–34). Eight other pages are devoted to the cosmic conflict between angels and devils, good and evil, heaven and hell (13–17). Four pages could be labelled 'Tis a melancholy thought', a refrain repeated throughout; the subject is death (3–6). Bidwell Booklet B has at least ten pages on the fall of mankind (27–36), and a like amount on being stewards (39–44, 46–48, 52), and seven or so on repentance and renewal (3–10).

It is impossible, of course, to know whether Bidwell delivered his manuscript notes word for word as sermons, or if he freely expanded upon them in the pulpit. But they seem to offer at least the gist of his ideas. On that assumption we can say that Bidwell lived in a world of vivid dangers. He saw hazards on all sides. His messages were laden with frightening images. 'There are **evil spirits**, **devils** or fallen **angels**', Bidwell warned his congregation in a carefully composed manuscript in his earlier hand.[24] His concluding 'Applications' for the same sermon began:

> Applic*ation*
> 1 – of awakening & reproof *iis* ['to those'] y^{t} expose *th*ems*elves* to
> be ruind & destroyd by **evil angels** & will not harken to
> y^{e} voice of those y^{t} warn *th*em of *th*eir danger. **God** has
> appointed some to be watchman, to discry danger
> & give warni*ng* Eze 3,17 = 19 – *th*ey are Messeng*ers*
> Some *th*ere are y^{t} run into danger & exposu*re* & when
> warned – are so impudent & hard hearted as not
> to take notice Eze 3,7 but y^{e} house of Israel
> will not hearken unto thee; for *th*ey will not –
> like those prov*erbs* 1,22 y^{t} delight in scorning
> & hate **God**, y^{t} will not turn at **God's** reproof
> when **God** calls *th*ey refuse, when he streach
> out his hand *th*ey dont regard, but set at
> nought ^ his counsels – but like y^{e} deaf adder
> -Ps 58,4 – but what is sd *de* ['concerning'] *th*em y^{t} turn not
> at reproof – why **God** will laugh –

22 Holland 1855, 599.

23 Holland 1855, 600, reports that the Rev. Lucius Field, dismissed in 1836, complained 'of the unfavourable location of the meeting house'.

24 Bidwell Booklet A, 14.

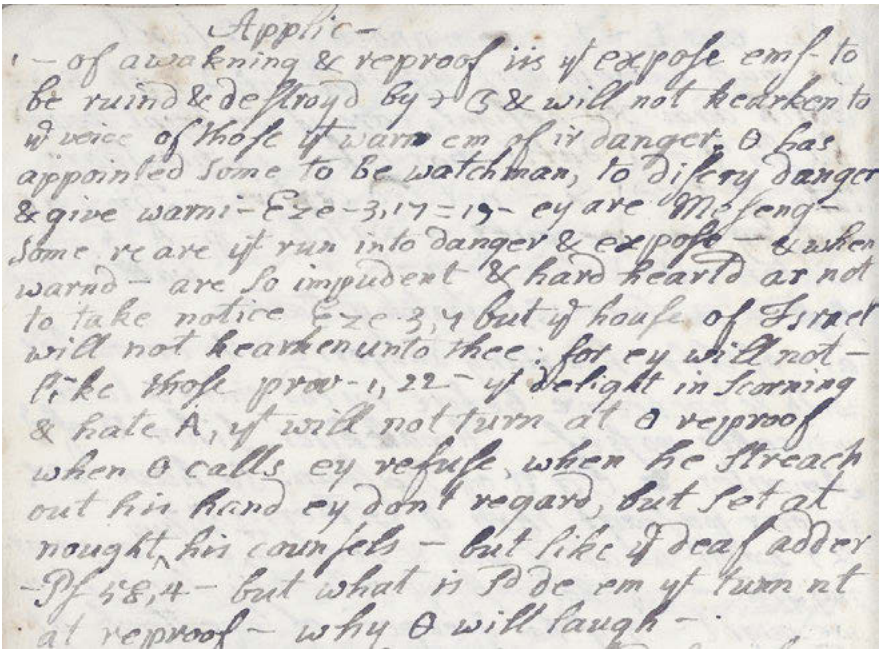

Fig. 7: Bidwell Booklet A, 22.

However, many of Bidwell's notes present a perplexing phenomenon: while it appears that the material in his earlier notes was original to him, in the manuscripts written in his more mature hand, using his later cipher, he borrowed liberally from others. His writing reproduced whole swathes of commentary from several notable religious writers and biblical scholars of prior generations. Bidwell sometimes followed a text for several pages. He copied from Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Matthew Poole's *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*, William Burkitt's *Expository Notes*, Samuel Clarke's *Sermons on the Following Subjects*, Matthew Henry's *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, Isaac Watts's *The Doctrine of the Passions Explain'd and Improv'd*, Samuel Clarke's *Works, Containing Sermons on Several Subjects*, and Isaac Watts's then relatively recent *Sermons, Discourses and Essays, on Various Subjects*.[25] There may have been others as well. It is noteworthy that these authors were all from an older generation. Henry Scougal died in 1678, Matthew Poole in 1679, and William Bur-

25 Scougal 1677; Poole 1683; Burkitt 1703; Clarke 1731; Henry 1737–1738; Watts [1729?]; Clarke 1738; Watts 1753. Bidwell may have used later editions of these.

kitt in 1703. Matthew Henry died in 1714, two years before Bidwell was born. Samuel Clarke died in 1729. Only Isaac Watts, who died in 1748 – two years before Bidwell came to Monterey – was close to contemporary. Bidwell does not seem to have read more current authors. At least four out of six books which Bidwell echoes were published or reprinted in the late 1730s, when he was in college.

The fact that all his sources were from an earlier era suggests that, among his contemporaries, Bidwell belonged to the traditionalist 'Old Light' school, not the more emotional and evangelistic 'New Light' school that sparked the Great Awakening. 'Old Lights' relied on intellect and reasoning. As traditionalists, they believed in arguing logically by constructing syllogisms in which the major premise (opening claim) was never supposed to be debatable, but rather so self-evident it had to be accepted.[26] They distrusted feelings or enthusiasm. This was Bidwell's practice: 'New Light' believers, on the other hand, preferred preaching 'with much Flame, Clearness and Power', as the evangelist George Whitefield put it, to encourage heartfelt personal commitment.[27] They believed that everyone can have a direct, emotional connection with God. Their movement was marked by belief in 'the bodily presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, continued revelation', and 'dramatic visionary phenomenon'.[28] The controversy between 'Old' and 'New Lights' deeply divided New England churches, and led to the creation of 'Separate' or 'Strict' congregations as people withdrew from the historic 'Old Light' churches.[29] Bidwell seems to have confirmed his allegiance to the 'Old Light' school in a sermon on Galatians 4:19, by echoing Henry Scougal on the limits of religious experience:

> 3 moving **affections**, rapturous beats, ex-
> tatic devotion, pray*ing* **with** pasion,
> thinking heaven with pleasure, being affected with kind &
> melt*ing* expressi*ons* with **which** *th*ey court
> *the*ir **Savior**
> **these** are resembl*ances* of piety & **means of** obtain*ing*
> it, **but** not whole **religion**.

26 Powers 2017, 22–23.

27 Ahlstrom 1975, 350.

28 Winiarski 2017, 16–17.

29 Winiarski 2017, 377: 'Throughout New England, hundreds of zealous new converts leapt out of the sacred enclosures that had safely corralled religious life in the puritan commonwealths for a century, while thousands more refused to affiliate with churches of the standing order.' See also Winiarksi, 2017, 364, 386–387.

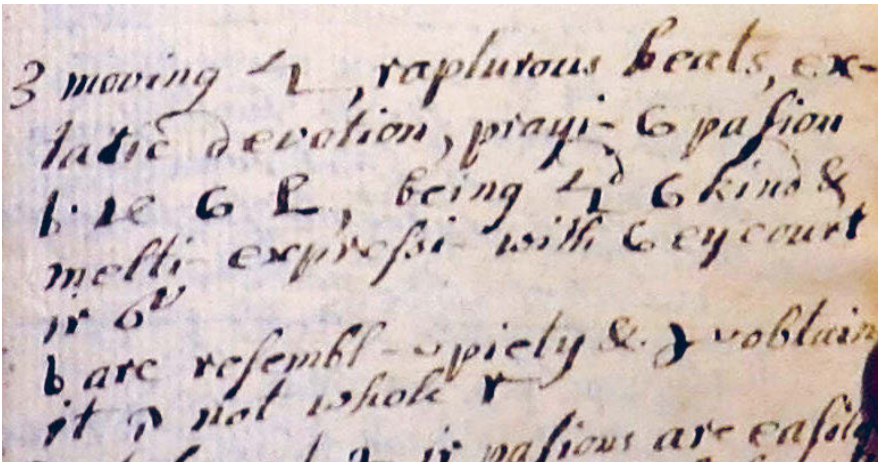

Fig. 8: Bidwell House Museum, sermon manuscript (uncatalogued).

None of the sources he used would have been familiar to any of his auditors. Still, he never acknowledged the material he reused, not even parenthetically, and not even privately in cipher. And he never offered any citations.

A sermon on pride offers a good example of his unattributed, copied notes. Fig. 9 shows the first page of Bidwell's manuscript sermon on James 4:6, dated at the outset 1759, and subsequently 1761, 1783, the other years in which it was preached (except for notes on sermons in his earlier ministry, where he sometimes mentioned the place, Bidwell gave only the years for his sermons). By juxtaposing a transcription of it with the relevant text from William Burkitt's *Expository Notes*, Bidwell's close reliance on a print source for his own preaching notes is clearly demonstrated:

1759 1761 1783
James 4,6 – **Job** 33,17 **Romans** 1,30 – proud

Envy censured, V*erse* 5 here **sin of** pride is
condemned, **God** resisteth – a milit*ary* term;
& imports y^{t} **God** sets self as in battle
array – **in** direct oppos*ing* **him**
who will set briers **Isaiah** 27,4 fury –
*the*re is no sort **sin which God** sets self **against** so **much**
to punish & plague – as proud **sins**, *th*ey
resemble **devilish sins**. Such are wholy **of God's**
fav*or*, beh*olds th*em afar off;
& *th*ey are subj*ect* **of his** high displeas*ure*

like unarmed **men in** an army, stand ex-
posd to **wrath**, no shelter, nothi*ng* to
keep **off** threateni*ng* **from** *th*em: no shelter
from div*ine* **wrath but in** div*ine* **love**;
*ther*e are two emin*ent* **works of** div*ine* **providence in world**
one is to lift up & exalt humble
other, to abase & pull down proud.
some pride *th*ems*elves* in **natural power**, acquired **power**]
– moral virtues, gospel graces, holy duties, spiritual per-
formanc*e*, **think** too **well of** *th*ems*elves* **because** *th*ey **do well**.
Inde ['hence'] learn y^{t} pride is comm*on* **sin** & ve-
ry provoki*ng* **sin**, & **this** needs **be** so **because** an
usurpat*ion* **place** & **power God** & sets itself
against all commandments & threatn*ings* God. God resists
but gives **grace** – i.e. 1 fav*or*, humble
have y^{e} **love but** proud y^{e} frowns **God**.
2 – i.e. **more** grace, furt*her* meas*ure* **grace** to humb*le*
richest wine – So **God** lodges choicest
grace in humb*le* & lowly **hearts**, not only **grace but**
more grace – to low **in** *the*ir **own** eyes, *th*ey are und*er*
spec*ial* protect*ion* & **also** direct*ion* **most** high **God**.

The Sin of Envy being censured before, our Apostle next condemns the Sin of Pride; he uses a Military Term when he tells us that *God resisteth the Proud*; it *signifies*, that he sets himself as in Battel Array against the Proud, in a direct Opposition to him; there are no sort of Sinners whom God sets himself so much against to Punish and Plague as proud Sinners: such are wholly out of his Favour, he beholdeth them afar off, and they are the Subjects of his high Displeasure; like naked Men in an Army they stand exposed to his Wrath; they have no Shelter, nothing to keep off the Threatning from them; for there can be no Shelter from Divine Wrath but in Divine Love: There are Two Eminent Works of Divine Providence in the World, the one is to lift up and exalt the Humble, the other is to abase and pull down the Proud; some Pride themselves in their Natural Parts, others in their Acquired Parts; some in their Moral Virtues, and Evangelical Graces, others in their Holy Duties, and Spiritual Performances; we seldom do well, but we think too well of our selves. *Learn* hence, That Pride is a common Sin, and provoking, yea, a very provoking Sin; and so must needs be, because it is an Usurpation of the Place and Power of God, and sets itself against all the Commands and Threatnings of God; *God resisteth the Proud, but he giveth Grace to the Humble. Grace*, that is, (1.) Favour: the Humble shall have his Favour, and the Proud his Frowns. (2.) God giveth Grace, that is, more Grace, further Measures of Grace, to the Humble; as we lay up our richest Wines in the lowest Cellars, so does God lodge his choicest Graces in humble and lowly Hearts; he giveth not only Grace, but more Grace, to the Humble; such as are low in their own Eyes, are under the special Protection and Direction also of the most High God.[30]

30 Burkitt 1703, sig. Xxxxx^{r}.

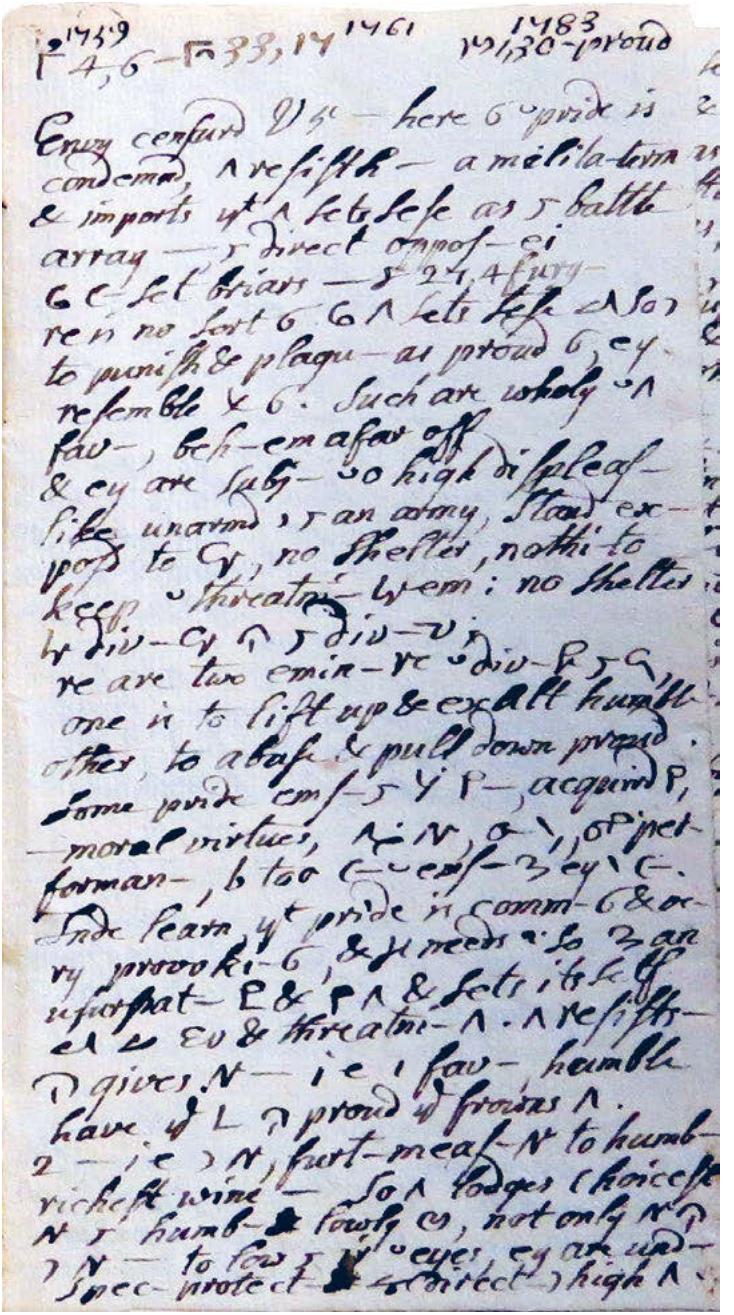

Fig. 9: Bidwell House Museum, sermon manuscript (uncatalogued).

Carrying handwritten notes into the pulpit was simpler than carrying the original books from which he could have read aloud (which, in the case of Burkitt's *Expository Notes,* would have been extremely bulky).

Any reputation Bidwell might have had as an original thinker becomes problematic, thanks to the ability to read shorthand of two and a half centuries ago. His sermons can now be analysed, leaving his status less distinctive than modern claims about him have supposed. Who knows what other myths may collapse, what other assumptions may fall, what other reputations may come into question, as a result of reading short-writing from bygone eras?

3 A third code?

In Bidwell's case there may be a silver lining to what later generations may think was a potential cloud over his reputation. Bidwell's sermons always dealt with scriptural themes. He did not 'preach revolution', so to speak. Hence he never directly endorsed anything secular, such as Revolutionary slogans, government, events, soldiers, crowds. But just as the authors he read and copied from made use of figurative and symbolic language, so I think he did too.

One snippet in Bidwell's more mature hand is most likely of his own composition because it is enumerated, in keeping with his customary usage. On a page marked '1777' he continued his focus on evil: '1 **we may** consid*er* [?] **devil**, Satan, **devil** serpent, old serp*ent*, dragon, the **great** dragon, accus*er* **Revelation** 12, 9, 10, 12=17–20, 2, 3'.[31] But most material in his later hand is copied. A good example is on a page dated 1754 and 1775. Concerning the sermon's text, the repeated references to this verse in Bidwell's manuscripts suggest that it was a favourite of his: 1 Peter 5:8 – 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour'. This threatening image occurs in at least three of Bidwell's transcribed sermons. Whatever his meaning in 1754, it is very possible that the significance in 1775 had to do with the dangerous, conflicted atmosphere of that time, with revolutionary warfare raging on both sides of western Massachusetts, in Boston and New York state. Immediately after indicating the date for his material, he copied a section from William Burkitt's *Expository Notes* on the verse, which includes stirring language about 'your adversary':

31 Bidwell Booklet A, 9.

> Note how every **word** contains a spec*ial* **encouragement** to **Christian**
> watchf*ulness*; Your adversary **who will do** you **all** mischi*ef*,
> **he** is the **devil**, an accuser, one y^{t} seeks all ad-
> vantages **against** you. **He** is cruel adversa*ry*, a
> lion, yea, roar*ing* lion w^{h} adds terror to cru*elty*,
> restl*ess* adv*ersary* **who seeks he may** devour, **for** y^{ts} y^{e} bate
> **he** gapes **for**. it grieves **devils these** apost*ate* **angels**...[32]

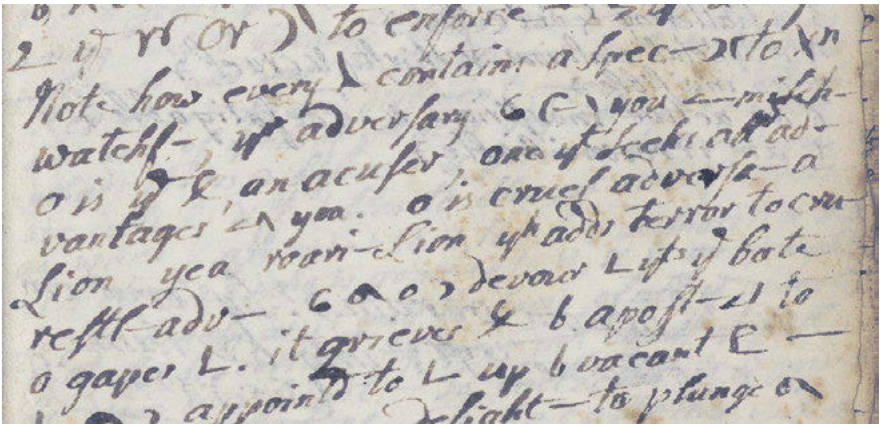

Fig. 10: Bidwell Booklet A, 11.

'[T]he way to over*come* **him** is by resist*ing*, not by yield*ing*', said Bidwell. 'He is cowardly & conq'd **enemy** resist **him** & he will run'. He further remarks on James 4:7, in notes that were for another sermon (borrowing from Matthew Poole's *Annotations*), 'You can't **be** conquered so long as you **do** not consent'.[33] In what is most likely still another sermon he echoed Burkitt again, saying,

> ... duct Providence, to whole law & will God, let all y*our* thoughts, affections, words & actions
> be guidd according to strict rules word God; but resist devil, by no means
> submit or yield – ; only way to over*come* **devil** is by not
> yield*ing ei*, **but** by resist*ing* & oppos*ing* him; **devil** is both a
> conq*uer*ed & cowardly **enemy**, tho bold face, yet faint **heart**
> resist him & he will flee –

32 Isaac Segal, Cherry Hill, New Jersey, points out that the lion was the well-known symbol of British power. Personal communication to author, 27 April 2022.

33 Bidwell Booklet A, 11, 12.

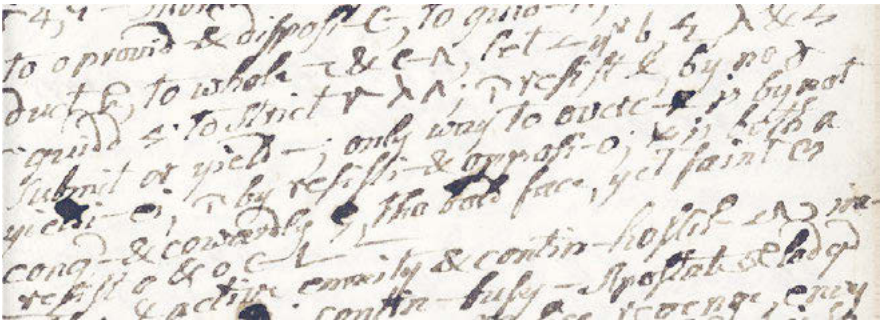

Fig. 11: Bidwell Booklet A, 19.

He repeats his advice to 'resist' on at least four pages of his manuscripts.[34]

So the issue may not be *that* Bidwell copied, but rather *what* Bidwell copied: his choices fit the tenor of the times. He selected uncompromising passages. He repeatedly chose fighting words. In addition to his other two systems, it can be posited that Bidwell developed a third code in his layered language about opposing 'your adversary'. He may have employed a semantic interplay of sorts: speaking of two things at once, where one symbolizes another. That Bidwell preached on 'the enemy' in the critical pre-revolutionary year of 1774 is noteworthy. He urged vigilance. He urged opposition. He urged resistance. Will that which applies in the spiritual world not also apply in the material world? Was the 'adversary' the devil only – or possibly also the Redcoats?

'[I] have been willing to bare my full proportion toward y^{e} extraordinary expence of y^{e} War', he wrote in a letter to the town in 1778. That included, for him, no salary (reluctantly) for four years.[35] His son, Adonijah Jr, served as a soldier on the side of the Revolution. Moreover, in 1781 he sold 450 pounds of beef for the war effort for £6 15*s*.[36] So Bidwell was a supporter of American independence, though he was impoverished by the process. Because he had not been paid for more than three years during the war, he stopped preaching, temporarily. When he presented a petition to the town, age weighed heavily on him; he was at the time 62 years old. His letter mentioned a number of grievances, including the fact that town meetings did not begin with prayer, a practice which he suggested could earn God's disapproval. He complained about

34 Bidwell Booklet A, 8, 11, 12, 19.

35 Hoogs 2020. Wikipedia, 'Adonijah Bidwell' claims that he 'gave up his salary for four years so [troops] could be paid', but he clearly did so unwillingly.

36 Hoogs 2015.

'bodily weakness', and the cold of the meeting house with its broken windows that let in the weather and prevented all but ten or twelve persons from attending. He does not seem ever to have received the back pay he sought from the town. Independence came on 3 September 1783. Adonijah Bidwell died nine months later, on 2 June 1784.

4 A notable neighbour

Bidwell was not the only minister in that area to use short-writing. One of his near neighbours was the famous Rev. Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). A premier American philosopher and theologian, as well as a leading 'New Light' figure in the Great Awakening religious revival which shook the colonies in 1730s and 1740s, Edwards also wrote shorthand, particularly in his youth. He used another of the alphabets catalogued by Upham, a system devised in 1632 by the Rev. Thomas Archisden or Arkisden (1608?–1682) in England, the home of nearly all early modern shorthand systems.[37] Not only did Edwards write in this alphabet during his youth; he also continued as an adult to identify locations where he preached his sermons with the Archisden system.[38] He left no sermon manuscripts in shorthand, however.

One curious fact remains. For more than six years, from at least July 1751 to December 1757, Edwards and Bidwell lived less than fifteen miles apart. In his exile from Northampton, Massachusetts, Jonathan Edwards, Yale College class of 1720, served the Stockbridge church and an associated Mohican Indian congregation. Adonijah Bidwell, Yale College class of 1740, served the Monterey church most of his life. But there is no record that they ever corresponded, or ever met.

37 Only ten of Edwards's characters are from Archisden; the remaining ten are similar but not identical to ones used by other shorthand systems. Archisden's system is catalogued as number 45 on Upham's list.

38 Upham 1902. See also Kimnach 1971, 208.

Manuscripts

Boston, MA, Congregational Library & Archives, MS5153: Adonijah Bidwell, sermon booklets[39]
Booklet A: 1754–1769 (containing thirty-one pages in short-writing).
Booklet B: 1757–1781 (containing forty-four pages in short-writing, out of a total of fifty-six pages, some of which are blank).
Monterey, MA, Bidwell House Museum, uncatalogued: Adonijah Bidwell, manuscript sermons.

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39 Digitised as part of the New England's Hidden Histories project, and available online at <https://congregationallibrary.quartexcollections.com/manuscript-collections/browse-the-adonijah-bidwell-sermons> (accessed on 12 May 2022).

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Shorthand and the Informed Public in Early American Politics

Abstract: Though shorthand manuscripts burst from the seams of North American archives, surprisingly little work has been done on the stenographic culture of early America. After shorthand permeated the intellectual, cultural, and religious world of the American colonies, it took on an important role in the newly formed nation. This article revises the limited discussions on early American stenographic reporters to-date. While stenographers could not avoid every suspicion of party politics or accusation of misbehaviour, most early national politicians trusted shorthand as a functional scribal technology, but one that introduced far-reaching questions about how much material an 'informed' public really needed. Today, scholars of early American politics continue to rely on the stenographic labours of early congressional reporters, without fully understanding or sometimes even acknowledging their craft.

1 Introduction

A figure stares off into an unidentifiable distance. In the backdrop, tucked away amid blotchy, green clouds, appears the Washington Capitol Building, its iconic dome jutting across the sky. There, in front, lurks the enemy, an ominous figure bent forward, ready to pounce. But against whom? The young woman, hair tied neatly in a bun, clad in professional attire, sits alert. The phantom foe reaches for his gun, but the vigilant woman her notepad. Here was a stenographer, and as the 1918 advertisement plainly explained, Washington needed her. Another woman, nearly identical in appearance, furiously types away at her steno machine. To the left, a creepy looking fellow slinks back, his sword dripping with blood and face with fear. 'The Kaiser is afraid' of stenographers. The more stenographers, the more dread. Again, Washington needed note-takers – this time five thousand of them.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111382692-006

Fig. 1: Roy Hull Still, artist, *Stenographers! Washington needs you!*, New York: Prudential Litho. Co (*c.* 1918), Washington DC, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002722567/>.

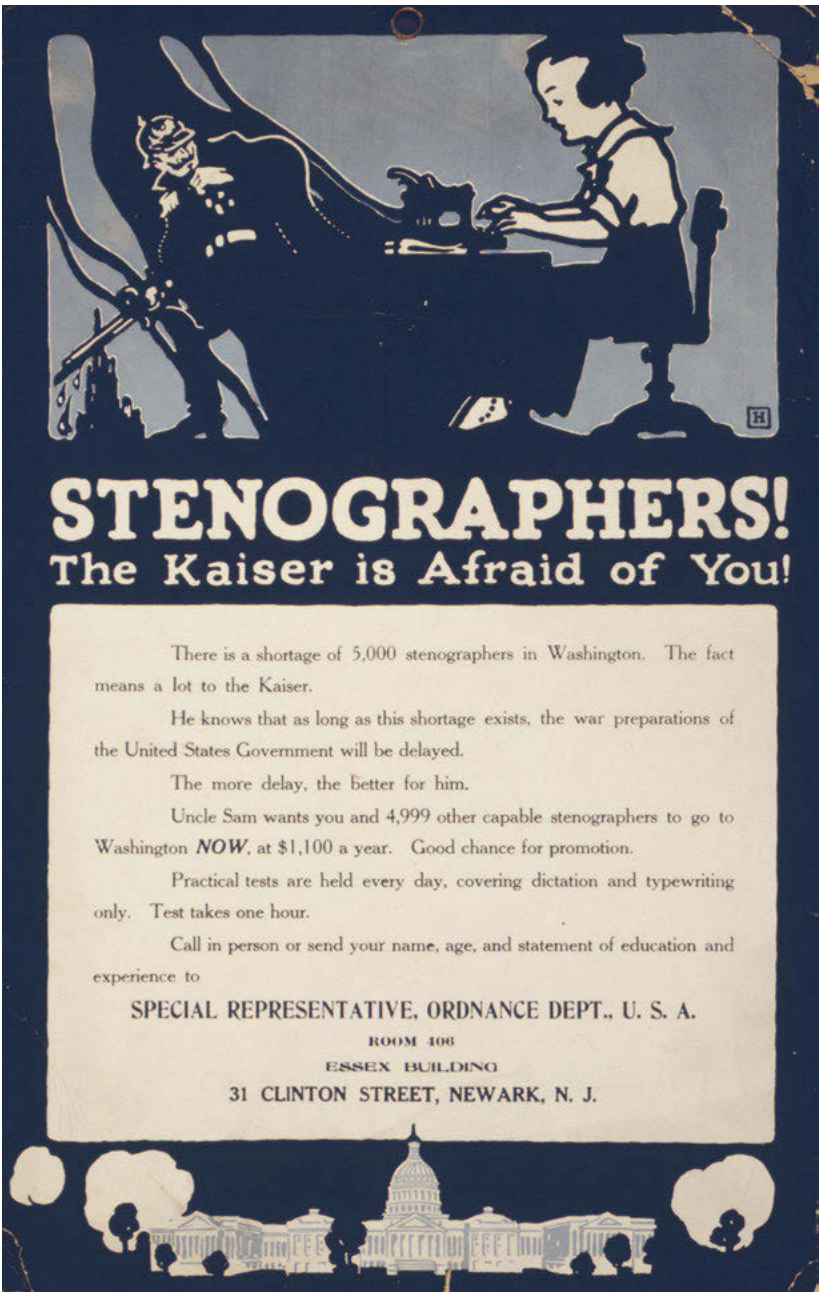

Fig. 2: *Stenographers! The Kaiser is afraid of you! There is a shortage of 5,000 stenographers* [...], United States (between 1917 and 1918), Washington DC, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/00652373/>.

Though undoubtedly melodramatic, both early-twentieth-century posters capture the air of importance stenographers throughout the long haul of shorthand's history have hoped to enjoy. Shorthand, it seems, was something more than a rote act of transcription; it was a tool for the success – indeed here, apparently, the very future – of the state. Likewise, they hinted at the stark anxiety that has often loomed over stenographers and their employers. As in any information economy, in a scribal one there were always going to be winners and losers. There was power in getting the record right, and danger in getting it wrong, or, worse yet, having no record at all. For all their apparent dignity, stenographers therefore had their discontents. Luckily, in this case, it was the Kaiser whom hordes of dexterous note-takers would foil. But was this always the case: shorthand reporters loved by their homeland and hated by their enemies? Has the reporter always garnered respect? And, for that matter, when was it that stenographers even became a staple of Washington?

Winding back the historical clock and leaving behind the world of wartime propaganda, this article traces the attitudes towards stenographers in the Early Republic, as the United States proper was just forming. Taking inspiration from political historians, and, more recently, historians of information, who have emphasised the ways that paperwork and note-taking have intersected with state formation and bureaucracy throughout the Early Modern Period, I will consider whether shorthand had a role in the documentary structures and governmental debates of the early years of the American republic.[1] Given the robust conversation about the place of an informed citizenry, it seemed logical to venture that shorthand – at its heart, a tool for information management – and its practitioners – stenographers – might crop up in the eighteenth-century record. This bland, unsalted hypothesis proved correct. But in the course of researching this subject, it has become increasingly clear that American historians have largely missed the message about stenographers and note-taking in the Early Republic.

Though it certainly holds true, as Kelly McCay recently reflected, that 'scholars have given shorthand short shrift for over a century',[2] some political and legal historians have discussed stenographers in late-eighteenth-century America.[3]

1 Soll 2009; Head 2019; Siddique 2020; Grafton et al. 2021; Lamal, Cumby and Helmers 2021.

2 McCay 2021, 2.

3 Slauter 2009, 123–166; Bilder 2012; McPherson 1944; McPherson 1946; Springer 1986; Hutson 1986; Ratteray 1973. It is worth noting that documentary editors are naturally much more attentive to the intricacies of shorthand than card-carrying historians. Unfortunately, within the historical profession itself, textual editors often do not garner the credit they deserve. Beyond issues of valorising certain scholarly works over others (for instance: textual edition < historical monograph), there is a more intractable problem. Like the famous adage about the mark of true art being its own concealment

When it comes to the founding period's political culture, it could be said that no honest early Americanist can claim absolute novelty on any topic. In the mid twentieth century, practising stenographer and researcher Marion Tinling expanded hundreds of pages of congressional shorthand notes.[4] Moreover, the documentary turn of some early Americanists in recent decades has prompted scholars to consider the papers of the 'founding fathers' as neither edicts from on high nor as simple notes that dispassionately, objectively record political debates.[5] All good so far. The limited discussions on shorthand, however, have often fixated on either lionising or demonising a sole stenographer, Thomas Lloyd, who recorded many of the first congressional debates.[6] Sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, American historians portray shorthand as a new, seemingly American product, a way of writing that struck bewilderment, awe, or even fear in the public.[7] In the Early National Period overall, apparently, shorthand could not be trusted.

This article will take the first steps towards revising this thesis. While political leaders and newspaper writers alike did sometimes grouse about the stenographer, the shorthand reporter's character was never the primary concern. In fact, judging by the congressional debates themselves, most early national politicians trusted shorthand as a functional scribal technology. After all, shorthand was not something new in the early American republic, as it had already encoded itself into the political, religious, and social culture of colonial America. Shorthand

(*ars est celare artem*), the better a documentary edition is, ironically, the easier it is for historians to ignore the herculean labours of the editor.

4 Tinling 1961. Tinling (1904–2006) worked eight years at the National Historical Publications Commission to decipher Thomas Lloyd's shorthand manuscripts. Her work formed the basis of the twenty-two-volume Johns Hopkins University Press series *The Documentary History of The First Federal Congress of the United States, March 4, 1789–March 3, 1791*, now available online at <https://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/FFCP.html>. Tinling also deciphered and edited the writings of the Byrd family of West Virginia: see Byrd 1941; Byrd 1942; Byrd 1958; and Byrd 1977. Though largely unacknowledged, Tinling's Herculean documentary labours have provided source editions invaluable to early American historians for decades.

5 Bilder 2015; Siddique 2021.

6 Tinling 1961; Slauter 2009, 123–166.

7 Eric Slauter, for instance, acknowledges the seventeenth-century popularity of shorthand, but highlights the eighteenth century as the time when manuals really took off, thereby short-circuiting the long-standing scribal context of shorthand in early America: 'Shorthand transcription was one of the great arts of eighteenth-century culture. While seventeenth-century English authors and publishers issued dozens of shorthand manuals, the number of self-help guides to what was variously called "tachygraphy", "brachygraphy", and "stenography" proliferated in the late eighteenth century' (Slauter 2009, 149). On practices of journalism, Hewa 2021 completely ignores the colonial American or early modern practices of stenographic reporting.

caused concern in so far as it served as a proxy for far deeper questions and far more nagging anxieties. The spectre of the stenographer forced delegates to balance the promise of creating an informed public against the economics or even the desire to publish an official record. Furthermore, as party politics increased over the course of the Early National Period, the shorthand reporter became a locus of anger over how the documentary record could favour the majority over the minority. Stenographers therefore became guilty by association. As a whole, however, shorthand's relationship with politics was more cordial than confrontational.

2 Scribal context and culture

Before we arrive at the first congresses in the early American republic, some background seems fitting.[8] By contextualising shorthand in the early modern world, we can appreciate the fact that stenography was by no means a new technology in late-eighteenth-century America, nor was the stenographer a new creature that inspired awe or invoked fear out of its sheer novelty. Indeed, forms of shorthand date back to antiquity, and run through at least Greece, Rome, and Byzantium.[9] Tironian notes (dubbed after Marcus Tullius Tiro, Cicero's slave and amanuensis) remained popular throughout the Middle Ages and medieval period.[10] But it was the late sixteenth century and in England in particular where shorthand had its renaissance.[11] In 1588, Dr Timothy Bright introduced a type of proto-shorthand called *characterie*.[12] Through a series of arbitrarily assigned symbols that could be adapted under certain prefixed rules, Bright promised English men and women a means by which 'a swifte hande may therewith write Orations, or publike actions of speach, uttered as becommeth the grauitie of such actions, *verbatim*.'[13] Bright's system was not without its difficulties; like mastering Manda-

8 In contextualising shorthand, I draw here from some of my previous work on practices of student shorthand in colonial New England.

9 Parkes 1991, 19–34; Boge 1975; Teitler 1985; Nordenfalk 1939; Haines 2014.

10 Daniels 1996, 807–880; Ganz 1990, 35–51.

11 McCay 2021.

12 Though brief, a rich descriptive bibliography of Bright's printed works can be found in Keynes 1962. A discussion of a manuscript handbook of Bright's on secret writing is contained in Carlton 1964, and more broadly on Bright, Carlton 1911. For more recent assessments of Bright's impact, see Brewerton 2002; and Ferrell 2007.

13 Bright 1588, sig. A3^{r} (italic/Roman reversed).

rin, it required the memorisation of hundreds of base forms that bore little resemblance to a recognizable alphabet. Still, Characterie caught on. What Bright offered was not so much a means to manage oral information, but a manner to master it entirely. As early modern historian James Fleming aptly puts it,

> if longhand notes were an attempt to gather the fruits from a discourse, *characterie* was an attempt to pluck up the whole tree. In that sense, it was actually an entirely different kind of writing technology from longhand note-taking.[14]

Even if promise proved out of step with practice, compendious writing remained popular for decades to come.[15]

Not long after Bright's Characterie, more recognizable forms of shorthand (known also by various other names: Stenography, Tachygraphy, Brachygraphy, Zeiglographia) arrived. Like Bright's, these methods used an array of preselected characters, but this time in the interest of forming an alphabet. Through the manipulation of consonants placed either above, below, or beside one another, a user could elide vowels and express entire words in just a few strokes of the pen. Some textbooks still offered sets of random symbols to memorise, but the obvious advantage of shorthand over Characterie was that it weighed less on the memory, the difference being a base alphabet to learn, rather than hundreds of words. Interest in shorthand soon exploded. Put bluntly, English shorthand took off at the turn of the seventeenth century, expanding beyond the elite interest of a few and 'becoming something of a national craze.'[16] A particularly popular method, such as Thomas Shelton's *Tachygraphy*, could run through at least twenty-two editions (some unauthorised) in roughly half a century, each one supposedly new, enlarged, or corrected.[17] Another famed manual could, in the early eighteenth century, proudly profess its fifty-fifth edition.[18] During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at least one hundred different English writers authored works on shorthand.[19] Shorthand easily made the voyage across the Atlantic and quickly embedded itself within New England's social, literary, and intellectual culture. Early American historians, even historians of the book and manuscript culture, have been reluctant to recognise the sheer prevalence of stenography in early

14 Fleming 2017, 78.

15 McCay 2021; Butler 1951; Davidson 2009, 33–102; Knowlson 1975, 7–43.

16 Mendle 2001, 63.

17 Henderson 2018.

18 Metcalfe 1721. Reference courtesy Mendle, Stallybrass and Wolfe 2006.

19 This figure is based on the charts in Rockwell 1893, 14–15. On the market competition among different shorthand authors, see Gold 1984.

American culture and in present-day archives. Still, pick your favourite – *vel potius*, your least despised – New England family, and evidence of shorthand knowledge effortlessly jumps from family papers. The Winthrops?[20] Yes. The Mathers?[21] Yes. The Shepards?[22] Again, yes. Roger Williams? Of course, given all the fanfare around his supposedly 'secret' code![23] Colonial grammar schools, so-called evening schools, academies, and colleges were hotspots of stenographic knowledge since the beginning of the seventeenth century and lasting through at least the end of the nineteenth century before shorthand found a permanent institutional home at secretarial schools.[24]

Though the first shorthand manual to be published in North America would not appear until the late eighteenth century, copies of earlier English works made their way into family and institutional libraries. In a tangible way, colonial America was thereby deeply rooted into the wider intellectual practices of early modern Europe. By and large, however, most learning took another route beyond the family. At college especially, students applied their well-practised methods of note-taking to shorthand works, with handwritten versions then circulating to other students as part of a culture of extracurricular learning. As the seventeenth century wore into the eighteenth, the opportunities to pursue this practice of note-taking only expanded. Recognising the student zeal for shorthand, independent tutors cropped up in and around New England, offering lessons both in person and via the mail. Young scholars often seized these opportunities on their own, earnest and eager as ever to master the oral and scribal culture of their surroundings, particularly when it came to recording sermons. In turn, these practices of stenographic writing worked full circle: outside of the classroom, many schoolchildren mastered shorthand, which they then applied to capture as much content as possible from sermons, which they organised in a notebook, which served as the means to teach future generations shorthand and thereby create more notebooks, more knowledge. Shorthand enabled a virtuous circle of incredible pedagogical potential, putting into circulation manuscript repositories of religious knowledge. Though early Americanists have pretended away stenography's existence, it is important to keep in mind that today just as much student shorthand

20 Wright 1940.

21 Mather 1911, 110; Monaghan 1991.

22 Shepard 1636–1681.

23 Williams 1676, 131; Fisher, Lemons and Mason-Brown 2014.

24 Delwiche 2022a; Delwiche 2022c. On nineteenth-century shorthand and secretarial culture, see Gregg 1964; Srole 2010.

survives from the colonial colleges as student Latin writings – which is a considerable amount.[25]

This scribal context and culture therefore strips away the supposed novelty of the eighteenth-century stenographer that historians of the Early Republic often unwittingly take for granted. Granted, there is some truth to the argument about the congressional stenographer representing a *nova persona,* but only in so far as there is truth to any tautology. A congressional stenographer only appears when, well, congresses appear. Nonetheless, shorthand reporters do not represent a distinct breed as much as an offshoot of a phylogenetic, scribal tree that stretched back for over a century in North America. The first printed manuals dedicated to congressional reporting in the Early Republic, such as the one on Thomas Lloyd's method published in 1793 by John Carey, do not actually claim originality. Like many shorthand manuals, this handbook stands eerily close to its predecessors; its introduction frames itself in a longstanding, nearly 150-year debate about the value of symbols in a stenographic system (this manual comes down somewhat in the middle of that conundrum, offering simple abbreviations such as 'K' for 'Congress' or 'Committee', and 'M' for 'member' or 'Motion').[26]

Importantly, the manual recognises how shorthand's primary (though not exclusive) early American focus for over a century – the sermon – could be shifted towards the legislature:

> Thus, the Stenograph, who intends to take down the Debates of Congress, needs not, in planning his abbreviations, ever think of Heaven, Hell, God, Devil, Salvation, Damnation, etc. these not being subjects of legislative consideration.[27]

Scores of New England note-takers had honed their scribal craft for religious purposes.[28] With the new nation came a new opportunity for the old art. Carey and Lloyd thus did not exaggerate too far when they professed that

> a very moderate degree of attention, on the part of the Teachers, would, in a little time, so extensively disseminate the knowledge of Short-hand, that every man, capable of handling a pen, would be able to take down the substance of a speech, while he sits in the gallery, and to inform his family and neighbours.[29]

25 Delwiche 2022b.
26 Carey 1793, 7.
27 Carey 1793, 14–15.
28 Meredith Neuman 2013.
29 Carey 1793, 16.

In effect, this call to action was for early Americans to do much of the same, to treat Congress, like the meeting house, as a scribal opportunity. Judging by the numerous statesmen and politicians (e.g. James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Jonathan Trumbull, among others) who had supported the publication of this shorthand manual, Carey and Lloyd seemed to have found an eager audience.[30]

By the time stenographers, pen in hand, entered the galleries of legislatures at the end of the eighteenth century, America's political leaders, many of them already steeped in stenographic knowledge themselves, had made peace with shorthand's potential.[31] Stenography, much like any technology, had never functioned perfectly. In 1770, Robert Treat Paine had to accept the unfortunate fact that his arguments in the trial of British soldiers implicated in the so-called Boston Massacre would not make it into print. In both a personal letter of apology and an editorial aside in the printed record of the trial, it was reported that the 'person who wrote the trial in short hand, was so fatigued, that he could not take down what Mr. Paine said.'[32] Paine, an avid user of shorthand while a student at Harvard, does not seem to have pressed the issue.[33] It is probable that Paine, like many other early Americans, never expected shorthand to be an exact transcript of everything.

When the topic of stenography came up in learned American periodicals of the Early Republic, authors praised shorthand while recognising its weaknesses. One exuberant proponent of penmanship warned that 'no pains should be spared, at an age when the muscles are pliant and the joints flexible to create the habits of a skilful penman.'[34] Through a series of tests and anecdotes obtained from friends, this same author recognised that the pen could not equal the pace of every tongue. But rather than lamenting the stenographer's wearied hand, the writer suggested that speakers could slow down to a manageable or 'deliberate' speaking style of one page of text (apparently 390 words and 650 syllables) read in five minutes.[35]

30 Carey 1793, iv–v.

31 Beyond owning manuals and occasionally annotating in shorthand, Thomas Jefferson, for example, received shorthand letters: Anon. to Thomas Jefferson 1807.

32 Hodgson 1770, 178. Sampson Blowers also apologised personally to Robert Treat Paine in a 1770 letter: 'The Trial is now in the press, and We all shall be extremely sorry, it should appear so very deffective [sic] as it must do, unless your Argument is inserted. The person who appointed to take the Trial in Short hand [i.e. John Hodgson] was so much fatigued that he was obliged to omit writing what you said in closing that Cause, so that unless you will prepare it yourself from your minutes the Trial must be published without it' (Blowers 1770).

33 For Paine's student shorthand, see Paine 1745–1750; 1755–1756, and Paine 1745.

34 Anon. 1800, 92.

35 Anon. 1800, 93.

Surely, not every politician could be counted on to speak at such a plodding pace, but the point remained the same: accommodate rather than critique shorthand. Nonetheless, despite occasional grumbling, it was clear that the relationship between a shorthand note-taker and a particular speaker was often more congenial than confrontational.[36] This partnership, though, would soon be put to the test.

3 Shorthand on trial

As the early American republic took off, shorthand reporters took advantage of a clear opportunity. While the early Senate sessions were closed off to the public, the House of Representatives allowed interested citizens, and, consequently, shorthand reporters, to listen from the gallery. Published first in serial, newspaper format, and later compiled into fuller scale volumes, *The Congressional Register* documented publicly the early debates in the halls of government. As news spread of congressional happenings, shorthand quickly came under critique.

It took just weeks before prominent early American politicians began complaining about the accuracy of *The Congressional Register*.[37] Months later, a disgruntled representative brought the issue to the floor of the House:

> That the several persons who have published the debates of this house, in the congressional register, and in newspapers of this city, have misrepresented these debates in the most glaring deviations from the truth – often distorting the arguments of the members from the true meaning – imputing, to some gentlemen, arguments contradictory and foreign to the subject, and which were never advanced – to others, remarks and observations never made – and, in a great many instances, mutilating, and not unfrequently, suppressing whole arguments, upon subjects of the greatest moment; thus, throwing over the whole proceeding a thick veil of misrepresentation and error.[38]

Sometimes subtracting, sometimes adding, the stenographer apparently followed his own rules when it came to recording speeches. Nonplussed politicians presented a number of examples of such errors in the published record, which conveniently (too

36 Colonial American authors sometimes even praised the aid of shorthand writers in helping take down their sermons. See Mather 1911, 455–456.

37 Madison 1789: 'I send you herewith the first No. of the Congressional Register, which will give you *some idea* of the discussions in the new Legislature. You will see at once the strongest evidences of mutilation & perversion, and of the illiteracy of the Editor.'

38 *The Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America* 1789, 1503.

conveniently?) never made their way into the documents of that day's debate.[39] A seemingly simple but potentially far-reaching measure was proposed:

> *Resolved,* That to misrepresent the debates of the house, whether it arises from incapacity, inattention, or partiality, has a mischievous tendency to infringe the freedom of debate – and that this house should no longer give sanction to it.[40]

In effect, the House of Representatives considered whether it wanted to control stenographers.

This motion, like many others proposed after it, failed. For as much as some members of the House cast scorn on stenographers, few wanted to take on the duty of correcting the congressional record daily. Politicians openly admitted the imperfections of *The Congressional Register*, and yet continued to read it, disseminate it, and rely on it. When asked decades later about the early House debates, James Madison matter-of-factly wrote that '[t]he accuracy of them is not to be relied on.' Nonetheless, he believed 'the ideas of the speakers, may for the most part be collected from them.' According to Madison, Thomas Lloyd, one of the primary stenographers employed to record the House debates, was 'indolent and sometimes filled up blanks in his notes from memory or imagination' and 'finally, became a votary of the bottle and perhaps made too free use of it sometimes at the period of his printed debates.'[41] Even given these shortcomings, Madison hastened to add 'that his intentions were

39 Two years later, one member of the House humorously chronicled just what sort of errors could creep into the record: 'It was said that a committee was appointed to bring in a bill for the preservation and safe-keeping of the *accounts* of the United States. I thought within myself that we were not so tenacious on this head, therefore suspected some mistake, and on consulting the journals I found that a committee had been appointed to bring in a bill for the safe-keeping and preservation of the *acts* of the United States [...] In another place I found a greater blunder still; it was said, that the House had appointed a committee for the regulation of the *barbers* of the United States; this struck me as a very gross misrepresentation, for I could hardly believe that the Legislature of the Union would, at so early a day, attempt to usurp an authority not vested in them by the Constitution, and that, too, over a body of men who could at any time put an end to the tyranny with the edge of the razor; but on searching the minutes in this case, I found that a bill was brought in for the regulation of the *harbors* of the United States', *Annals of Congress*, January 1790, 1061. This and the following quotations are taken from HeinOnline, *Annals of Congress* (1789–1824), <https://heinonline.org/HOL/Index?index=congrec/aoc&collection=congrec> (accessed on 1 February 2022).

40 *The Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America* 1789, 1503.

41 I have been unable to verify or refute any accusation about a stenographer's drinking habits. Shorthand reporters, much like anyone else, can always misbehave. In fact, the House of Representatives recently received a reminder of this everyday truth when a stenographer grabbed the House microphone and began ranting about freemasonry. See Scott Neuman 2013.

good, and his dispositions amiable. As a Stenographer, he had the reputation, and I beleive [sic], justly of being skilful.'[42] This ambivalence to, but overall respect of shorthand, typified much of the subsequent debates about stenographers that flared up in the House of Representatives in the Early Republic.

In January 1796, John Swanwick of Pennsylvania created a stir by raising a similarly straightforward question to the House of Representatives: 'whether the House were to sanction and authorise the reports of the proposed stenographer.'[43] Interestingly, the politician framed initial critiques of the stenographer not on the grounds of unreliability, but precisely the opposite:

> one of the principal causes of complaint against reporters was of a nature that did not admit a remedy. Gentleman rose, in the ardour of discussion, and suffered many remarks to escape from them, which neither in thought nor expression, were perfectly correct. If the reporter, as was his duty, took them down, and stated them exactly, gentlemen were irritated by seeing themselves exhibited in this shape, and then blame was cast on the reporter.[44]

In this thinking, stenographers were punished for doing their jobs. Accuracy, as much as inaccuracy, could apparently be a cause for irritation.

To be sure, some House members disagreed, stating that even with the best intentions, it was always possible for shorthand reports to contain errata which would prove difficult to correct.[45] One House member lamented so-called 'atrocious mistakes' from non-sanctioned stenographers, threatening that he would prefer to shut the doors to government entirely than endure imperfect reports.[46] To such a critique, a certain Mr Nicholas ceded that reporters often embellished speeches, sometimes in fact improving on the underlying text:

> A speech was once made for him by a person who reports in this House, and who has a very good style of writing. The style, said Mr. N., was above mine. There was not a sentiment in it which I would have disavowed. It was a better speech than mine; but in an entire column, there was nothing that I said.[47]

Naturally, this pleasantly (mis)represented speaker declined sending any corrections to the printer. In short, the errors that representatives complained of in the written record were nuanced and not simply a matter of the stenographer always

42 Madison 1832.
43 *Annals of Congress*, January 1796, 274.
44 *Annals of Congress*, January 1796, 274.
45 *Annals of Congress*, January 1796, 274–275.
46 *Annals of Congress*, January 1796, 277.
47 *Annals of Congress*, January 1796, 278.

getting things wrong. On the whole, nobody expressed a blind faith or even desire for verbatim transcription; they knew better, and overall refrained from outright assailing of the shorthand reporter.[48]

Like the seasons, resolutions about stenographers came and went in the House of Representatives. As measures either to reign in shorthand reporters or to subsidise their work failed in equal measure, some Congressmen began to wonder whether the topic merited discussion at all. In response to a 1798 standing committee report, which, among other items, dealt with shorthand reporters, one House member tried to thwart any further talk of shorthand:

> Mr. Harper was in favour of the committee's rising, not because he thought the question important, but because he thought it unimportant [...] for however unimportant he thought it, he perceived other gentlemen thought differently, and he supposed intended to produce a long debate upon it, and this he wished to avoid, in order to proceed with the business of the public.[49]

Likewise, another politician expressed bewilderment that some of his colleagues

> spoke as if there was no stenographer in the House [...] While I see a stenographer taking down the words I am now speaking, and when I find our proceedings regularly laid before the public, I can see no necessity for any general regulation on the subject.[50]

Again and again, Congressmen by and large approved of the House stenographers and wondered whether there was something else motivating conversation about them.

Lurking behind all the sometimes twisted, sometimes tedious debates about stenographers was a much clearer, pressing fear. The crux of the issue, eloquently expressed by many members of the House, was the sheer reality of party politics:

> Faction and Party have been mentioned; happy stenographer, if he can keep clear of these! If he fall into their power, insensibly he will represent one side in clouds and darkness, the other as ornamented with the brightest beams of light. How will he please both? Misrepresentation is complained of: alas, sir, how quick is error- how slow is the progress of truth in almost all things. Our stenographer must indeed be a wonder-working man, if he can revert this tide, and make every where light and correct reasoning prevail.[51]

This was the argument that motivated so much of the chatter about stenography in the Early Republic, namely the politics of the shorthand reporter. One newspa-

48 *Annals of Congress*, January 1802, 407.
49 *Annals of Congress*, March 1798, 1287.
50 *Annals of Congress*, March 1798, 1288.
51 *Annals of Congress*, January 1796, 278–279

per columnist, commenting on this very 1796 debate about a House-sanctioned reporter, wrote that there was no way around the matter:

> Were a perfect stranger to listen to a debate he would contract a partiality for one side or the other, before it was half over. Every man in a popular government has his party; and who can suppose that the stenographer would not have his?[52]

The very nature of the shorthand reporter's work was contentious: 'When there is no opposition there can be no debate, and, of course no need of a Stenographer.'[53] So long as political parties existed, so long as politicians butted heads, the stenographer could be a lightning rod of discontent.

Indeed, one of the most common – most mind-numbing, eye-tiring – threads of discussion about shorthand in the early House of Representatives was where the stenographer could sit: in the gallery, or on the floor.[54] Though the discussion sometimes bordered on almost absurd analyses of acoustics, the fuel that fired the debate was the question of who could admit or dismiss stenographers from spaces not permitted to the general public. This had, in fact, very little to do with stenographers themselves, and all the more with the performing power of political majorities or minorities in the House of Representatives. In an impassioned 1812 procedural debate about admitting stenographers, one incensed House member soared to supreme oratorical heights:

> It is now attempted to exclude the stenographers of one party, and to keep information from the people [...] It might as well be attempted to supersede by a visionary human code, the fixed laws of nature – to change the principles of gravitation, and cause lead to ascend, or sparks to fly downwards; it might as well be attempted to shift the bed of the Chesapeake, or change the course of old Potomac, as attempt to crush the spirit of opposition, to stifle investigation, change the nature of truth, or shut out its light from the people. Vain expectation! You may bar up the doors, nail down your windows, block up the chimneys, stop every crevice in this spacious hall, cork even the keyhole, still will the rays of resistless truth pierce these solid walls and shed their light upon the land.[55]

If, by 1813, the stenographer had become the proxy for truth, that was a process that took time to develop.

For in the early years of the republic, representatives had yet to resolve how much information an informed citizenry needed. For all the critique of partisan

52 Anon. 1796, 22.

53 Anon. 1796, 23.

54 *Annals of Congress*, January 1802, 26; *Annals of Congress*, December 1800, 806–808; *Annals of Congress*, January 1802, 406; *Annals of Congress*, March 1798, 1292.

55 *Annals of Congress*, May 1813, 114.

newspapers, many House members thought that the weekly column was a fine enough medium for the stenographer, and there was no need for the House to pay for anything more.[56] While some men emphasised the need for reliable records for the constituencies back home who could not possibly travel to listen to congressional debates themselves,[57] others plainly argued that the content of the debates did not matter; so long as everyone knew the vote, there was no need for a detailed play-by-play.[58] One House member ridiculed even the narrower idea of keeping a record for House members themselves:

> He thought that the House had no greater reason to supply the members with this work than other publications; they might as well be furnished with the works of *Peter Porcupine* [a pamphlet], or *The Rights of Man* [Thomas Paine's writings], at the public expense.[59]

Stenographers remained debatable in the Early Republic because so many questions of governance and information dissemination still had to be worked out.

4 Conclusion

The story of stenography in the first decades of the new American nation is messier than we may at first imagine. No new scribal practice, no stranger to early American culture and life, it comes as little surprise that shorthand would continue to thrive in the Early Republic. But as stenographers honed their craft to document governmental debates, they in turn became subjects of discussion, targets of occasional ire. From the banal to the overwrought, stenography did in fact generate heated congressional debate, but surprisingly little of which had to do with the underlying mechanics or reliability of shorthand. On numerous occasions in the debates themselves, Congressmen proved themselves markedly knowledgeable of shorthand's history, discussing precedence for stenographers in Britain and France.[60] Likewise, early American politicians could tell the difference between abbreviated notes and shorthand, as they called out reporters who were not in fact stenographers *stricto sensu*.[61] It was not stenography itself that pre-

56 *Annals of Congress*, December 1796, 1607–1608.

57 Annals of Congress, February 1796, 281.

58 *Annals of Congress*, January 1796, 275; *Annals of Congress*, December 1800, 812.

59 *Annals of Congress*, December 1796, 1610.

60 *Annals of Congress*, February 1796, 281. On early modern French stenographers, see Orr 1987; and Gardey 2008, 25–71. On British ones, see Henderson 2001.

61 *Annals of Congress*, May 1813, 120.

sented the problem, as much as the spectre of party politics and the uncertainty over how much information an informed public really needed. Of course, we must acknowledge one enormous caveat, a doubt even the surest of scholars should not shake off: in studying the place of stenographers in early politics, we must necessarily rely on congressional proceedings produced by those very stenographers in question. Shorthand reporters have had some of the strongest hands in shaping the documentary record. It cannot be ruled out that an overall positive view of the stenographer in the annals of the early American congresses might very well be in part because stenographers helped shaped that impression. There is no foolproof way around this documentary predicament. Just as early republican politicians made peace with shorthand, so too must today's historians by acknowledging early congressional reports as works-in-progress, part and parcel of a country whose information and political culture were also inchoate.

As we have seen above, early politicians remained ambivalent, but overall appreciative of the stenographer. As the American nation matured, shorthand reporters slowly gained even more respect. After all, the stenographer's task was one that few but the stoic would ever take on. In an 1872 speech at the House of Representatives, one member gave his due appreciation to the wonder-working of stenographic reporters:

> We tumble into their ears ofttimes a muddy stream which filters through their brains and drops from their finger-tips clear and bright. It often sounds terrible, but they make it read tolerably well [...] Occasionally we get up and roar for an hour at the top of our voices, and we would have no listeners, were it not that those patient and long-suffering men are paid for listening [...] Others may escape to the cloak room and console themselves with a cigar until the danger is past, or fly across the avenue and revive their spirits with a glass of Bourbon. But these gentlemen must stay and take it all. They guard, maintain and uphold the dignity of the American Congress.[62]

Two decades later, when one of the House stenographers passed away, *Harper's Weekly* featured a similarly affectionate piece:

> The stenographer who is taking a debate has often a most difficult task [...] The House is in an uproar [...] Then members clinch their fists to emphasise remarks which no one hears except the man who utters them, but each of which is of the profoundest importance to its author.[63]

Stenography was not for the faint of heart. 'It is a hard, never-wearing task that this stenographer is performing, and he cannot last long under the strain. There are no

62 Blair and Rives 1872, 805. Reference courtesy of Oppenheim 1889, 105–106.
63 Anon. 1888, 698.

old men among the Stenographers of the House.'[64] Since the first days of the American colonies, through to the Early Republic (and even, to a certain degree, down to the present day), shorthand went hand-in-hand with some of the most important political, religious, and judicial happenings. Mostly anonymous, stenographers busied and bruised their hands at making history that has all too often written them off. But Washington needed stenographers, a sentiment as true in the twentieth century as in the eighteenth. It is high time we recognise their role and re-evaluate their lives.

Fig. 3: 'The Stenographer in Babel', *Harper's Weekly*, 32 (15 September 1889), 697.

64 Anon. 1888, 698.

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Delphine Gardey

Religion and Literacy, Parliaments and Business: Shorthand Writing in Great Britain and France, from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century

Abstract: From religion to literacy, from parliaments to business, the aim of this paper is to revive the worlds of shorthand from the sixteenth century onwards, highlighting the many issues at play in the formal and social characteristics of this art (or technology). Comparing Britain and France, the aim is to consider the plasticity of shorthand systems, how their meanings and uses varied over time and place, and how they could shape cultural and political forms. Shorthand was successively (and sometimes simultaneously) knowledge and art, language and science, and educational and commercial technology. This paper begins with the uniqueness of an art that was initially only British (for two centuries) before developing on the European continent. It analyses in detail specific features of a culture that combined proto-phonetics, the study of the English language, and the lived and textual experience of Puritanism. It then focuses on the use of shorthand in Britain and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it became a legal and parliamentary technology. It reveals two different national traditions and ways of using and promoting journalism and *in extenso* reporting based on shorthand to ensure the publicity of debates and the regime of opinion. Finally, it examines the educational and commercial actualisations of shorthand – its growing popularity in Britain (with Isaac Pitman) and France (with Émile Duployé) as an educational technology for the people in the mid nineteenth century, and as a tool for business in the late nineteenth century. All this points to shorthand as a technology that contributed to the achievement of completeness, truth, and accuracy in the legal, political, and, subsequently, economic spheres.

1 Introduction

The history of shorthand has been forgotten twice. Interest in shorthand treatises and manuscripts seems to have died out between the two World Wars, along with the last generation of professional shorthand writers who practised their art in the noble branches of the profession – court, parliamentary and conference ste-

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nography. As for the commercial shorthand typist,[1] a position invented at the end of the nineteenth century which became predominantly a woman's profession,[2] his/her art fell into oblivion in the late twentieth century, when stenography began to disappear both from the administrative and commercial enterprises of capitalist economies and within the state apparatus of communist regimes.[3] The aim of this contribution is to resurrect this whole world, from the sixteenth century onwards, underlining the many issues that were at play in the formal and social characteristics of this art (or technique) of the past.

This paper first invites us to reconsider what technologies are and to reassess their potential to stand as legitimate and interesting objects for historical analysis.[4] Shorthand systems interest cultural, social, and economic historians as intellectual technologies; technologies that do not directly fall within the order of production, but have an impact on ways of intervening and acting in the world. The idea here, rather, is to focus on 'arts of doing'[5] and to provide new stories about cognitive and material changes that shaped European societies and economies over the last five centuries.[6] Shorthand plays an important role in this story, both as a scripturalisation technology in the Early Modern Period and also as a 'sound technology' – shorthand being the first speech-recording technology of the modern world. This paper tries to account for how these ordinary activities – and their associated values – both shaped and were shaped by religion, politics, and the economy.

The objective is also to enrich the history of technology with these 'little tools of knowledge'[7] and to revisit established theses on literacy. For most historians, the development of literacy is what characterises modern and contemporary Western societies. Literacy relates both to writing and printing, and encompasses the processes by which people within a population learn how to read and write. It is often argued that the written form developed in early modern and modern Europe to the detriment of the oral form (i.e. the 'art of memory'), while political and economic modernisation has increasingly relied upon writing, which was considered a favourable instrument for the development of rational and abstract

1 Gardey 2001b.

2 Anderson 1989; Davies 1982; Gardey 2001a; Gardey 2006.

3 On the birth of the Soviet stenographic profession and its use in the public sphere before and after the October Revolution see Lovell 2015.

4 Veyne 1971.

5 De Certeau 1980.

6 This is the perspective in Gardey 2008, which traces the history of cognitive and technical 'arts of doing' before computing (up to the era of the punched card system).

7 Becker 2001.

thinking.[8] Shorthand, which stands at the intersection of the oral and the written, is a perfect candidate to examine and qualify these changes. A study of stenography allows us to complexify our picture of the relationship between the oral and the written, manuscript and print culture, literacy and politics, and literacy and the economy.

From the perspective of the social studies of technology, the objective is to account for the plasticity of shorthand systems, their interpretative flexibility,[9] how their meanings and uses vary, and how they could shape social and political forms. The objective is to 'denaturalise' technologies,[10] that is, to pay attention to their contextualised definition and associated community of practices. Historically, shorthand methods and systems have aesthetic, scientific, social, religious, and political dimensions. Shorthand is successively (and sometimes concurrently) a knowledge and an art, a language, and an educational and commercial technology. The objective is to finally show how the theoretical and practical plasticity of abbreviated writing systems plays in favour of their longevity – personal appropriations (the improvements and additions of the individual user) shifting both the formal qualities and the uses of stenography over the long term.

Lastly, this paper questions the singularity of an art that – for its first two centuries of use – was exclusively British, only later developing on the European continent. This makes the comparison between Great Britain and France asymmetrical. Shorthand should first be considered as specifically British (a 'singular culture').[11] This will be the subject of Section 2, analysing in detail specific traits of a culture that mixed proto-phonetics, research on the English language, the lived and textual experience of Puritanism, and the specificities of a literate culture that extended beyond print culture.

Introduced in France at the end of the eighteenth century, shorthand was 're-invented' during the French Revolution, when novel uses were imagined, giving rise to new formal meanings. Section 3 focuses on shorthand uses in Great Britain and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when this 'technological and cultural transfer' occurred. Far from duplicating the British uses of a 'smart' technology, the French Revolution, eager to develop universal and rational languages and to promote freedom and circulation of speech and writing, proposed a novel cognitive, social, and political interpretation of shorthand. This had long-lasting consequences, as shorthand's development in France during the first two-

8 On orality and literacy see Ong 1982; Goody 1986; Goody 1987; Finnegan 1988; Olson 1994.

9 Akrich 1992; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1985; Bijker, Hughes and Pinch 2012.

10 Grint and Woolgar 1995.

11 Gardey 2010a.

thirds of the nineteenth century was essentially supervised by judicial and parliamentary institutions. This was notably different from the development of parliamentary shorthand in Great Britain, where it was hindered by limitations linked to traditions and parliamentary privileges.

Section 4 of this contribution will account for the role of shorthand in popular education initiatives that developed with the support of intensive and novel commercial practices in the second half of the nineteenth century. Twenty years apart, two main figures – Isaac Pitman (1813–1887) in Great Britain and Émile Duployé (1833–1912) in France – dramatically changed the meaning and uses of shorthand, articulating the simplification of systems with large-scale public education programs and commercial initiatives. This reconfiguration, coming about at the time of shorthand popularisation and development, is the basis of the eventual usefulness of this art in its commercial definition. After the religious, scientific, and political spheres, it was education and the economy in which this decidedly flexible technology was redeployed.

2 A singular culture of the written word and faith: Great Britain in the Early Modern Period

2.1 Some brief preliminary technical remarks

As time went on, the authors of shorthand treatises made different formal and technical decisions that were inextricably linked to social practices. Technically speaking, abbreviated systems (initially alphabet-based) gave way to 'protophonetic' systems (sounds or syllables transcribed into short 'signs') – an option that was considered by inventors and early historians to be characteristic of 'modern' shorthand. Doing so, authors tended to distinguish themselves from previous quests and uses which they qualified as 'medieval', 'cryptographic' and/or 'secret' writing practices. The intensification of invention that characterises modern shorthand took place within British culture and must therefore be considered as part of it. It should be noted that early modern stenography took place in a period of stabilisation of written English and of the establishment of English as a written language competing with Latin. Later, for instance, in the mid nineteenth century Pitman's system emerged as a phonetically-based 'new' shorthand that was simplified along technical, educational, and commercial lines – at a period when reflection proliferated on the social and political benefits of reforming the English language and its spelling.

Ultimately, stenographic activity also meant producing artificial scripts based on a series of articulated rules. This contribution does not go into technical details, but it is important to keep in mind that stenography in its modern definition consists of translating a sound into a sign. Shorthand systems are thus metalanguages. And considering that stenographic systems explore the sound aspect of language, they should also be recognised as part of the history of phonetics and linguistics – which, to my knowledge, they still are not.

2.2 Inventors, motives, and uses

Often following in the footsteps of the prestigious techniques and practices of the *notae* of antiquity (the Tironian notes ascribed to Cicero's scribe), inventors flourished in England during the Early Modern Period, forming a strong and lasting movement in favour of the stenographic abbreviation of writing. Shorthand historians have generally agreed that the modern history of English shorthand started in 1588, with the treatise of Timothy Bright (1551?–1615): *Characterie: an arte of shorte, swifte and secrete writing by character*. Considered to be the first shorthand treatise, Bright's *Characterie* also had the first monopoly obtained by an author over a method of abbreviated writing.[12] *The art of stenographie*, by John Willis, was first published in 1602 and republished some sixteen times between then and 1648; this was followed by the first edition of Thomas Shelton's *Tachygraphie* (now lost, dated 1626 according to evidence from the Stationers' Register) which was republished no fewer than fifty-seven times between 1630 and 1710.[13]

From the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, shorthand treatises and systems flourished in England. Between 1588 and 1800, over three hundred manuals (originals or subsequent imprints/editions) were published by approximately one hundred authors. A large corpus – unprecedented and unmatched on the continent – took shape: methods, authors, and practitioners progressively established a theoretical field and shaped social uses of this art. A tradition was invented, as shown by the practice of forming collections of manuals, and also by the convergence in vocabulary. Two terms ('shorthand' and 'stenography') tended to prevail, bringing together the diversity of quests and proposals for the abbreviation of writing.[14]

12 Davidson 1996.

13 Alston 1966, 8–12.

14 *Shorthand* is a contraction of *shorthand writing* (as opposed to so-called *longhand writing*). Introduced in 1621, this expression was in time to become the common naming of abbreviation

The intensification of publications and the diversification of authors and users tended to constitute shorthand as a field in its own right, subject to lively discussion. As with other branches of science, controversies over priority of invention, competition between different systems, and establishment of 'schools' through the creation of theoretical lineages or dynasties, became common. Major seventeenth-century authors of shorthand manuals included Theophilus Metcalfe (1610–1645), whose manuals remained in print from as early as 1635 to 1727; Jeremiah Rich (1630?–1667?), whose manuals circulated from 1642 to 1792; and William Mason (1672–1709), whose various systems were widely used in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for taking down sermons, trials, and debates.[15] The poet John Byrom (1692–1763) was another famous shorthand writer who is known to have established his system in the 1720s.[16] Byrom used to take notes in Parliament and was appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society. His main rival at the time in the field of shorthand writing was James Weston, with his manual *Stenography completed* (1727).

As of the late seventeenth century, the value and potential of practical aspects of shorthand were increasingly recognised. Many people became interested in shorthand writing, which was practised by scholars, clergymen, scientists, and lawyers to take down personal notes, prepare sermons, and note down pleas, speeches, or court decisions. Treatises and authors captured the attention of the Royal Society, while great minds such as John Locke or Isaac Newton became enthusiasts and practitioners of shorthand. The prestige of shorthand writing in the eighteenth century is embodied in the creativity and virtuosity of the Gurney family. The initiator of this dynasty was Thomas Gurney (1705–1770), the author of *Brachygraphy*, first published in 1750, of which each edition had a circulation of between four and five hundred copies.[17] In 1803, 6,900 copies of the Gurney method were sold.[18] Recognised for his skills, Gurney was appointed as official shorthand writer to the first court of justice of the City of London (the Old Bailey) in 1737, where he held his position until his death. His sons published new editions and, when shorthand writing was officially introduced in the British Parliament, it was a member of the Gurney family who was appointed as first official short-

systems for writing, while the word *brachygraphy* was progressively abandoned by the mid eighteenth century: Carlton 1911, 77n–78n.

15 Alston 1966, 14–17 (Metcalfe); 13–14, 17, 20, 22–24 (Rich); 24–25, 28–29, 31–33 (Mason).

16 Byrom's system was published only after his death, in 1767 (Byrom 1767). See also Byrom et al. 1739; Butler 1951, 44–55; Underhill 2008; Underhill 2013; Underhill 2015.

17 Gurney 1750.

18 On the Gurneys see Navarre 1909, 111–113.

hand writer. Descendants of this family held official positions until the beginning of the twentieth century.[19] Gurney shorthand was widely used in the nineteenth century, for example by Charles Dickens.[20] In 1786, another highly influential system was published: Samuel Taylor's. His essay established a standard for an universal system of stenography, upon which most of the French shorthand movement is based, and which more generally marked the beginning of shorthand writing in Europe.

After this brief introduction to the quest for abbreviation and the role it played in modern British society, I would like to focus on a few specific characteristics that outline various patterns and uses of this art, particularly in the Early Modern Period.[21]

2.3 Truth, characters, and sound

A quick glance at the titles of the first shorthand treatises shows that authors pursued diverse, yet comparable, objectives: 'swift', 'short', and 'secret' are among the most frequently used adjectives to describe the methods. This was the case with Bright's *Characterie* (1588), and many thereafter. These expressions sketch a first scope of possible meanings and uses. Other motives emerged with the 'brachygraphic' method proposed in 1590 by Peter Bales (1547–1610). The system was articulated around three objectives: 'Swift writing' ('to write as fast as a man speaketh treatably'), 'True writing' ('to write true Orthographie in our English tongue as it is now generaly printed, used'), and 'Faire writing' ('readie waie to write faire in verie short time').[22] Bales's *Brachygraphie* aimed at a sort of new 'truth' or 'sincerity' of language: truth that was now possible via the transcription of speech; sincerity in the way sound was represented in printed English.

John Willis (1572?–1625) was the first to use the word 'stenography', and to imagine a simple geometric system (and not the usual letters of the alphabet) to represent the existing words of the English language, which has been defined a posteriori as 'proto-phonetics'.[23] As Willis declared, 'in this Art, not the Orthographie, but the sound of the word is respected'.[24] This writing was also subsequently

19 Navarre 1909, 114.

20 See the contribution by Hugo Bowles and Clare Wood in this volume.

21 For recent and forthcoming contributions to the history of early modern British shorthand, see McCay 2021 and McCay 2024.

22 Bales 1597, title page.

23 Mounin 1967, 198.

24 Willis 1602, sig. B6^{r}; quoted in Carlton 1940, 19.

identified as 'geometric'. Its objective was the exact representation of sounds using signs. Willis's system, like those of Bright and Bales, did have an English 'character', in the sense that it participated in the reform of the English language and fitted within the larger context of transformations of the culture of the written word. Even though Willis's work consisted of researching the English language itself, he was the first to propose a sort of 'metalanguage', the principles of which could be applied to all languages: 'this Booke discouerth a true and constant forme of Art, applyable not to one Language alone, but generally to all'.[25] Willis's formal proposal ('the first system to provide for the expression of consonants, vowels and diphthongs by simple geometrical forms')[26] thus served as a blueprint for developments in shorthand writing for two centuries. It is in fact considered, more than Bright's or Bales's systems, to be the method that paved the way for modern shorthand writing.

2.4 Sermons, Englishness, and Calvinism

The history of the early days of modern stenography could be written differently. Let us return to Bright, and the description of Characterie in 1586: 'A matter of rare noveltie and effected a great use and commoditie, to couch much matter in so short compasse and to take a speech from any man's mouth as he delivereth it'.[27] Despite the difficulty of the method, Characterie may have been used as a technique to take down sermons, as mentioned by a certain John Lewys who claimed in a 1589 manuscript to have 'taken in *charactery*' a lecture by Stephen Egerton.[28] This would make it the first known speech in early modern England to have been taken down in shorthand. According to Adele Davidson, the sermons of the famous Puritan preacher Henry Smith were also taken down by users of the same method.[29] Several printed sermons by Stephen Egerton and Henry Smith, two active members of the Puritan movement, indicate that they were transcribed by the use of Characterie, but the interpretation of those claims is a living controversy within the scholarship. Some take the printed sources at their word, while others await manuscript evidence. Be that as it may, with Bright's Characterie and Willis's Stenographie, the history of early modern stenography is thus closely

25 Willis 1602, sig. A2^{v}.

26 Carlton 1940, 19. Linguists and historians of linguistics mostly ignore these systems and formalisms.

27 Vincent Skinner to Michaell Hicks, 30 March 1586, quoted in Carlton 1940, 4.

28 London, Senate House Library, Carlton Shorthand Collection, Box 11/3.

29 Davidson 1998, 302–303.

linked to that of Calvinism and Puritanism. Abbreviation as a recording technology opened the possibility of perpetuating, passing on, and distributing sermons given in front of limited audiences.[30]

Work by Damian Nussbaum and Lori Ferrell provides another account of the link between Bright and Puritanism. In 1589, Bright published an abridged version of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* – a key book of the late sixteenth century important for the rise of Anglicanism (and denigration of Catholicism) which had a significant influence in England and served as an inspiration for many sermons. Abbreviating the English language contributed to a nationalist actualisation of Foxe's text and to a new interpretation of the text.[31] For Lori Ferrell, Characterie represents the emergence of a distinct Calvinist or Puritan culture:

> The art of shorthand as 'invented' by Timothy Bright represents (even if poorly) certain important elements, both visual and ideological, that identified Calvinist style at the end of the sixteenth century: it was designed to be graphically distinctive, demonstrably organized, and mnemonically oriented. These characteristics were necessary to the theological and cultural phenomenon known as 'experimental predestinarianism', which required believers meticulously to examine daily experience, remembering and sorting through sensory and psychological data in order to ascertain the temporal state of their eternal souls.[32]

The cognitive aspects of these shorthand methods as techniques of decomposition and recomposition of the English language are thus associated with certain traits of a spiritual ethos, or culture. Even if Bright's Characterie wasn't taken up to the extent that published works claim, it represented an opportunity – and thus a desire – for certain religious movements in the late sixteenth century to acquire new accurate knowledge, whose cognitive aspects were related to a new theology. This material culture (a new writing technology) was also a new intellectual and spiritual culture, which contributed to the establishment of a specific community within a larger community.[33] As Meredith Neuman has said of Puritan New England,

30 Thanks to Kelly Minot McCay for her essential comments and insights on the transcription of sermons.

31 Nussbaum 2018.

32 Ferrell 2007, 76.

33 Loades 1999.

> the lived experience of Puritanism was simultaneously communal (centered both spiritually and politically on gathered churches) and individualistic (emphasizing the work of ceaseless self-examination in light of strong Calvinist doctrine).[34]

2.5 Orality, literacy, and printing culture

I would like to quickly stress two points. The first is the paradoxical aspects – secrecy and publicity – associated with the use of shorthand writing in a religious context. Using coded language is a particularly clever way to publicise seditious speech. Coded, and yet decodable by a group of insiders, shorthand writing can circulate within a restricted community, functioning as a 'language' or a 'writing' accessible only to a few. Learning and mastering a complex linguistic system serves to build and strengthen a specific culture[35] and define the contours of that community – what Timothy Underhill calls a 'textual community'.[36]

This leads us to focus on the complex relationships that existed between authors, stationers, and stenographers during the early days of stenography, in a context where the status of authors was itself vague.[37] Shorthand had a double function of translating oral language into written language and acting as a technology for duplicating sermons of which shorthand writers sometimes claimed to be the authors.[38] The existence and use of shorthand as a technology of scripturalisation, duplication, and circulation added to the complexity of the generally admitted regime of ownership between authors, texts, and publications.[39] From the beginnings of stenography, abbreviated writing was put forward as allowing the making of multiple copies (for example, by Peter Bales (1547–1610) who insisted on the fact that 'by this Arte, you may with speede write out any excellent written Booke or Copie (neuer yet imprinted) to your priuate vse and benefite')[40]. Shorthand copies as a reduction and duplication technique appeared as a less costly way to access, provide, and circulate texts, at a time when printed books were still rare and expensive. Roger Chartier has shown that handwritten copies of books

34 Neuman 2017, 6–7.

35 Characterie was explicitly presented as a secret script. This claim tended to disappear among authors of the Modern Period.

36 Underhill 2013, 231.

37 Chartier 2004. See also Biagioli 2006.

38 Davidson 1998 states that in the absence of copyright regulation during this period, stationers who obtained copies of sermons could pre-empt copyright from the speakers.

39 For an approach to note-taking as an intellectual and scientific technology that unfortunately doesn't take into consideration the invention and use of shorthand see Blair 2004.

40 Bales 1597, sig. B1^{v}.

were in circulation even as book publishing developed.[41] Shorthand copy of books – whose importance can only be guessed at – might have contributed to these practices. This advantage of the art of abbreviation (copying in shorthand gets around the need to buy an expensive book and saves paper) still acted as a motive for Isaac Pitman in the 1830s, when he invented a new system and new uses for this technology.[42]

2.6 Shorthand as a method: Meditating, learning, inventing (up to the eighteenth century)

By the eighteenth century, books were mainly copied 'for oneself'. Shorthand was first and foremost a personal method for taking notes, used by scientists, scholars, and clergymen in their intellectual activities. The Bible exerted a strong influence on the form of the treatises, as well as in the modes of transmission and learning of the art of shorthand. From the start, shorthand treatises illustrated abbreviation rules using excerpts from biblical material, which played an illustrative and pedagogical role. As a cultural reference, excerpts of the Bible were useful for practicing the method. As a moral reference, it gave credence to the project and the intention of its inventor. For learners of a method, abbreviating the Bible was a test of the method's formal qualities; transcribing the Bible was a way to verify that contraction rules as much as abbreviated signs were understood and helped them to acquire automatic reflexes. Conversely, reading the Bible from shorthand excerpts was akin to translation, verifying the value of a system and one's own capacity to decipher it. Translating the Bible into a method of shorthand brought recognition to the author of the shorthand system as well as to the apprentice. Shorthand collections include evidence of these scriptural and spiritual practices, of this biblical and stenographic intertextuality, with small decorated leather-bound books, small personal notebooks, which are copies of the New Testament in shorthand and constitute 'Bibles of one's own', that could be carried close to the heart.

41 Chartier 2004, 141; Chartier 2001; Eisenstein 1979.

42 Gardey 2008, 54–55; Pitman 1894.

Fig. 1: The title page of William Addy's Holy Bible (1687). New York Public Library, *KC 1687 (Bible. English. Shorthand. 1687. [Holy Bible, containing Old and New Testaments with Singing Psalms) Copy 1. Photo by Kelly Minot McCay].

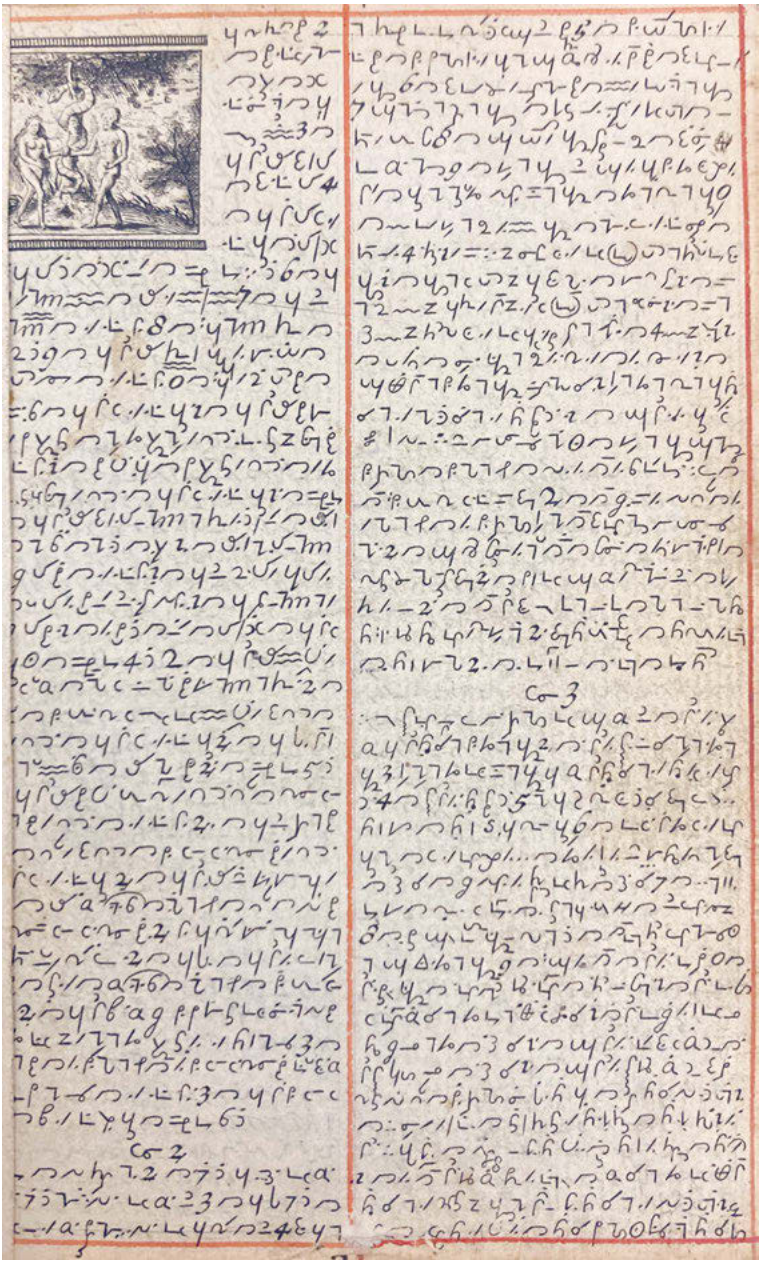

Fig. 2: First page of William Addy's Holy Bible (1687). New York Public Library, *KC 1687 (Bible. English. Shorthand. 1687. [Holy Bible, containing Old and New Testaments with Singing Psalms) Copy 1. Photos by Kelly Minot McCay].

In many respects, shorthand appears as a cognitive and spiritual technology mainly driven by self-learning and personalisation. Each learner, studying one method or another, was both reader and writer, but also a potential inventor. Each had the opportunity to tailor, amend, improve, and modify the proposed system, both practically and formally. This constitutes an essential feature that has driven the culture of shorthand writing over the long term. The practice of shorthand writing is both an application of and a derogation from the codified system, as stenographers are always free to improve or tailor the system with new signs or tricks of their own.

Writing, symbolising, translating, compressing, writing for oneself, meditating, remembering. Shorthand is both an intellectual and scholarly technology in its own right and an instrument to practice other intellectual and scientific activities. In eighteenth-century Great Britain, it was used to take personal notes, to collect quotes or excerpts of a reading, to take notes in conferences, to remember experiments or journeys, and so on. The interest of scholars and scientists in this art made it as much an exercise to test the 'rules of grammar and geometry'[43] (a space for experimentation), as a knowledge instrument and tool for scientific practices. Yet these well-tried uses were not passed on to France. The 'technological transfer' was limited to the transmission of a method (a language) that was in turn translated and retranslated, and, in doing so, deeply reinterpreted in its uses.[44]

3 Shorthand as a scientific and political technology: Great Britain and France, late eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries

3.1 The demand for verbatim reports in the judicial and parliamentary spheres in Great Britain

As well as a technology in and of itself, shorthand was also, as we have seen, a technology of circulation and publicisation. The early modern tradition of verbatim note-taking – the culture of transcribing preachers' sermons and the scaffold speeches of the condemned – soon expanded to other types of speeches, serving the judicial and parliamentary spheres. Shorthand note-taking was introduced in courts and Parliament in an unprecedented drive for exhaustive accountability,

43 Gardey 2008, 29.

44 For the central notion of 'translation' as socially embedded see Latour 2005.

contributing to the cultivation of a regime of public opinion and publicity. More precisely, it contributed to the socio-technical shaping of two institutions essential to democracy, though it did so differently in Great Britain and in France.

In eighteenth-century Britain, shorthand writing had become an auxiliary for note-taking in the legal domain. Note-taking and verbatim transcription were initially used during legal procedures to speed up the recording of discussions, but they were less commonly used for the purposes of publicity – to provide the public with accurate (or exhaustive) information about the trial and court decisions.[45] While there is evidence that some seventeenth-century trials were taken down in shorthand, it did not necessarily follow that the content of the trial transcription was made public.[46] However, reporting on judicial affairs became more reliable over time, as can be seen in newspapers of the late eighteenth century. This is evidence of the gradual establishment of a public sphere and the emergence of a regime of opinion – a development that shorthand both reflected and supported, even as its use was monitored and restricted.

In the British Parliament, there were in fact restrictions in place that limited the publication of debates and even the note-taking practices permitted during a session. Summary-style reports were allowed, but not extensive, fully-transcribed proceedings. William Woodfall (1739–1803), for example, who founded the *Morning Chronicle* in 1769 and served as the sole publisher, printer, and reporter for the paper, was apparently not allowed to take notes in the House of Commons and wrote his columns from memory.[47] In a study of politics and print culture, Christopher Reid emphasises the restrictions formulated by the House of Commons in order to control and limit the production and publication of detailed accounts of the debates.[48] The Chambers considered it one of their essential prerogatives to report on their deliberations and to choose what they would make public:

> that is a breach of the privilege of this house, for any person whatsoever to print, or publish in print, anything relating to the proceedings of the house without the leave of this house.[49]

Until 1832, a member of Parliament could formally prevent the publication of proceedings based on this Chamber privilege.

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45 Scharf 1989; Ibbetson 1995.

46 Havette 1917b, 3.

47 See also Aspinall 1956; Thomas 1959; Woodall 1973; Oldham 1987; Ferris 1992; House of Commons 2010.

48 Reid 2000. Preventing publication of unofficial parliamentary reports was formally reiterated by the Commons between 1732 and 1771.

49 May 1851, 77.

In such a prohibitive context, an exceptional and revealing case is worth mentioning. As members of the House of Commons could not be forbidden from taking notes, Sir Henry Cavendish (1732–1804), a user of Gurney's shorthand, transcribed several years of debates, both in London (1776) and Ireland (1783–1789).[50] Even though Cavendish's intent seems to have been to ensure verbatim coverage of the discussions, he appears not to have wanted (or been authorised) to make it public. The English transcriptions were published only after his death, while the Irish transcriptions were deciphered and published only at the end of the twentieth century.

Thus, from the late eighteenth century, British Parliament was an institution open to the presence of reporters and the public, but in a paradoxical way. There was a long tradition of published accounts of parliamentary debates, which were of varying reliability and accuracy but tended to improve as a result of the competition between newspapers. The plurality of press organs guaranteed a pluralist presentation of facts and debates – in short, a regime of opinion existed. Until 1872, regulatory restrictions could limit reporters' presence to public sittings. Even if Parliament formally acknowledged the presence of newspaper reporters in 1803, they had to queue with the public to find a seat. In 1828, some floor space was arranged for their exclusive use in the Commons, and in 1831 in the Lords. After the Great Fire of 1834 destroyed both houses of Parliament, more room was set aside for journalists, but up to the 1870s, reporters continued to complain about their seating, acoustics, and limited freedom to report on members' words and debates.

This situation changed in the 1860s and 1870s. First, a 'lobby list' was drawn up, which listed the reporters who were authorised to access the Members' Lobby in order to obtain quotes. Second, was Hansard, named after Thomas Hansard, who had been granted a contract for parliamentary debates as printer of the House of Parliament in 1812 (before then, the position had been held since 1800 by William Cobbett (1763–1835)). Hansard was given funds to hire stenographers to cover other aspects of parliamentary work such as committee debates. It is probably in this context that William Gurney Salter (1837–1928), who came from a long dynasty of stenographers, was appointed as assistant stenographer to the House of Commons in 1863 and to the House of Lords in 1864. In 1872, he obtained the title of 'stenographer to the Houses', whose responsibility was to lead a group of stenographers whose main task was to record committee discussions and the verbatim transcripts of public sittings.[51] By this time, Hansard was relying on stenographers in its pay. In 1888, a committee made up of members of both Houses decided against the creation of an 'official' report, concluding that newspapers and Hansard were sufficient. Only in 1909 did the Commons

50 Malcomson 2001.

51 On the Gurney dynasty see Navarre 1909, 111–113.

finally decide to take on the responsibility of producing Hansard (now called the 'official report'), recruiting eleven shorthand writers and reversing two centuries of 'liberal' production of parliamentary debates.[52]

3.2 Shorthand as a technology of the French Revolution

In France, parliament and the justice system were directly involved with the practice of note-taking, and shorthand came to play an essential role in the development of a regime of reporting-based opinion.[53] As a new art that was imported, translated, socialised, and redefined in the 1780s and 1790s, shorthand developed in France rapidly during the revolutionary era. This was a time when the development of spaces for discussion gave those who asserted their ability to record speeches and debates recognition and an audience.

One such stenographer was Jean-Félicité Coulon de Thévenot (1754–1813), who associated his 'art of writing' with freedom and the spirit of the Revolution: 'the art of writing as fast as you can talk seems to have preceded the age of freedom, the better to preserve its earliest monuments'.[54] Coulon's definitively French stenographical treatise was published in 1787 after years of training. According to his biographer, he hoped that the Revolution would ensure the success of his shorthand. He was seen at all the assemblies, especially those of the Jacobins, whose sessions he collected and sold to several newspapers. 'He travelled through public places, stopping behind groups with a pencil in his hand' and 'worked for the national guard general La Fayette, to whom he gave daily reports on what he was hearing'.[55] Coulon covered a few parliamentary sessions in 1795.[56] In 1797, he proposed that a newspaper be founded to provide an official account of legislative debates.[57] The newspaper was established on a trial basis and reported on two months of council debates before being rejected.[58]

52 House of Commons 2010.

53 Gardey 2013.

54 Coulon de Thévenot 1787a, 7. Another version was dedicated to the French king: Coulon de Thévenot 1787b.

55 Havette 1906, 43, 46. This and subsequent translations from the French are the author's. See also Havette 1913; Havette 1917a.

56 Coulon de Thévenot 1796; Havette 1913, 19.

57 *Le Tachygraphe* 1797–1798.

58 Havette 1906, 46. Coulon's proposal approved by the Council of Five Hundred (the lower chamber legislative assembly during the Directory) was finally rejected by the Council of Elders (the upper house).

Fig. 3: 'Table Tachygraphique' from Jean Fèlicitè Coulon de Thévenot, 1783, Ville de Nîmes, Bibliothèque Carré d'Art, Ms_160_4.

We must also mention Coulon's competitor, Théodore Pierre Bertin's (1751–1819) translation of Samuel Taylor's method and adaptation to French (first translation 1790–1792; revised in 1794 and 1796).[59] This shorthand system was used for the revolutionary educational enterprise, the *Cours de l'école Normale de l'An III* (1795) – lectures given by eminent scientists, which were recorded, transcribed, and circulated in order to 'educate' new citizens and propagate 'universal knowledge'.

With parliamentary debates, shorthand authors and practitioners claimed to produce an exact 'copy' of debates, their goal being to propagate 'truth', enable judgment, serve posterity, and enable, through transcription and dissemination of the written word, publicity as the necessary companion to the new 'spirit of freedom'. This ideal of transparency, the desire to publicise and reproduce debates, was occasionally tested under the Constituent National Assembly (1789–1791) and the Convention (1792–1795) through various shorthand methods and other processes.[60] What characterised this period was the idea that a new, written language,

59 Bertin 1792. For further relevant materials see London, Senate House Library, Carlton Shorthand Collection, Théodore Pierre Bertin, manuscripts, printed papers and treatises.

60 One of them was the 'Logograph', a non-phonetic note-taking method relying on a strict physical organisation. Twelve to fourteen people sat around a round table, each with a series of long,

could encapsulate and enable free speech; that the formal qualities of shorthand bore the 'virtues' needed to achieve transparency and truth.[61]

The figure of Jean-Baptiste Breton de La Martinière (1777–1852), who was among the first effective stenographers in France,[62] provides insight into the relationship between these different objectives. A writer of the Taylor-Bertin shorthand, this young, bourgeois Parisian used shorthand to take notes of courses at the *École normale de l'An III* and contributed to their publication.[63] He is also credited for his shorthand notes of the Babeuf trial.[64] A traveller, translator, and writer, he published many works. Under the Empire and the Restoration, he was an active stenographer of legal proceedings and published a series of trials.[65] His stated objective was to produce a 'faithful representation', the 'physiognomy' of the procedure: 'Nothing was added, nothing was omitted'.[66] Breton's activity as a legal stenographer, however, was associated with the regime of freedom of the press and submitted to censorship. Still, the ideal was there and was soon expressed for the benefit of parliamentary proceedings. As one of the first parliamentary shorthand writers, Breton was indeed one of the doyens of journalism. A column written after his death summarises his role in the formation of an opinion-based regime in France:

> M. Breton was a faithful and constant companion of the tribune. He rose with it, and he fell with it [...] one could say that he produced the 'proceedings of the century [...] He knew the words of history, he knew them how they were told and not how they had been made.[67]

In short, he is remembered as the man who served the liberal art of judicial and parliamentary speech.

narrow strips of paper in front of him. The first few words of a speaker's speech were taken by the first writer, who immediately nudged the next to continue the task, and so on. The completed strips were passed to copyists and were corrected before being delivered for printing. Navarre 1909, 398–400; Gardey 2008, 35–47.

61 Ozouf 1993; Chartier and Corsi 1996; Rosenfeld 2001; Gardey 2008, 29–44.

62 Authors, such as Coulon de Thévenot, did not convince many of the practical implementation of their methods.

63 *Séances des Écoles normales* 1800, vol. 1.

64 Loyer 1904.

65 For instance Breton de la Martinière 1800. For references to published transcriptions of French trials see Gardey 2008, 296.

66 Igonel and Breton 1801, 3.

67 Navarre 1909, 215.

3.3 Shorthand, publicity and parliamentarianism in France

Breton contributed to the emergence of the first public sphere in France through the development of parliamentary reports in the press.[68] After the 1814 Charter, the publicity of parliamentary debates was performed by newspapers that sent shorthand journalists to the Chamber of Deputies (which was open to the ordinary public) and the Chamber of Peers (which was not).[69] Transcriptions of the debates were recorded by a few men who were practitioners of shorthand systems that they themselves improved. The Chambers could be considered a space for experimentation and validation of shorthand methods during this period in France, marked by theoretical and dynastic rivalries between the masters and disciples of different systems.[70] The expansion of reports and interest in them developed more seriously under the July Monarchy. The liberal regime was directly interested in publicising debates.[71] Article 27 of the 1830 Charter stated that sessions of the Chamber of Peers should be open to the public, as in the Chamber of Deputies. Several newspapers applied and were allowed to report. The Chamber bolstered the importance of shorthand and the publicity of debates, announcing in 1834 a deal with the *Moniteur*, which was given the exclusivity of *in extenso* proceedings and publication.[72]

This marked a shift from newspaper publication to an official, monopolistic publication sponsored by the parliament itself, which was given the means to employ stenographers to accurately report the debates.[73] There are parallels between this organisation and the role played contemporaneously by Hansard in Great Britain, but three points differentiate between them: the non-formal official status of Hansard; the non-involvement of the Chamber in the organisation of Hansard's service; and the lack of focus on *in extenso* reporting. Moreover, towards the end of the July Monarchy, the French regime was clearly pursuing the

68 This section is based on the study of parliamentary archives as well as a sociological survey (fieldwork carried out at the department of the full proceedings of the French parliament, Service du Compte rendu intégral de l'Assemblée Nationale) between January and June 2003 and January and June 2008.

69 Parliament had to regulate presence of non-members among them. Journalists have gradually acquired a different status from the rest of the 'public'.

70 Gardey 2008, 48.

71 On the development and use of shorthand in German parliaments (Stenographischer Dienst) since the beginning of the nineteenth century, see Boeddeker 2023.

72 Paris, Service des Archives et de la Recherche Historique Parlementaire (SARHP), CRI – Historique.

73 Paris, Service des Archives et de la Recherche Historique Parlementaire (SARHP), Assemblée Nationale, Paris, séries 17 AN10; 16 AN70; Gougeon 1995.

idea of proceedings internally certified by the Chambers. The Senate was first to organise its own shorthand service in 1846, under Hippolyte Prévost (1898–1873). This initiative convinced the deputies under the July Monarchy, but it was only after the 1848 Revolution that two Chambers were merged (*Assemblée Nationale Constituante*) and their administrations were unified.[74]

The service implemented in France in 1848 was extremely long lasting in its organisation and principles. It was re-established with the reinstatement of the republic in 1871 and remained active until the beginning of the twenty-first century, resisting all forms of technological or organisational competition.[75] A list of what remains to the present includes: the central role of the presence of shorthand writers in the benches; shorthand virtuosity as a reporting technology of parliamentary discussions and 'movements' during sessions; the fragmentation of shorthand note-taking; translation by shorthand writers of the notes they have taken; rapid shifts between shorthand writers during sessions; division of labour between shorthand writers who 'roll' (*rouleurs*) and 'proofreaders' (*réviseurs*) who produce the text in written form;[76] the highly hierarchised organisation of tasks; the work chain on which texts circulate in their different states between persons; rapid transfer for typographical composition of the text to the *Journal officiel* by pneumatic tubes; and the certification of the words by the chief of the service of the proceedings under delegation of authority of the president of the assembly.[77] This organisation of a public service to publicise debates clearly differs from the British parliamentary tradition.[78]

74 Gardey 2008, 53–54; Gardey 2010b, 138–141.

75 Gardey 2005; Gardey 2010b.

76 On the left of the president's chair the *rouleur* (a chamber stenographer) listens to the 'interruptions' from the political and physical left, while on the right, the *réviseur* (a chamber stenographer of higher rank) picks up all the remarks and injunctions. This geographic distribution of the recording system is also a hierarchical distribution of the listening and editing process. The role of the *rouleurs* is to reconstitute the *raw* words of what is said (the *rouleur*'s job is to note four minutes of the session before being relieved by a colleague and do a first and immediate transcription known as the *brut* or *raw text*). The more qualified *réviseurs* (who remain in session for twenty minutes before being relieved) listen and reconstitute the global meaning based on the five *rouleur*'s notes and transcriptions and his own notes and/or transcription, while at a third level, the director of the service (or his adjunct), present for the whole length of the session, certifies what happened. It is the director who is ultimately responsible for the minutes being published in the *Journal officiel de la République Française*. See Gardey 2005.

77 Poudra and Pierre 1902.

78 For a historical and gendered reading of French parliamentary rituals and culture since the French Revolution see Gardey 2015 and Gardey 2022.

Comparing the British and French uses of parliamentary shorthand reveals a paradox. Whereas shorthand had been an integral part of the culture of the written word in Great Britain since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its use (like any other form of note-taking) was strictly restricted in Parliament. Note-taking during sessions, as well as the circulation of speech and parliamentary debates outside the space of freedom of the Chambers, were persistently seen as a possible breach of parliamentary liberties and traditions.[79] Conversely, in France, where these technologies were barely used even in the late eighteenth century, the Revolution was a powerful driver for the development and (re)definition of shorthand. The revolutionary stage, the ideal of transparency, and the opening of the parliament to the people, provided deep and durable orientations for the formal and practical significance of a technology that developed mainly in the political and judicial spheres in the early nineteenth century.

4 Educative utopia and new commercial culture: Shorthand in Great Britain and France after the mid nineteenth century

4.1 From educative utopia to commercial empire: Pitman's phonography

While French shorthand was essentially limited to the judicial and parliamentary spheres from the 1830s to 1850s, the situation changed in England with the impact of a single figure: Isaac Pitman, who worked as much to build his empire as he did to establish his legacy.[80] Inventor, publicist and proselyte, Pitman represents a really important change in the history of shorthand, between the old world of shorthand and the new, whose character and advantages he actively redefined. With his 'phonography', Pitman opened shorthand to new audiences and uses, spreading intense propaganda to establish the foundations of a new economy in which the written word would come to play an unprecedented role.

79 Gardey 2005.

80 In addition to the printed works cited, this section is based on research in the archives and printed works collection, Bath, University of Bath Library, Pitman's private collection and archives of Pitman and Sons, sections A, B, C and D.

Isaac Pitman (1813–1897) has been the subject of many autobiographical and hagiographical publications initiated by Pitman and his entourage, which contributed to the development of the Pitman legend. Born into a rigorist and devout family of eleven children, Pitman received his primary education in Bath, where he worked in a factory with his father from a young age. He was introduced to shorthand by a cousin, and soon developed a passion for the art and a commitment to publishing an easier and less costly system of his own design. His 'phonography' represented a new, simplified method, first published in 1837.

Pitman was essentially a self-taught man, and his shorthand allowed others to be the same. A man of great religious knowledge, he led an ascetic lifestyle that was counterbalanced by great intellectual curiosity, which helped him overcome the material and social obstacles he faced early in his life. His desire for knowledge included a commitment to educate others, one shared by his family at large (five of Pitman's siblings were teachers). Pitman first conceived of shorthand as a way to save time and money – by making personal copies of books that were too expensive to buy. Not long after publishing his *Phonography*, Pitman became overtly involved in the English language reform movement as a vehicle for popular education, encapsulated in his later work, *A Plea for Spelling Reform* (1878). His objective with both his Phonography[81] and his reformed spelling was to establish a simplified language that every English speaker could use, which would make it possible to educate children faster and more efficiently.

But how to diffuse a new shorthand method in a landscape in which several shorthand systems were already used by a large number of hardened amateurs and professionals? Pitman's idea was to promote his system not in the form of a treatise, as his competitors did, but as a simple printed page at the modest cost of one penny (the *Penny Plate*). As a budding publicist, Pitman waited for the implementation of the postal reform that drastically reduced postage fees, allowing him to distribute his *Penny Plate* by the Penny Post at the cost of a single penny, regardless of its destination within the United Kingdom. He also offered free correspondence lessons, which made his system the most accessible on the market.

Pitman mailed in subsequent years the *Penny Plate* to schoolteachers all over England. In the meantime, with the help of his brothers, Pitman toured Great Britain to promote his system, initiating a vast campaign of propaganda for phonography. Between 1842 and 1852, Pitman delivered a constant stream of lectures, conferences, and lessons, all the while continuing to publish. While he first distributed his shorthand system in primary schools among teachers and students, it also interested people with greater means and education, who paid to attend con-

81 Pitman 1840.

ferences and thus provided financing for his activities. During the 1860s, Pitman endeavoured to distribute his method among journalists, and inaugurated the (eventual) commercial definition of shorthand by proposing his system to the railway administration in 1869. The proselytising aspect of this movement must be emphasised. In England, Phonography soon mobilised a strong enough audience of young, educated people to ensure the propagation of the method through their educational and philanthropic devotion. In 1852, Ben Pitman, one of his brothers, travelled to the United States and successfully circulated Pitman's system in America, as well.

By the early 1840s, the success of Pitman's shorthand was clear: 50,000 copies of the *Penny Plate* were printed in 1841; twelve successive editions were published up until 1867; 130,000 copies were sold by 1852; 230,000 by 1870; 500,000 by 1887.[82] As the method was distributed, new treatises, manuals and exercises were published for teachers and students, as well as books printed in shorthand characters. The first Institute of Phonetics, established in Bath in 1839, moved and expanded four times during the nineteenth century, showing the extraordinary expansion of this initiative of education and information.

Despite the seniority and variety of shorthand systems already in circulation, Pitman managed to eradicate all prior alternatives, as well as any real subsequent competition (which he did in part by taking his rivals to court). In the mid 1890s, control of Pitman's publication empire and colossal commercial education business passed to his sons. The Pitman family oversaw the publication of technical manuals, a large number of commercial training institutes, and controlled the shorthand system that studied by more than 95% of shorthand students. The corporation developed in parallel with the rise of a 'new' technology for the business world: shorthand note-taking in association with transcription on a typewriter. This promised to achieve – and indeed did achieve – an accelerated production of administrative and commercial writing,[83] one of the technological and professional factors that facilitated the 'administrative revolution' of the late nineteenth century.

82 Baker 1908, 355–360.

83 Gardey 2001a; Gardey 2001b; Lowe 1987.

4.2 Simplifying, promoting literacy, and educating: The successes of Émile Duployé

There is no clear evidence that Émile Duployé (1833–1912), one of the main popularisers of shorthand in France, knew about Isaac Pitman. Nevertheless, Duployé and Pitman shared a series of motivations, including that of using shorthand to provide education to the lower classes.

Duployé was twenty years younger than Pitman and not, strictly speaking, an inventor of his own form of stenography. His first introduction to shorthand was in a seminar at his diocese led by a travelling scholar, who taught Duployé a variant of Conen de Prépéan's shorthand (modified by Aimé Paris).[84] Duployé was committed to simplifying the method[85] with his brother, in hopes of making it accessible to all and – more precisely – enabling children to learn how to read using phonics. Duployé's inventions and intentions are encompassed in the motto of the Two Worlds Shorthand Institute (Institut sténographique des Deux Mondes) that he founded in 1872:

> popularizing shorthand to make basic education and intellectual work easier [...] Our proposal is first and foremost to provide the illiterate with a writing system that is not only faster than ordinary writing, but also a lot easier to learn and to read.[86]

Duployé began to distribute his method in the late 1860s, two decades after the invention of phonography, and did so not by establishing the same kind of commercial and publishing empire as Pitman, but by forming a constellation of circles and organisations that brought together users of a method that was distributed in primary, commercial and philotechnical associations and schools. These eventually propelled his own system to a place of precedence over other existing French methods in the late nineteenth century, when the commercial aspects of shorthand were beginning to develop in France.

As a Catholic clergyman (he was ordained as a priest at twenty-six) who had help from his brothers, Duployé brought to his work a similar proselytising and educational spirit as Pitman, though it did not lead to an actual 'business'. Like Pitman, Duployé disseminated his shorthand through popularisation and propa-

84 Conen de Prépéan (1777–1837) adopted the method of Taylor-Bertin (1813). Aimé Paris (1798–1866) proposed an adaptation of this adaptation in 1827, and worked as a legal and parliamentary shorthand writer for newspapers in the 1830s. Aimé Paris's method constituted one of the branches of French shorthand in the nineteenth century.

85 Duployé 1860.

86 Quoted in Gérardin 1931, 10.

ganda, which his detractors called 'senseless publicity' and a 'storehouse mess of stenographic objects'.[87] Duployé acknowledged having distributed an average of 300,000 to 400,000 leaflets in his first years of activity, and he published many advertisements in newspapers, displayed many posters in train stations, and promoted his method on envelopes, stationery, and other advertising materials.[88]

Duployé began by focusing on teachers, advocating for shorthand writing as a pedagogical tool for early literacy. The first advocates of Duployan included many schoolteachers and directors. Public school played an essential role in spreading shorthand both locally and nationally. Many associations, journals and local bulletins were set up. Duployan groups were largely responsible for the development of shorthand from the 1870s onwards in France, and by the late nineteenth century the Duployan movement had a considerable number of followers. Even though other remote branches of French shorthand (Aimé Paris; Prévost-Delaunay) underwent renewal during this period, they could not rival the Duployan movement.

As with Pitman's Phonography, the main driver behind Duployan was popular education. Duployé sought to democratise literacy and identified shorthand as an instrument to develop a culture of the written word. More so than Pitman, who organised courses and schools dedicated to his method, Duployé first targeted teachers already active in the existing republican institutions, and afterwards mobilised amateurs, curious people, and educators in philotechnic circles and in municipal teaching programs. The socialisation of adults and the development and structuring of a federation of circles of practitioners, who in turn trained new users, played a decisive role in the dissemination of the method and its rise as a commercial and professional technology.

In the late nineteenth century, Duployan shorthand transformed a literacy technology into a commercial technology in the Francophone world,[89] thus following the example of the Anglophone model. The dynamics of capitalistic development – the 'administrative' or 'business' revolution that first occurred in the United States in the late nineteenth century – redefined the uses and the value of shorthand, which became a defining instrument of a new commercial spirit and helped to give a special role to the written word in the world of business.

87 Guénin 1880, 92.

88 Taken from an unspecified oral quotation from Duployé, made before 1870, quoted by Navarre 1909, 280.

89 I won't go into details about this story, which is well known for the United States, Great Britain and France, and on which I have published extensively for France: Gardey 2001a and 2001b.

5 Conclusion

Shorthand has had multiple heterogeneous objectives and uses in history: a system to characterise the sound of language; a rational language that would be better than vernaculars; a copying technology; a method to accelerate the production of writing; a speech recording technology; a technology for learning reading and writing (literacy or education); and, lastly, a commercial technology.

The largely unknown social history of shorthand as a technology can revive a world of inventions, uses and users. It can also account for the historicity and locality of formal and practical meanings of language, art, and technology.

In addition to exhibiting the existence of a culture of the written word, of a scriptural tradition, and of a specific cognitive and spiritual culture, the early history of shorthand in Great Britain is an invitation to reconsider the complexity and diversity of relationships between the oral and the written, handwriting and printing, language and signs, sound and text. Shorthand, as an experimental space with a production of knowledge of its own, is a field with many contributors, one which has been the object of controversies and formal and practical competition since the sixteenth century. Paradoxically, it emerged in a specific linguistic and cultural context (English and British culture in the Early Modern Period) but was described as a 'universal' language and invention that effectively developed as such two centuries later in many versions and many European languages.

The comparison between Great Britain and France allows us both to qualify the differences in trajectories, meanings and uses, and to identify some similarities. It allows a better account of the locality (and sometimes non-locality) of formal and practical actualisations, as well as religious, social, and political shaping of a technology. Conversely, it is yet another way to exhibit the fact that technologies (considered as cognitive, intellectual, and material resources) play an active role in shaping Western cultures, societies, and economies. Focusing on the uses of shorthand in the parliamentary setting allows us to account for both the specific features of each parliamentary culture and how the public sphere emerged in Great Britain and France. As a political technology, shorthand has played a key role in the establishment of major institutions of democracy (justice, parliament) and each language and country deserves a history of its own. Here again, the issue of the oral and the written needs to be revisited. As a note-taking – or speech-recording – technology, shorthand claims to serve an ideal of truth and exhaustiveness. It is an instrument of record-keeping, accountability, and publicity – a tool of democracy that facilitates an informed public.

The educational and commercial actualisations of shorthand in Great Britain and France are evidence of the expansion of the desire for exhaustiveness, truth,

and accuracy from the religious sphere to the judicial, political, and economic spheres. This is where shorthand played an essential role after the mid eighteenth century: as a technology to democratise literacy; as a key instrument for the operations of democratic institutions; and as a means and object of renewal of literacy-based economies.

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The Romantic Melodic Code: What Stenography Tells Us About Mid-Nineteenth-Century Music

Abstract: The mid-nineteenth-century phonographic shorthand systems of Gabelsberger (Germany, 1834) and Pitman (England, 1837) involved systematic mappings of simple pen-strokes to speech sounds. Gabelsberger's method, especially, emphasised the curvilinear writing's emanation from inner thought and sensation. With attention to the histories of music theory and technology, this study proposes that the kind of melody that arose in German Romantic music from the 1830s to 1850s was conceptualised similarly to the new stenographies. Stenographic signs always had specific meanings, while melodic shapes or gestures sometimes had definite semantic referents (as in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*) and sometimes referred to less determinate inner feelings (as in music by Robert and Clara Wieck Schumann and others). Nevertheless, the economy of Romantic melody's communicative use of expressive shapes or gestures is comparable to that of phonographic stenography. Thus music and stenography illuminate each other.

1 Introduction

Das Ohr vernimmt die Rede,
Der Geist ergreift den Sinn,
Die Hand wirft die Contouren
Der Redeklänge hin;
Das Blatt zeigt sie dem Auge,
Das Aug'—mit einem Mal'
Fasst sie, und führt zum Geiste
Den kurz notirten Schall. –
Der Zeichen höh're Deutung
Mahnt des Verstandes Ohr,
Und Klang und Sinne der Rede
Schwebt klar dem Geiste vor. –

Note: This essay revisits Cramer 2006 with different examples and analytical approaches. I hope the simpler technical approach will not only speak to a non-musician audience but also present the ideas with more clarity.

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The ear hears the speech,
the mind grasps the sense,
The hand casts the contours
of speech-sounds;
The page shows them to the eye,
The eye – in an instant
Grasps them, and guides toward the mind
the short-notated sound.
The signs' higher meaning
reminds the understanding's ear,
And sound and sense of speech
hover clearly before the mind.[1]

In this verse, Franz Xaver Gabelsberger (1789–1849) describes his new phonetic stenography as a medium of communication with the *Geist* – a word commonly used in Romantic discourse to refer not just to the mind but also to the spirit, to the seat of both thought and feeling. In the mid nineteenth century, Romantic music was considered an expressive conduit for the *Geist*. When Gabelsberger described the shorthand symbols for words as *Contouren* ('contours'), he was using a word that fits the melodies composed by his musical contemporaries equally well. These terminological choices bring to light an overlap between nineteenth-century stenography and music that speaks to the nature of these two art forms and their historical world.

I begin my exploration of this overlap by suggesting that both stenography and melody rested on the habits involved in writing and reading the shaped, continuous curves of nineteenth-century cursive script. Cursive writing consists of curvilinear traces of the horizontal motion and the varying speed and pressure applied to the pen. With the flexible split-nib pens usually used in the middle of the nineteenth century, greater pressure causes the tines of the nib to spread and leave a thicker trace. A light stroke leaves a thin trace or 'hairline'. Each word is written in a single stream of ink – or rather, even if the ink stops flowing or the pen must leave the paper, each word is read as the trace of a continuous sequence of pen-strokes. Reading cursive script (especially when there are imperfections) is rarely simply a matter of recognising letters. The reader deciphers the curvilinear writing by mentally reconstructing the feelings and gestures of the hand that left the trace. The same is true of stenography.

Romantic melody is another curvilinear trace, a stream of sound whose shapes and connections are tracked aurally. As with cursive and stenography, melody's apparent continuity is often an illusion, as the aural signal itself is inter-

1 Gabelsberger 1834, pt 1, 20 (all translations from Gabelsberger 1834 and Gabelsberger 1850 are mine).

rupted by short silences such as breaths or other articulations. Even when the sound does not stop, there are abrupt changes in pitch between consecutive musical notes, yet we perceive a continuous succession of tones, not auditory stairsteps.[2] The feeling of connectedness between one tone and the next has long eluded explanation, but it is psychologically quite real. Building on gestalt and other strains of psychology, Albert S. Bregman showed how melodies are objects in the mind whose tones coalesce perceptually into single 'auditory streams' – much as connected lines segments merge visually so that they are perceived as unified shapes.[3] In general, consecutive tones within a scale-step of each other will be heard as connected, whereas fast tones separated by very large pitch differences will not. Tones separated by moderately sized leaps may be heard as connected or not, depending on context, manner of performance, and listener expectation.

A listener can hear such continuous melodic auditory streams as shapes or interpret them as traces of gestures.[4] Certainly, melodies are shaped by actual physical movements: musicians choreograph the movements of their fingers and arms or their breathing to sustain or swell the tone, to let silences slip by unnoticed, or to feather the steps and leaps, all in the service of a melody that sounds continuous and distinctly shaped.[5] But, to be less literal, musical sound itself may be conceived gesturally. In Romantic music, I argue, conjunctions of small steps and large leaps are composed to be heard as continuous traces of distinctively shaped motion.[6] Robert Schumann's well-known song 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai' (1840) begins with an ingenious example seen in Fig. 1. The melody is shaped with a leap that risks becoming a gap between B and G-sharp as in Fig. 2a. Yet the B and G-sharp are also heard as the culmination of a continuous curve of several notes rising in the accompaniment, so they are perceived as connected, as seen in Fig. 2b. This perceptual illusion lets the mind experience the full continuity illustrated in Fig. 2c, as though some metaphysical object is moving along the dark tracks marked out between pitches.

2 Gjerdingen 1994, 335–336, 345–346.

3 Bregman 1990, 1–45. Well-explained demonstrations may be heard in Bregman and Ahad 1996a, accessible at several online locations including Bregman and Ahad 1996b.

4 Godøy 2009, 113–118, and Godøy 2011 discuss shape as an attribute of musical gesture in terms of cognition. Schneider 2009 gives an extensive overview of the topic. Hatten 2004, esp. 3–4, 101–102, 113, offers a thoroughly developed theory of musical gesture rooted in this kind of perceived continuity.

5 Godøy 2011 examines such shaping in performance. For one discussion of musicians' conscious practices in this regard, see McGill 2007, esp. 85–193.

6 By 'shape', I mean particularly the shapes heard as 'gestures' in individual melodic lines. See Cramer 2006, 140–143.

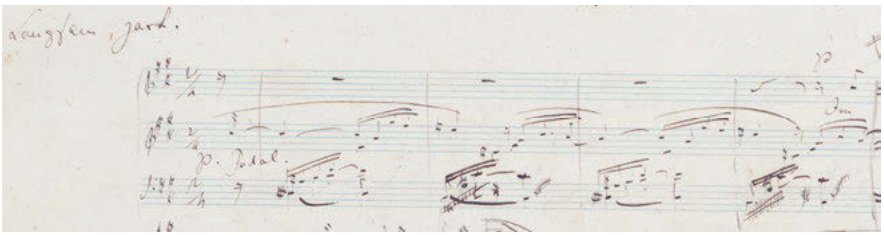

Fig. 1: Detail from Robert Schumann's 1840 autograph of 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai' (*Dichterliebe*, op. 48, no. 1), measures 1–4. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Mus. ms. autogr. R. Schumann 16,2: 31 (Robert Schumann 1840).

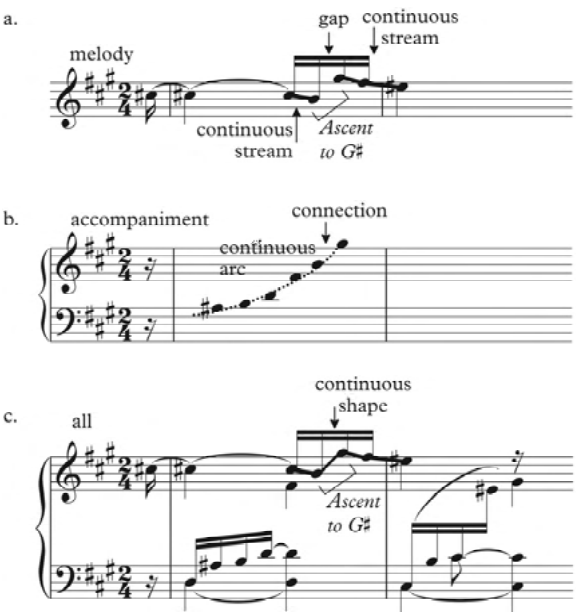

Fig. 2a–c: Streaming connections in 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai', measures 1–2 (Robert Schumann 1879).

Shaping a melodic auditory stream using a musical instrument is not so different from writing with a pen in cursive.[7] If melody requires the manufacture of an illusion of connection, handwriting and stenography with the nineteenth-century

7 For a longer discussion of the technology and rhythmic choreography of nineteenth-century handwriting, see Cramer 2006, 133–136, 139–140.

pen require the skilful regulation of varying ink-flow. If the choreography fails, the result – beyond a malformed symbol – may be a break in the ink-flow or, worse, an ink-blot. Such handwriting is not simply movement up and down or left to right across the page. Pressure directed into the page is also of the utmost importance. A thin ascending line demands light pressure and fast motion, a thick descending line the opposite, and curves require a combination. Varying thickness is generally ornamental in cursive script, but in mid-nineteenth-century stenography it is an essential carrier of meaning.

My claim is that, in the mid nineteenth century, the shaped curvilinear traces of both stenography and melody were thought to traverse the barrier separating the inner world of subjectivity and the mind from the outer world of objectivity and the senses, and thus to communicate the transcendent interiority to which Romantic musicians such as Robert Schumann aspired.[8] Both kinds of traces were made up of basic shapes that were classifiable and could therefore function as signs. Stenographic signs were mediated by the sounds of real spoken language and thus had specificity that music lacked, but both fields eschewed pictorial signs and preferred abstract curvilinear traces; both fields tended toward a finite classification of the possible symbols; and both took spoken language as a model. In the 1830s, Gabelsberger in Germany and Isaac Pitman (1813–1897) in England introduced methods of shorthand whose shapes were specifically correlated to phonetic meanings according to systems of geometric distinctions. Gabelsberger cast his as a cursive system, calling attention to its tracing of familiar handwritten gestures. Taken up in later systems such as those of Wilhelm Stolze (1841) and Leopold Arends (1860), this became the hallmark of German stenography. Where cursive alphabets made florid use of a finite repertory of pen-strokes, stenography imposed rigorous economies of meaning on even more systematically constructed repertories of shapes. A similar economy of shape and meaning is apparent in the melodies of much mid-nineteenth-century German Romantic music. Compared to language and writing, instrumental music's semantic precision is limited, but I find it useful to imagine that mid-nineteenth-century composers sought to discover a 'Romantic melodic code'.

8 On musical interiority, see Stefaniak 2021, 21–66.

2 Wagner's melodic expression

Carl Dahlhaus defined Wagner's characteristic 'unending melody' as an 'unbroken (unending) continuity' in the orchestra in which 'every note seems expressive and significant (melodic)'.[9] He found it different, chiefly, from Italian opera, in that its 'melodic' attribute lay not in harmonically-based phrases of regular predictable lengths nor in ornamental 'padding' but rather in the 'substantiality and eloquence of the motifs and successions of notes'.[10] These particular characteristics are not exclusive to Wagnerian melody but are found in much mid-nineteenth-century German melody. But where Dahlhaus – like so many others – interprets such melody with reference to the history of ideas (specifically Wagner's manipulations of Schopenhauer's ideas), other sources may better help us to interpret such melody as a communicative technology. Friedrich Kittler, in recasting nineteenth-century literary history as a tale of media and technology, begins with the innovative enlistment of German mothers to teach reading and writing to their children through oral demonstration of the sounds of letters, a practice that began shortly before 1800. This, he argues, produced a 'discourse network' (that is, a habitus, episteme, or culture-wide pattern of thought) in which early-nineteenth-century Germans imagined idealised maternal voices – which they equated with pure meaning or ideas – behind alphabetic letters. Thus, alphabetic handwriting became an organising concept of early-nineteenth-century literature and ideas. Kittler then jumps forward to 1900, by which time he says technological developments had led to a discourse network in which the mind was a surface written on by perception and thought was like the imprint left by a gramophone stylus, film image, or typewriter stroke.[11]

Mid-nineteenth-century stenography and melody occupy a space within that century-long transition after it had become common to regard thought and ideas in terms of inner life but before inner life was approached as a matter of explainable physical and psychological processes. Building an account of Wagnerian melody with this narrative in mind, David Trippett begins by demonstrating the coexistence of 'symbolist' and 'realist' impulses in German theories of melody from the 1820s on. Within the time's prevailing view that 'art was to express in

9 Dahlhaus 1992a, 308–309, translated from Dahlhaus 1986a, 212–214: '*unendliche Melodie*', '*abbrechenden ("unendlichen") Kontinuität*', '*jeder Ton expressiv und bedeutsam ("melodisch") erscheint*'.

10 Dalhaus 1992a, 308, 311, translated from Dahlhaus 1986a, 212, 217: '*Füllsel*', '*"Substantialität" und "Beredtheit" der Motive und Tonfolgen*'.

11 Kittler 1990, esp. 27–53, 70–123, 206–265.

outward, sensibly perceptible forms the inward spiritual life of human beings', the established symbolic view saw melody as representing feelings (or other meanings) through 'shape that acquires signification by association (tradition) and context'. 'Realist melody', in contrast, was a direct register of experience. The late 1830s, for example, harboured a view that rising pitch was correlated with increasing intensity of feeling.[12] And by the 1850s, devices began to appear that promised to reveal inward life through the mechanical inscription of certain physiological processes or vocal sounds.

By way of illustration, the first such instrument, Carl Ludwig's kymograph of 1846–1847, was created to draw a graph of changing blood pressure using a catheter inserted directly into the bloodstream. It literally punctured the boundary between outer and inner. It also meant that 'the graph itself became the phenomenon to be analyzed'.[13] Thus the stenographer Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville expected the output of his phonautograph of 1857, a kymographic device that inscribed the soundwaves of speech, to be readable, a 'natural stenography'.[14] In the event, it did not prove readable by humans, but after further conceptual shifts, phonographs resembling his technology came to be used to reproduce sound realistically. Meanwhile, Wagner's followers began to imagine in Wagnerian melody a direct trace of feelings much like direct kymographic traces – but Wagner himself disagreed.[15] Romantic melody is more stethoscopic than kymographic. Its ups and downs may be traces, but not of fluctuating inner intensity. Like handwritten phonographic stenography, it is composed of distinctive signs meant not to directly recreate but to symbolically communicate inner states.

Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*), a monumental set of four operas created between 1849 and 1874, epitomises this. His innovative vision involved characters singing declamatory melodies onstage amid elaborate scenery while the orchestra, unseen below the stage, emitted symphonic music representing the network of narrative ideas that circulated and evolved during the four operas' plot cycle. The excerpt from *Die Walküre* (the second opera in the *Ring*) shown in Fig. 3 illustrates the use of signs in the composer's well-known musical storytelling. During the scene, the god Wotan is forced to renounce his

12 Trippett 2013, 62–65.

13 Borell 1987, 56. By comparison, the stethoscope, invented in 1816, also allowed physicians to cross the boundary and hear inside the patient, yet it required physicians to analyse sounds as indexes of complex physical processes and as signs of the patient's inner state of health; see Sterne 2003, 90–92, 100–109, 128–136.

14 Trippett 2013, 257–60; also Pierce 2017, 144–145.

15 Trippett 2013, 57, 330–340, 393–398.

connection to his daughter Brünnhilde, who will become mortal and fall asleep guarded by a ring of fire, awaiting the hero destined to unite with her. The excerpt begins with the winding down of a series of repetitions of a melodic motive representing *Sleep*. The trombones state a leitmotif referring to *Fate*, and the *cor anglais* (English horn) then alludes twice to *Renunciation,* while Wotan sings of the gods' need to turn away from humans.

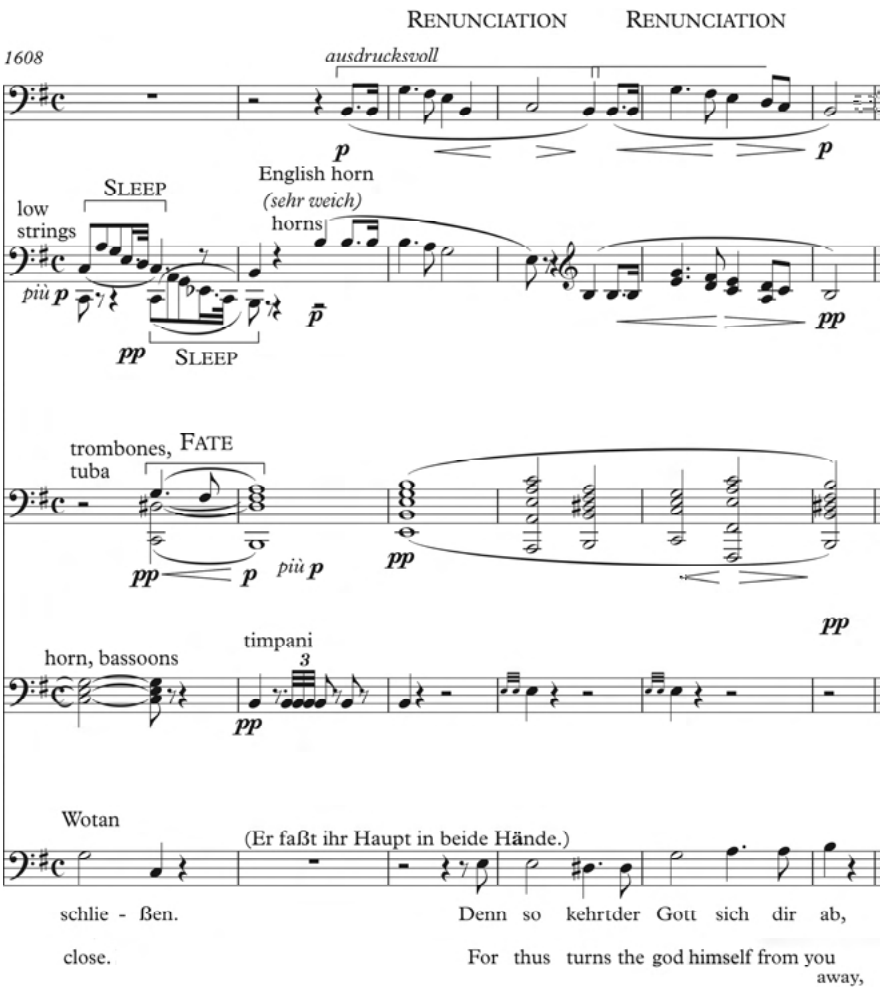

Fig. 3: Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Act 3, Scene 3, measures 1608–1612 (Wagner 2002).

What makes these melodic motives recognizable? And how does the audience learn or deduce their meanings? Sometimes the motives iconically resemble something about that which they represent. The *Sleep* motive, through its repetitious, rhythmic rising and falling, is discernibly iconic of something gestural about sleep, perhaps its patterned breathing. The *Fate* motive relies on the grammar of musical harmony: it stops short of the expected final chord, leaving a sense that something is yet to come. The somewhat more complex *Renunciation* leitmotif,[16] though, acquires meaning like a linguistic sign, a word: it needs to be taught to the audience. And it has been, at the very start of the *Ring* cycle. Scene 1 of *Das Rheingold* allegorises the origin of language by developing the basic elements of the cycle's leitmotivic vocabulary at the same time as it presents the background of the plot.[17] The scene's music begins with a single held low tone which soon grows into melodic waves that represent water. Three Rhine-maidens introduce themselves like toddlers learning to talk, babbling nonsense words to wave-like melodies. The process of differentiating the motivic vocabulary – of churning the undifferentiated waves into distinctive motives – speeds up when they rebuff the lecherous Alberich. Embittered, Alberich resolves to take the lump of gold that glistens on a rock as a simple object of delight and exploit it for his own purposes. This is when the Rhine-maiden Woglinde observes that one cannot turn the gold into a magic ring without renouncing love. The melody through which she declaims these words, shown in Fig. 4, introduces the *Renunciation* leitmotif, and it reappears several more times in the operas, becoming associated with momentous decisions between worldly power and the power of love. By the time the English horn plays it in Fig. 3, it is quite familiar.

16 Different guides vary somewhat in the leitmotifs they identify and the names they give them, but by and large the differences are not great. On the meaning of this leitmotif and its significance to the *Ring* as a whole, see Cooke 1979, 2–9; Corse 1990, 80–81; Berger 2017, 66–77, 97–98, 156.

17 For a stimulating reading of this scene as the birth of 'melody which fecundates the language of words', see Nattiez 1993, 51–60; also Kittler 1990, 77–78.

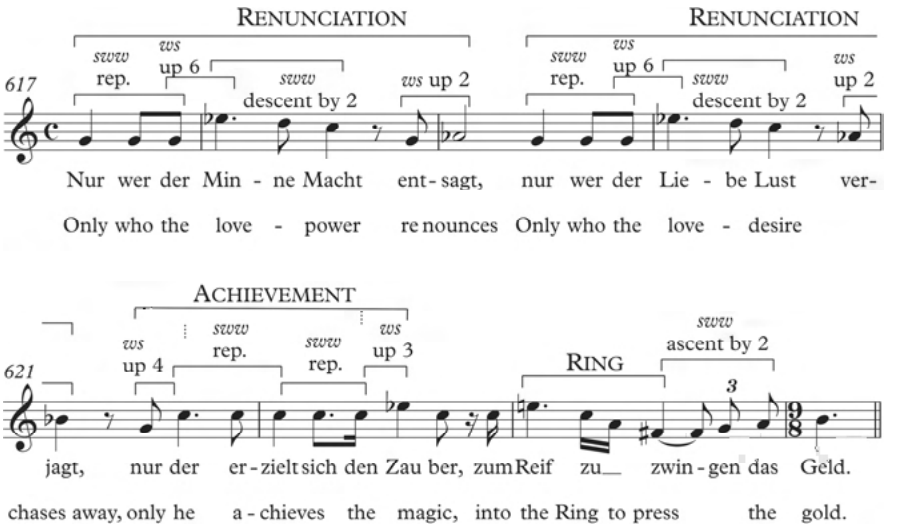

Fig. 4: Woglinde sings of the choice between love and worldly power, introducing the *Renunciation* leitmotif. Wagner, *Das Rheingold*, Scene 1, measures 617–624 (Wagner 2010).

The referentiality of Wagnerian leitmotifs is complicated. The idea of a repertory of motives whose forms and meanings were relatively fixed is traceable to Hans von Wolzogen, who published a *Thematischer Leitfaden* for the *Ring* cycle's leitmotifs even before the first complete performances of the cycle in 1876. It caught on because audiences needed some means to differentiate and decode the strands in Wagner's musical tapestry. Ever since, such guides have been a key part of audiences' understandings of Wagner's work.[18] Naming leitmotifs is useful, perhaps even necessary, as a first step toward comprehension of the *Ring*.[19] Nevertheless, the drawbacks of such guides have been noted ever since they first appeared.[20] Naming them makes them seem static and hides the extent to which they vary from instance to instance. Wagner himself did not endorse the approach; he understood the symphonic pageant of motives as an 'emotionalizing of the intellect',[21] the opposite of applying fixed verbal meanings. His long-time hope, to use Trippett's terms, had been to find a 'pre-semantic channel of communication' in

18 Thorau 2009, 139–148.
19 Dahlhaus 1986a, 214–215; translated in Dahlhaus 1992a, 309–310.
20 Bribitzer-Stull 2007.
21 Thorau 2009, 138.

the service of 'cognizing a poetic idea'.[22] As Sandra Corse explains, Wagner turned to Herder's postulates about the expressivity of ancient language and to Hegel's account of the stages of consciousness as he imagined a form of expression free of the limits that modernity, in his view, had imposed on language and thought.[23] His leitmotifs, then, would represent 'objectified emotion' or 'a complex combination of emotion and thought'. In this scheme, thought was an 'image' impressed on the mind at 'another place and time', a '*memory* of a sensual experience', or (quoting Wagner) 'the bond between an absent sensation and a present one that is wrestling for expression' ('*das Band zwischen einer ungegenwärtigen und einer gegenwärtig nach Kundgebung ringenden Empfindung*').[24]

One way to grasp Wagner's expression is to consider the leitmotifs in terms of gesture. For Wagner, a man of the theatre who directed the staging of his own works, 'the nexus between [physical] gesture and music was exceptionally strong'.[25] While he may not have treated melody as itself a form of gesture, he came close. His melodies were often rooted in gesture, mirroring motions and emotions occurring onstage – for example, a sailor's rolling gait set with a wave-like melodic accompaniment.[26] Mary Ann Smart says, 'What gestures expressed visibly, melody cast in a more interior, emotive form'. It was a 'reciprocal relationship': if orchestral motives originated in onstage gestures, the mimicking might also be considered in reverse, with the stage performer viewed as a 'puppet of the orchestra, her limbs moving in response to orchestral "gestures" that encoded emotion'. Thus, stage gesture 'underlin[es] and decipher[s] the semantically coded utterances that emanate from the orchestra'. When repeated later, an orchestral gesture reminds the audience of the original physical gesture. The gesture has now 'acquired the status of an idea' – that is, it has become expressible by means of a leitmotif.[27]

Like gesture, speech declamation was vital to theatrical expression. Wagner attempted to give precise musical notation for declamation in the recitatives of his

22 Trippett 2013, 224.

23 Corse 1990, 52–54. For further thoughts on the parallel between leitmotifs and words, see 57–62.

24 Corse 1990, 46–47. The quotation of Wagner is from Wagner 1907, vol. 4, 183; I have adapted the translation from Wagner 1893, 327. For a recent discussion of the philosophical background of Wagner's views on language, reason, and sensation (in the context of a broad consideration of the ideological significance of Wagner's works), see Berger 2017, esp. 10–46. On leitmotifs' connection to memory, see Dahlhaus 1986a, 212, translated in 1992a, 308; Dahlhaus 1986b, 81, translated in 1992b, 114; and Breig 1986, 426, translated in 1992, 451.

25 Knust 2015, 233.

26 Knust 2015, 224.

27 Smart 2004, 172–176, 187.

opera *Lohengrin* (composed 1845–1848), over repeated orchestral melodies meant to systematically supply unity.[28] Simplistically but not inaccurately, music theorists of the time interpreted him as espousing melody whose shape was modelled on the rising and falling pitch of speech declamation.[29] In fact, Wagner had in mind the '"magic" locution' of a particular singer, Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, whose exceptional declamation 'allowed semantic expression and plastic melody to blend'.[30] But unfamiliar performers responded with incomprehension, and even Wagner acknowledged that the effect was 'monotonous' and 'unrhythmical'.[31] The failure of this attempt to express interior meaning may explain his subsequent move toward orchestral speech and toward music-dramas based on a sensory theory of language that explicitly had word roots at its heart.[32] He famously formed the libretto of the *Ring* cycle around word-root association (*Stabreim*). In his book *Oper und Drama*, written at the outset of his work on the *Ring* cycle, Wagner says the meaningful essence of a word resides in the shape of its etymological stem. Vowels are imperceptible to the 'eye' of hearing while consonants are apparent to that 'eye',[33] forming the 'outer shapes' of the vowels:

> [The consonant] raises the sounding vowel of the root to a definite characteristic, by firmly bounding its infinitely fluid element, and through the lines of this boundary it brings to the vowel's colour, in a sense, the drawing [*Zeichnung*] which makes of it an exactly distinguishable, recognizable shape.[34]

For Trippett, Wagner's discussion of the 'ear-dominated "eye of hearing"' is 'less a claim for synaesthesia than a belief that seeing alphabetic characters affects the way we hear and write text.' He takes Wagner in Kittlerian terms as audiating the written word.[35] Wagner was indeed a creature of Kittler's alphabetised early nineteenth century, but it seems unlikely that he had alphabetic writing directly in mind when he wrote about syllable shapes. His notion of word roots as drawings

28 Breig 1986, 400–405, translated in Breig 1992, 433–437. On declamation as the style of composition that 'came most easily to Wagner' and influenced the shaping of his melodies well into the composition of the *Ring*, see Knust 2015, esp. 225–227.

29 Trippett 2013, 252–265.

30 Trippett 2013, 224–225.

31 Trippett 2013, 228–240, 158, 184, 256.

32 Trippett 2013, 274–275. Wagner's thinking in this regard is derived from Herder, Hegel, and Feuerbach; see Corse 1990, 45–57.

33 Wagner 1907, vol. 4, 135–138; translated in Wagner 1893, 273–276.

34 Wagner 1907, vol. 4, 129; translation adapted from Wagner 1893, 267.

35 Trippett 2013, 199–200.

in which consonants shape vowels, however, has a conceptual parallel in Gabelsberger's stenographic system.

In all of his operas from 1850 onward Wagner invested the orchestra with the faculty of speech. To be sure, many of its melodies are introduced through declamation, as we have already seen with the *Renunciation* motive (Fig. 4); when a motive is first heard in the voice, the prosodic fit between words and melody may teach the audience the motive's meaning. But the basis of the motives' structural and semantic logic seems to go much deeper. Trippett raises large questions in this regard:

> Beyond the expressive human voice, what about Wagner's ambitions for an instrumental speech faculty? [...] Did the linguistic specificity of vowels within speech roots extend to Wagner's orchestral motifs and *Klangfarben*? His celebrated claim that 'the orchestra indisputably possesses a *faculty of speech* ... [which is] something quite real and palpable' would appear to suggest so, but how far did the ambition of this sonic communication go?[36]

Wagner's own discussion helps Trippett answer these questions more fully with respect to *Klangfarbe* [tone colour – i.e. timbre or instrumentation].[37] The question about motives is much more difficult to address, though. Comparing melodic fragments to morphemes, syllables, or words outstrips our readily available conceptual apparatus. And how are we to understand it when Wagner writes of a speech-like 'lyric outpour' of 'motives pressed together before the eyes'?[38] We turn to stenography's linkage between sound, gesturally-produced visual shapes, and linguistic meaning.

3 Stenography and interiority

The names of various new stenographical methods published in the 1830s emphasized that they were rooted in the sounds of speech: *Rede-Zeichen-Kunst* (speech-sign-art), sound-hand (which became phonography ['sound-writing']), phonegraphy.[39] Equally noteworthy, though, is their rootedness in a nineteenth-century psychological understanding of communication. For Gabelsberger, communica-

36 Trippett 2013, 360–361, quoting Wagner 1907, vol. 4, 173; translated in Wagner 1893, 316.

37 Wagner 1893, 307–308; for exploration of this idea see Trippett 2013, 361–374.

38 Wagner 1893, 305.

39 Gabelsberger 1834; Pitman 1837; Pitman 1840; De Stains 1839. In Gabelsberger's publication, a lithographed title page gives the hyphenated word *Rede-Zeichen-Kunst*, although the printed title page does not.

tion was the transfer of one person's thoughts to another with signs as the intermediary – the process he illustrated with the poem at the start of this chapter, in which signs mediate the translation from inward thought to outward sign (*Zeichen*) and back:

> *All unser Sprechen und Vernehmen ist lediglich Darstellung und Auffassung sinnlicher Zeichen, ein beständiges Befassen mit abstrahirten Merkmalen zur Empfänglichmachung und Verdauung des Sinnlichen für den Geist, und wieder lauter bildliches Einhüllen des Geistigen zum Zwecke der Veroffenbarung desselben auf sinnlichem Wege.* [...] *Das Zeichen allein ist das zauberische Band, welches das Sinnliche mit dem Übersinnlichen und Geistigen verbindet.*
>
> All our speaking and hearing is merely presentation and comprehension of sensory signs, a constant grappling with abstract characteristics so as to make the sensory receptible and digestible to the mind (*Geist*), and again pure pictorial enveloping of the mental (*geistig*) for the purpose of revealing it in a sensory way. [...] The sign alone is the magical bond that connects the sensory with the supernatural and spiritual.[40]

Thus signs are the senses' outer tokens of inner thought. Not only do signs make our thought accessible to our own consciousness, but they also allow us to communicate our thought to others. But signs on their own are not yet language (*Sprache*). Gabelsberger reserves that term for systems of symbols from which selections can be combined to convey meanings:

> *Gerade aber dadurch, dass der Mensch denkend und mit Auswahl sich der Zeichen bedienen lernte, ist er zum Meister der Sprache geworden, die Alles umfasst, was einmal zum klaren Gedanken geworden ist.*
>
> Precisely because man learned to use signs by thinking and choosing, however, he has become a master of language, which encompasses everything that has once become a clear thought.[41]

For Gabelsberger, then, language is the articulate and intentional use of spoken, written, or other signs. In introducing his method, Gabelsberger considers the entire field of communication, offering a comprehensive survey of signs as they exist in various sensory realms: auditory (speech or music), visual (writing or art), and spatial (gesture, facial expressions, pictorial writing). While he privileges spoken language (*Mundsprache* or *Lautsprache*), calling it 'fully developed language' ('*vollkommen ausgebildeten Sprache*'),[42] he also considers *Schrift* to be a

40 Gabelsberger 1834, pt 1, 3–4.
41 Gabelsberger 1834, pt 1, 8.
42 Gabelsberger 1834, pt 1, 10.

potential *Sprache*. Gabelsberger ultimately concludes that, among the conceivable systems of representation, speech is the one that a written language should replicate. This is why he finds *Rede* (speech) to be a term preferable to *Sprache* and calls his stenographic system *Redezeichenkunst.*[43]

Something similar was developing in England. Introducing his system briefly and practically in 1837 without knowledge of Gabelsberger's monumental 1834 publication, Pitman stated that his purpose was the expression of 'thoughts and affections' through shapes systematically corresponding to the sounds of speech.[44] This dual emphasis on interiority and speech remained as he spelled out his method in greater detail in successive editions. By 1848, he imagined the possibility of a written language 'legible to men of all nations, independently of the diversities of their native languages', yet he insisted it would require symbols 'not of the things spoken of, not of the ideas conceived, but of the sounds by which these ideas are familiarly represented.' Abstract pictorial signs might have seemed more suitable for universal writing, but he deemed the phonographic approach necessary because '[a] philosophical language [...] can be none other than the universal language in which each individual has thought and felt from childhood' – that is, speech.[45]

Pitman's phonography taxonomically maps speech sounds to geometric shapes. Straight lines iconically represent abrupt consonants, curves softer consonants. As Fig. 5 shows, *g*, *t*, *d*, and *b* appear as lines while *f*, *v*, *s*, and *n* are curves. Thus the words *forgive* and *forget* differ in their endings – an arc for *v* and a vertical line for *t*. Further, Pitman uses thin pen-strokes to denote unvoiced consonants and thick strokes for the corresponding voiced consonants. In *forgive*, the *f* and *v* are represented by the same shape, a descending arc, and differ only in voicedness with the *f* thin and the *v* thick. The *t* in *forget* is a thin vertical line, while *t*'s voiced counterpart, *d*, is thick. Vowels are represented by the placement of dots and dashes next to the consonant-based word outline (but those symbols could be omitted in practice, to enhance writing speed).

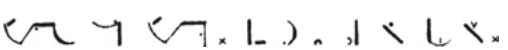

Fig. 5: 'Forgive and forget. Do as you would be done by' written in Pitman's Phonography. Pitman 1848, 65 (printed words given at 39).

43 Gabelsberger 1834, pt 1, 19–20.

44 Pitman 1837, 9. Pitman later wrote that he had been unaware of other 'attempts to write according to sound' until three years after his first publication – that is, until 1840 (Pitman 1848, 5).

45 Pitman 1848, 10.

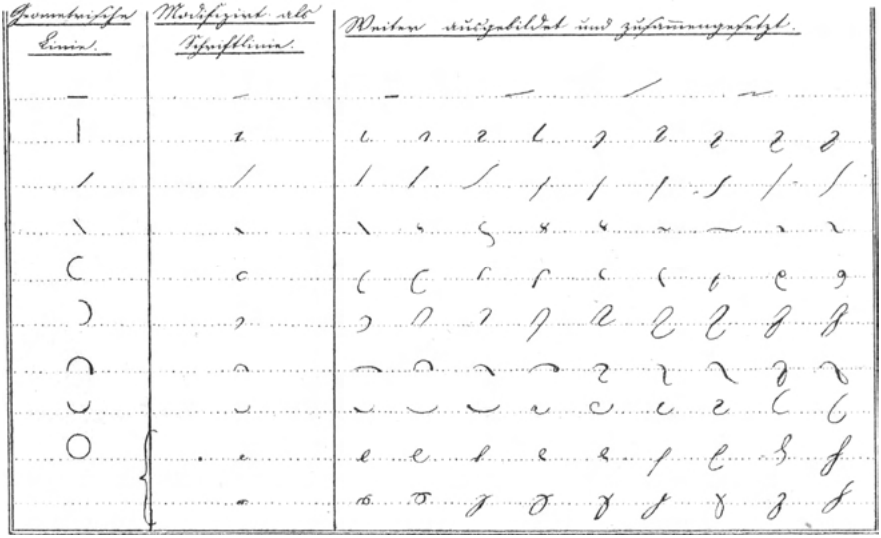

Fig. 6: Geometric basis of Gabelsberger's cursive *Redezeichenkunst.* Gabelsberger 1834, pt 2, 14. First column: *Geometrische Linie* ('geometric lines'); second column: *Modifiziert als Schriftlinie* ('modified as cursive lines'); third column: *Weiter ausgebildet und zusammengetzt* ('further developed and combined').

Gabelsberger's system, like Pitman's, is founded on geometric categorisation. The nine basic geometric symbols may be seen in the left column of Fig. 6: vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines; a circle; and left, right, up, and down semicircles. This fact may go unnoticed because, unlike Pitman's, Gabelsberger's geometry is modified to be written with the strokes of cursive handwriting. The middle column of Fig. 6 shows basic cursive renderings of the geometric symbols, and the right column shows a variety of modifications and combinations of these renderings, with the more complex forms toward the right. This table illustrates possible pen-strokes without regard to their stenographic use, but most if not all of the symbols may be used in *Redezeichenkunst* to represent possible phonemes, syllables, or larger speech segments of the German language. The simpler outlines in the right column represent basic phonemes, while those that are more complex represent blends or sequences of sounds. A full account of the system is beyond the scope of this essay, but the lesson to be drawn here is that the writing and reading of *Redezeichenkunst* requires a grasp of the modification and combination of basic shapes.

One type of modification is the representation of vowels not through separate symbols next to the consonants, as with Pitman, but through gestural inflections within consonant-symbols, such that vowels and consonants shape each other. In

justifying the incorporation of vowels as graphic modifications of the symbols for consonants, Gabelsberger appeals to the sonic and spiritual qualities of speech:

> [*D*]*er Vokal als der spirituöse Theil der Sprache im Zusammenlaut mit den Konsonanten, welche die materiell objektive Bezeichnung bei sich führen, in der Regel sich leicht von selbst verstehen lasse.* [...] *Soll also ein Vokal mit einem Konsonanten unmittelbar verbunden werden, so brauchen wir nur etwas von seiner Qualität, von seiner Eigenschaft und Bildlichkeit auf Letzteren überzutragen, so dass der Konsonant von dem selben durchdrungen und belebt wird, wie der Konsonanten-Schall von der mittönenden Stimme.*
>
> [T]he vowel as the spiritual part of speech in harmony with the consonants, which carry out the materially objective signification, can usually let itself be easily understood. [...] If, therefore, a vowel is to be directly bound to a consonant, we need only to transfer just something of its quality, of its character and appearance, to the latter, so that the consonant is permeated and enlivened by it in the same way as the consonant's sonority resonates with the sounding voice.[46]

By vowels' quality, character, or appearance, Gabelsberger means the forcefulness of *a*, the rounding of lips involved in pronouncing *o*, the height of *i*, the flattening or width of *e*, and so on.[47] Consider three words in Fig. 7 that share opening and final consonants: (20) *Wasser* ('water'), (21) *Weser* ('the River Weser'); and (22) *Vezier* ('vizier'). Forcefulness denoting *a* applied to the downward curve denoting *w* yields a thick downward curve signifying the opening syllable *Wa-* of *Wasser*, while in *Weser* a wider horizontal connection after the downward curve denotes the wide vowel *e* of *We-*. *Vezier* has an unaccented opening syllable *Ve-* and consequently a neutral *e*, so its opening curve is not modified, but the high *i* sound of its closing syllable *-ier* is signified by raising the short diagonal symbol that denotes *r*. Or consider (10) *Kapitel* ('chapter'): the initial *k* and *p* strokes are thick to incorporate the vowel *a*; the light ascender *t* rises high for the vowel *i*, and the final dot showing *l*, like the unstressed vowel *e*, is neutral. By comparison, in (11) *Kapital* ('capital'), a forceful final dot indicates the vowel *a*; and in (12) *Kapitol* ('capitol'), an additional curved stroke before the dot conveys the *round* vowel *o*. Similarly, a rounding makes the difference between (23) *Athem* ('breath') and (24) *Atom* ('atom').

46 Gabelsberger 1850, pt 1, 24–25.

47 Gabelsberger 1850, pt 1, 4–7, 27.

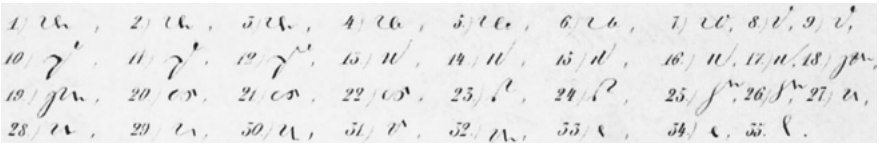

Fig. 7: Examples of consonant-vowel shaping (with their longhand meanings below). Gabelsberger 1850, pt 2, 5.

Table 1: Words written in Fig. 7.

1 *modern*	2 *modern*	3 *moderiren*	4 *Model*	5 *Modell*	6 *Möbel*	7 *mobil*	8 *Mittel*	9 *Metall*
10 *Kapitel*	11 *Kapital*	12 *Kapitol*	13 *gebet*	14 *Gebet*	15 *Gebiet*	16 *Gebot*	17 *gebeut*	18 *schimmern*
19 *Chimären*	20 *Wasser*	21 *Weser*	22 *Vezier*	23 *Athem*	24 *Atom*	25 *zittern*	26 *citiren*	27 *mehr*
28 *Mähre*	29 *Meer*	30 *mehrere*	31 *mir*	32 *murren*	33 *der*	34 *dar*	35 *dir*	

Describing examples such as those of Fig. 7, Gabelsberger noted the need for close attention to 'partial strokes' (*Theilzüge*), which amount to gestures traced by the pen:

> *In der mechanischen Darstellung oder Zeichnung dieser* [...] *Wörter, stellt sich im Grunde keines merklich länger als das andere dar, und dennoch ergeben sich die grössten Verschiedenheiten des Ausdruckes, und zwar mit der genauesten, pünktlichsten Unterscheidung, welche hauptsächlich auf einem raschen Drucke mit der Feder, oder auf feinerer Gestaltung eines Theiles der Züge, oder auf Abwechselung in der Stellung der Buchstaben, oder auf einem unbedeutend scheinenden Vokalvorderstrichchen u. dgl. beruhen.* [...] *Ebendarum sind diese Beispiele ganz vorzüglich geeignet, den Anfänger in der aufmerksamen Anschauung der Theilzüge zu üben, was wir von unserer Kurrentschrift aus nicht so gewohnt sind, indem wir nur das Gesammtbild des Buchstaben oder des Wortes anzuschauen pflegen, und nicht so strenge und aufmerksam jeden einzelnen Federzug verfolgen.*
>
> In the mechanical representation or drawing of these [...] words, none of them appears noticeably longer than the other, and yet one gains the greatest variety of expression, and indeed with the most precise, accurate distinction, which is mainly based on a quick pressing of the pen, or on finer shaping of part of the stroke, or on changes in the position of the character, or on a seemingly insignificant vowel stroke, and the like [...] For that very reason these examples are excellently suited to train the beginner in the attentive observation of the partial strokes, which we are not used to from our longhand handwriting, since we are accustomed to only looking at the overall picture of the letter or the word, and not so strictly and carefully following each individual stroke of the pen.[48]

48 Gabelsberger 1850, pt 1, 31.

An important aspect of *Redezeichenkunst* discussed here is the need to be attuned to the subtle but distinctive physical pen-movements required to replicate the communicative power of speech through the modification and combination of basic shapes. Gabelsberger's mention of stenographic outlines that achieve 'the greatest variety of expression' resonates with Wagner's discussion, encountered earlier, of the 'lyric outpour' of 'motives pressed together before the eyes'. In stenography, of course, the variety of expression arises not because 'quick pressing' and 'finer shaping' with the pen are emotively expressive gestures but because they produce the distinctions needed to distinguish one partial stroke from another. While it seems unlikely that Romantic melody is ever fully devoid of emotive (or 'realist') gestural expression, Wagner's motives do rely on a linguistic mode of expression, as we have already seen. Such expression may be elucidated through a musical analogy with the partial strokes of stenography.

4 Melodic Code

4.1 Wagner and Gabelsberger

Gabelsberger's geometric approach allowed the systematic mapping of partial strokes to speech sounds while the cursive aspect of his system emphasised the shapes' fluidity and tactility, their emanation from the *Geist*. Similar possibilities were recognised in mid-nineteenth-century melody, as music theorists such as Adolf Bernhard Marx (1837) and Johann Christian Lobe (1844) attempted to catalogue the expressive connotations of each melodic interval.[49] Wagner did not stop with mere intervals. Like handwritten letters or stenographic word-outlines, his leitmotifs are made up of combinations or permutations of groups of intervals, 'fragments' that are 'continually being reassembled in different formations – coalescing in a logical succession which here pours forth like a stream, there disperses in an eddying vortex'.[50]

In reference to Gabelsberger's 'partial strokes', we may call these Wagnerian fragments 'partial figures', gestures of just a few tones. The possible number of distinct basic partial figures is finite, if one goes by general features: a figure may

49 Trippett 2013, 110–129.

50 Wagner 1979, 38, quoted in Trippett 2013, 120. Trippett discusses Wagner's permutations in Trippett 2013, 119. Dahlhaus explores how Wagner's themes continually 'metamorphose' into each other in Dahlhaus 1986a, 206–217, esp. 208, translated in 1992a, 304–311, esp. 305; Dahlhaus 1986b, 75–77, translated in 1992b, 110–112.

descend, ascend, or change direction. It may or may not include a leap. Rhythmically, it may involve metric differentiation (strong-weak or weak-strong) and rhythmic evenness (short-short or long-long) or unevenness (long-short or short-long). What matters is the movement between one note and the next, not so much the notes themselves. Specific pitches and specific rhythms ('eighth-note B followed by quarter-note D', for instance) do not define a figure. The relative sizes and directions of motion between tones do, along with the way they fall on relatively strong and weak beats (a note beginning on the second, third, or fourth beat of a measure is metrically weaker than a note falling on the first beat, and a note beginning between beats is still weaker).

It will be helpful to use concise labels characterising the partial figures according to metric profile (with *s* standing for strong beat, *w* for weak) and pitch movement. Thus the label <*ws* up 6>, for example, describes a two-note partial figure whose second note falls on a stronger metric position and whose pitch is higher by a minor 6th than that of the initial weak tone. The label <*sww* descending steps> has three notes, with the first metrically strong and the next two each dropping in pitch by a step. A small portion of the *Ring* cycle's stock of partial figures is inventoried in Fig. 8.

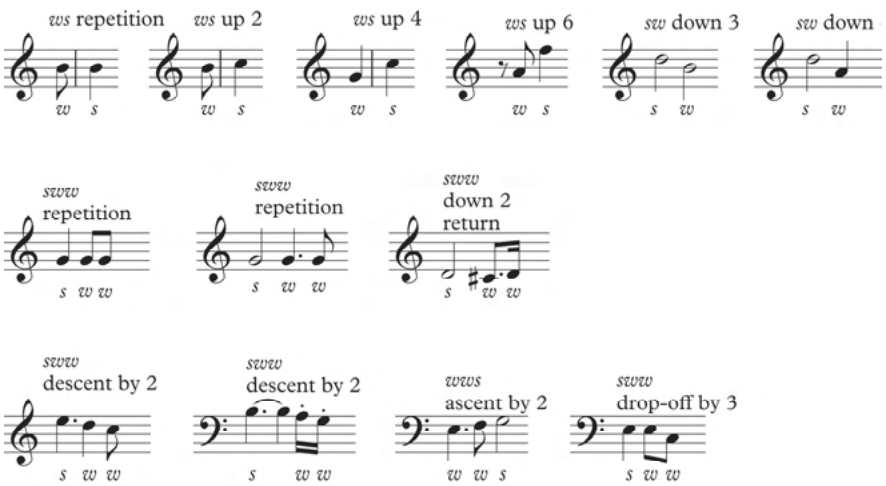

Fig. 8: Some partial figures from Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

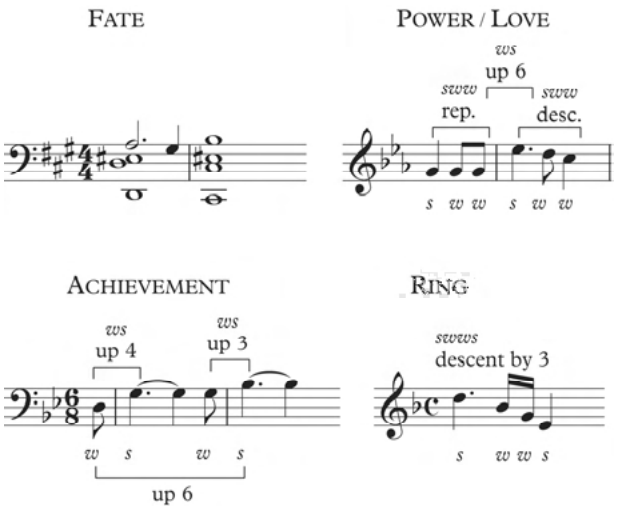

Fig. 9: Some complex and combined figures in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

Much as with the stenographic examples of Figs 5 and 7, complex or combined partial figures form identifiable shapes in music; some are seen in Fig. 9. Like word roots, their meanings become known through figures affixed to them and contexts surrounding them. *Renunciation* (Fig. 4) contains a segment in which <*ws* up 6> is framed by <*sww* rep> and <*sw* descent by 2>. Woglinde's words gloss it to mean *Love* or *Power*, as seen in Fig. 9. In the full *Renuciation* leitmotif, this shape is further combined with the tag <*ws* up 2> (which might perhaps be taken to function like a linguistic suffix expressing negation) and repeated. Several later reiterations establish it even more strongly, and when heard during Wotan's farewell to Brünnhilde shown in Fig. 3, it reveals that Wotan's past decisions – he exploited the magic of Alberich's ring to accomplish the building of Valhalla – have precluded him from loving her. In Woglinde's initial statement, *Renunciation* introduces two further figures. The *Ring* figure (seen in Fig. 9) ends her statement. In between, she sings of achieving magic to a figure beginning <*sw* up 4> and ending <*ws* up 3> which anticipates Wotan's announcement of the coming of a hero (Fig. 10) and Brünnhilde's announcement of *Siegfried as Hero* (Figs 11 and 12). The common meaning expressed in these instances might be called *Achievement*, as seen in Fig. 9. From a greater distance it may be observed that *Renunciation*, *Achievement*, and *Siegfried as Hero* all make use of <*ws* up 6>. This figure <*sw* up 6> is important also in the *Question* leitmotif (Fig. 13); it is introduced when Brünnhilde learns love

and compassion through dialog with Siegmund, who is fated soon to die in battle.[51] As this is a turning *toward* love, the meaning associated with *Question* is the inversion of that associated with *Renunciation*. Likewise, the leitmotif's structure is an inversion: instead of the *descending* <*sww* descent by 2> *after* the high note heard in *Renunciation* and *Siegfried as Hero*, an *ascending* <*wws* ascent by 2> is heard *before* the high note (and during the <*ws* up 6>). Yet it is not simply a movement toward love; *Question* also contains the *Fate* figure shown in Fig. 9, and the motive will always be heard in association with fateful dramatic situations.

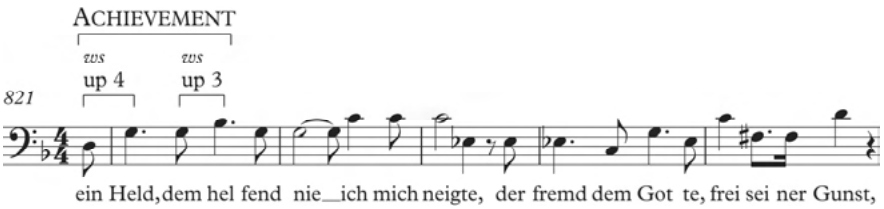

Fig. 10: Wotan foretells the existence of the hero Siegfried. *Die Walküre*, Act 2, Scene 2, measures 822–826 (Wagner 2002).

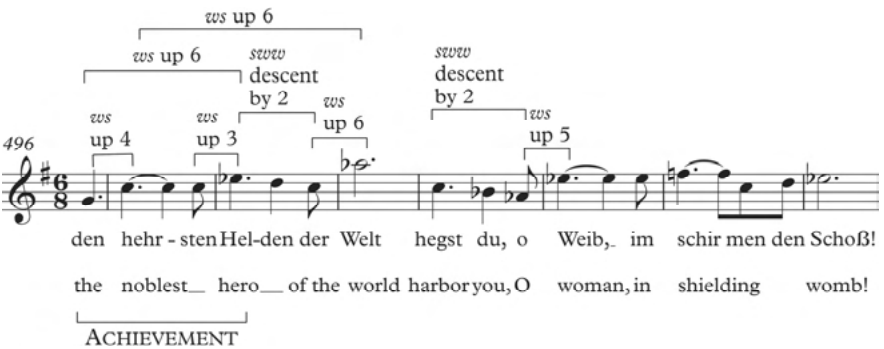

Fig. 11: Brünnhilde reveals that Sieglinde is pregnant with the hero Siegfried. *Die Walküre*, Act 3, Scene 1, measures 496–503 (Wagner 2002).

51 Lee 2022 thoroughly discusses musical and dramatic aspects of this motive.

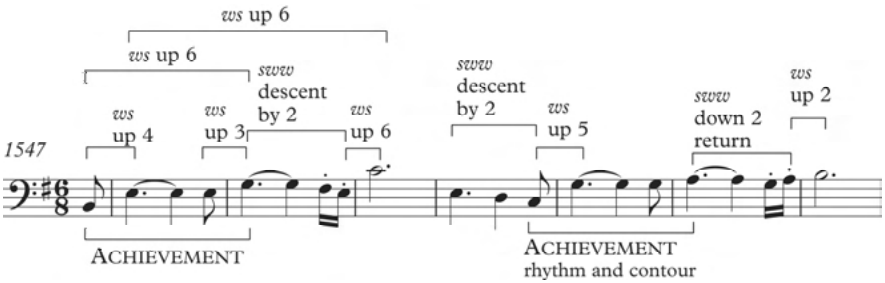

Fig. 12: Orchestral leitmotif: *Siegfried as Hero*. Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Act 3, Scene 3, measures 1547–1554 (Wagner 2002).

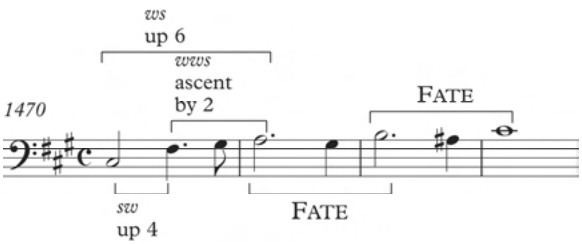

Fig. 13: Question leitmotif. Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Act 2, Scene 4, measures 1470–1473 (Wagner 2002).

In a way, to listen to the *Ring's* leitmotifs – hear them originate and develop, notice resemblances, consider their meanings – is to engage in one of the most important aspects of nineteenth-century linguistics: etymology. It entails not merely an experience of following the leitmotifs' histories, but also (in the sense of *ἔτυμος* [true, real] + -λογία: the study of words' true meanings), finding essential meaning in the leitmotifs' gestural contours.[52] Stenography is etymological in a similar way. Many nineteenth-century systems adopt the practice of surrounding phonographically-written word roots with even more abbreviated symbols for prefixes and suffixes; in Gabelsberger's, this was called *etymologische Schreibkürzung* (etymological shorthand).[53] Perhaps more importantly, phonography offered the illusion of arriving at a word's essence. Thus the authors of an 1848 Pitman manual re-

52 On etymology and early-nineteenth-century German linguistics, see Campbell 2001, 93–94. On its presence in Wagner's thought, see Trippett 2013, 298.

53 While Gabelsberger 1834 does not use this term, Gabelsberger 1850 divides *Redezeichenkunst* into three parts: first, *Schriftkürzung* (i.e. the core phonetic system); second, *Etymologische Schreibkürzung*; and third, *Syntaktische Schreibkürzung* (syntactic shorthand).

ferred to Pitman's phonography as '*doing the truth*', locating its appeal to 'the philosophic mind' in 'the beauty and simplicity of its principles' and 'the *luxury* of being able, after a moderate amount of practice, to drop one's thoughts upon paper with the rapidity of speech, and with the clearness of unerring certainty to the eye.'[54] If this appeal pertained to stenographic *doing*, that is, with finding and forming the symbols, it also had to do with the contours' visual aspect. Gabels-berger, too, found power in the way a stenographic outline could rouse a word's mental image:

> *Mit der Kenntniss der Buchstaben und ihrer Verbindung verschwindet auch das Fremdartige und Verwickelte der Gesammtbilder, und was für das Auge vorher ein ganz verworrenes, geheimnissvolles Aussehen hatte, steht nun klarsprechend und wohlgefällig vor ihm. Der geistige Scharfblick, der beym Schreiben und Lesen wesentlich thätigen Antheil nimmt, bürgt für jede kleinste Unterscheidung durch die zum Grunde gelegten Regeln und wechselseitigen Verhältnisse, und wenn auch die Hand sich hin und wieder kleine Abweichungen oder Fehler zu Schulden kommen lässt, so ergänzt und berichtiget er, unterscheidend zwischen Soll und Wirklichkeit, das ausser Acht Gelassene.*
>
> With the knowledge of the symbols and their connection, the strange and intricate aspects of the complete picture disappear, and what to the eye previously had a very confused, mysterious appearance now stands clear-speaking and pleasing before it. Spiritual insight, which takes an essentially active part in writing and reading, vouches for every smallest distinction through the underlying rules and mutual relationships, and even if the hand occasionally makes small deviations or mistakes, then it completes and corrects what has been neglected, distinguishing between intention and reality.[55]

Here, in effect, Gabelsberger is describing linguistic fluency. A fluent user of the language of *Redezeichenkunst* becomes intensely aware of what is being expressed and senses the writing's intricacies melting away. This does not mean becoming unaware of the writing. When the 'rules and mutual relationships' bring the writing into mental focus, its 'confused, mysterious appearance' becomes 'clear-speaking and pleasing' – it does not disappear from consciousness. In my limited experience using phonographic stenography, there comes a point when writing the word – choreographing its flow of pen-strokes – seems to capture its essence and particularity well enough to make speaking superfluous. It stands on its own as a linguistic sign.

Something similar happens in Wagnerian opera. In my experience, there comes a point in a performance when the music's particular features cease to monopolise attention – when the curvilinear twists and turns of melody contribute to the illusion being presented on stage without dominating awareness. This

54 Andrews and Boyle 1848, 5–6.
55 Gabelsberger 1834, pt 1, 111.

does not mean the music goes unnoticed; it is not like a movie in which the music's volume is turned down to provide a barely audible, inarticulate mood. Rather, it comes from immersion in the play of combined and recombined partial figures until the listener reflexively and perhaps unconsciously recognises the similarities and differences between motivic statements. Even a listener who has not given the motives names or consciously attributed meanings to them senses the dramatic connections, disjunctions, and developments implied by these similarities and differences. Indeed, composers other than Wagner depend on this ability of the listener to parse Romantic curvilinear melodies into expressive segments. Thus we return to the magic that was the aim of musical Romanticism.

4.2 Robert and Clara Schumann

Wagner was the composer who most explicitly articulated stenography-like ideas about melody in writing, and who most extensively instantiated his ideas about musical meaning in actual musical compositions. But he was not alone in adopting the Romantic melodic code, nor was his way of using it the only way. Far more commonly, the shapes of Romantic melody were taken to be non-referential, though still directly expressive of the individual's particular inner, subjective experience, in ways that eluded verbal glossing.

Alexander Stefaniak notes that in representing their domestic relationship to the public, the Schumanns cast the pianist Clara as the interpreter who could bring Robert's compositions 'from the incorporeal realm of his mind into the sensous world',[56] but it seems the opposite was also possible. The passage from Robert's 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai' seen earlier in Fig. 1 echoes a passage from the middle movement of Clara's piano concerto, op. 7,[57] seen in Fig. 14. A perceptive description by Katharina Uhde and R. Larry Todd reads:

> [T]he Romanze in A♭ major [...] contains one passage that especially impressed Robert (bars 30–34), though the connection is still not widely appreciated. Here, she reaches the key of A major (bar 30) that is straightaway challenged by a turn to the dominant of F♯ minor (bars 32, 34). The pendulating ambiguity between B minor and F♯ minor, languorously ascending arpeggiations in the bass, and telltale suspensions in the treble unleashed Robert's creativity five years later at the beginning of *Dichterliebe*, which impresses as a distinctive rehearing of Clara's passage.[58]

56 Stefaniak 2021, 71–74.

57 Schumann 1990.

58 Uhde and Todd 2021, 168.

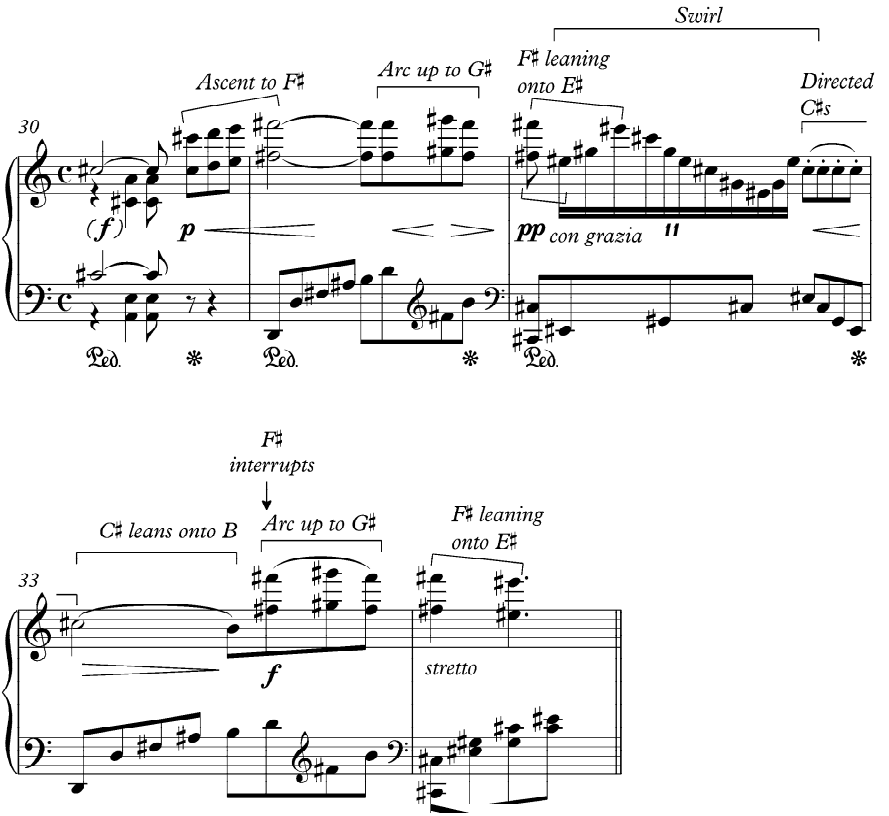

Fig. 14: Clara Schumann, *Concerto for piano and orchestra*, op. 7, ii: Romanze, measures 30–34 (Clara Schumann 1990).

This description identifies much of interest in the suspensions, repetitions of fragments, and layering of treble and bass voices. The abrupt shift away from A major probably did contribute to Robert's captivation; so did the oscillation between B minor and C-sharp minor chords which prime the listener for an arrival on F-sharp minor without going there. Such features help create a sense that the music is communicating a subjective state, first between Clara and Robert and second between them and us, the listeners. But so does the curvilinear trace, about which the description says nothing beyond a mention of 'languorous' ascents in the accompaniment. To be sure, harmonic features such as dissonance and tonal contrast are quite important to the hearing of Romantic melody, as they help make melodies recognizable, articulate or extend melodic segments, and motivate changes or continuations in direction of pitch motion. Descriptions of

devices such as suspensions are readily understood by musically trained readers in terms of evocative tension and thus expression.

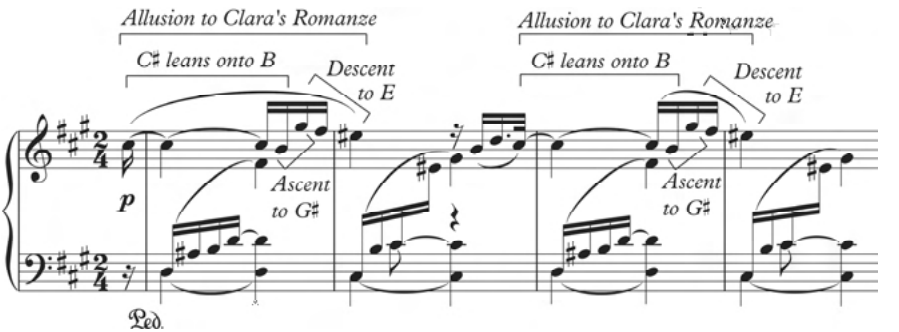

Fig. 15: Robert Schumann, 'Im wunderschönen Monat Mai' (*Dichterliebe*, op. 48, no. 1), measures 1–4 (Robert Schumann 1879).

We need better descriptive language, though, for the curvilinear trace itself, with its up, down, stepping, and leaping movements involving contrasting long, short, strong and weak notes. Of another work, Stefaniak says that Clara 'stretches Weber's theme into a different meter but retains its telltale melodic and harmonic shape'.[59] Exactly what is telltale about the *shape* of a melody? I would describe the directed motions of pitch that are marked in the annotations of Fig. 14: an ascent (to F-sharp); an arc (up to G-sharp and back) leading to F-sharp leaning on and descending to E-sharp (later repeated); a swirl of notes circumscribing E-sharps in three different octaves; repeated C-sharps landing on a final C-sharp; and a leap up from B to F-sharp. Robert's echo of this passage, shown again in Fig. 15, shares one of these melodic features – the C-sharp leaning on and descending to B (Uhde and Todd's 'telltale suspension') – and offers an interpretive transformation of the arc-followed-by-leaning pair of figures, which it simplifies into a leap up from B to G-sharp followed by descent arriving on E-sharp. I suspect such catalogues of melodic moves fail to evoke a sense of musical expressivity, even for technically adept readers. However, in a culture of handwriting and stenography, pitch motion can be evocative if conceptualised like the motion of a pen across – and into – a page. Segments of melody whose tones are perceived as belonging to a single stream are heard as distinctive by virtue of patterns of longer vs shorter tones, larger vs smaller pitch distances, and continuities vs reversals of pitch direction.

59 Stefaniak 2021, 151.

The auditory 'shape' that emerges is perceived as tracing the touches and movements of the musician producing the notes and, in turn, the mental state(s) that produce those gestures.[60]

There is an analogy to be made in which Clara's passage resembles alphabetic writing, Robert's stenographic. Viewed in terms of the simple act of taking dictation, the analogy is imperfect, of course. Stenography is a transcription of speech, while Robert's passage is not a transcription of Clara's passage. But the analogy is illuminating. Like a cursive alphabetic word, Clara's passage is made of several fairly complex, self-contained motions or gestures, sometimes noticeably separated from one another. The events labelled in Fig. 14 may be understood as musical pen-strokes; but if they are, the swirl must be a flourish, the sort of thing one would find in cursive alphabetic writing but not in stenography (where every movement of the pen is a signifier). And at least one curvilinear connection is left merely implied, something possible in handwriting but not stenography: Clara does not connect B to F-sharp. Although the earlier ascent to F-sharp may prompt the listener to imagine a connection to F-sharp here as well, this F-sharp is suddenly loud, as though an interruption, and Clara's accompaniment does not reinforce a perceived connection the way Robert's does.

Robert's passage, by comparison, stenographically reduces Clara's utterance to a compact, continuous melodic gesture of three simple motions, like taking dictation. Every note is significant, without padding or swirls. And compared to Clara's, it is stenographically reductive in another sense. Clara's may be heard as a series of musical gestures in the way of much early-nineteenth-century music (as described by Robert Hatten), where each of the gestures has a different real-world model.[61] The ascent followed by an arc might be considered a lift (as of a physical object); the swirl a graceful display; the leanings sighs; and the interruption rhetorical. Heard gesturally, Robert's passage would not be so varied. Its leanings continue right into the ascents and are thus difficult to interpret as sighs. Robert almost literally indicates that the three simple motions are to be considered part of a single pen-stroke by subsuming them under a long slur (the arc seen above the notes in Figs 1 and 15).[62] His melody is a connected chain of curvilinear pitch movements, like the gestures of a stenographer's pen. This reduction in the field of available musical signs is stenographic – perhaps a feature of Robert's modern-

60 Cumming 2000, 134–138 finds gesture to involve the shaping of melodic patterns by performers, although it is implied in the composed notes themselves, as performers must 'answer to the suggestions of notated shaping' (Cumming 2000, 138).

61 Hatten 2004.

62 The use of the slur symbol to mark phrases in this way was new in the mid nineteenth century.

ism, and certainly an important element of the Romantic melodic code. Finally, Robert's passage is stenographic in that it evokes a memory – to use Gabelsberger's terms, it is a sign that unites Robert's sensory and spiritual images of Clara's music.

Many other composers reared in the early nineteenth century took similar or related approaches to melody – Schubert, Berlioz, Mendelssohn, and Liszt among them – and they were enthusiastically followed by later composers. Whether employed simply to convey an expressive sense or used to illustrate semantically specific associations with definite referents, the Romantic melodic code remains with us, for example in symphonic film scores. Even in Wagner's most semiotically determined uses, Romantic melodies could not convey specific meanings without abundant contextual information, but melodies of this kind still guide film and media audiences in the contemplation of subjective interiority,[63] and some – most famously, those of John Williams – narrate through the use of leitmotifs.[64] They differ in expressive strategy from, say, the representations of affect in late-seventeenth-century music or the gestures of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century music. Phonographic stenography and Romantic melody both, it appears, emerged from early-nineteenth-century conceptions of language, mind, and meaning, and writing – a world where it made sense to express interior meaning and thought itself as a flow of curvilinear shapes.

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63 Kassabian 2001, esp. 70, 92, 123–139.

64 Bribitzer-Stull 2015, esp. 12–14, 264–269, 272–275, 279–284.

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Hugo Bowles, Claire Wood

Decoding Dickens: Social Stenography and the 'Tavistock' Letter

Abstract: Victorian author, Charles Dickens, is better known for his fiction than his shorthand writing. However, shorthand played a key role in his early career as a court and parliamentary reporter and remained an essential part of his writer's toolkit thereafter. Dickens's surviving shorthand has proved difficult to decipher, due to the nature of the Brachygraphy system he learned and his idiosyncratic use of it. This paper traces the importance of social stenography – dyadic or collective work to improve shorthand deciphering and writing – in transcribing Dickens's shorthand. Focusing on the efforts of William J. Carlton and his associates William L. Stower Hewett and Frank Higenbottam in the twentieth century, and the work of participants involved in a competition to decipher Dickens's 'Tavistock' letter, hosted as part of The Dickens Code project, in the twenty-first century, this chapter argues that social stenography has an important role to play in finding solutions to previously undeciphered shorthand manuscripts.

1 Introduction

This paper explores the role of social stenography in identifying solutions to the idiosyncratic shorthand writing of Victorian author Charles Dickens (1812–1870). Social stenography, which refers to dyadic or collective work to improve shorthand deciphering and writing,[1] has a strong historical tradition. Letter writing, for example, has been recommended for shorthand practice since the eighteenth century. Aulay Macaulay (d. 1788) claimed that by using his Polygraphy system 'Gentlemen and Ladies may, in the Size of a Card, communicate their Thoughts to each other in as extensive a Manner, as can be done in a Sheet of Paper'.[2] Isaac Pitman (1813–1897) was able to take advantage of the reformation of postage rates to devise a shorthand correspondence course and establish the Phonographic

1 We acknowledge prior use of the term 'social stenography', with reference to social media users 'cloaking messages in texts with double meanings, such that outsiders garner one meaning, while insiders decipher the true intent' (Davis 2016, 145). However, this usage appears to originate from a misspelling of the term 'social steganography', coined in boyd and Marwick 2011.

2 'Advertisements and Notices' 1756.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111382692-009

Correspondence Society; in the second half of the nineteenth century, the writing of shorthand postcards between Pitman users became a popular, low-cost way of socialising and practising their stenography at the same time.[3]

On the social transcription front, the Latham-Matthews edition (1970–1983) of the diary of Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) was transcribed from Shelton's Tachygraphy system by the editors with collective help.[4] Timothy Underhill has also highlighted two examples of John Byrom's (1692–1763) shorthand – a transcription of a Smollett novel and two lines of shorthand cut into paper by his sister Phebe – which illustrate 'the sociability of eighteenth-century shorthand and its deciphering' because they are 'designed to be read and re-read by people besides the original writer'.[5] According to Underhill, Byrom's shorthand was informed by eighteenth-century associational culture and Byrom was a pioneer of informal clubs for pupils to help each other with deciphering, where members might be 'very merry, guessing words'.[6] More recently, manuscripts in Melin shorthand, written by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren (1907–2002), have been transliterated for the first time through a process of 'expert crowdsourcing', which involved assembling a team of volunteers previously trained in the Melin system.[7]

Dickens's shorthand, based upon the Brachygraphy system, provides a particularly interesting case study for social stenography; the inherent difficulties of transliterating Brachygraphy are exacerbated by Dickens's modifications and messy handwriting, rendering the script unintentionally cryptographic.[8] Here we examine collaborative attempts to decipher Dickens's surviving shorthand papers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Following an overview of Dickens's place in nineteenth-century stenographic culture and the challenges of decoding his shorthand, we turn to the efforts of Dickens scholar and stenographic authority William J. Carlton (1886–1973) and his associates William L. Stower Hewett (b. 1878?) and Frank Higenbottam (1910–1982) to transcribe shorthand copies of letters in Dickens's hand. Subsequently, we explore the work of participants involved in a

3 Archibald and Worsley 2019.

4 The editors' 'Preface' notes, '[i]t is, in fact, only by some such co-operation between students of seventeenth-century shorthand, language and history that many of the difficulties peculiar to Pepys's manuscript can be tackled', Latham and Matthews 1970, xii.

5 Underhill 2021.

6 Byrom 1855, 391.

7 Andersdotter and Nauwerck 2022.

8 For this reason, we refer to 'deciphering' and 'transcribing' Dickens's shorthand, rather than simply 'transliterating' it. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* gives the following definition of 'transcribe, *v.*' 2a: 'To write out in other characters, to transliterate; to write out (a shorthand account) in ordinary "long-hand"; formerly also, to translate or render accurately in another language'.

competition to decipher Dickens's 'Tavistock' letter, hosted as part of The Dickens Code project (2021–2023),[9] funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, UKRI. In part, our purpose is to reflect upon the ways in which manuscripts take on different meanings through time, as shorthand memos that Dickens kept as a record of his business dealings become objects of fascinated curiosity. We also examine how the nature of these decoding efforts were shaped by available technologies and differing levels of familiarity with shorthand culture. We argue that social stenography has an important role to play in finding solutions to previously undeciphered shorthand manuscripts.

2 Dickens's shorthand life

Before Dickens became a novelist, he was a shorthand writer, honing his craft in the late 1820s and early 1830s. The early nineteenth century was an interesting period for stenographic culture in England. Although a representative body for shorthand writers would not be formed until 1849,[10] shorthand was increasingly professionalised, meeting a growing demand for verbatim reporting of court and parliamentary matters. Because shorthand could be learnt from a manual, rather than being 'taught as part of an elite educational system', it was accessible to lower middle-class and some working-class people.[11] Accordingly, stenography was valued as a skill that could lead to professional, economic, and to some extent social advancement. The role of parliamentary reporter, to which Dickens aspired, was newly respectable, with '[t]he press gallery [...] now attracting the right sort of young man – clever, ambitious, observant'.[12]

In 1837, Pitman published *Stenographic Sound-Hand*, a phonographic shorthand system that would come to dominate the market due to its 'superior learnability and readability'.[13] However, this was too late for Dickens, who learned *Brachygraphy: Or, An Easy and Compendious System of Shorthand*, an alphabetical system that dated back to 1750, devised by Thomas Gurney (1705–1770) and improved upon by his son Joseph Gurney (1744–1815) and grandson William Brodie Gurney (1777–1855).[14] The

9 <https://dickenscode.org>.

10 Scharf 1989, 199–200.

11 Kreilkamp 2005, 81.

12 Hessell 2012, 130.

13 Bowles 2019, 19. Cf. Pitman 1837.

14 Thomas Gurney was heavily influenced by *La Plume Volante, or the Art of Short-Hand Improv'd* (1707) by William Mason (*fl.* 1672–1709). See Bowles 2019, 9–10.

Gurney system was widely adopted in 'official reporting for parliament and the government'[15] and had a reputation for reliability in parliamentary reporting and legal circles,[16] thanks in part to the formal appointment of Joseph and subsequently William Gurney as 'Short Hand Writer[s] to both Houses of Parliament' (see Fig. 1). The prestigious nature of the system was an important factor in Dickens's decision to learn Brachygraphy, along with the fact that his father, John Dickens (1785–1851), and maternal uncle, John Henry Barrow (1796–1858), were also practitioners.[17]

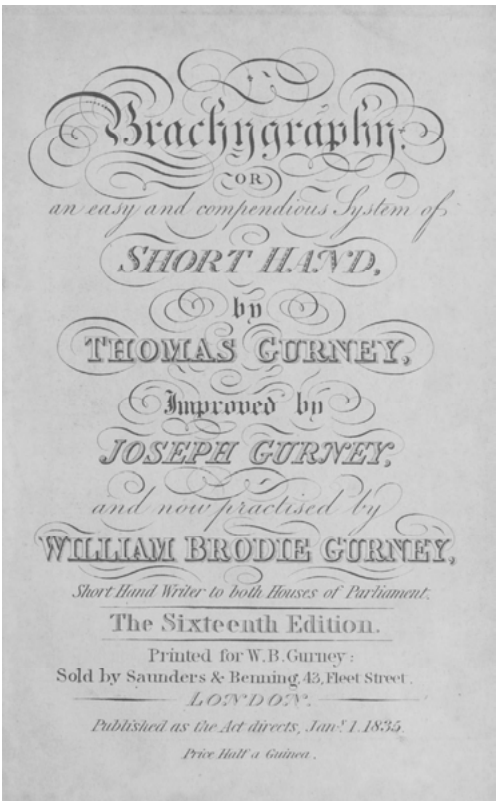


Fig. 1: Title page of Gurney's *Brachygraphy* manual, 16th edn (Thomas Gurney, Joseph Gurney and William Brodie Gurney 1835). Photograph by Claire Wood.

15 Quoted in Drew 2003, 8.

16 Carlton 1926, 39.

17 For more on John Dickens and Barrow as shorthand reporters see Carlton 1926, 24–26 and Allen 2023, 317–318.

Dickens started learning shorthand at the age of about sixteen, in or around the year 1828, most likely from the fifteenth edition of the *Brachygraphy* manual, published in 1825.[18] Barrow later claimed to have taught his nephew, although Michael Allen suggests it is more likely, given Barrow's other commitments, that he 'pointed Dickens in the right direction and gave him encouragement, rather than taking him through it day by day, week by week'.[19] Dickens's own account suggests he was self-taught: 'I was teaching *myself* a very difficult art and walking miles every day to practice it all day long in the Courts of Law'.[20] A similar emphasis is found in Dickens's most autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), which depicts David's struggles to master the rudiments of Brachygraphy:

> I bought an approved scheme of the noble art and mystery of stenography (which cost me ten and sixpence); and plunged into a sea of perplexity that brought me, in a few weeks, to the confines of distraction. [...] When I had groped my way, blindly, through these difficulties, and had mastered the alphabet, which was an Egyptian Temple in itself, there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters; [...]. When I had fixed these wretches in my mind, I found that they had driven everything else out of it; then, beginning again, I forgot them; while I was picking them up, I dropped the other fragments of the system; in short, it was almost heart-breaking.[21]

However, following the initial work of memorisation, Dickens does introduce a social element to David's shorthand learning process. To help David get up to speed, his friend Tommy Traddles offers to 'dictate speeches [...], at a pace, and with occasional stoppages, adapted to [David's] weakness', creating a mock-Parliament (see Fig. 2).[22]

There were several reasons why David (and presumably Dickens) found Brachygraphy difficult to grasp. The manual itself, following a dedication, 'Preface', and several panegyrics on the system's virtues, provides learners with a seven-page introduction to the principles of Brachygraphy and tables illustrating the alphabet, representation of vowels, and arbitrary characters. Subsequently, examples of Bible verses, sermons, and speeches are rendered in Brachygraphy shorthand, followed by several texts written in English but 'Spelt as written in the shorthand' (that is, with internal vowels omitted and words represented by arbitrary characters styled in italics), and then the same texts written out in full.[23]

18 Carlton 1926, 38.
19 Allen 2023, 406.
20 Dickens 1965–2002, vol. 7, 245 (emphasis added).
21 Dickens 2004, 551.
22 Dickens 2004, 552.
23 Thomas Gurney, Joseph Gurney and William Brodie Gurney 1835, 23.

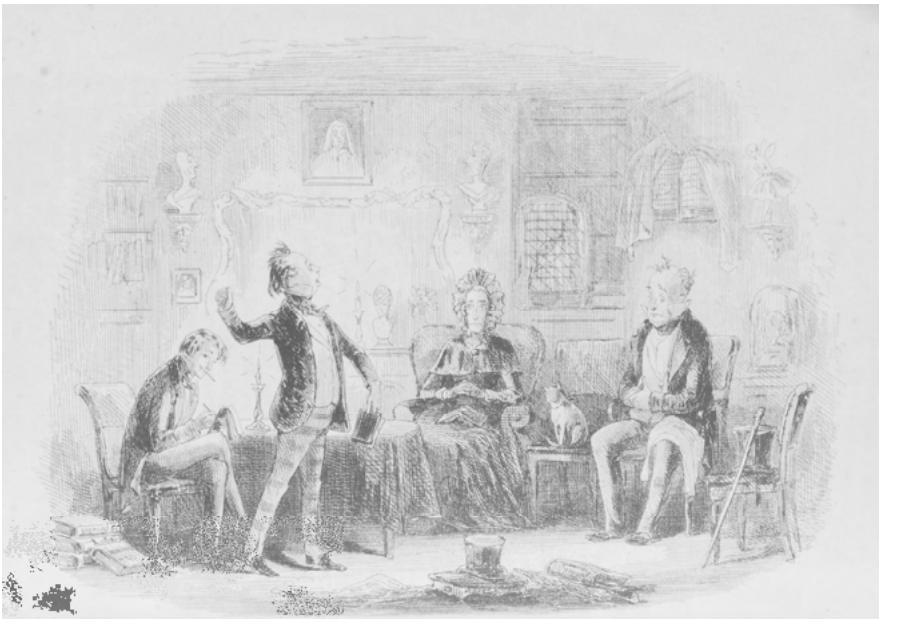
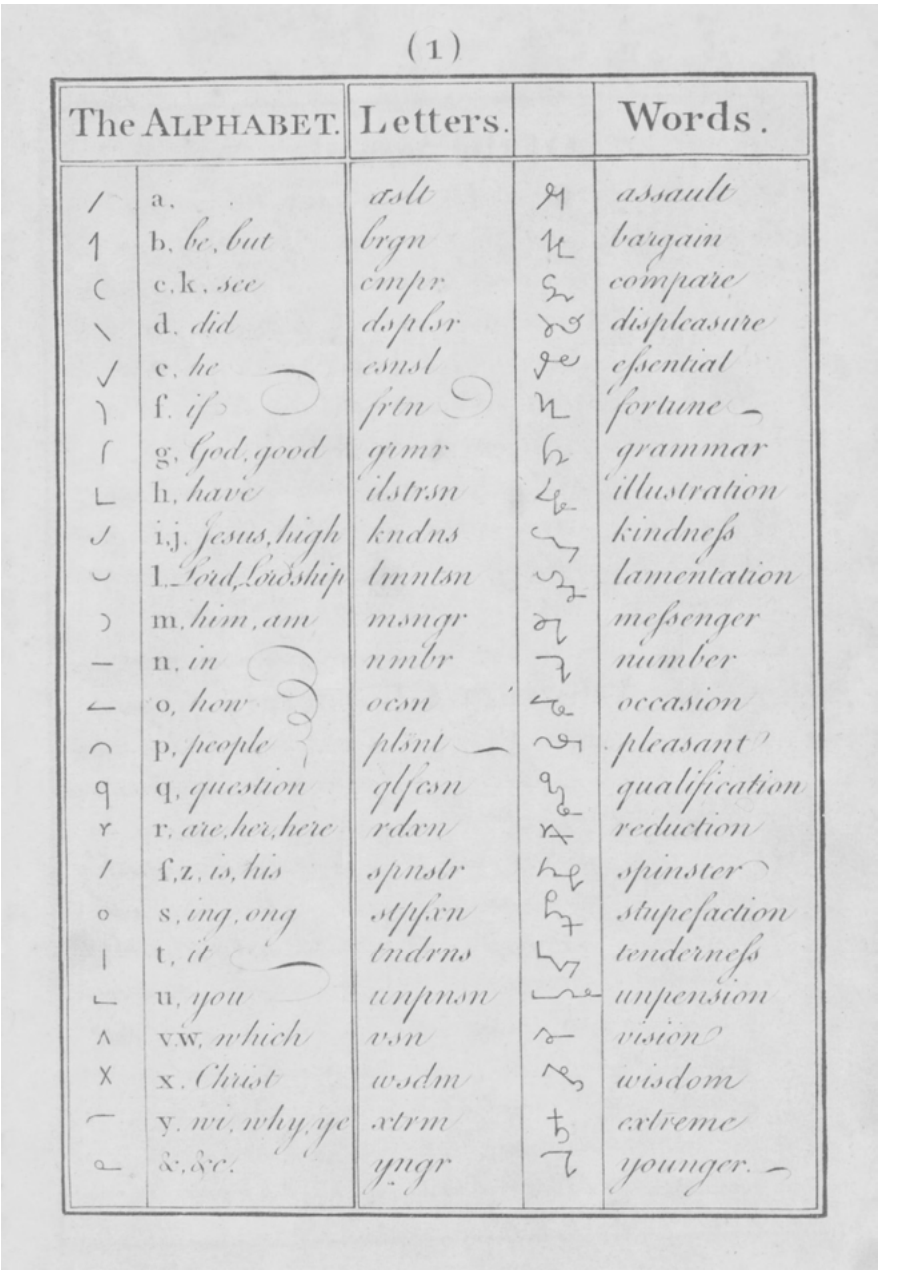


Fig. 2: Hablot K. Browne ('Phiz'), 'Traddles Makes A Figure in Parliament and I Report Him'. An illustration from Chap. 38 of *The Personal History of David Copperfield* (1st edn: London: Bradbury and Evans, 1850). Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Leicester [SCM 01818].

The title-page (see Fig. 1) may have proclaimed Brachygraphy 'an easy and compendious System', but in reality it was neither. The alphabet (see Fig. 3) includes four symbols that represent two letters, as well as symbols that appear virtually identical (the oblique dash representing *a*, long *s*, and *z*), or which can be easily confused (the characters for *o* and *u*), particularly when writing at speed. Furthermore, the learner is obliged to memorise seventy-four arbitrary characters, which stand for individual words, parts of words, or phrases, as well as learning how to build individual letter-shapes into words by joining alphabet characters together. All of this needed to be put together at the speed of speech and written legibly enough to be transcribed back into longhand – a difficulty that we explore below.[24] It is no wonder that a novice stenographer like David Copperfield found learning Brachygraphy 'almost heart-breaking'.[25]

24 For a more detailed exploration of the difficulties involved in learning Brachygraphy, see Bowles 2019, especially Chap. 2.

25 Dickens 2004, 551.



(1)

The ALPHABET.		Letters.		Words.
/	a,	*aslt*		*assault*
1	b, *be, but*	*brgn*		*bargain*
(	c, k, *see*	*cmpr*		*compare*
\	d, *did*	*dsplsr*		*displeasure*
√	e, *he*	*esnsl*		*essential*
)	f, *if*	*frtn*		*fortune*
ſ	g, *God, good*	*grmr*		*grammar*
⌊	h, *have*	*ilstrsn*		*illustration*
∫	i, j, *Jesus, high*	*kndns*		*kindness*
∪	l, *Lord, Lordship*	*lmntsn*		*lamentation*
)	m, *him, am*	*msngr*		*messenger*
—	n, *in*	*nmbr*		*number*
⌐	o, *how*	*ocsn*		*occasion*
⌒	p, *people*	*plsnt*		*pleasant*
9	q, *question*	*qlfcsn*		*qualification*
r	r, *are, her, here*	*rdxn*		*reduction*
/	s, z, *is, his*	*spnstr*		*spinster*
o	s, *ing, ong*	*stpfxn*		*stupefaction*
|	t, *it*	*tndrns*		*tenderness*
⌐	u, *you*	*unpnsn*		*unpension*
∧	v w, *which*	*vsn*		*vision*
X	x, *Christ*	*wsdm*		*wisdom*
⌐	y, *wi, why, ye*	*xtrm*		*extreme*
⌐	&, &c.	*ygr*		*younger*

Fig. 3: Alphabet table from Gurney's *Brachygraphy* manual, 16th edn (Thomas Gurney, Joseph Gurney and William Brodie Gurney 1835). Photograph by Claire Wood.

Nonetheless, Dickens managed to tame the 'savage stenographic mystery' of Gurney's Brachygraphy and began to use these skills to supplement his income.[26] Between approximately 1829 and 1831 he worked as a freelance shorthand reporter in the ecclesiastical courts at Doctors' Commons.[27] This freelance work enabled him to improve his shorthand writing to the extent that, in the autumn of 1832, he was employed as a 'permanent member of staff' to report proceedings from the Gallery of Parliament for Barrow's newspaper, the *Mirror of Parliament* (1828–1841), continuing in this role for two years.[28] He was also a news reporter and claimed, in a potted biography sent to the novelist Wilkie Collins (1824–1889) in 1856, to have done 'anything in that way in any sort of circumstances'.[29] While Nikki Hessell brings much-needed nuance to accounts of Dickens's exceptional speed, accuracy, and skill as a parliamentary reporter,[30] various testimonials indicate Dickens's proficiency.[31]

Dickens continued to use shorthand throughout his life for reporting, letter-writing, copying, and note-taking. Early shorthand training had a profound influence on the author's development, from instilling methodical habits and a sensitive ear for different voices, to providing material for scenes that he would later expand on in his fiction.[32] More fundamentally, 'learning to encode and decode an unusually difficult shorthand system' changed the way that Dickens processed language, instilling a puzzle-solving stenographic mindset.[33]

3 Dickens's shorthand manuscripts, deciphered and undeciphered

By his early twenties, Dickens was both an expert and prolific stenographer and would have been using shorthand on a daily basis. Sadly, no actual shorthand from his reporting years has been identified, nor is there any evidence that he wrote fiction in shorthand, although he did make a shorthand copy of part of the

26 Dickens 2004, 632.

27 It is difficult to date some aspects of Dickens's early career with precision. As Michael Allen notes, '[t]here is no documentary evidence to say exactly when [Dickens] began to get work as a shorthand reporter' (Allen 2023, 409). See Carlton 1926, 46–71 for a discussion of Dickens's time at Doctors' Commons.

28 Allen 2023, 451.

29 Dickens 1965–2002, vol. 8, 131.

30 Hessell 2012, 10–14 and 129–166.

31 See Forster 1928, 48–49, 62.

32 Hessell 2012, 11–12.

33 Bowles 2019, 65.

longhand manuscript of *The Chimes* (1844), 'in case of accidents' with the Italian post.[34] The surviving manuscript evidence of Dickens's shorthand comes from his note-taking, shorthand teaching, and business correspondence. Some of the note-taking is spontaneous: a scribbled shorthand quotation from *The Holly-Tree* (1855) in his 1867 pocket diary[35] and a seven-line memo written on the back of a letter from bookseller George Lovejoy.[36] The most important material for deciphering purposes has come from Dickens's teaching of shorthand. Dickens taught the Gurney system to at least three pupils: to his brother-in-law Robert Hogarth (1816–1843) in 1836; to Arthur Paul Stone (1838–1919), the son of his friend and neighbour Frank Stone (1800–1859), in 1859; and to his son Henry Fielding Dickens (1849–1933) in the mid 1860s. A twelve-folio teaching notebook containing written notes on how the Gurney system worked shows Dickens to be revising and personalising the system for teaching purposes.[37] There is a similar set of notes in the five teaching booklets that record his lessons with Stone,[38] which were partially deciphered by volunteers involved in The Dickens Code project between 2022 and 2023.[39]

There are five surviving manuscripts of Dickens's letters in shorthand, four of which had been fully or partially deciphered previous to the work of The Dickens Code project. The first of these is a letter to his publisher Richard Bentley (1794–1871) about alterations to a business agreement.[40] A copy of a second business letter to Bentley from Dickens's friend, literary adviser, and later biographer, John Forster (1812–1876), is also written in Dickens's shorthand.[41] Another letter, written from Dickens's country home, Gad's Hill Place, on 22 November 1867 and fully deciphered, is to his Bostonian promoter,[42] regarding financial arrangements for a

34 Dickens 1965–2002, vol. 4, 203.

35 New York, New York Public Library, Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, Charles Dickens's pocket diary 1867. This was a reminder to himself to use the quotation in a speech that he would be giving at a farewell dinner coming up in November.

36 London, Charles Dickens Museum, papers of William J. Carlton (henceforth 'Carlton Papers'), memo from George Lovejoy, 29 May 1841. In the memo, Dickens declines a request from Lovejoy to stand as a Liberal candidate for the Reading constituency.

37 Manchester, John Rylands Research Institute and Library, English MS 725.

38 Philadelphia, Free Library of Philadelphia, Benoliel Collection, Arthur Stone's shorthand notebooks.

39 This paper focuses on an earlier breakthrough for The Dickens Code project, concerning the 'Tavistock' letter, but see Bowles and Wood 2023 for deciphered material from Stone's notebooks.

40 London, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, MSL/1876/Forster/172 (part), shorthand copy of a letter from Dickens to Bentley, 14 July 1837.

41 London, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, MSL/1876/Forster/172 (part), Dickens's shorthand copy of a letter from Forster to Bentley, 22 October 1838.

42 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-008_0001, letter to Samuel Arthur Chappell, 22 November 1867.

series of farewell readings. The Charles Dickens Museum also holds an interesting example of a shorthand copy of a letter, partially deciphered, that Dickens wrote to the author William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863), intervening in a quarrel between Thackeray and Forster.[43] Dickens copied his reply in shorthand onto the back of a letter that Thackeray sent to him explaining the situation. As with the Lovejoy memo, the Thackeray letter suggests that stenography played an important role within Dickens's record-keeping practice.

The only letter remaining undeciphered, dubbed the 'Tavistock' letter on account of the 'Tavistock House' letterhead (referring to Dickens's home address in the 1850s), is housed in the Morgan Library and Museum's collection of Dickens manuscripts in New York.[44] It was acquired some time before 1913 by the financier and collector John Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913) as part of a large collection of correspondence between Dickens and his friend William Charles Macready (1793–1873). The letter is a one-page document of fifteen lines separated into four paragraphs It has been attributed to Dickens based upon its provenance and because it is written in Gurney shorthand on Dickens's Tavistock House stationery and in his characteristic blue ink. The 'Tavistock' letter was chosen for The Dickens Code project's first public deciphering challenge in 2021, which drew upon the insights of volunteer decoders from across the world. But, before turning to this twenty-first-century permutation of social stenography in action, we explore the longer history of deciphering attempts and some of the difficulties involved.

4 Deciphering Dickens's shorthand: Early attempts

Deciphering a shorthand text is no different from reading any kind of unusual script. Essentially, it involves a two-way process of decoding the shapes of the script into letters, combinations of letters, or words, to make hypotheses ('bottom-up' processing), and testing those hypotheses against the verbal and semantic content of the surrounding text ('top-down' processing).

However, Dickens's shorthand is a particularly difficult script to decode for a number of reasons. As noted previously, in more than one instance Brachygraphy uses the same or visually similar symbols to represent different letters. This means that individual characters, or combinations of characters, often have more

43 London, Charles Dickens Museum, B174_A516, letter addressed to Dickens from William Makepeace Thackeray with Dickens's reply noted in Brachygraphy shorthand, 11 June 1847.

44 New York, Morgan Library and Museum, MA 107.43, autograph letter or document in cipher.

than one potential solution. The alphabet table reproduced in Fig. 3 indicates some of these difficulties; for instance, a single symbol represents the letters *i* and *j*, as well as the words *Jesus* and *high*. Dickens did not always follow Gurney's rule for expressing internal vowels through the position of the succeeding consonant,[45] giving rise to a range of hypotheses. For example, the linked shorthand characters of *b* and *d* could be transcribed as *bad*, *bed*, *bid*, *bud*, *bead* and so on, with the interpretation highly dependent on the context. *David Copperfield* depicts David encountering this read-back problem, having finally mastered writing shorthand characters quickly enough to keep up with Traddles's speeches:

> I [...] should have been quite triumphant if I had had the least idea what my notes were about. But, as to reading them after I had got them, I might as well have copied the Chinese inscriptions on an immense collection of tea-chests, or the golden characters on all the great red and green bottles in the chemists' shops![46]

The original shorthand writer might rely upon context and memory to fill in some of the gaps when transcribing shorthand back into longhand (although for the novice David, at this stage in his training, the Brachygraphy symbols still appear like a foreign language). However, later transcribers must work from the context of the sentence alone.

An additional issue is that Dickens changed the meaning of some original Gurney symbols, invented new symbols of his own, and wrote many of the standard Gurney symbols in a non-standard way.[47] It is common for expert stenographers whose shorthand only has to be read by its writer to take graphic shortcuts and alter shorthand shapes as they write. These individual brands of 'shorthand of shorthand' are hard for other people to decipher, but in Dickens's case the problem is exacerbated because he wanted his pupils to learn 'by the book' so his stenographic idiosyncrasies do not always appear in his teaching notebooks.

The first attempt to decipher Dickens's shorthand was undertaken on behalf of J. Holt Schooling (1859–1927), who published a densely illustrated article on 'Charles Dickens's Manuscripts' in *The Strand Magazine* in 1896. Schooling applied directly to the firm of Messrs Gurney and Sons, founded by Thomas Gurney in the eighteenth century,[48] for help with the shorthand copy of Dickens's letter to Bentley, dated 14 July 1837. This manuscript is laid out like a letter, with a line of address, followed by twenty-one lines of shorthand across two pages, separated into

45 Thomas Gurney, Joseph Gurney and William Brodie Gurney 1835, Table 2.
46 Dickens 2004, 553.
47 Bowles 2019, 43–46.
48 Scharf 1989, 216.

four paragraphs. The majority of the letter consists of Brachygraphy symbols, occasionally interspersed with numerical figures and two instances of capitals in Roman script. The firm was able to produce a full transcription, while noting (without knowing the manuscript's author) that, '[a]lthough evidently written by an expert, there are a few idiosyncrasies in the shorthand. It does not strictly follow the Gurney system.'[49] In the transcript, no attempt is made to identify 'B.R.' and 'O.T.'. This was a blank that Schooling himself filled in, explaining that the initials stood for the titles of novels in Dickens's contract negotiations with Bentley – 'B.R.' referred to *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and 'O.T.' to *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839) – providing an early example of what different types of expertise, stenographic and Dickensian, could bring to the puzzles prompted by Dickens's shorthand.

Several decades passed until the next deciphering attempts, undertaken by Carlton and Stower Hewett in the 1940s and 1950s, and Carlton and Higenbottam in the 1960s.[50] Carlton's papers, held in an archive at the Charles Dickens Museum, provide a fascinating if partial account of his efforts to seek out and decipher Dickens's shorthand, in the course of which he consulted Higenbottam and Stower Hewett for assistance with the shorthand transcription. The papers also contain undeciphered stenographic fragments and isolated transcriptions by Carlton of missing pieces of shorthand. Carlton, who wrote many of his notes in shorthand and had an extensive collection of stenography of his own, brought both stenographic and Dickensian expertise to the effort. Higenbottam was City Librarian for the Royal Museum and Public Library, Canterbury, with particular expertise in translation and decoding, going on to publish a 'teach yourself' book on *Codes and Ciphers*, which included a chapter on how he deciphered the coded manuscript diary of Sir Arthur Throckmorton (1557–1626).[51] Less is known about Stower Hewett, who corresponded with Carlton from an address in Liverpool, although it is clear that he had stenographic expertise and apparently a particular knowledge of the Gurney system. In a letter dated

49 Schooling 1896, 34.

50 Carlton appears to have consulted at least one other Gurney expert. Stuck to the back of a receipt for the proofs of pages from the Clarendon edition of Dickens's letters is a notice of the death of Alfred Charles Mill (1889?–1969), 'believed to be the only surviving professional writer of Gurney's shorthand' and said to have been 'called in to decipher Charles Dickens's shorthand'. Carlton added a handwritten attribution, '*The Times*, 2 April '69' and below this a note dated 25 March 1948, which states '[w]rote Mill, of Gurney's, saying that I would call for the Dickens material I left with him on the 7th, 8th, or 9th April', see Carlton Papers, C233-D-01-012_0001. It is not clear what role Mill played in deciphering the manuscripts and no further reference is made to his contributions in the Carlton Papers. For whatever reason, it appears that Carlton ended up consulting Stower Hewett instead, later in 1948.

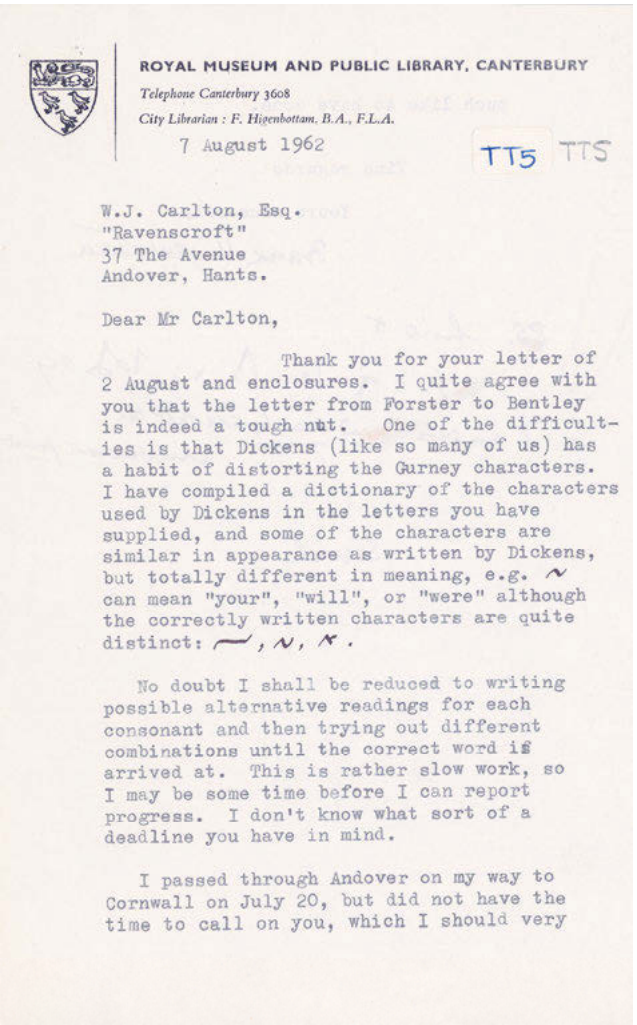
51 Higenbottam 1973, 134–148.

8 October 1948 he reflects on what an 'interesting and pleasant job' the transcription work has been, while suggesting 'it is quite possible there are not more than two or three people in England at the present time who could have tackled it'.[52] Another letter, dated 5 November 1948, refers to an independent transcription Stower Hewett made of the 14 July 1837 shorthand copy of a letter to Bentley, suggesting several corrections to the version printed in Schooling's article, while remarking that 'on the whole I think Gurney have done it well'.[53]

The Carlton papers provide fascinating evidence of different approaches to transcribing and deciphering. Stower Hewett and Higenbottam worked independently, sending transcriptions and letters detailing their progress and difficulties to Carlton, who also made and shared his own transcriptions. Unfortunately, Carlton's outgoing letters are not preserved, but the incoming letters give a sense of how he directed the collaboration. In a letter dated 2 July 1962, for example, Higenbottam suggests a solution to a particular word that Carlton has brought to his attention.[54] Stower Hewett's method involved travelling to the John Rylands Library in Manchester to consult Dickens's shorthand notebook,[55] looking at as many examples of Dickens's shorthand as possible, and often making more than one attempt at transcription, with time between tries.[56] Like Carlton, in some cases Stower Hewett also attempted to research the context of particular letters and examine published material ('I [...] have been looking at Ray's Thackeray's letters, but could find no copy of D's letter to him').[57] Higenbottam also asked to see further examples of Dickens's shorthand, '(with transcription, if possible)',[58] and described constructing a 'dictionary of the characters used by Dickens in the letters [...] supplied' to assist with deciphering.[59] Higenbottam speculated that '[n]o doubt I shall be reduced to writing possible alternative readings for each consonant and then trying out different combinations until the correct word is arrived at' (see Fig. 4) – a comprehensive, if time-consuming transcription method.[60] We also find Higenbottam tracing the shorthand characters in ink onto paper, with

52 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-013_0001, letter from Stower Hewett to Carlton, 8 October 1948.
53 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-001_0001, letter from Stower Hewett to Carlton, 5 November 1948.
54 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-001_0005, letter from Higenbottam to Carlton, 2 July 1962.
55 Carlton Papers, C233-D-01-019_0037, letter from Stower Hewett to Carlton, 1 January 1949.
56 'If you still have the photograph, I should like to have another go at it', Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-006_0003, letter from Stower Hewett to Carlton, 7 April 1951.
57 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-006_0003, letter from Stower Hewett to Carlton, 7 April 1951.
58 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-001_0005, letter from Higenbottam to Carlton, 2 July 1962.
59 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-003_0001, letter from Higenbottam to Carlton, 7 August 1962.
60 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-003_0001, letter from Higenbottam to Carlton, 7 August 1962.

the alphabet characters written in pencil above, then laying tracing paper over the top and writing proposed solutions for some of the symbols (see Fig. 5).[61]



ROYAL MUSEUM AND PUBLIC LIBRARY, CANTERBURY

Telephone Canterbury 3608

City Librarian : F. Higenbottam. B.A., F.L.A.

7 August 1962

TT5 TTS

W.J. Carlton, Esq.
"Ravenscroft"
37 The Avenue
Andover, Hants.

Dear Mr Carlton,

Thank you for your letter of 2 August and enclosures. I quite agree with you that the letter from Forster to Bentley is indeed a tough nut. One of the difficulties is that Dickens (like so many of us) has a habit of distorting the Gurney characters. I have compiled a dictionary of the characters used by Dickens in the letters you have supplied, and some of the characters are similar in appearance as written by Dickens, but totally different in meaning, e.g. ~ can mean "your", "will", or "were" although the correctly written characters are quite distinct: ⁓, ∿, ~.

No doubt I shall be reduced to writing possible alternative readings for each consonant and then trying out different combinations until the correct word is arrived at. This is rather slow work, so I may be some time before I can report progress. I don't know what sort of a deadline you have in mind.

I passed through Andover on my way to Cornwall on July 20, but did not have the time to call on you, which I should very

Fig. 4: Letter from Frank Higenbottam to William J. Carlton, 7 August 1962, C233-D-02-003_0001, Carlton Papers. Courtesy of the Charles Dickens Museum, London.

61 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-003_0005, transcription of a shorthand copy of a letter to Bentley, 22 October 1838. We have attributed this to Higenbottam based upon the handwriting.

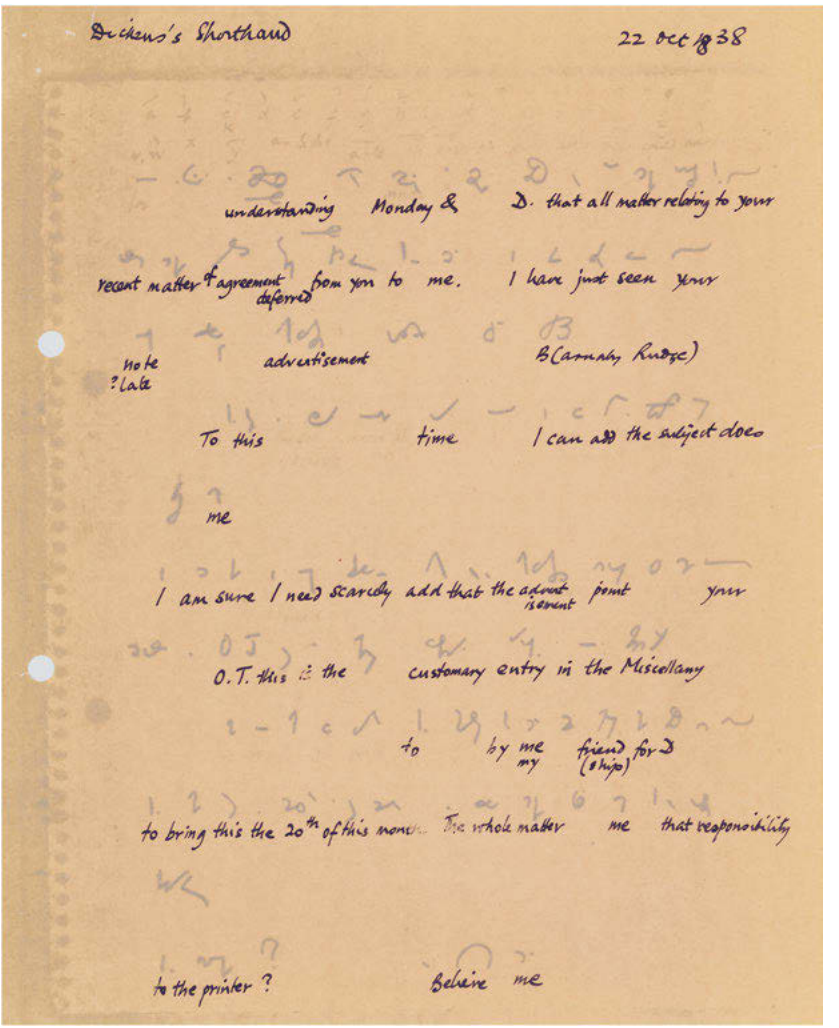


Fig. 5: Partial transcription of a shorthand copy of a letter to Richard Bentley, 22 October 1838, C233-D-02-003_0005, Carlton Papers. Courtesy of the Charles Dickens Museum, London.

In their letters, Stower Hewett and Higenbottam reflect upon the pleasures and difficulties of transcribing and deciphering Dickens's shorthand script. One of the main challenges they encountered was the author's 'habit of distorting the Gurney characters'; Higenbottam noted that 'some of the characters are similar in ap-

pearance as written by Dickens, but totally different in meaning', whereas the original Gurney versions are 'quite distinct'.[62] This ambiguity proved a particular stumbling block; on at least one occasion, the three stenographers came up with three different transcriptions for the same symbol.[63] Comparing notes helped them to identify the idiosyncrasies of Dickens's shorthand script, improve the quality of the transcriptions, and identify the most likely solutions. Sometimes, however, collaboration also helped to identify when to admit defeat. After making another attempt at the Thackeray letter, following Carlton's own efforts, Stower Hewett confessed himself unable 'to get the few words we want'; 'if I were you, in the circumstances, I should edit the parts which are undecipherable, as we have undoubtedly got the sense of the whole thing', he admitted ruefully.[64]

Nonetheless, Carlton, Stower Hewett, and Higenbottam's achievements are impressive. Carlton established Dickens's shorthand as worthy of serious scholarly interest[65] and together the team was responsible for the transcription of all of Dickens's known surviving shorthand correspondence, barring the first letter to Bentley (previously deciphered in the Schooling article, but improved upon by the collaborators) and the 'Tavistock' letter. Carlton seems to have made two brief attempts at the latter, tackling the first two lines of shorthand without any kind of collaboration. The second attempt reads, 'I feel touched that every/though very … to appeal to in Naples if [deleted words] that occurred to me at … yesterday'.[66] It is striking that even an expert stenographer like Carlton could have found the first sentence so difficult and perhaps that is why he did not take his transcription any further.

The Carlton papers reflect the possibilities for social stenography at a particular moment in time, with collaborators working in different locations and making use of available technologies. There is a mix of typewritten and handwritten notes and letters, photostats of shorthand manuscripts, and copies of the letters in pen and in pencil. Reviewing the collection brings vividly to life some of the challenges of the pre-digital research era; often a single photostat of a manuscript had to be sent back and forth, or a handwritten copy made; Stower Hewett expressed his frustration at not being able to access the right copy of *The Strand Magazine* when he travelled to the John Rylands Library. Efforts were necessarily asynchronous, with suggestions and improvements exchanged by post and pondered separately. From the letters, it appears that transcription was a slow and sometimes frustrat-

62 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-003_0001, letter from Higenbottam to Carlton, 7 August 1962.
63 Bowles 2019, 52.
64 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-006_0005, letter from Stower Hewett to Carlton, 27 April 1951.
65 See Carlton 1926.
66 Carlton Papers, C233-D-02-007_0005.

ing business, fitted in around other activities.[67] It is thought-provoking that, despite various technological advances, many of the fundamentals of transcribing and deciphering Dickens's shorthand – Stower Hewett's repeated transcription attempts, Higenbottam's 'dictionary' and writing out of every possible solution – remain the same, as we would discover in our crowd-assisted efforts to 'decode' Dickens in 2021, focusing on the 'Tavistock' letter.

5 Deciphering the 'Tavistock' letter in the twenty-first century

After Carlton's effort, the only other verifiable attempt at transcription of the 'Tavistock' letter took place in November 2011, ahead of the bicentenary of Dickens's birth in 2012, when a curator at the Morgan Library and Museum posted an image of the letter on the library website and asked readers for help in deciphering it.[68] This laudable attempt at public transcription appears to have been unsuccessful.

In 2021, we turned our attention to this mysterious letter as part of The Dickens Code project. The project had three key aims: to seek solutions to Dickens's undeciphered shorthand writing, bring the author's diffuse shorthand corpus together, and enhance academic and public knowledge of Dickens's shorthand, as well as stenographic culture more generally. At the heart of the project was a public network of 'Dickens decoders' that sat alongside an academic network drawing expertise from Dickens studies, shorthand studies, forensic linguistics, digital humanities, and informatics. Although transcribing Dickens's shorthand is fraught with difficulty for novice decoders, we thought that Carlton's method of transcribing separately and then comparing was essentially correct, but that progress had been slow because he had only had two experts to help him. We felt that deciphering Dickens's shorthand needed more quality transcribers because the more possible transcriptions you have, the more hypotheses you are able to test. We therefore decided to increase the number of expert transcribers through an open call for volunteers via a digital platform. Essentially, we wanted to explore new possibilities for social stenography in the twenty-first century, using crowd-assisted transcription. The 'Tavistock' letter seemed the ideal choice for a public transcribing and deciphering challenge: not only was the letter visually striking, with fifteen clean lines of legible

67 'I am only sorry I have so little time except at week ends to get on with it', Carlton Papers, C233-D-01-019_0041, letter from Stower Hewett to Carlton, 1 April 1949.
68 Kiely 2011.

shorthand interspersed with a few words and initials in Roman script, but nothing was known about its contents (see Fig. 6). One consequence of waning familiarity with stenographic culture in the twenty-first century was to make the 'Tavistock' letter appear more deliberately cryptographic than it would have seemed to Carlton and his colleagues. The possibility of finding out something new about Dickens and helping to solve a literary mystery caught the public's imagination.

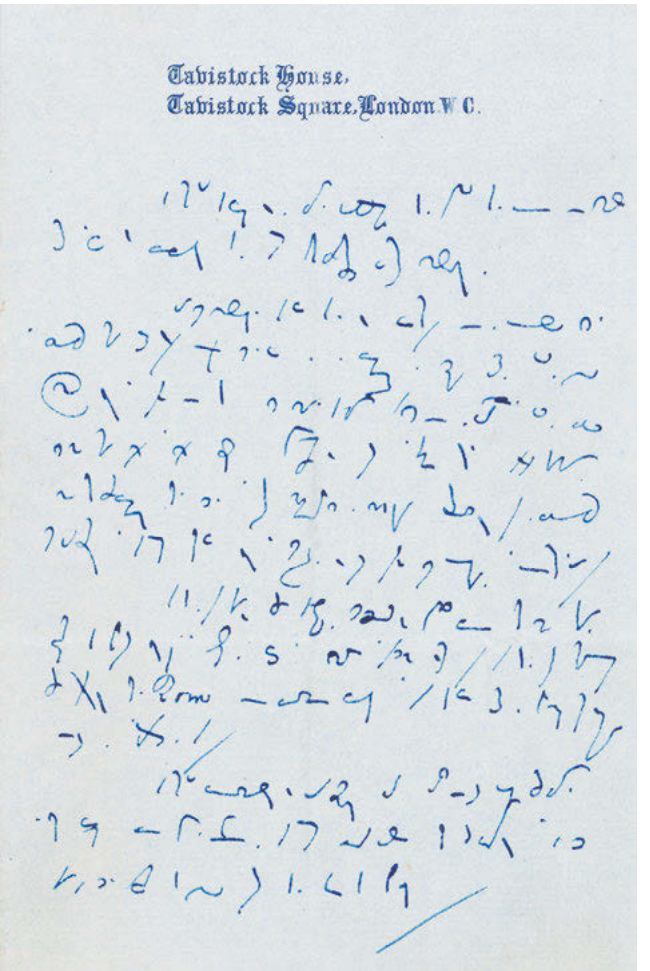


Fig. 6: Charles Dickens, autograph letter or document in cipher: London, to an unidentified recipient, 1851–1860, p.1 [shorthand copy of a letter that Dickens wrote to J. T. Delane, editor of *The Times*, in May 1859]. New York, Morgan Library & Museum, MA 107.43. Acquired by Pierpont Morgan before 1913. Photograph by Janny Chiu. Photographic credit: Morgan Library & Museum, New York.

From the outset, we were conscious of the opportunities and potential pitfalls of asking volunteers to assist with transcription. Crowd-assisted transcription falls under the broader category of 'crowdsourcing', a process that involves 'leveraging public participation in or contributions to projects and activities',[69] and encompasses various types of for- and non-profit initiatives that invite volunteers (the 'crowd') to contribute their labour and expertise towards achieving a defined goal, generating mutual benefit in the process. While some insist that 'crowdsourcing' refers only to online activities,[70] others argue convincingly that the practice has a long pre-digital history, including major projects such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which relied upon more than six million reader-contributed examples of early word usages.[71] In relation to deciphering Dickens's shorthand, the main advantages of academic crowdsourcing were the potential to speed up the transcription process and to generate diverse solutions by involving a wider range of people with different skillsets and perspectives.[72] This method also aligned with our aim of enhancing public knowledge of Dickens's shorthand and stenographic culture more generally. At the same time, we recognised that academic crowdsourcing is not a simple or universal solution. Transcribe Bentham (2010–), a project that involves volunteers in transcribing the unpublished manuscripts of philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832),[73] found that initially 'the rate of volunteer transcription did not compare favourably with that of professional scholar-transcribers' and that there was 'an extremely high moderation overhead, with significant staff time needed to process the outputs', assess the quality of the submissions, and provide contributor feedback.[74] For us, the potential difficulties included the fundamental difficulty of the task, the probability of generating erroneous solutions, and the challenges of moderation when there was frequently more than one possible solution. The need for clear research parameters, a transparent methodology, training and guidance, and ethical consideration of the role of volunteers[75] underpinned the creation of our crowdsourced 'social stenography' network.

We launched our prize competition, focused on deciphering the 'Tavistock' letter, at our 'Decoding Dickens' symposium in July 2021 with a deadline of 31 December 2021. Entrants were asked to complete a competition entry form transcribing as

69 Hedges and Dunn 2018, 1.

70 Estellés-Arolas and González-Ladrón-de-Guevara 2012.

71 Ellis 2014.

72 Brabham 2013, 20, 23.

73 See Transcribe Bentham, University College London, <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/transcribe-bentham/>.

74 Hedges and Dunn 2018, 31.

75 See case studies in Ridge 2014; Terras 2016; and Hedges and Dunn 2018 for reflections on best practice for crowdsourcing in academic and cultural heritage contexts.

many shorthand symbols as they could, as well as completing a short report on how they had approached the challenge. The £300 prize came from an anonymous donor, with the competition administered by the Dickens Project, a research consortium headquartered at the University of California Santa Cruz.[76] In order to maximise participation, our only restrictions were that participants had to be aged eighteen or over and agree to place their proposed solution under a Creative Commons license.

We anticipated that our volunteer decoders were unlikely to have stenographic expertise, although former shorthand learners, writers, and teachers turned out to be one of our key participant groups, along with Dickensians, and computer coders. For this reason, we used online events and digital resources to help familiarise members of the public with Dickens's shorthand and provide them with training in how to read the Brachygraphy system. One major advantage, compared with Carlton's earlier efforts, was the ease with which different resources could be linked up from a central website.[77] Participants could access various editions of the *Brachygraphy* manual through the Internet Archive[78] and review high-quality digitisations of Dickens's shorthand manuscript notebook at the John Rylands Library without having to travel to Manchester. Email increased the speed of communication, while video conferencing platforms made it possible to host workshops with international participation. With Higenbottam's 'dictionary' in mind, we also created a downloadable 'Dickens Code Alphabet' of how Dickens wrote different alphabet characters, and a 'Dickens Code Lexicon' of his most frequently used shorthand symbols, simplifying some of the unnecessary complexities of the Gurney manual. A YouTube training video for step-by-step transcription and a series of online workshops were created also, to support participants new to decoding.

While the cash prize generated an immediate buzz, particularly within the online Dickens community, it took time to build momentum. Two elements were key to finding a wider audience. Social media promotion via Twitter (now X), including puzzles and mini-challenges to help users understand the principles of Brachygraphy, and a well-attended online workshop at 'Being Human', the UK's national festival of the humanities, both generated mainstream media coverage.[79]

76 See 'Dickens Project Consortium', The Dickens Project UC Santa Cruz <https://dickens.ucsc.edu/about/consortium.html>.

77 See <https://dickenscode.org>.

78 The Internet Archive is a non-profit digital library that provides open access to more than 44 million books. See 'About the Internet Archive', *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/about/>.

79 Notably, The Dickens Code project featured in a twelve-minute segment on BBC Radio 3's 'Free Thinking' programme (see 'Being Human 2021', BBC Radio 3 'Free Thinking' (11 November 2021),

Downloads of competition entry forms spiked in November–December 2021, numbering over a thousand. Out of those, only sixteen valid entries were received.[80] This not only reflects the difficulty of the task but the need to generate a lot of publicity when the task is so challenging. Our next step was to process these entries, adopting a probabilistic correction methodology. First, we attempted our own transcription and used that as a baseline for a working solution. When the contestants sent in their solutions, we noted down every transcription made of every word by each decoder. If a transcription fitted both the shorthand shapes and the semantic context, we marked it as 'possibly correct'. Each of these 'possibly correct' pieces served to increase the verbal and semantic context of the manuscript, making other possible solutions more 'probably correct' than others, so that the more gaps we were able to fill, the more interpretable the remaining symbols became. However, since many of Dickens's shorthand characters can be read in different ways, there were different 'possibly correct' readings of the same symbol. In order to identify which of the readings was '*probably* correct', we looked at the 'possibly correct' solutions in three phases.[81]

In the first phase, we concentrated on the transcriptions which five or more transcribers agreed on and added all these words to the working solution. This included a number of frequently occurring arbitrary characters with straightforward shorthand shapes and a grammatical function (articles, pronouns, prepositions, connectors, deictic markers, modal verbs). There was also significant agreement for several more complex characters referring to lexical items. In the second phase, our attention turned to the symbols for which there was less agreement, with three or four decoders transcribing the same word. To decide on the 'most probable' answer, we looked first for agreement among the decoders who had been most successful in the first phase. If in our opinion their solution matched the shorthand shape and the verbal context, it would be accepted as the 'most probable' hypothesis against which we would test the other solutions. In the third and final phase of correction, we looked at the words that had been transcribed by just one or two transcribers. Again, we relied on the solutions provided

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0011d1v, and the competition had full-page coverage in print and digital editions of *The Times* (see Tor 2021).

80 'Valid' entries were considered as those submitted on a signed competition entry form before the deadline.

81 Since the methodology adopted for correction can only be probabilistic, it should be noted that the transcript of the 'Tavistock' letter is not definitive. It is presented as the most likely solution and remains open to further suggestions and comments. Revisiting and reviewing earlier transcriptions was also part of Carlton's practice, as Stower Hewett's comments on the Schooling transcription indicate.

by the two most successful decoders as the benchmark for testing all the other hypotheses. This produced the following working solution:[82]

> I feel [obliged] **though** very [reluctantly] to appeal to you in **person** [3 words] that [3 words] advertisement [1 word] [yesterday].
> [7 words] in the *usual* way *the* **ad** for [three] **days** *next* **week** of the **contents of** *number* **3 of** *All* **the** *Year* Round *with* a **particular** in it **which** [11 words] for [3 words] **announcing** that after **Ascension** Day **Household Words** *will* be [discontinued] by me *and* **its** [partnership of proprietors dissolved]. *The* **ad** *was* [refused] and **sent** back with a [message] that *this particular* was **untrue** *and* **unfair**.
> **As** *to* [its] *truth* it is [absolutely] **impossible** that [something] *can be more* true because [6 words] *a* **plain** *and* **simple fact**. *As* to **its** [fairness] it is [signed] by [Romilly] in open *court and is* **taken from** the [shorthand writer's notes of] *a* judgement **of his**.
> I feel **convinced** that he himself [10 words] *on* **any** ground **of sense or reason** [3 words] and I am **sure** I may [2 words] **your** [1 word] to *have* it [restored].

From this mosaic of 'probably correct' words we could start to glean the context of the letter and identify directions for further research to fill in more of the blanks. The 'Tavistock' letter referenced two weekly magazines that Dickens edited: *Household Words* (1850–1859) and *All the Year Round* (1859–1870). Because both titles were mentioned, this fixed the date of the letter to the year 1859 or later, with the letter's content pointing to the vexed transition from one periodical to another. This corroborated a detail from Carlton's transcription: he had added 'May 1859' at the top of both his attempts, copying a note pencilled on his photostat of the shorthand manuscript by an unknown hand. Given the uncertainty surrounding this date, we chose not to share it in the competition blurb. However, 'May 1859' now looked increasingly probable, particularly in light of a further clue, 'Ascension Day' (the fortieth day of Easter), which clarified the timeframe. The final issue of *Household Words* was published on 28 May 1859, just five days before Ascension Day (2 June 1859). The subject matter clearly involved advertising 'of the contents of number 3 of *All the Year Round*' and the transcriptions 'in open court' and 'judgement' suggested a legal element.

Working from these clues, we investigated legal judgements involving Dickens and his periodicals within this timeframe, as well as consulting contemporary newspaper reports, and biographical accounts. This led us to the well-known legal

82 Plain text indicates words added in the first phase of probabilistic correction, where five or more transcribers were in agreement; italics are used for words added in the second phase (agreement between three to four transcribers); bold indicates words added in the third phase (suggested by one or two transcribers). In square brackets we indicate where words are missing and/or solutions were added following further contextual research.

controversy of early 1859 in which William Bradbury (1800–1869) and Frederick Mullet Evans (1804–1870), who co-owned *Household Words* with Dickens and two others, had contested the wording of the phrase 'discontinued' on advertisements that Dickens had published to promote his new magazine, *All the Year Round*. The origins of this dispute went back to May 1858, when Dickens formally separated from his wife Catherine (1816–1879). Rumours swirled concerning Dickens's relationship with a young actress, Ellen Ternan (1839–1914), and his sister-in-law Georgina (1827–1917), and Dickens took the extraordinary step of publishing a statement of innocence as the leading article in *Household Words* on 12 June 1858. Dickens had the same statement published in *The Times*, and called upon national and regional papers to do the same in what was essentially a pledge of loyalty. At the time, Evans and Mark Lemon (1809–1870), the publisher and editor of *Punch* magazine, were acting on Catherine's behalf. For reasons both professional and personal, they did not feel it appropriate to publish Dickens's statement in *Punch*. Dickens was furious and decided to 'dismiss Bradbury and Evans as his publishers, buy up their share in *Household Words*, and have it printed elsewhere.'[83] When Bradbury and Evans refused to sell, in Autumn 1858, Dickens unilaterally decided to close the journal down and establish another in its place. The situation escalated, with Bradbury and Evans filing a 'Bill of Complaint in Chancery' to protest Dickens's announcement that the journal would be discontinued.[84]

The law report of the case, which was heard in the High Court on 26 March 1859, quotes the offending advertisement as follows: 'On Saturday, 28th May 1859, Mr. Charles Dickens will cease to conduct *Household Words*, *that periodical will be discontinued*, and its partnership of proprietors dissolved.'[85] We were intrigued to find that the word 'discontinued', and phrase 'partnership of proprietors dissolved' matched some of the untranscribed shorthand symbols. The law report also helped with transcription of the puzzling word 'Rom', which was written in longhand on the manuscript. This clearly referenced Sir John Romilly (1802–1874), the Master of the Rolls, who had heard the case. Successful deciphering of 'Romilly' provided the context to help us transcribe the word 'signed' and the phrase 'shorthand writer's notes'. Finally, the words 'true' and 'fair' clearly corresponded to the transcription's 'truth' and 'fairness' and were helpful for transcribing 'as' in the parallelism 'as to (its truth)' and 'as to (its fairness)'. Overall, we managed to transcribe a further twenty-two symbols after the competition closed by undertaking detailed contextual research.

83 Drew 2003, 135.

84 Drew 2003, 135.

85 Bradbury *v.* Dickens 1859.

Having transcribed as many words as possible, our attention then turned to interpretation of the letter, particularly the question of who Dickens was making his personal appeal to and why he was writing about an advertisement for *All the Year Round*. Mindful that we were likely dealing with a shorthand draft or copy of a letter, our first step was to consult volume nine of the British Academy / Pilgrim Edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, which covers 1859–1861, focusing on letters sent between March and May 1859. We also searched the Charles Dickens Letters Project (2002–) database for any new letters that had come to light since publication of the Pilgrim Edition.[86] In the printed edition of the letters, we found mention of a letter to the editor of *The Times*, John T. Delane (1817–1879).[87] The original letter does not appear to have survived, although the Pilgrim editors knew that it existed because it was referenced in another letter that the manager of *The Times*, Mowbray Morris (bap. 1818, d. 1874), wrote to Dickens on 9 May 1859. In this letter, Morris apologised for the rudeness with which a clerk had treated the messenger that Dickens sent regarding his advertisement, noting that the clerk had been 'severely reprimanded'.[88] However, Morris explained, 'the real reason for refusing the advertisement was not altogether bad', as the clerk was aware of the legal dispute between Dickens and Bradbury and Evans and 'was therefore suspicious of the possible objections of your opponents', particularly as he had received instructions from Morris himself 'to reject all statements that are calculated to injure anyone'. In closing, Morris noted that he had ordered the 'immediate publication of your advertisement'.[89]

On the strength of Morris's letter and the content of the shorthand transcript, there was a strong possibility that the 'Tavistock' letter was a shorthand copy or draft of the 'lost' letter to Delane. Subsequently, we undertook further primary research into the publication of advertisements related to *All the Year Round* in *The Times*, as well as consulting various secondary accounts of the dispute, to support our hypothesis.[90] That Dickens's plea to Delane concerned getting the advertisement republished provided a context that helped us transcribe the final phrase of the letter – 'to have it restored'.

To decide upon the overall winner of the competition, we convened a judging panel consisting of members of the project team as well as two shorthand experts. The panel reviewed all of the entries, considering both the quality of the solution and the quality of the accompanying report. Through this process, we identified

86 See Charles Dickens Letters Project, <https://dickensletters.com/>.

87 Dickens 1965–2002, vol. 9, 62, letter to J. T. Delane, 6 May 1859.

88 New York, Morgan Library and Museum, MA 104.19, letter to Dickens, 9 May 1859.

89 New York, Morgan Library and Museum, MA 104.19, letter to Dickens, 9 May 1859.

90 See, for example, Fielding 1954; Patten 1978, 260–271; and Drew 2003, 135–136.

our overall winner and our highly commended runner up. Everyone who took part in the competition received personalised feedback. Since the deciphering of the 'Tavistock' letter was competitive and aimed at a prize, emphasis in the feedback was on whether the transcriber's solution was correct or incorrect. Everyone who transcribed a new symbol in the 'Tavistock' letter for the first time was credited on The Dickens Code 'Roll of Honour', a public listing on our website that pays tribute to the insights of the decoders. The announcement of the results was timed to coincide with the anniversary of Dickens's birth on 7 February and we worked with the University of Leicester's press team to prepare a release detailing the results of the competition and what the solution to the 'Tavistock' letter revealed about Dickens's life and work.[91] The way in which the discovery was made, centring the expertise of members of the public,[92] caught the public's imagination, resulting in international newspaper coverage, radio interviews in the UK and Australia, and television coverage in the UK, France, and Russia.

The significance of the 'Tavistock' letter discovery lies in its novel approach to shorthand transcription and deciphering, perhaps more so than the contents of the letter itself. This shorthand manuscript contains no new revelations about this fraught moment in Dickens's professional life, although it does provide additional insight and texture. The 'Tavistock' letter reveals an author under pressure and unafraid to take his grievance to the highest authorities in order to get the outcome he desired. The wider significance of this discovery is in what it shows about the possibilities for social stenography in the twenty-first century, bringing together non-academic and academic expertise.

6 Social stenography in practice

The transcribers' reports provide fascinating insights into the deciphering process, suggesting that the challenges faced were similar to those experienced by Carlton, Stower Hewett, and Higenbottam. The ambiguity of the Gurney symbols as written by Dickens was a recurrent complaint. '[A]lmost everything is ambiguous' commented one participant, while another noted that 'he didn't distinguish between curved and sharp-edged letters so a "w" or "v" would look like a "p". Also, the angle of his letter was not consistent and sometimes I was not sure if it was a "t" or a "d" or an "s".' There were four comments on the fact that small variations in shape were

91 Anon. 2022.

92 Usborne 2022.

supposed to represent different symbols or just different ways of writing the same symbol; one transcriber described having to 'second guess' whether the loops represented letters or were just part of his shorthand style.

The other key challenge was the difficulty of transcribing in a contextual vacuum. This lack of context referred to both an immediate verbal context that can help a reader to guess what a particular symbol refers to and the wider discourse context of what the letter might be about or why it was being written. Three transcribers commented on the problem of linguistic register and their lack of familiarity with the kind of language and phraseology that Dickens used in his letters – 'I don't always recognize words and phrases that were used in Victorian London but are rare today'; 'language was from a different era'; 'I found it challenging to understand the language of someone who was writing in the 1850's'. Another factor that contributed to the contextual vacuum was the inadequacy of or limited access to resources. One transcriber noted that 'Dickens's notebook is a bit all over the place [...] there is a lot of information missing' and another made the valid critique that resources which might have been helpful for contextual research, such as the British Academy / Pilgrim Edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, or journal articles about Dickens's shorthand, were behind paywalls and not available to members of the general public without subscription.

The approaches that our participants took to transcribing were interesting and varied. Some transcribers were linear in their approach, beginning at the start of the letter and transcribing sentence by sentence, while others mentioned a more holistic strategy of first trying to transcribe what was easy in the whole of the text and then doing what was hard; for one transcriber, this involved scanning the text without any prior knowledge of the system and highlighting symbols of the same shape which they saw being repeated. For individual sentences, one transcriber said he tried to get 'the bones of a sentence' that would give him an understanding of its grammar and what grammatical category an individual word might belong to. In terms of deciphering complex symbols, some transcribers appeared to be systematic in their approach, describing the process as 'trial and error', 'brute force' and 'noting down every possible interpretation of a symbol underneath the symbol' – the same strategy that Higenbottam considered adopting. For at least one participant, reference to the original *Brachygraphy* manual seemed of little use given Dickens's idiosyncrasies: 'what I found most useful was studying Dickens's handwriting and how he made the Gurney system his own'. Transcribers also mentioned developing their own materials, with two noting that they had built their own record of transcribed symbols (a version of Higenbottam's 'dictionary') and one creating a glossary organised by shape (for example, 'vertical line' shapes, 'horizontal line' shapes), rather than alphabetically. Finally, some

transcribers mentioned undertaking background research on Dickens to support their hypotheses. One transcriber who was familiar with *Household Words* would run transcribed words through the Dickens Journals Online (2012–) corpus[93] to see if they appeared in a context that was helpful for what she was transcribing. The ability to keyword search databases of Dickens's fiction and non-fiction is potentially a significant advantage for our twenty-first-century decoders, even if in the case of the 'Tavistock' letter this approach was of limited use.

Among the transcribers' tips for others engaged in shorthand deciphering, were suggestions to familiarise oneself with the system so that symbols could be spotted more quickly in the text and constantly revising and checking what you have transcribed, to keep an open mind, and to not 'get too attached to what you have deciphered'. In the specific case of Dickens's shorthand, one transcriber suggested using different editions of *Brachygraphy*: 'look at the (1770) 7th or 8th editions (they're practically identical to each other) which have more symbols. Look at the completely rewritten (1884) 18th edition which is set up a lot like Dickens's Manchester Document'.

The partial solution of the 'Tavistock' letter is instructive, revealing many continuities with traditional shorthand transcribing and deciphering practices. However, the 'social' aspects of our social stenography network were limited, with participants communicating directly with the project team but not with one another. Because it was framed as a competition, it made sense for transcribers to work independently. For people who were motivated to work on their own, the idea of a personal challenge provided an individual incentive that was helpful for successful decoding. Another advantage is that when transcribers are working on their own, it will produce a greater variety of results and is therefore more likely to produce a correct solution.[94] For example, if ten transcribers work collectively on a series of complex symbols, their priority is to reach a consensus which works for the group and so they will come up with just one result, but if they work independently of each other, the end result might be two or three different solutions rather than just one. This variety of solution is also extremely helpful for learning about the system because the solutions that do not align with the 'majority solution' can be analysed and compared with it; occasionally, one of the non-aligned solutions will even turn out to be the correct one.

However, independent solving has its disadvantages. The lack of the kind of mutual support that you might find in a standard learning environment like a

93 See Dickens Journals Online, University of Buckingham, <https://www.djo.org.uk/>.

94 James Surowiecki discusses the importance of 'diversity and independence' to the wisdom of crowds: 'Paradoxically, the best way for a group to be smart is for each person in it to think and act as independently as possible' (Surowiecki 2005, xix–xx).

classroom may have discouraged decoders who found their initial encounter with shorthand difficult to manage. Our experience with feedback also showed that, for our decoders, 'one successful transcription leads to another'. When we published the final version, several transcribers contacted us with solutions for the untranscribed symbols, commenting on the fact that the context of the final transcription had opened up new trains of thought about what a symbol might refer to. Overall, if more cooperative support had been available to transcribers, it would probably have increased the number of entries that were sent in and the number of words that were transcribed.

In order to maximise the potential for learning and obtaining correct transcriptions, we need to continue with the idea of individual solving while at the same time increasing opportunities for interactive learning for transcribers who prefer to work collectively. This means focusing online content and activities around the creation of what the sociolinguist John Swales calls a 'discourse community'.[95] There are a number of specific ways that this can be done, including providing feedback based upon the kinds of mistakes a particular learner is making (rather than focusing on correct/incorrect transcriptions) and presentation of a 'most probable version' as well as alternative solutions, followed up by collective discussion of the respective versions, so that transcribers can see where their solution differs from the 'most probable' one and explain whether or not they agree with it. Increased interactivity will also encourage transcribers to reflect on whether they are transcribing in the most productive way. Their feedback to us on the approaches they took shows that there is no single approach to transcribing that works for everyone and that transcribers will develop a strategy that suits their personal learning style. What the project needs to do is to make these approaches explicit via feedback and show transcribers that many approaches are possible.

There are also opportunities to make greater use of Web 2.0 to support collaborative deciphering. In this iteration, web-based technologies increased the speed of communication, enabled access to some digitised resources, and allowed us to create an international network of decoders. However, the use of a platform such as From the Page, would enable volunteers to transcribe and annotate Dickens's shorthand manuscripts more collaboratively, and enable us to better preserve different stages in the decoding process and better credit the people involved in discoveries.[96]

95 See Swales 1991.

96 This platform is used by the Victoria and Albert Museum's Deciphering Dickens project (<https://fromthepage.com/vanda>), which facilitates crowd-assisted transcription of Dickens's longhand manuscripts.

7 Conclusion

The deciphering of the 'Tavistock' letter through crowd-assisted transcription shows that social stenography has an important role to play in finding solutions to previously undeciphered shorthand manuscripts. Indeed, for manuscripts where the shorthand is particularly difficult, as in our case, crowdsourcing may turn out to be the only route to successful deciphering. There is, in our opinion, significant scope for digital projects like The Dickens Code where a single item of shorthand has led to hundreds of people engaging with a previously unknown stenographic culture.

For social shorthand projects to be successful, however, we need to take care of the 'social'. Our experience of crowd-assisted transcription shows that an understanding of the digital pedagogy of shorthand is as important as a knowledge of the shorthand itself and its historical context. The harder the shorthand, the harder it becomes to maintain a cohesive stenographic community. Individuals need to be engaged through clear, imaginative online materials, regular personalised feedback and opportunities to work individually and collectively.

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General Index

Within this index, the headings are arranged in word-by-word order, ignoring definite and indefinite articles in titles. The primary aim is to assist the reader in finding names and terms of interest, rather than creating an exhaustive concordance. This is also why terms that appear too frequently, and would therefore be impractical as index headings, are omitted.

Imre Galambos

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