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Introduction

INTELLECTUAL WORK—reading, note-taking, thinking, writing—has a history. Studying the ideas and arguments resulting from such work is the traditional purview of intellectual history. A more recent approach is to examine the practices involved in creating them. This interest is no doubt fueled in part by our own experience of methods of working transformed by waves of technological innovation since the 1990s. Alongside the hand-wringing and the hosannahs that have accompanied the many new tools, louder than ever for those based on Large Language Models like ChatGPT, it's no surprise that historians too have responded with their special skills. Asking new questions inspired by present concerns has generated a surge of interest in past practices around the making of knowledge and of texts. On one level this approach can highlight long continuities in the basic features of intellectual work and its challenges. There has long been too much to read, not enough time, many distractions, and the hope and difficulty of attracting a favorable audience. On another level a focus on practices emphasizes the remarkable variations in the material and social conditions of intellectual work and their impact.

For example, in Greco-Roman antiquity, servants, often enslaved, performed most acts of reading and of writing, by reading aloud, taking dictation on wax tablets (wooden boards covered in wax that could be inscribed with a metal stylus, then erased and reused), and recording final copies on papyrus rolls. Today by contrast we rely on electronic devices and experience reading and writing as mostly solitary, even if it takes place in a shared space like a coffee shop or a library. In examining the working methods of scholars, with a special focus on Europe in the later Renaissance (ca. 1500–1650), I will emphasize their frequent reliance on helpers, whether hired for the purpose or already present in the household, e.g., as family members or live-in students. I use “amanuensis” (a Latin term formed from “a manu” for a “hand-servant”;

plural: amanuenses) as a category term to include those who provided help specifically in the management and production of texts, performing tasks like copying, taking dictation, indexing, collating, correcting, annotating, commenting, and composing. The term sounds pretentious today; in 1977 Toni Morrison used it to convey the puffery with which a young woman disappointed in her job prospects described to her mother her new position as a maid.¹ But in the early modern period it was the apposite word for an assistant in intellectual work and it spread from Latin into English (among other vernaculars), as I will discuss in more detail in chapter 1.

My focus on amanuenses brings to light the considerable gap between how intellectual work actually happened—in collaboration with others—and how it was portrayed in writing and in imagery at the time and until recently—as a quasi-heroic solitary activity. This gap between practice and representation (present in other periods and places too) is particularly striking in the Renaissance, when powerful new media such as printing, engraving, and oil painting diffused enduring models of the scholar at work.

The title pages of printed books, designed to attract buyers, focused on selling points. Crucial among these in learned books was the name of an author with a reputation (or the hope of creating one), in addition to the name of the printer. Inside the book, in dedications, prefaces, and the text itself, authors asserted their accomplishments and intellectual ownership to seek recognition and profit for their work. Outside the book, bibliographies and catalogs (of libraries or book sales), developed to manage the explosion of printed books, reinforced the identification of each book with one author as a matter of convenience. Thus, long before the eighteenth century and the formal beginning of copyright law, a moral and economic conception of individual authorship was well developed among the learned. These features have so enduringly shaped our own understanding of authorship that they are hardly noticeable.

More remarkable to us today are the many vivid depictions of authors at work in oil painting, a new medium of high value. Renaissance artists from Domenico Ghirlandaio to Albrecht Dürer to Hans Holbein portrayed scholars at work reading or writing, from the Church Fathers of late antiquity (like Augustine or Jerome) to humanists alive at the time (like Desiderius Erasmus, 1466–1536, or Guillaume Budé, 1467–1540).² This iconography was not novel, since medieval illuminators also depicted writers at work, whether anonymous scribes or identifiable figures like the Evangelists or the French poetess Christine de Pizan (1364–1430). But the Renaissance depictions—frescoes and oil

paintings—were larger, more detailed, and generally reached a broader public (through paintings that copied them and engravings that could be printed and sold in hundreds of copies). Renaissance iconography typically integrated details from the workspaces of the period (ranging from ancient collectibles to household items, or a dog) but usually no other person: the scholar was alone with writing implements, papers, or books—books he owned but especially books that he had written.³

In fig. 0.1, Erasmus rests his hands with satisfaction on a book on which the foredge in Greek then Latin reads “the labors of Hercules of Erasmus of Rotterdam.” The expression referred to the great work he had completed in editing the writings of Church Father Jerome in 1516 and just recently revised.⁴ It also alluded to the big book that launched Erasmus’ fame—the *Adages* (first published in 1508 then in successively expanded editions) in which Erasmus explained thousands of sayings from ancient literature, usually in a few paragraphs each, but in some cases he added pages of digressive commentary, as he did for the expression “the labors of Hercules.” The book standing on the shelf in the upper right is inscribed with the date of completion (1523) and a tribute to the painter with this Latin inscription: “I am Johannes Holbein, whom it is easier to denigrate than to emulate.”⁵ Both painter and writer assert their authority and intellectual property in this painting. Erasmus and Holbein tapped into the prestige that humanist authors and artists had successfully accrued to their activities in the earlier Italian Renaissance, and each claimed recognition for his own difficult and admirable achievement.⁶ This painting has been inspiring on many counts; it became the model for further portraits of Erasmus by Hans Holbein and for other artists and scholars. Let it inspire us to investigate behind the scenes how scholars actually worked at projects that were indeed Herculean, especially since they lacked so many of the aids to research and writing that we now take for granted. One important element of their practice was to rely on human aides.

In this book I will examine a particular kind of working relationship—between scholars and amanuenses or, to borrow some convenient terms from administrative jargon, between “principals” and their assistants (a principal being defined as someone who has an assistant). My most basic point is that reliance on amanuenses was the norm not only in the Renaissance but also across most contexts in the European tradition, from antiquity to the twentieth century, as I show in a brief historical overview in chapter 1. I hope that the materials and dynamics that I analyze suggest parallels also across other times (including our own) and places (such as the many sites of scholarship



FIGURE 0.1. Hans Holbein, Portrait of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam with Renaissance Pilaster. Erasmus sent this portrait in 1524 to William Warham, archbishop of Canterbury, to accompany a new edition of the letters of the Church Father Jerome which Erasmus had just published with a renewed dedication to Warham.

elsewhere in the world).⁷ Because these relationships were highly variable according to the social circumstances and individual preferences of each scholar and amanuensis, I have opted to delve more deeply into a few cases for which I found telling sources in a variety of genres: learned books with revealing front matter or paratexts, biographies and funeral eulogies, and manuscripts

such as letters, wills, and working papers. Most stem from centers of northern humanism from Zurich and Basel to Strasbourg and Paris between the early sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries.

We now have machines that take dictation, correct and edit prose, and can even write competently from a prompt (although the informational content is not always reliable). Have computers and various software programs become our amanuenses? Markus Krajewski drew attention to this implication in the two meanings of the German word “Diener,” which designates both a human servant and a computer server.⁸ To some extent, then, this project fits a pattern of examining what was once a widespread practice (relying on a human amanuensis) precisely after it is no longer common and thus comes to seem interesting.

The visibility and invisibility of amanuenses are a central theme of this book. In chapter 2 I explore the many circumstances including their own behaviors that conspired to keep helpers out of the written record that has come down to us. But I also notice that amanuenses do surface in print—principally to take the blame for errors in what I call the “servant-function” and, occasionally, to receive praise or credit. Chapter 3 treats the work they performed, using surviving working papers among other sources, and how it was characterized at the time. Their work was called “mechanical” on a couple of grounds: because it was considered to be drudgery requiring no judgment and/or because it was performed at the command and pay of another. Regardless of how their role was viewed then, I highlight examples of amanuenses exercising expert judgment to improve their principal’s work and of mutually respectful collaborations. Uncovering otherwise private goings-on in the scholar’s workshop reveals instances where the published attribution of a text does not match its actual authorship. Chapter 4 presents cases of ghostwriting or stolen credit (depending on how one assesses the dynamics) in both directions: i.e., when a helper wrote a text published under the principal’s name, as one might expect, but also conversely when the scholar composed a text and published it under the name of an assistant. In chapter 5 I show how amanuenses could play a central role in shaping the posthumous reputation and publications of their former principal, whether in tension or in cooperation with the heirs of the deceased. My aim throughout is to explore the complexity of these hierarchical yet close relationships on many levels—intellectual, social, and emotional.

I draw on and contribute to three areas of historiography which I have found especially inspiring: on collaboration—in the production of writing, of literary, artistic, and scientific work; on early modern European learned culture; and on the history of working methods.

Many Kinds of Collaboration

Collaboration has become a topic of interest in studies of current practices as well as past ones, as collaborative work has grown in frequency and in size over the last few decades. In the sciences, the vast scale of experimental research and the range of different specializations needed on a project are some of the factors behind an explosion in the number of coauthors on papers. In the humanities and social sciences large editorial projects (e.g., of the papers and works of major historical or literary figures or major reference works like dictionaries and encyclopedias) predated the twentieth century. Teamwork has grown anew recently on the model of the natural sciences and from the rise of projects spanning multiple disciplines and skills, including digital methods. Norms for assigning credit in collaborative work have also been developing as a result. They have generally emphasized more explicit and complete lists of participants, from hundreds of coauthors on scientific papers to movie credits that scroll for ten minutes.⁹ A recent trend in academic promotion reviews calls for explicit descriptions of the contributions of each coauthor because this is otherwise unclear. Needless to say, assessing the roles of different contributors in past contexts is all the more difficult to determine. Nonetheless historians of literature, art, and science have made great advances in underscoring the social nature of the production of texts, art, and scientific knowledge. The term “collaboration” encompasses a wide range of ways in which two or more people can work together given that we often lack more specific terms to describe them.¹⁰ In the following section I propose a few different axes of analysis: diachronic-synchronic; hierarchical-egalitarian; specialized or not; episodic or sustained; but first, the most basic axis: human-superhuman.

Help from the Supernatural

The oldest notion of collaboration with an author involves the supernatural—including the muses whom poets invoked in ancient Greece and Rome and in many periods thereafter; or the Holy Ghost, whose role in inspiring the sacred figures of Christianity was crucial to the authority of their writings. The latter interactions especially were completely hierarchical: the role of the saint was to serve as a conduit for the word of God, with no emphasis on their personal contribution. To highlight the faithful work of reporting the word of God, the term “amanuensis” and equivalents (penman, secretary) recur in describing the Evangelists, to emphasize that they had written the Gospels under dictation



FIGURE 0.2. Caravaggio, *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (1602), formerly in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin. This painting was destroyed in World War II and is known only through black and white photographs. Caravaggio produced it on commission for the Contarelli Chapel in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, but it was rejected. Caravaggio made a second version, in which the angel is instructing Matthew without the same direct physical contact; that one was accepted and still adorns the Chapel today.

from the Holy Spirit.¹¹ The same point was also conveyed in the iconography of a dove or an angel instructing an Evangelist or other holy writer. In an unusually vivid scene on this theme, Caravaggio depicted the angel physically guiding the hand of the fisherman Matthew; Matthew looks amazed at the resulting text, which is rendered in Hebrew to emphasize its divine origin (even though the Gospel of Matthew was composed in Greek) (fig. 0.2).¹²



FIGURE 0.3. An angel inspires John the Evangelist while his scribe records the text in a book. The scroll displays the first verse of the gospel of John in Greek: “Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.” In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

In a few cases the holy “author” receiving supernatural instruction served as a conduit to a third figure, an amanuensis or scribe who was responsible for writing the text. This chain of double delegation was meant to display rather than undermine the authoritative transmission of the resulting inscription.¹³ In a late medieval (likely Byzantine) image of Saint John the Evangelist, an



FIGURE 0.4. Saint Gregory and his secretary, frontispiece of the “*Registrum Gregorii*,” a manuscript gathering letters by Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604). The manuscript was commissioned in Trier by the archbishop Egbert in the late tenth century and originally contained at least 200 pages, but only 37 leaves survive today. This full-page illumination was the work of an unidentified artist known as the Gregory Master.

angel speaks to John who is poised to write on a scroll, but his scribe Prochorus is the one creating the final form of the Gospel, in a codex or bound book (fig. 0.3). All three are marked as holy by a halo, although John’s halo is less visible against the gilt background. Similarly, a late tenth-century depiction of Pope Gregory the Great shows him holding a book and seated at a desk, but

not writing. Gregory receives inspiration from the divine dove on his shoulder and dictates to a scribe behind a curtain. The scene depicts an episode recounted in the *Life of Gregory* by John the Deacon of Rome (ca. 720s–790s). Gregory’s scribe, noticing that Gregory had stopped dictating, investigates by poking a hole with his stylus in the curtain that blocks his view. The scribe was recording Gregory’s words on his wax tablet, the surface commonly used for note-taking in the Middle Ages, possibly in shorthand as might be depicted here, before producing a final, careful copy on parchment. The scribe is awed by the sight of the Holy Ghost speaking directly to the saint. Upon realizing the scribe’s indiscretion Gregory swears him to secrecy out of modesty, but the scribe reports his experience years after Gregory’s death to counter those who questioned Gregory’s authority in speaking on divine matters¹⁴ (fig. 0.4).

In these cases of divine inspiration, although the scribe might introduce errors that required correcting (cue the humanists of the Renaissance who deployed their methods of textual criticism), he was considered to have made no contribution to the text itself. Hence the general anonymity in which scribes operated for centuries. The authority of the sacred text also depended on the noncontribution of those transmitting the divine message—i.e., the Evangelist or saint as amanuensis whether or not they relied on a holy scribe to physically record the message.

Conceptions of the interaction between poet and muse in the classical Greek and Roman traditions are more complicated. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are presented as the muse’s responses to the poet who invoked them, but from the earliest ancient discussions of these poems their composition was attributed to a blind man named Homer.¹⁵ The notion of supernatural inspiration from the muses served mostly as a metaphor, though the muses were sometimes depicted in physical terms. For example, the opening lines of Hesiod’s *Theogony* (8th century BCE) describe the muses dancing, bathing, and singing, and the muses were depicted as actual women in a late antique mosaic of Virgil seated between two muses (fig. 0.5) or in Raphael’s fresco depicting Parnassus (1511) in which the muses and the great poets mingle.

The model of Virgil resonated powerfully in the Renaissance as poets like Pierre de Ronsard and Edmund Spenser, for example, portrayed themselves as specially inspired to compose epic stories of their nation, in the *Franziade* (1572) for France and *The Faerie Queene* (1590–1596) for Elizabethan England.¹⁶ In the modern period the image of the poet controlled by their otherworldly inspiration continued to hold some sway. A fragment of Emily Dickinson’s, the greater context of which has not been determined, reads: “But ought not the



FIGURE 0.5. Mosaic depicting Virgil between the two muses of history (Clio, holding a scroll) and tragedy (Melpomene, holding an actor's mask), from the first to third centuries CE. The writing on the scroll on Virgil's lap begins with the opening words of verse 8 of the *Aeneid*: "Musa, mihi causas memora, quo numine laeso, quidve . . ." Muse, tell me the cause: how was she [Juno] offended in her divinity . . . (tr. A. S. Kline, 2002). The mosaic was found on the site of ancient Hadrumetum, now in Sousse, Tunisia and is on view in the Bardo Museum in Tunis.

amanuensis to receive a commission also."¹⁷ Dickinson was apparently referring to herself as an amanuensis serving as a conduit to a higher source of inspiration and deserving of a "commission," whether reputational or financial. On this interpretation she was articulating her own sense of being unacknowledged while working hard to channel wise words and pleading for some recognition.

The moment for that recognition has arrived!

Making Texts in Manuscript and Print

Current analyses of textual production leave out the supernatural element and investigate the contributions that scribes and amanuenses made in creating a text. Any text composed by dictation involves a collaboration between the one dictating and the one recording the spoken word in a written form (e.g., manuscript, typed, or digital). Since texts rarely indicate how they were composed, we rely on a variety of clues to infer the use of dictation. Some kinds of errors are distinctively aural, based on mis-hearing rather than mis-understanding, mis-copying, or mis-typing. For example when Montaigne corrected in the proofs of the first edition of his *Essais* the expression “vilein vice” (vulgar vice) to “vile indice” (bad sign), the error is most easily explained from mis-hearing. This is strong evidence that orality was part of the writing process and the most likely explanation is that Montaigne dictated the text initially to an amanuensis and the error was not caught until the text was set in type and proofread.¹⁸ In other cases we know that the written text originated in an oral delivery—e.g., an oration, a sermon, a pedagogical lecture, or “table talk” which collected informal remarks of a prominent figure. In these genres the speaker often planned for someone (an amanuensis in their employ, or one or more students in their class) to take notes during the oral event from which a full text would be written out and vetted by the speaker before circulation (or not, as in the case of posthumously published table talk).¹⁹ An ancient example of such an occasion, depicted by many artists, is the account by Tacitus of the Stoic philosopher Seneca summoning writers to take down his words as he slowly died by suicide following Nero’s command in 65 CE (fig. 0.6). Although Tacitus reported that Seneca’s own words as recorded by his scribes were circulated at the time, they have not come down to us.²⁰ In many other cases, including the teachings of Aristotle, the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, or the table talk of Martin Luther, we have texts written from oral delivery that originated from a collaboration between a principal and one or more amanuenses.

More generally, in any case of scribal production and transmission those responsible for each copy of a text contributed to its production. Unlike when taking dictation, scribes making copies of a text (from an autograph written in the author’s own hand or from an existing copy) worked without access to the original author and therefore relied on their own judgment to correct errors and even improve the clarity of the text as they saw fit. They usually made these interventions silently, in addition to introducing errors inadvertently, and we cannot always tell whether a change introduced in a copy was intentional or



FIGURE 0.6. Seneca Preparing His Own Death with His Foot in a Bath, engraving by the French artist Simon François Ravenet (1706–74) reproducing an oil painting by Luca Giordano of 1682–83. Giordano was the first to follow Tacitus’ report in depicting multiple scribes gathered around the ancient philosopher Seneca to collect his final words. Seneca committed suicide on orders from Nero by opening the veins in his leg—hence the basin to collect the blood and the time to talk. Four scribes are poised to record his words either in thick notebooks (on the right) or on loose sheets placed on a board (on the left).

not. Textual criticism has identified various errors as characteristic of manuscript copying, including omitting, repeating, and inverting words or whole lines, just as we are well aware of common errors in keyboarding.²¹ While some errors were no doubt inevitable in the difficult work of copying, recent work has also pointed out that scribes varied in their faithfulness: in some cases an exact copy was the goal and the result, while in other instances scribes were expected to make silent changes and did so.²² Scribes also made decisions about the script they used and the layout of the text they wrote, with or without instructions from the person commissioning the work and in keeping with the norms of their context and the genre of the text.

Some manuscripts involved the work of multiple scribes, who can be differentiated by distinctive features in the handwriting or other patterns of work. When a manuscript was complete, the text could be improved by a professional “reader” hired to correct errors and add helpful annotations to facilitate the use of the text by the patron or community for whom it was meant.²³ The commissioner of a manuscript could also hire an illuminator to add decorative elements in color which were not only aesthetically pleasing and signs of care and wealth, but also helpful in making the text easier to read, consult, and remember.²⁴ The making of a medieval manuscript was thus collaborative by division of labor, which was usually distributed across different specialists working serially in separate spaces. Christine de Pizan offers a rare example of an author who assembled a group of experts with all the necessary skills to work alongside her and produce in one place, and likely under her direct supervision, a manuscript ready for presentation to a patron, as codicologists have concluded from close analyses of the surviving manuscripts.²⁵ As a widow she was head of her household and “assumed the male role of making a living as a scholar,” relying on her mother for domestic tasks.²⁶ The production of manuscripts by scribes remained an essential feature of the media landscape at least through the eighteenth century alongside the broad reach of printing.²⁷

The production of a printed book was even more collaborative. While one scribe working alone could produce one copy of black script on parchment or paper, any book printed by movable type required a team of workers to produce hundreds of copies.²⁸ The new technology invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the early 1450s spread rapidly, as small presses proliferated across many regions of Western Europe. Within the first fifty years most of these early adopters foundered under the strain of the financial risks involved in investing in hefty production costs before any product could be sold and expenses recouped. By 1500, the new industry had become consolidated into several major commercial centers which were well positioned to market newly printed books across as wide a market as possible.²⁹ In addition to a good location, successful printers required materials—one or more presses, sufficient paper, and vast quantities of metal sorts for all the letters and symbols in different sizes and fonts—and workers. Each press required at the very least a compositor to set the type (and later to distribute the type back into cases for use the next day), one worker to ink the type, and another to pull the bar, producing at each pull one sheet printed on one side, which would be printed on the other side the next day. These double-sided sheets, most often comprising two, four, or eight pages of text, were collated into sets to form the complete text of

a book. Printed matter could be transported in sheets, but before it was usable in codex form, the sheets would be appropriately folded and sewn into quires, and the quires stitched together at the spine. The cheapest imprints were sold stitched with a cover of thicker paper and as a result survive much less well than longer, larger, and more expensive books for which buyers would pay for a binding—opting for limp vellum at a low price point or wooden boards covered in stamped leather at the high end.

The complexity and the financial pressures governing the production process created opportunities for the introduction of changes both intentional and unintentional in the published version of the text. When a stop-press correction introduced a change in the middle of a print run and some of the printed sheets carried the change while others did not, usually all the printed sheets would be put into circulation, regardless of these variations, given that tight profit margins precluded discarding any printed sheet unnecessarily. As a result, throughout the handpress era (i.e., before the nineteenth century), printed copies from the same edition and print run are not necessarily identical and can comprise what are called different states of the edition.³⁰

As the possibility of stop-press changes illustrates, the process of setting type could involve multiple rounds of correction, especially when authors and printers staked their reputation on producing a scholarly book of high quality. After the compositor expertly calculated the layout of the printed text and set the type, a single proof sheet was printed so that others could identify any errors to be corrected. Well-respected printers would typically employ a reader and a corrector (the one reading aloud from the authorial manuscript, the other following the printed text) to check each sheet for accuracy, flagging changes for the compositor to make in the set type.³¹ This process could be repeated for second proofs, to be checked in the same way, or directly by the author or a delegate sent by the author if one of them could get to the printer's shop at the opportune moment. In some cases text was also composed during the printing process, whether to accommodate a last minute addition by the author, or a message from the printer ("printer to the reader"), or to solve a problem of layout (e.g., providing text to fill pages left blank at the end of a quire, since these could not be omitted without damaging the structural integrity of the book in its bound form). The printing process thus introduced a bevy of little-known figures active in the printshop who shaped the printed text by composing, proofreading, and correcting it, and who might also write short blurbs, for example to explain how to use an index or a list of errata. Indexes and lists of errata were two final elements of paratext that, if drawn up

carefully, could not be created on the spot. The production of the book could be paused while the author's amanuensis or someone the printer hired for the purpose completed them, and once they were printed, the book would be finalized.

The extent of an author's knowledge of and intervention in these processes varied. Some authors were too geographically distant to be consulted, in which case they could rely on a local intermediary or simply let the printer and his associates take charge. Other authors cultivated close relationships with their printers, in which case they probably were able to influence some of the decisions made during production, although sometimes even they commented that the printer's preferences prevailed over theirs.³² A series of excellent recent studies has illustrated the variety of interactions between the author and the many players working at or for the printer. The tone of these interactions could range from conflictual to amicable, at different times even within the same relationship. To emphasize how widely shared was the responsibility for producing a printed book, these historians speak of "editorial acts" by the "co-elaborators" of the text, adding new facets to our notion of authorship.³³ As eminent book historians have noted, "authors do *not* write books . . . nor do printers print them."³⁴ Books result from the collaboration of many people active in shaping the text and its physical instantiation, as is still the case today.

Collaborative Writing

If we focus on the process of composing a text, collaboration also takes multiple forms. Some measure of "diachronic collaboration" seems inevitable: whether explicitly noted or not, new work is shaped by the producer's awareness of previous related work.³⁵ Indeed, the study of sources and "influences," both recent and long past, has figured as a major theme in intellectual and literary history. In many cases the debts to past works were left unmentioned, either with the expectation that alert readers would notice and appreciate the allusions, or because the new author was happy to receive as much credit for originality as possible. A spate of recent studies on compilation has emphasized how many genres were formed by selecting and arranging material from existing texts, including books of "secrets" or recipes, and collections of verse or quotations or anecdotes.³⁶ In some cases a work called attention to the antecedents on which it relied. Some early modern reference books for example listed on the title page the authors of earlier editions before naming the author of the latest one (as shown, for example, in fig. 4.1).³⁷ While historians are

grateful for these clues, such declarations were designed principally to enhance the authority and appeal of the book and also omitted the names of many others who had been involved in the formation of the text, in each edition along the way. By contrast with engaging with other authors across time, “synchronic collaboration” encompasses those who contributed writing, information, feedback and corrections, or other kinds of help in the production of a work at roughly the same point in time—among them amanuenses.

The diachronic and synchronic forms of collaboration are not mutually exclusive. One of the great textual achievements of the early modern period, the King James Bible of 1611 was commissioned as a revision of the existing Bishops’ Bible (first published in 1568) and entrusted to a team of forty-seven scholars working in six “committees,” two in each of three locations (Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster), who distributed among themselves the eighty books of the Bible to translate. Forty unbound copies of the 1602 Bishops’ Bible were supplied by the printer to the translators, so that they could work by annotating the printed sheets. The translators worked in parallel on their separate assignments from 1604 to 1608, then formed a subcommittee of twelve who reviewed and revised the whole translation.³⁸ Advertised as “Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues: and with the former Translations diligently compared and revised by his Maiesties special Commandment, Appointed to be read in Churches,” the new Bible derived its authority from showing respect for earlier work and from being commissioned and approved by the king. The translators were neither named nor mentioned.

“Collaborative authorship” is the strongest term for synchronic collaboration and typically denotes composition of one text by multiple people. Alongside the new prominence of individual authorship fueled by Renaissance ideals and diffusion through printing, collaborative authorship has been well documented for different spheres in early modern literature. Scholars now estimate that as many as half of the professionally authored plays in England in the time of Shakespeare were written collaboratively: different writers were paid for contributing plot elements, scenes, and acts which the keeper of the playhouse would combine. The main benefit was the speed with which plays could be written in this way, in just four to six weeks; the urgency of production was so great that plays sometimes went into rehearsal before the writing had been completed.³⁹ In addition the actors could make changes in the course of performance, just as those involved in publishing a play likely made interventions as well. Those plays that were published appeared variously under one or more of the coauthors’ names or none at all.

In a different pattern of literary collaboration the coterie that formed in some salons of seventeenth-century France contributed feedback and writing to novels that were published anonymously.⁴⁰ This method of distributed authorship and anonymous or pseudonymous publication appealed to wellborn women who sought to avoid reputational damage from accusations of vanity or avarice for making their writing available for sale in print. While we know little about exactly how they wrote together, the authors formed a tight-knit coterie and produced some unusually long works of fiction, such as the 13,000 pages of *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649–53).⁴¹ These examples of cowriting were likely among the more egalitarian, with each participant doing the same kind of work as the others, but for a different segment of the text, as was explicitly the case in the writing of the King James Bible.

Collaborative writing could also be hierarchical. One such project is unusually well documented, thanks to the detailed work plan circulated in letters and in print by Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575), who had set out to write a new ecclesiastical history to serve the needs of the new religion (Flacius was Lutheran in the main, with Calvinist sympathies on some points). After a few years of collecting and assessing the doctrines and practices of the Church since its beginnings, Flacius realized he could not complete this huge task alone, nor even with one or two helpers. He envisioned instead a carefully stratified team of fifteen collaborators and solicited contributions of funds and labor to implement it. Seven students “endowed with reasonable learning and judgment” would excerpt passages of interest from assigned authors. Next, two more mature men, having completed a Master of Arts, would “assess, outline and arrange the materials that have already been assembled.” Above them five “governors and inspectors of the whole enterprise” would oversee the work and “help make decisions about the contents and their arrangements,” at times even doing some writing themselves, and keep the project afloat by managing the team and the accounts. Flacius also advocated hiring one “so-called amanuensis who makes fair copies of the materials composed in this way.”⁴² The results were remarkably successful: eight folio volumes were published between 1559 and 1574 covering the first thirteen centuries of the Christian Church; the three final centuries were left unpublished in manuscript. Although the title page listed no authors, the dedication of the first volume—to King Christian of Denmark and his son Frederick and to Maximilian King of Bohemia—was signed by four men who led the project.⁴³ Each of the “Magdeburg Centuries” (so named because the project was carried out in Magdeburg) comprised several

hundred pages of text followed by detailed indexes of biblical passages cited and of “memorable words and things.”

The project also prompted a Catholic riposte in the *Annales ecclesiastici* published in twelve volumes (1588–1607) which stemmed from yet another model of collaboration, found in some religious orders. The title pages announce the authorship of Cesare Baronio, a member of the Oratory, a Counter-Reformation order founded in 1575. In the eighth volume of the series (1600), Baronio hailed Philip Neri (1515–1595), the founder of the order, as “the prime author and architect” of the project, although historians have concluded that there is no evidence of Neri’s involvement. With this unusual paratext addressing thanks to the “blessed Philip Neri,” Baronio promoted both the sanctity of Neri (who was canonized in 1622) and the authority of the *Annales*.⁴⁴ Baronio relied on fellow Oratorians (whom he does not name) for assistance of many kinds—such as proofreading, indexing, scholarly advice, and feedback.⁴⁵ The kind of collaboration made possible by a religious order well supplied with educated clerics happy to work without pay or much recognition for the greater glory of the Church dates back to the first biblical concordances compiled by Dominicans in the thirteenth century and has produced countless large works of scholarship down to the present.⁴⁶ Unfortunately the details of their methods of collaboration are often particularly difficult to document.⁴⁷

By the late seventeenth century various academies, formed by learned men sometimes with the patronage of a grandee, also launched some collaborative projects, notably vernacular dictionaries by the Accademia della Crusca in Florence and the Académie française in Paris (published in 1612 and 1694 respectively), and a handbook for poetry by some professors of Giessen (published in 1677). Along with the commentaries on Aristotle by the Jesuits of Coimbra (from the 1590s), these comprised the main examples of what Vincent Placcius called “sociales libri” or social books in his 1689 treatise on note-taking and writing.⁴⁸ Placcius (1642–1699), a professor of rhetoric at Hamburg, called these works “most perfect” but also observed that this method of producing books “sociatim” (in a group) was “more rare because of the envy and discord among people.”⁴⁹

Although explicitly collaborative books were few in the early modern period, they include one signal example in the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers par une société de gens de lettres* published in twenty-eight volumes between 1751 and 1775. Whereas my general point in this section is that books attributed in the early modern period to a single author involved the contributions of many, as recent research reveals, in this

instance the modern trend of crediting the *Encyclopédie* to Diderot and d’Alembert downplays the attribution on the title page to a collectivity. That “society of men of letters” was not a previously organized group, but designates some 250 writers who contributed articles to this vast reference work mostly anonymously (and so effectively that half the contributors have yet to be identified by historians).⁵⁰ In the modern period some of the most ambitious collaborative projects have been multigenerational—perhaps none more so than the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, begun in 1894 and still underway as an exhaustive study of classical Latin usage.⁵¹

Occasionally there are contracts governing collaborative authorship, for example to establish a relationship between the “declarative author” responsible for the import of text and a different “executive author” who composed the text.⁵² “Ghostwriting” as a term dates from the late nineteenth century, when it served as a plot element in novels.⁵³ But arrangements of this type are documented well before then. Contracts survive from early seventeenth-century France, for example, pairing travelers who had limited writing skills with a writer tasked with composing a marketable account of their travels (as I discuss in chapter 4).⁵⁴ In the mid-nineteenth century when Charles Dickens employed other writers to contribute to various of his publications anonymously under his masthead, we have some of those writers’ words to mine for greater insight. Among them Wilkie Collins as a young man appreciated the income and the opportunity to work with someone he admired, but he may also have chafed under the lack of recognition. Scholars have debated the emotional dynamics of this collaboration.⁵⁵ Similarly we can wonder how early modern amanuenses experienced the constraints and opportunities of working for a principal of high standing while receiving little public recognition. Of course, we have limited insight into the feelings of individuals who lived in very different cultural contexts from our own, whether in nineteenth-century England or in Renaissance Europe, and we can expect that their attitudes and reactions, e.g., to the social hierarchies of their time, differ from those that seem natural to us. The history of emotions has developed recently as an exciting new field, generating studies on the early modern period and, thanks especially to Françoise Waquet, on the emotions involved in intellectual work and collaboration.⁵⁶

Some ghostwriting arrangements are quite impersonal, as in series—of children’s books or romances, say—in which multiple writers compose the books that are published under a brand name following a formula.⁵⁷ Better known are the one-on-one relationships between a public figure and a writer. Some ghostwriters prefer to remain anonymous to the public, at least at the

moment of publication, even while their role is known within the specialist circles of those who could broker a new commission.⁵⁸ These relationships are highly variable, since they involve just two people in close contact, with their own personalities and motives for entering into these arrangements. Similarly, the dynamics between principal and amanuensis involved a complex mix of hierarchy with proximity. Across these many forms (diachronic and synchronic, hierarchical and egalitarian), collaborative authorship generally allowed for faster, more abundant, and more polished production of work than could have been achieved by one person working alone, thanks to multiple people performing substantially similar work.

Art in the Workshop

Whereas authoring texts was rarely impossible without collaboration, in the fields studied by art historians (painting, sculpture, architecture) collaboration is often considered essential to the process of production. Hence the shock delivered by the Impressionists for example when they chose to paint alone outside the studio (and with premixed paints rather than relying on assistants to prepare the pigments). Collaboration was built into the medieval system of production by workshops in which a master would train apprentices and hire journeymen to perform work alongside him and under his direction. Collaboration is also common today when artistic projects require multiple pairs of hands, or specialist skills in working with particular materials, or when artists see their role as having ideas that others put into physical form.⁵⁹

Although historians of art have long focused on the creativity of individuals, they have been at the forefront of studies of collaboration since the 1980s. The sources that first drew their attention to the role of assistants were contracts, e.g., from the Italian Renaissance, which stipulated that the most crucial elements of a painting (like faces and hands) be carried out by the principal himself. Whereas medieval contracts specified which pigments would be used, appreciation for the skill and reputation of renowned artists became more public and more pronounced in the Renaissance along with princely patronage for them, and generated these explicit mentions of the hierarchy within the workshop.⁶⁰ The extent to which commissioners or patrons can be considered part of the creative process given the instructions and feedback they could impart to the artist is also worth pondering.⁶¹

Art historians have often examined the methods of artistic production in order to distinguish the contributions of the master from those of their

assistants. Attributions of work to the “school of” a famous artist stem from the widespread notion (and likely actual practice) that masters would train their assistants in their particular style. The dynamics within each workshop varied, as recent studies have emphasized. Some principals gave strict and narrow instructions to their assistants, while others (e.g., Raphael or Rubens) gave their assistants freer rein to paint a scene or background.⁶² Michelangelo was famously demanding and irascible, but he also maintained effective collaborations with many assistants, favoring a horizontal over a pyramidal reporting structure.⁶³ Similarly it is likely that amanuenses were in some cases given wide latitude in carrying out a task, while in other cases they were expected to follow narrowly specific instructions—depending on the principal and the nature of the work.

Despite some level of competition among artists, this professional community also valued and fostered collaborative skills. In fifteenth-century Florence, Leon Battista Alberti recommended a “collaborative system of art production” in which artists and patrons provided feedback and critiques to ensure high-quality results.⁶⁴ In his *Lives of the Artists* (1550), Giorgio Vasari hails Raphael as a model for the profession, not only for the quality of his paintings and frescoes, but also for his skills in working well with others. He trained with and studied closely the works of other painters and when he attained major commissions himself, such as the suite of rooms in the Vatican, he brought on collaborators and assistants. Vasari marvels at the harmony that Raphael instilled in the many painters who worked with him: “he was never seen leaving home to go to court without fifty painters, all worthy and good men, accompanying him to pay him honour.” When he received a request from another painter, even one he did not know, he would leave “his own work to assist them”; as for those under his employ, Raphael would “help them and teach them with the kind of love that is more appropriately given to one’s own children than to other artisans.”⁶⁵ By praising Raphael not only for his art but also for his courtesy toward fellow artists and those striving to enter the profession, Vasari created ideals for other artists to emulate. Vasari also innovated in praising a principal for treating his assistants well, but I have not found much uptake of that theme before the eighteenth century.⁶⁶

However they were treated (no doubt poorly in some cases), assistants in the workshops of artists were often able to move on to an artistic career of their own, as Vasari’s *Lives* illustrates. In many cases the assistants came from a social milieu that was roughly equivalent to that of the artistic career they sought to join, facilitating entry; in a few cases training and talent acquired during an

assistantship overcame the disadvantage of a lower social origin.⁶⁷ Similarly, many amanuenses likely viewed their activity as a phase of life and a source of valuable experience from which to start their own careers, but this was a less consistent outcome than in the case of artists' assistants. The scholarly career lacked the clear route to entry provided by training in an artist's workshop. The experiences of scholarly amanuenses were idiosyncratic and the next steps after time spent in a scholarly household (see chapter 3) were less predictable than what the workshop system generally made possible for young artists.

Invisible Technicians and Scientific Knowledge-Making

Historians of science have been at the forefront of the focus on practices across a wide range of scientific activities, from work in laboratories to calculations to observations. The dominant finding is that those who took credit for and persuaded their audiences of new scientific observations or theories were gentlemen—i.e., men who behaved according to the norms of the educated elite. But they drew on the contributions of many others, often socially inferior, in ways that researchers have recently emphasized. In a seminal article published in 1989, Steven Shapin called attention to the role of laboratory assistants who carried out the experiments credited to Robert Boyle (1627–1691) but were rarely mentioned in print.⁶⁸ Shapin estimates that between two and six assistants were at work each day in Boyle's laboratory in the London house he shared with his older sister, Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh. Their tasks ranged from simple ones that any servant could perform to others requiring special skills, such as operating an air pump or preparing pure samples of phosphorus.⁶⁹ Boyle referred to them only occasionally in his abundant writings, principally to explain experimental failures.⁷⁰ Otherwise he used passive or impersonal phrases to describe their work, with the result that identifying them has been challenging.⁷¹ The expression that Shapin coined, "invisible technician," and the accompanying illustrations of experimental actions performed by putti have become iconic inspiration for a surge of studies across many different periods that have aimed to bring to light contributors to the scientific process hitherto obscured.

In the manuscript published posthumously as his *Brief Lives*, John Aubrey (1626–1697) mentioned Boyle's "noble laboratory, and severall servants (prentices to him)."⁷² But Aubrey's comparison of Boyle's laboratory assistants to apprentices who would learn a trade with the ambition of entering it elides the considerable obstacles that kept Boyle's servants from becoming recognized

as natural philosophers. One young man who started as Boyle's assistant went on to a career of his own. Robert Hooke (1635–1703) had worked for Boyle for seven years when the latter recommended him for the position of Curator of Experiments at the Royal Society in 1662. Two years later Hooke was appointed professor of geometry at Gresham College and in 1665 he published his first book, *Micrographia*, illustrated with observations he made with a microscope he had devised. Hooke's trajectory was unique and, as successful as he was, Hooke famously never felt he received the respect he deserved from the other fellows of the Royal Society who were of a higher social rank than he who, as the orphaned son of an Anglican minister, had attended Oxford on a chorister's scholarship.⁷³ Hooke's education and his exceptional mathematical and mechanical skills made possible his transition from servant to natural philosopher despite the tacit social norm that scientific knowledge-making was the purview of gentlemen. More generally those who managed to break into learned circles without a gentlemanly background "labored under an extra obligation to demonstrate how far they'd come from their non-elite origins, and they were susceptible to differential treatment than the men who had been born into gentle or noble status."⁷⁴

Artisans had already been singled out for their role in early modern science, especially those who published works about their skills and perspectives. This strand of historiography started with a group of Marxist scholars in the early twentieth century and continues to generate new insights across an expanding range of artisanal knowledge, from the mathematical arts to ceramics, and new historical approaches such as reconstructions of early modern methods and recipes.⁷⁵ In the last few decades, research from global and postcolonial perspectives has added many new players to accounts of early modern European science: native informants shared know-how and information otherwise inaccessible to European travelers; go-betweens and translators made communication possible across physical and cultural barriers; brokers and agents facilitated the circulation of texts, objects, and people; and subalterns of many kinds, including the enslaved, created and transmitted knowledge about the natural world.⁷⁶ Women have received special attention across a wide spectrum, from the "old wives" cited as sources of vernacular wisdom, to the well educated women who supported (e.g., through their domestic labor) and also participated in the activities of their husbands, fathers, or brothers in various ways, including by observing stars, collecting specimens, drawing, coloring, or engraving.⁷⁷

These various kinds of contributors were expert and crucial to the formation of new knowledge, as many historians have shown, but their interventions

were typically episodic and their impact, limited by the multiple social hierarchies of the early modern context, was mediated by those recognized as natural philosophical authorities. In some cases explicit mention of the work of a low-status helper served to elevate the principal by making clear that he was not involved in doing lowly or menial work, as Lydia Barnett has argued in her analysis of how diggers were credited with finds of fossils by the eighteenth-century gentleman naturalists.⁷⁸ Renée Raphael reaches a similar conclusion that Georg Agricola referred to miners in his *De re metallica* (1556) in order to emphasize the distance between their manual labor and his own position as a scholar.⁷⁹ Unlike the assistants to artists who could anticipate entering that profession, informants and occasional contributors rarely parlayed their roles into more sustained recognition or the status of principal. Situated somewhere between those two contemporary types, the amanuensis sometimes became a published author in due course, but *qua* amanuensis was another kind of “invisible technician” among the many who were essential to knowledge-making, in early modern Europe and many other historical contexts.

All these kinds of collaboration in the production of literature, art, and scientific knowledge feature multiple dynamics. In some cases the helper was engaged in exactly the same kind of work as the principal and supplied extra work capacity. In other cases the collaboration involved a division of labor according to skills specific to each person (e.g., knowing another language, operating an instrument, or mastering a particular artistic or scientific process). Amanuenses often supplied both kinds of help. From another angle of interest, in some cases the helper was present and able to provide feedback and input throughout the collaborative process—though whether that feedback was perceived as welcome would depend on the personal dynamics involved. In other cases, especially under division of labor, the helper made a punctual, episodic contribution and was not in a position to provide input (e.g., was not present at the completion of the work). The extent to which a helper was also a source of ideas and advice is particularly difficult to assess, even in recent times, let alone at a historical remove. Nonetheless this kind of contribution is of special interest, and amanuenses in position over extended periods were well placed to provide potentially critical input during the work in progress with their principal.

Much more could and will, I hope, be written about collaboration, but this brief overview of recent approaches suggests to me that we have uncovered complex dimensions to the topic faster than we have developed a sufficiently nuanced vocabulary to describe them. Using the term “amanuensis” will not

solve that problem but can help us examine a particularly multivalent synchronic, sustained, and hierarchical form of collaboration that we can notice more readily in many times and places if we look for it.

Setting the Stage

Why Focus on the Renaissance?

The early modern European context presents a number of advantages for studying amanuenses (in addition to the fact that it is my area of expertise). The Renaissance (especially starting in the fifteenth century) is the earliest period in the European tradition for which we have extensive collections of working papers, including notes, drafts, and letters that were not meant for public circulation and retain more evidence of the work of helpers. Unpublished materials of course existed in earlier periods, but they rarely survive. In ancient Rome the younger Pliny reported in a letter that his uncle Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) had bequeathed to him 160 papyrus rolls full of his notes, likely organized under headings, “written in a minute hand on both sides of the pages, so that their number is really doubled.”⁸⁰ This fascinating comment is evidence that Pliny had saved his notes and passed them on to his nephew, but we know nothing more about them. What survives instead is the finished work that Pliny the Elder “published” (that is, made public for circulation by hand copying since mechanical reproduction was not an option)—the thirty-seven books of his *Natural History* which constitute the longest ancient work to have been transmitted in its complete form down to modern times. Even with exciting archeological finds of papyri we have minimal evidence about drafts and other unpublished writings from antiquity.

Thanks to the durability of parchment, many manuscripts from the medieval period have come down to us in their original form. Most medieval manuscripts that have survived were published, that is, carefully produced in a scribal hand and perhaps also embellished with rubrication or illumination. But some private manuscripts also survive, especially from the thirteenth century onward, that were made for study and personal use. These include some drafts written by Thomas Aquinas, for example in his famously “unintelligible” handwriting and many archival records kept by notaries and governmental or ecclesiastical institutions.⁸¹

The greater preservation of working papers from the Renaissance was made possible by both material and cultural factors: their inscription on durable

paper, the motivation to preserve these materials on the part of those making them and their immediate heirs, and the existence of institutions in which they were preserved through long periods of neglect. Paper was introduced into Europe from the Arab world, first in Italy in the twelfth century, and North of Alps in the fourteenth century. Until then there were two different kinds of media: expensive parchment codices for the long-term preservation of texts, and inexpensive parchment scraps or reusable wax tablets for jotting down notes for short-term use.⁸² Paper improved on both these options—it was less expensive than parchment and more durable than inscriptions on scraps or wax. Thanks to paper, notes taken for short-term use could survive just as well as finished products.

We also owe the survival of working papers to a conscious interest in preserving them. During the Renaissance, scholars began viewing their stock of notes as a treasury to share with others, including family members or students and the community of scholars. When those wishes were respected by those who inherited them, the papers were saved and some were transmitted for centuries more within the family or in archives or libraries. A range of institutions were founded in the early modern period—including university and college libraries and learned societies and academies—that played a crucial role in preserving the archives of scholars (as I discuss further in chapter 5). In these working papers we can see the hands of helpers who would otherwise be unknown.

The Renaissance is also distinctive for significant social changes that created new contexts for the practice of authorship and scholarship. The patronage of princes and popes fueled the rise of humanism and the employment of those who wrote in the classical Latin that was brought back into fashion by Petrarch (1304–1374) and many others starting in the fourteenth century. Humanists served as tutors, as speech- and letter-writers, diplomats, secretaries, and librarians. They offered their patrons both prestige and expertise stemming from their mastery of the classical sources, at the same time that this corpus was being expanded—by the rediscovery of ancient texts that had been copied onto parchment centuries earlier and then forgotten, and by the spread of the knowledge of Greek and Greek sources.⁸³

Humanism did not displace long-standing sites of learning in clerical contexts. The Dominicans and the Franciscans had been dominant in European universities since their origins in the thirteenth century, though they ceded some ground to salaried professors in the early modern period. New religious orders contributed to the educational landscape. Most widespread were the

Jesuits (founded in 1540) who developed an extensive network of colleges providing both preparatory and university-level education.⁸⁴ Other orders supported the work of learned individuals (like the Minim Marin Mersenne in Paris) and of collective projects, such as the publication of massive collections of medieval manuscripts by the Bollandists and the (Benedictine) Maurists.⁸⁵ In these cases each religious order concentrated its members with the skills and penchant for erudition in just one monastery located in Paris, along with books and other needed resources. These select religious houses were able to produce high-caliber scholarship and publications. As in earlier centuries, when teams of Dominicans or Franciscans compiled the first biblical concordances and other large reference works, clerics were optimal collaborators in that they required neither remuneration nor recognition.

The rise of the scholarly household was largely an innovation of the early modern period. Even if we know of no explicit prohibition against marriage in a medieval university like Paris, celibacy for students and teachers was the norm in the major settings for scholarship in the Middle Ages, such as universities and religious orders.⁸⁶ A new expectation of clerical marriage after Martin Luther's marriage to Katharina von Bora in 1525 spawned many studious households among Protestant clerics and teachers (except in Oxford and Cambridge where by tradition celibacy was required of fellows in the colleges until the late nineteenth century). Among Catholics, the increased hiring of salaried rather than clerical instructors in universities was already underway in the fifteenth century, and the growth of an educated elite of officers and magistrates further favored the formation of scholarly households, whether the head was celibate (like Erasmus) or married (like Budé).⁸⁷

As Gadi Algazi has argued, this domestic context for scholarly work involved the formation of new norms for daily life and of a new persona for the early modern scholar as distinct from both the ascetic cleric and the urbane courtier. For example the scholar required a place in the home to which to retreat for quiet study, and permission (from family members and neighbors) to withdraw from the usual expectations of sociability.⁸⁸ At the same time scholars also entertained visitors of various social backgrounds and relied on others, typically wives and daughters, or a female housekeeper, plus additional servants as needed, to cook and clean for everyone in the household as well as guests.⁸⁹ Students frequently boarded in these scholarly households, becoming temporary members of the "familia."⁹⁰ While servants were typically paid in addition to receiving room and board, students instead paid for the privilege of living and learning with their teacher in specie or in kind, e.g., by carrying

out assigned tasks. These arrangements varied of course, by context and according to the personality and goals of the *paterfamilias* around whose work the household typically revolved.

Most famously the early modern period reckoned with a new technology which, like the digital turn we are experiencing today, made the dissemination of a text faster and broader and less expensive, once the investment was made to print it. Many humanists praised the new technology since it promised the preservation of recently recovered ancient texts for all time; once they were printed in hundreds of copies, redundancy would facilitate preservation. In fact many early modern imprints have been completely lost, with no copies surviving, but the losses have mostly affected cheap and ephemeral imprints rather than the bound books in learned genres on which I focus.⁹¹ Printing introduced a new layer of intermediaries between an author's manuscript and a published text, as mentioned above, such as compositors, proofreaders, and correctors.

Printing also generated new anxieties. Multiple humanists complained about the commercial motives of printers who favored profit over quality and created a dangerous overload by producing far more bad books than good ones. There was of course a market for manuscripts throughout the Middle Ages, which grew significantly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; in the environs of universities, the demand for texts was large and predictable enough to warrant producing multiple manuscript copies of some texts commercially without relying on a prior commission. Nonetheless printing introduced a quite different business model, since it required a greater investment of funds upfront and generated a much larger number of copies, which then needed to find buyers. As a result, printed books were traded and sold at international fairs and across geographic and cultural distances, especially in the case of learned books since Latin served as the language of learning shared across Europe. Printing promised great reputational rewards by spreading an author's name and work far across space and time—hence the significance of being named in a printed book in various roles, as author, dedicatee, ode-writer, friend, contributor, or printer. At the same time appearing in print posed the risk, in case of a negative reception, of a bad reputation being spread equally widely.

I have argued that the many paratexts in early printed books (more numerous than those in medieval manuscripts) were designed in part to allay that anxiety of publication by highlighting the dignity of the author, of the topic, and of those the author named as protectors and friends (e.g., in the dedication and commendatory odes).⁹² One of the unexpected by-products of this dynamic was mention in publications of amanuenses—not to give them credit or thanks,

but on the contrary to pin on them the responsibility for faults that the reader might encounter in the book. They were not named but featured in variations on the request to the reader to “please excuse the errors of the amanuenses.” This “servant function” accompanied the rise of an “author function” (linked to the appearance of the author’s name on the title page of a printed book) and was designed, I argue, to forestall criticism of the author given the risks involved in diffusing a book to an audience that extended further beyond the author’s personal circles than in the case of oral or manuscript publication.⁹³

Another crucial element of scholarly life in early modern Europe was the Republic of Letters which formed what we would call today a virtual community comprising the educated across the many regions of Europe engaged in the pursuit of learning. The concept and the term have both proved durable well past the Italian Renaissance where they originated.⁹⁴ Although travel was slow and dangerous by today’s standards, a system of postal relays spread across Europe starting from the service between Innsbruck and Milan that the Habsburg commissioned of the Taxis family in 1494; the result has been called a “communications revolution” that made possible the conveyance of letters and small packets (but not heavy goods) on many routes in less than a week.⁹⁵ Merchants who traveled from all over Europe to regular fairs where they exchanged goods and news also served as alternative channels for communication. Thus, even while it continued to suffer from localized famines, early modern Europe experienced a remarkable level of intellectual integration thanks to a shared educational canon steeped in humanism and the use of Latin as the international language of learning (followed by French from the late seventeenth century on). Many students and teachers traveled between multiple places of learning, as they had in the Middle Ages, and amanuenses did too.

The Republic of Letters has long been hailed as a place of remarkably harmonious cooperation across religious and national divides. Friendship was a central theme of interactions among those who participated in this “imagined community.”⁹⁶ Friends shared ideas and feedback on works in progress and exchanged gifts of information, books, and other objects; these interactions offered yet another collaborative dimension to authorship beyond those more formal ones discussed above. Expressions of friendship abounded in manuscript and in print: in letters and inscriptions in books or manuscripts kept for the purpose, in dedicatory epistles and liminary odes included in the paratexts of learned books.

Nonetheless, recent work has emphasized that the “*Res publica litterarum*” was also shaped by the religious and regional fault lines of the time, along with

(continued...)

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