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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, an ever-growing body of scholarship has pointed out how, between the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, technical and practical knowledge was increasingly spread and circulated in writing.¹ Among the many forms that practical literature took in the early modern period, a particularly popular one was the recipe book, a textual typology that Matteo Valleriani has eloquently defined as a 'fundamental, almost primordial means of codification of practical knowledge'.² The production of collections of recipes or 'secrets' (the two terms often overlap in these texts) appears to have intensified from the late Renaissance onwards, both in print and in manuscript form.³ In particular, vernacular books of secrets, which initially deal with specific arts but soon acquire a more encyclopaedic scope, proliferated on the book market during the sixteenth century, and their success lasted throughout the early modern period.

A pivotal role in the good fortune and dissemination of these texts was played by Venetian printing presses, which in the 1550s and 1560s issued some extremely successful titles that set the ground for the European fortune of the genre. The most widely known of these books is undoubtedly the *Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio Piemontese*, first published in 1555 but often reprinted with several additions until the eighteenth century, and translated into most Western European languages.⁴ The success of Alessio and his epigones did not escape the keen eye of Tommaso Garzoni (1549-1589), who named them 'professors of secrets' and placed them within a tradition of seekers of hidden natural knowledge stretching back to Antiquity.⁵

Following the pioneering studies of John Ferguson, printed books of secrets have been investigated more thoroughly in recent years by other scholars, both as a literary genre and with reference to single texts and authors.⁶ With regard to Italy, in-depth studies have been conducted on the *Secreti* ascribed to Alessio, who is nowadays mostly understood to be a pseudonym of the well-known *poligrafo* Girolamo Ruscelli (1518-1566);⁷ on the *Secreti della signora Isabella Cortese*, the

¹ To mention only a couple of recent contributions on this topic, see Matteo Valleriani (ed.), *The Structures of Practical Knowledge* (Cham: Springer, 2017); Annemie D. G. Leemans, *Contextualizing Practical Knowledge in Early Modern Europe* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020).

² Matteo Valleriani, 'The Epistemology of Practical Knowledge', in Valleriani (ed.), *The Structures of Practical Knowledge*, 5.

³ The flourishing of collections of recipes or 'secrets' across early modern Europe has been the object of many contributions over the last decades. See most recently Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin (eds), *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500-1800* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell (eds), *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1550-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge. Medicine, Science, and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

⁴ [Girolamo Ruscelli], *Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio Piemontese* (Venezia: Sigismondo Bordogna, 1555).

⁵ As ancient and medieval professors of secrets, Garzoni mentions Pliny, Albert the Great, and Roger Bacon. See Tommaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo nuovamente ristampata [...] con l'aggiunta d'alcune bellissime annotationi a discorso per discorso* (Venezia: Giovanni Battista Somasco, 1589), 184.

⁶ John Ferguson, *Bibliographical Notes on Histories of Inventions and Books of Secrets*, 2 vols. (London: Holland press, 1959). On printed books of secrets see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature. Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Allison Kavey, *Books of Secrets. Natural Philosophy in England, 1550-1600* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Massimo Rizzardini, *Secretum. Alchimia, medicina e politica del corpo nel Rinascimento* (Milano and Roma: Bevivino, 2009).

⁷ For a recent and thorough study on this topic, see Massimiliano Celaschi and Antonella Gregori, *Da Girolamo Ruscelli a Alessio Piemontese. I "Secreti" in Italia e in Europa dal Cinque al Settecento* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2015); Bela Zbigniew defends the actual existence of Alessio Piemontese: 'The Authorship of the "Secrets of Alexis from Piedmont" (Venice, 1555)', *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki*, 61 (2016), 41-64.

only sixteenth-century printed book of secrets attributed to a woman;⁸ and on the controversial figure of Leonardo Fioravanti (1517-after 1583), a Bolognese surgeon and physician who authored several medical treatises and at least two books of secrets between 1561 and 1582.⁹

This essay aims to investigate a lesser-known book belonging to this genre, the *Secreti diversi et miracolosi*, which is spuriously ascribed to the famous Modenese physician Gabriele Falloppia.¹⁰ Although this work did not enjoy as much fame as the collections of ‘Piemontese’ or Fioravanti, its success can be compared to that of Isabella Cortese’s *Secreti*. The two texts shared a similar editorial history, as both were translated into German and reprinted throughout the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a matter of fact, pseudo-Falloppia’s work had an even longer editorial life, being issued one last time in 1731.¹¹

Despite its success, the *Secreti diversi* has seldom been considered in recent scholarship. Only William Eamon briefly takes it into account in his monograph on books of secrets, suggesting that hiding behind Falloppia’s mask was none other than Leonardo Fioravanti.¹² Indeed, the only written sources repeatedly cited in the *Secreti* are Fioravanti’s books: the *Capricci medicinali* (1561), and even the *Specchio di scientia universale*, whose first known edition (1564) actually post-dates the *princeps* of pseudo-Falloppia’s secrets. Although there is not enough evidence to determine whether it was truly Fioravanti who gathered the secrets and tried to exploit Falloppia’s fame, whoever compiled the book was certainly up-to-date with the literary activities of the Bolognese surgeon.

Rather than address the issue of authorship, I will focus here on the paratexts of the *Secreti*, paying particular attention to the first and second edition, respectively issued in 1563 and 1565.¹³ This work provides a particularly interesting case study to investigate the communicative strategies and goals of compilers and printers who engaged with this extremely popular genre in late Renaissance Italy. Indeed, the editorial history of the *Secreti* allows us to reflect more broadly on the success of books of secrets in late Renaissance and early modern Europe. If the fortune of this literary genre mirrored the aforementioned surge of interest in practical knowledge, equally important was

⁸ See Claire Lesage, ‘La littérature des “secrets” et “I secreti d’Isabella Cortese”’, *Chroniques italiennes*, 36 (1993), 145-78; Meredith K. Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy. Women and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 46-72. However, the identity of Isabella Cortese is shrouded in mystery just as much as Piemontese’s; Tommaso Garzoni (*Piazza universale*, 184) identified both Piemontese and Cortese as pseudonyms of Ruscelli. See also Massimo Rizzardini, ‘Lo strano caso della Signora Isabella Cortese, professoressa di secreti’, *Philosophia*, 2.1 (2010), 45-84.

⁹ See Piero Camporesi, *Camminare il mondo. Vita e avventure di Leonardo Fioravanti medico del Cinquecento* (Milano: Garzanti, 1997); William Eamon, *The Professor of Secrets. Mystery, Medicine, and Alchemy in Renaissance Italy* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2010). For a study of paratexts in Fioravanti’s work, see Katinis, this volume.

¹⁰ [Pseudo-]Gabriele Falloppia, *Secreti diversi et miracolosi [...] raccolti dall’ecc. Gabriele Falloppia, et da varie persone sperimentati* (Venezia: Marco Di Maria, 1563).

¹¹ [Pseudo-]Gabriele Falloppia, *Secreti di medicina, chirurgia, ed alchimia raccolti da Gabriello Falopia. Di nuovo ristampati [...]* (Venezia: Giuseppe Lovisa, 1731).

¹² Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 135-6, 166-7. Pseudo-Falloppia’s book is also briefly mentioned in a slightly later essay, where it is simply regarded as a spurious collection of recipes from various authors. See Stefania Bardi, ‘Tesori di ricette e giardini di segreti’, in Giovanna Lazzi and Mino Gabriele (eds) *Alambicchi di parole. Il Ricettario Fiorentino e dintorni* (Firenze: Polistampa, 1999), 83-9. Finally, Michael Stolberg’s recent monograph on Falloppia dedicates a few pages to the book of secrets and its editorial history, confirming its spuriousness but concluding that the real agent behind the collection remains unknown. See Michael Stolberg, *Gabrielle Falloppia, 1522/23-1562. The Life and Work of a Renaissance Anatomist* (London: Routledge, 2022), 173-5.

¹³ The seminal study on paratexts remains Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987). More recent historiography, however, has significantly broadened the scope of this research field, addressing a wide array of paratextual features that had not been considered by Genette. With regard to early printed books, see in particular Marco Santoro, ‘Appunti su caratteristiche e funzioni del paratesto nel libro antico’, *Accademie e biblioteche d’Italia*, 68 (2002), 5-38; Philiep Bossier and Rolien Scheffer, *Soglie testuali. Funzioni del paratesto nel secondo Cinquecento e oltre / Textual Thresholds. Functions of Paratexts in the Late Sixteenth Century and Beyond* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2010); and Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, *Renaissance Paratexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). The variety of current approaches to paratextual material is well represented by the contributions to the dedicated journal *Paratesto. Rivista internazionale* (2004-).

the ability of editors and publishers to craft products that could be appealing in an increasingly crowded marketplace. Not all books of secrets, in fact, had a favourable outcome: the analysis of pseudo-Fallopia's case reveals how their fortunes were not only a matter of content but also, and often more importantly, how that content was presented to the readers. Thus, the clever use of rhetorical strategies and paratextual tools was often crucial in determining the success of these texts.

This essay consists of two main sections. The first (part II) addresses the early editorial history of pseudo-Fallopia's *Secreti* by looking at the prefatory materials of the first two editions: dedicatory letters, prologues, and addresses to the readers. Prefatory texts have attracted much attention since their study by Gérard Genette, as the space where authors (or, in this case, editors) can promote themselves, defend their work, and provide an insight on how readers ought to engage with it.¹⁴ With regard to the *Secreti*, one aspect that is particularly emphasized in the paratexts analysed here is the internal structure of the collection, which relates to questions about the use, readability and reliability of the book. The subsequent section of the essay (part III) will thus focus on the organization of the recipes within the collection, considering its specific features and its coherence with the editors' claims in the prefatory texts. It will be argued that the different organizational choices made in the first and second editions of pseudo-Fallopia's *Secreti* affect the way that single recipes, but also the collection as a whole, could be accessed and interpreted. Finally, a transcription of two chapters of the *Secreti* (Appendix) will help to illustrate some of the arguments presented in the essay.

II. THE EDITORIAL HISTORY OF PSEUDO-FALLOPPA'S *SECRETI DIVERSI*

The first known edition of the *Secreti diversi et miracolosi* dates back to 1563. It was issued in Venice by the printer Marco Di Maria, and edited by the bookseller Giovanni Antonio Di Maria.¹⁵ The latter signed a dedicatory letter addressed to the *doge* of Venice, Girolamo Priuli (1486–1567), and was likely also responsible for the unsigned preface that follows. Apart from the usual celebratory formulas, the dedication matters here for what Di Maria says about Fallopia: the Modenese physician (who had passed away only a year earlier) was not only an excellent physician and anatomist, but also a restless seeker of nature's hidden secrets. Di Maria claims that these secrets had 'fallen into his hands' ('essendomi capitati i detti secreti alle mani') and that, having realized how much the world could have benefitted from this vast repository of knowledge, he had decided to publish them.¹⁶ The same argument is repeated in the preface, where the origins and structure of the collection are also explained in greater detail. It is revealed here that Fallopia had gathered his secrets both from literary sources and from the practice of colleagues and artisans, and then tried them out to ascertain their efficacy. Di Maria then says:

¹⁴ Research on Renaissance and early modern prefatory materials is vast: see recently Ann Blair, 'The Dedication Strategies of Conrad Gessner', in Gideon Manning and Cynthia Klestinec (eds), *Professors, Physicians and Practices in the History of Medicine. Essays in Honor of Nancy Siraisi* (Cham: Springer, 2017), 197–237; and Brian Richardson, 'Self-Commentary on Language in Sixteenth-Century Italian Prefatory Letters', in Francesco Venturi (ed.), *Self-Commentary in Early Modern European Literature* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 135–64. Italian dedications have been thoroughly studied in the last two decades: a rich bibliography on the topic is available via the website of the project *I margini del libro*: <https://www.margini.unibas.ch/web/en/index.html> (accessed February 2023).

¹⁵ A kinship between the two Di Maria, both of whom were native to Salerno and ran respectively a printing firm and a bookshop (*libreria*) in Venice, is plausible. Several members of the Di Maria family worked in the book industry between Venice and the kingdom of Naples in the sixteenth century. Marco printed several works on law and medicine between 1558 and 1569; a few titles from his catalogue were republished by Giovanni Antonio in the 1570s, using the same typographical mark. See Pietro Manzi, 'Editori tipografi e librai napoletani a Venezia nel secolo XVI', *La Bibliofilia*, 76 (1974), 52–7; and Giacomo Moro, 'Insegne librerie e marche tipografiche in un registro veneziano del '500', *La Bibliofilia*, 91 (1989), 60.

¹⁶ Pseudo-Fallopia, *Secreti diversi*, fols. *3v–*4v.

Those [secrets] that he had tried and proven successful, he annotated in a book that he kept close to him; those that were not successful, he discarded; and there is a large number of them written in a book, which have not been tested yet.¹⁷

Having recalled how the secrets came into his possession and that their publication was intended for the common good, Di Maria informs his readers on the criteria guiding his edition:

Having pondered over it for a while, I decided to publish two parts [of Falloppia's collection]: that is, those [secrets] which have been tested and proven effective, and those which have not been tried out by him; while those that had been proven ineffective, I discarded as useless [...] Therefore, this first part will contain *only true secrets* of surgery, medicine, and other arts; the second part will consist of *all those secrets which he had not experienced*.¹⁸

The decision to publish untested material appears to diverge from the trend established by most contemporary books of secrets. From Alessio Piemontese onwards, titles of this genre had emphasized the role of experience (*esperienza*) in attaining reliable knowledge. 'Professors of secrets' repeatedly claimed to reveal recipes that had been validated empirically, mostly by themselves, and that were therefore considered certain.¹⁹ William Eamon has stressed this point in stating that Piemontese's *Secreti* 'extolls the empiricism of practical people – vernacular knowledge – and subtly shifts the criterion of truth from logical certainty (*scientia*) to practical productivity, a viewpoint that would come to fruition in the philosophy of Francis Bacon, who urged philosophers to compile histories of the mechanical arts'.²⁰

Upon closer inspection, however, Di Maria's choice to publish both tested and untested material does not really contradict the claims of 'Piemontese' and his followers, as only secrets that had been put to experiment by Falloppia are presented as true and reliable. The centrality of empirical validation in the production of certain knowledge is also underscored by the frequency of words linked to the semantic field of experience in Di Maria's preface. As for the other recipes, Di Maria sees them as 'beautiful things, from which one can learn a lot. And even if a few secrets might prove to be untrue, they would still be delightful for those who read them, because they all deal with beautiful matters upon which one can pleasantly debate; and they reveal only things that are fit for lofty minds'.²¹ Thus, while truthfulness and reliability are the main attributes of the first group of secrets, they are not essential qualities in the definition of the second. Instead, untested secrets are characterized by a host of different, but equally positive, attributes on an aesthetic, intellectual and social level.

The distinction between empirically validated (and therefore true and certain) and untested (and therefore uncertain, verisimilar at best) secrets is reflected, to some extent, in the different concepts that the editor places at the core of the two groups: utility and delight. It should be noticed, however, that these notions are not mutually exclusive: tested recipes are often characterized by

¹⁷ 'quegli che sono riusciti, et di loro ha visto vera sperienza, ne ha fatto mentione sopra un libro appresso di se; et quelli che non sono riusciti, gli ha lasciati da banda; et ne sono restati una grandissima qauntità scritti in un libro, dei quali non è ancor stata fatta sperienza nessuna'. *Ibid.*, fol. *7r-v.

¹⁸ 'considerando io sopra di ciò, mi è parso di volere mandarne in luce due parti: cioè quegli che sono provati et riusciti, et quelli che non sono ancora stati da lui sperimentati. Ma quelli, dei quali ha fatto la prova, et non sono riusciti, gli ho voluti lasciare da banda per cosa inutile [...] Si che dunque questa prima parte saranno tutti *secreti verissimi*, tanto in cirugia quanto in medicina et altre professioni; la seconda parte sarà *tutti quelli secreti, dei quali ancora non havea fatto sperienza nessuna*'. *Ibid.*, fols. *7v-*8r. My emphasis.

¹⁹ On the empirical approach of many Italian books of secrets, see Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 139-51, 161-7. Talking about English texts, Allison Kavey (*Books of Secrets*, 4) also points out a similar attempt to gain the reader's trust by building on the direct experience (*lato sensu*, thus including the mere witnessing) of the author/compiler.

²⁰ William Eamon, 'Books of Secrets and Vernacular Knowledge', in Dana Jalobeanu and Charles T. Wolfe (eds), *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences* (Springer, 2020), DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-20791-9_240-1.

²¹ 'bellissime cose, et da cavarne grandissimo construtto. Et se bene ve ne fusse alcuno che non fusse la verità, almanco sarà dilettevole da intendere da chi quel tale leggerà: perciocché veramente trattano bellissime materie da discorrere piacevolmente, et in essi si mostra solamente cose da elevati ingegni'. Pseudo-Falloppia, *Secreti diversi*, fol. *8r-v.

rhetorical and narrative expedients which, while making the secret more persuasive, also make the reading more pleasant. At the same time, untested secrets are not presented as merely delightful matters, nor as meaningless curiosities, but as a source of educational reading, which can also be enjoyed in social encounters. In this sense, they embody other forms of utility from the concrete re-enactment of a prescription, being intellectually, socially, and even morally useful. Moreover, this vast number of untested secrets could also have a heuristic function: a hint in this direction comes from the preface itself, where the editor declares to have ‘discarded as useless’ only the recipes that had been empirically proven ineffective. From this viewpoint, even the most bizarre secrets (such as, for instance, a secret to make basilisks)²² are not to be deemed impossible on theoretical grounds, but should rather be regarded as possible until proven otherwise; once empirically tested, these secrets may eventually give rise to a certain knowledge. The second part of pseudo-Fallopia’s book thus appears to work as a repository of uncertain facts, waiting to be validated or confuted by first-hand experience.

Soon after the appearance of the *Secreti* on the book market, its attribution to Fallopia was roundly rejected by Andrea Marcolini, a disciple of the Modenese physician.²³ Marcolini’s statement did not discourage Marco Di Maria, who reprinted the *Secreti* under Fallopia’s name already in 1565. However, while the accusation of spuriousness did not seem to be of any concern to him, Di Maria still felt the need to undertake a substantial revision of the collection. He entrusted this second edition to Borgaruccio Borgarucci, a young *poligrafo* at the beginning of his career.

Little is known about Borgaruccio. Probably being born in the 1540s, he was the younger brother of the jurist Bernardino and the physicians Giulio and Prospero.²⁴ Like many other *poligrafi* active in late-sixteenth-century Venice, he contributed to the dissemination of knowledge in the vernacular, although he also edited several Latin texts.²⁵ Pseudo-Fallopia’s *Secreti* was one of his first engagements, but his young age did not stop him from making consistent alterations to the book. In this second edition, Giovanni Antonio Di Maria’s dedicatory letter and preface disappear and are replaced by a short address to the reader signed by Borgarucci himself, whose main aim was to explain and legitimize the revision of the work.²⁶

According to Borgarucci, the first edition of the *Secreti* has left many readers unsatisfied: in his prefatory text, the *poligrafo* sees the *princeps* ‘asa premature childbirth’ (‘come parto imperfetto’), pointing out that his predecessor has been too eager to send it to print. He is particularly critical of the absence of a coherent arrangement of the contents, which, in his view, would have forced readers to skim through the entire book in order to find whichever secret they were looking for.²⁷ Making up for this shortage, Borgarucci informs the readers that he has reorganized the

²² *Ibid.*, fol. 76v.

²³ See Gabriele Fallopia, *De medicatis aquis, atque de fossilibus tractatus pulcherrimus, ac maxime utilis: ab Andrea Marcolino Fanestri medico ipsius discipulo amatissimo collectus. Accessit eiusdem Andreae duplex epistola* [...] (Venezia: Lodovico Avanzo, 1564), fol. a4r. Marcolini, who edited the text, wrote his refutation in the Latin dedicatory letter (plausibly with the intention to preserve his mentor’s reputation within the learned community), stating that the book of secrets ‘was falsely ascribed to Fallopia’ (‘falsissime Falloppio tribuitur’).

²⁴ See Luigi Firpo, ‘Borgarucci’, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 12 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1971), online: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/borgarucci_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/borgarucci_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (accessed February 2023).

²⁵ On *poligrafi* and editors in late Renaissance Venice, see at least Claudia Di Filippo Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere. Lavoro intellettuale e mercato librario a Venezia nel Cinquecento* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1988); Paolo Trovato, *Con ogni diligenza corretto. La stampa e le revisioni editoriali dei testi letterari italiani (1470-1570)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991); Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy. The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For a list of titles mentioning Borgaruccio as editor or author, see the online catalogue EDIT16: <https://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/> (accessed February 2023).

²⁶ [Pseudo-]Gabriele Fallopia, *Secreti diversi et miracolosi, nuovamente ristampati, et a commun beneficio di ciascuno, distinti in tre libri* [...] (Venezia: Marco Di Maria, 1565).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, fol. *2r-v. At least in this regard, Borgarucci was not being entirely fair to Giovanni Antonio Di Maria’s work: while there were indeed some structural issues with the first edition, a table of contents and the progressive numeration of chapters still allowed for the collection to be accessed without reading it top to bottom.

collection, arranging its contents in three books: the first is to deal with medical recipes, the second with the preparation of oils and distilled waters, and the third with all sorts of curious and delightful secrets.²⁸

In addition to this intervention on a structural level, Borgarucci also announces that he has implemented a textual revision of the book. Overall, these corrections are not as extensive or evident as the changes to the arrangement of the recipes: Borgarucci mostly corrects typographic errors, although a few alterations seem to reflect an effort of linguistic standardization.²⁹ However, a cross-check of the two editions reveals that Borgarucci's revision involves not only language and organization, but also the contents of Falloppia's *Secreti*. In fact, the *poligrafo* omits about thirty recipes from the reprint, although there is no mention of this decision in the preface. The deep structural changes and the fact that chapters in the second edition are not numerated (as they were in the *princeps*) mean that the omissions are easily overlooked. While Borgarucci remains silent on the reasons behind this choice, it can be noted that most discarded recipes played heavily on the sense of wonder, dealing with tricks and illusions, techniques for controlling animal behaviour and magical practices.

Before turning to the implications of these organizational choices made by Di Maria and Borgarucci, it is worth pausing to reflect briefly on the later editorial history of the *Secreti diversi*. A late sixteenth-century catalogue of books presented at the Frankfurt Book Fair lists an edition of pseudo-Falloppia's *Secreti* issued by Marco Di Maria and dated to 1569, which, however, I could not find in modern catalogues.³⁰ If this mention is not erroneous, it might hint at an otherwise lost edition, or at the unsold copies of a previous edition which was re-issued with a new title-page. Either way, the presence of the *Secreti* in this catalogue suggests a plausible channel through which the book came to be known outside of Italy, as it was translated into German already in 1571.

In 1570, Borgarucci's revised version of the *Secreti* was republished in Venice by Vincenzo Valgrisi. While Marco Di Maria was on the whole a minor figure on the frenetic stage of the Venetian print business, Valgrisi was undoubtedly one of its major protagonists. Already in the 1540s he had begun complementing his production of humanistic texts with the publication of several technical and medical treatises, both in Latin and the vernacular. The most successful outcome of this editorial policy was Pier Andrea Mattioli's commentary of Dioscorides's *Materia medica*, a true best-seller on the late Renaissance Italian book market.³¹ The association of the *Secreti* (which was still circulating under Falloppia's name, despite Marcolini's refutation) with a famous and influential publisher such as Valgrisi certainly boosted the success of the title. By the end of the century, Borgarucci's edition had undergone eight more reprints, while its German translation, first published in Augsburg by Michael Manger (1571), was reprinted six more times before 1600. The good fortune of the *Secreti* endured throughout the early modern period, being issued several times (although less frequently) in the following century, until one last Venetian edition in 1731.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL CHOICES BETWEEN RELIABILITY AND READABILITY

²⁸ *Ibid.*, fol. *2r. The redistribution of the contents is advertised also in the title page, which states more accurately that the third book contains 'some very important alchemical secrets, and other curious and delightful secrets' ('alcuni importantissimi secreti d'alchimia, et altri secreti dilettevoli et curiosi').

²⁹ A comparison conducted between the first four recipes occurring in both editions of the *Secreti* (some of the few chapters whose order is not altered by Borgarucci) reveals an attempt to amend the language of its regional features: thus *fazza*, *raxa*, *lieva*, *zalla* become respectively *faccia*, *rasa*, *leva*, *gialla*. See pseudo-Falloppia, *Secreti diversi* (1563), fols. 1r-4r; and *Secreti diversi* (1565), 1-6.

³⁰ Nikolaus Basse, *Collectio in unum corpus, omnium librorum hebraeorum, graecorum, latinorum necnon germanice, italice, gallice, et hispanice scriptorium, qui in nundinis Francofurtensibus ab anno 1564 usque ad nundinas autumnales anni 1592 partim novi, partim nova forma, et diversis in loci editi, venales extiterunt* (Frankfurt am Main: Nikolaus Basse, 1592), part III, 18.

³¹ On this see Tiziana Pesenti, 'Il "Dioscoride" di Pier Andrea Mattioli e l'editoria botanica', in *Trattati di prospettiva, architettura militare, idraulica e altre discipline* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1985), 61-103.

In order to fully understand the editorial choices made by Di Maria and Borgarucci, it is necessary to investigate how those choices influenced the meaning and reception of the *Secreti*. What was the communicative intention of the editors, and how was it expressed throughout the book? One way to answer this question is to study how the structure of the book evolves from the first to the second edition, as this is also a central concern in the prefatory texts considered so far.

In addressing the paratextual elements that determine the physical layout of a text (e.g., typographical characters, line spacing, use of images, capital letters), Giorgio Montecchi has sharply observed how the editor 'is able to communicate with the reader through his graphical choices, the distribution and the articulation of the text on the page'.³² The editor, however, can also address the reader through the distribution and articulation of contents within the book, and through what Guyda Armstrong has called 'organizational paratexts', referring to 'such elements as the title, title-page, table of contents, running headers, page numbers, and novella numbers'.³³

A marked attention to textual organization in an even broader sense is the focus of a recent essay by Edoardo Barbieri on the so-called *libri di pietà*. Barbieri highlights how the distribution (both in terms of *mise en page* and of *mise en texte*) of the same materials within different genres of religious books reflect different modalities of reading. In considering the structure of an early sixteenth-century Italian printed psalter, he compares it to the re-arrangement of psalms in the contemporary Liturgy of the Hours. In the psalter, the canonical 150 psalms are presented in a consecutive order and accompanied only by a short vernacular translation and comment, a structure that favours private reading and meditation. Conversely, texts disposed according to the liturgy of hours reorganize the psalms in a different order, link them to other biblical texts, enrich them with ulterior meanings by adding hymns and antiphons, and generally frame them within a fixed temporal division of days, weeks and years.³⁴

Drawing on Barbieri's approach, the focus of this section will lie on the organizational strategies that characterize the first two editions of the *Secreti*, and particularly on the changing *dispositio* of the recipes within the collection.³⁵ Di Maria's and Borgarucci's own prefatory texts, which discuss the choices that underpin the structure and internal order of the book, reveal a certain sensitivity to the importance of arranging the contents effectively in gaining the readers' trust. An analysis of the actual order of the *Secreti* and its comparison with the statements put forward in the prefaces can tell us much about the scope and meaning that the editors intended to give to the collection, and about the efficacy of their operation.

The investigation of organizational features seems particularly fruitful in the study of the books of secrets, as one peculiar characteristic of this literary genre is its lack of textual unity. Each

³² 'riesce a comunicare col lettore grazie alle scelte grafiche, alla distribuzione e all'articolazione del testo sulla pagina'. Giorgio Montecchi, 'La disposizione del testo nel libro antico', in Marco Santoro and Maria Gioia Tavoni (eds), *I dintorni del testo. Approcci alle periferie del libro. Atti del convegno internazionale. Roma, 15-17 novembre 2004; Bologna, 18-19 novembre 2004* (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 2005), Vol. 1, 191-205: 199. See also Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information the Modern Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 152-60.

³³ Guyda Armstrong, 'Paratexts and Their Functions in Seventeenth-Century English "Decamerons"', *The Modern Language Review*, 102.1 (2007), 40-57: 42.

³⁴ Edoardo Barbieri, 'Organizzare il testo / organizzare la lettura. Alcuni libri di devozione tra XV e XVI secolo', in Maria Guercio et al. (eds), *Disciplinare la memoria. Strumenti e pratiche nella cultura scritta (secoli XVI-XVIII). Atti del convegno internazionale, Bologna, 13-15 marzo 2013* (Bologna: Pàtron, 2014), 27-9.

³⁵ The choice of this term consciously hints at one of the five parts of oratory in classical rhetoric. Scholars have investigated the progressive popularization of rhetoric during the Renaissance. Within Italy, new editions and commentaries of classical authors (chiefly Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian) were increasingly available on the book market, while a growing number of vernacular titles can be registered especially from the central decades of the sixteenth century onwards. See Lawrence D. Green and James J. Murphy, *Renaissance Rhetoric Short-Title Catalogue, 1460-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); and Peter Mack, *A History of Renaissance Rhetoric, 1380-1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 164-76. This process probably prompted a more marked attention on the rhetorical aspects of communication (including the disposition of arguments, or, in this case, literary contents) also among late-Renaissance editors and printers who engaged with an increasingly competitive marketplace, attempting to allure and persuade readers into buying their products.

‘secret’ constitutes an autonomous and self-sufficient text, which could have (and often had) circulated independently, or in previous manuscript or print compilations.³⁶ To borrow a term from recent literary criticism, a book of secrets is a ‘polytext’, insofar as it represents ‘a physically circumscribed and autonomous collection, composed of texts which are themselves autonomous and which do not lose this autonomy [...] when they are contextualized in the collection’.³⁷

A significant consequence of the polytextual (and often polygenetic) nature of books of secrets is that the responsibility for their production – and thus for the meanings they conveyed – almost never fell on the hypothetical ‘author(s)’ of the secrets revealed, but on whomever collected, selected and organized such recipes for publication. In the case at hand, the secrets are ascribed to the literary *persona* of Falloppia, but the shape of the collection is determined by the editors Di Maria and Borgarucci.³⁸ In this, too, books of secrets can be seen as polytexts, as their creation ‘does not coincide with the creative process of the individual components [that is, here, the recipes], but with the act of gathering them’.³⁹

While contemporary approaches to polytexts can differ notably, there seems to be general agreement on the fact that the interpretation of both the individual texts and the whole collection are influenced by the ways in which the collection is accessed.⁴⁰ Such interpretation is ultimately a matter of how the reader engages with the book, but compilers can try to orient the encounter between text and reader by structuring and ordering the collection in a specific manner, and by providing paratextual tools that bound the single elements together and help navigate the polytext.

Turning back to the *Secreti diversi*, the way that recipes are ordered, and the profound structural revision which the work underwent between the first and the second editions, cannot be overlooked, as this impacted on the message conveyed by the book.⁴¹ Indeed, while the first and second editions of the *Secreti* contain (almost) the same texts and keep largely unchanged the internal features of each chapter, they nevertheless constitute two very different collections because of the different criteria that guide the disposition of the recipes therein. Such criteria, the analysis of which will be the object of the following pages, underscore two different editorial intentions, and have important consequences on the way that readers are encouraged to receive and interpret the work.

As discussed above, the preface to the first editions expresses the intention to keep Falloppia’s (alleged) distinction between tested and untested secrets. The reliability of the former is granted by Falloppia’s direct experience, while the latter are presented as uncertain, lacking empirical proof that can vouch for their efficacy. It is therefore possible to detect a tension between a truthful, practically expendable knowledge, on the one hand, and a verisimilar, still only hypothetical, knowledge, on the other.

However, the structure of the book does not match with the prefatory statements. Instead of the two parts promised in the preface, the book consists of one continuous sequence of chapters, numbered from 1 to 447. This might lead one to think that a second part, consisting only of untested secrets, was meant to be published separately, and that the *Secreti* actually reveals only recipes tested

³⁶ This polygenetic nature is openly acknowledged by many professors of secrets, who, like ‘Falloppia’, declared to have gathered secrets both from personal investigation and from various oral and written sources.

³⁷ ‘una raccolta [che] è fisicamente circoscrivibile e autonoma, è composta di testi a propria volta autonomi i quali non perdono tale prerogativa [...] nel momento in cui sono contestualizzati nella raccolta’. Mara Santi, ‘Simul stabunt [...] Note per una teoria politestuale della raccolta di narrativa breve’, *Allegoria*, 69-70 (2014), 87-8. Santi’s essay focuses on collections of short stories, but her definition of polytext can be (and has often been) broadened to other genres. For a recent synthesis on this topic, see Elke D’hoker and Bart Van Den Bossche, ‘Cycles, Recueils, Macrotxts. The Short Story Collection in a Comparative Perspective’, *Interférences littéraires/Littéraire interférenties*, 12 (2014), 7-17.

³⁸ On the role of printers and editors as compilers of books of secrets, especially with regard to the anonymous collections produced in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, see Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 112-33.

³⁹ ‘non coincide con l’atto creativo delle singole componenti, bensì con l’atto del riunire’. Santi, ‘Simul stabunt’, 88.

⁴⁰ D’hoker and Van Den Bossche, ‘Cycles, Recueils, Macrotxts’, 15.

⁴¹ Allison Kavey has devoted some interesting thoughts to the ‘structural decisions made by printers’ of some sixteenth-century English books of secrets, highlighting the role of organizational structure in orienting and endorsing certain readings of the collections over others. See Kavey, *Books of Secrets*, 65-7, 88-92.

by 'Fallopia'. However, it is more likely that the book contains both parts, despite the lack of an internal division into two sections. In fact, the preface puts more emphasis on the relevance of untested secrets than on the utility of tested secrets, something that would make little sense if referring to a book yet to be published. Moreover, there is no evidence of a 'second part' of Fallopia's secrets published in the following years.

The hypothesis that the *Secreti* contains both parts is endorsed by a thorough study of the internal features of the collection, which reveals a profound shift in the style, contents and structure of the chapters about one third of the way through the book. In the first part of the *Secreti*, which deals mostly with medicine and occasionally with cosmetics and metallurgy, each chapter focuses on a specific secret, for which clear and precise instructions are given. The secrets are usually corroborated by a first-person narrative, with 'Fallopia' recounting the circumstances of their acquisition, his many experiences and the miraculous cures performed through them. Conversely, chapters from the second (and more conspicuous) section of the book tend to focus on the goal rather than on the remedy, with many alternative secrets being gathered on the same subject and linked together through the anaphoric use of the word 'again' ('ancora'). Most notably, Fallopia's voice fades away: the origins of the secrets are seldom accounted for, or they are projected in distant times and spaces instead of being ascribed to contemporary practitioners. Equally absent is the narration of the healings performed with a certain remedy, while empirical testing is mentioned only sporadically, and mostly in the form of a vague 'tried' ('provato').⁴²

Coherently with what has been declared in the preface, a clear difference between two sorts of secrets emerges. This difference seems based on the presence of Fallopia's *persona* and of his first-hand experience, which determines whether a certain recipe should be read as truthful and certain (something that has already been tested), or only verisimilar (something that has yet to be tested).⁴³ This criterion, which might be labelled 'epistemological', reveals two quite different mind-sets, or even two different *personae* at work in the respective sections of the *Secreti*. The first part displays the activity of 'Fallopia the experimenter', whose empirical attitude produces certain knowledge. The second part shows the work of 'Fallopia the collector', who is omnivorous in his interests and whose compiling effort leads to a form of knowledge which is entertaining and formative, although not certain. Untested secrets are therefore presented as literary products, with no pretence of truthfulness. This viewpoint reduces the importance of the recipe's reliability, granting more space to its ability to elicit wonder and delight. Indeed, the second part of Fallopia's book intertwines recipes for distilled medicaments and metallurgical techniques with feats of natural magic, instructions to perform tricks and amuse guests, tempers for legendary swords, and even a secret to create basilisks from putrefied sage, whose ashes would turn brass into gold.⁴⁴

While mirroring a contemporary fascination with marvellous objects and phenomena, Di Maria's editorial choices also appear to outpace most other books of secrets in reflecting the late-Renaissance interest in first-hand experience and practical knowledge.⁴⁵ Although contemporary titles frequently highlighted the empirical validation of the recipes collected, these claims should always be considered cautiously. The highly formulaic value of the phrase *probatum est* has been the

⁴² The shift between the first and the second group of recipes is exemplified by the Appendix (pp. ??), which contrasts the two chapters taken from the first and second part of the book, and which deal with the same topic in the two very different styles just outlined.

⁴³ It could be argued that the act of testing a written recipe turns a literary product (something that *could* happen) into an empirical fact (something that *has* happened).

⁴⁴ On this see Ruben Celani, '(Un)natural Conceptions and Alchemical Transmutations: Making Basilisks in a Sixteenth-Century Italian Book of Secrets', in Rebekah Compton and Donato Verardi (eds), *Magical Materials in Renaissance Philosophy, Literature and Art* (Lugano: Agorà &Co, 2022), 107-35.

⁴⁵ On wonder in late-sixteenth- and seventeenth-century culture, see Joy Kenseth (ed.), *The Age of the Marvelous* (Hanover, N. H.: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1991); Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), Ch. 8; Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen (eds), *Merchants and Marvels. Commerce, Science and Art in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

object of several linguistic studies, especially with regard to English medical recipes.⁴⁶ This formula did not necessarily point to an empirical testing of a recipe, but ‘may have been derived from scholastic scholarly texts where the proof of the efficacy of a medicine was not the result of a series of laboratory tests but rather a logical outcome of a textual discussion in which contemporary theories of medicine were considered with respect to the recipe in question’.⁴⁷ Finally, even when they were more than mere efficacy phrases, the claims to empirical validation – which were advanced in prefatory paratexts, as well as in the liminal parts of single recipes – could be untrue, or they could refer to the experience of an external source that was deemed reliable by the author/compiler.⁴⁸ That is not to say that the recipes revealed by professors of secrets were never tried out, but simply that the presence of the words ‘proved and true’ (‘provato e vero’) does not guarantee *per se* that they were actually experimented.

While the claims advanced in other sixteenth-century vernacular books of secrets might have had a formulaic function, Di Maria’s operation seems to be more complex and articulated. For instance, the editor underscores the reliability of empirically validated secrets also by acknowledging the non-reliability of secrets that are yet to be tested. The sharp differences that can be detected between chapters ascribable to the two sections of the book also contribute to defining more clearly the boundaries between what can be held true and what is still only probable, thus reinforcing the primacy of first-hand experience in the attainment of certain knowledge. The example given at the end of this essay (see Appendix, pp. ??) clearly shows the distance between a single recipe validated by the authoritative *persona* of ‘Fallopia the experimenter’, on the one hand, and the heterogeneous multitude of recipes for the same purpose accumulated by the tacit *persona* of ‘Fallopia the collector’, on the other.

When Borgarucci took over as editor of pseudo-Fallopia’s *Secreti*, he conducted a threefold process of revision that was focused on language, contents, and the structure of the book. The linguistic revisions are generally minimal, while the interventions on the contents of the collection are slight but significant, with the silent removal of about thirty recipes. His efforts, however, were mostly devoted to the arrangement of the recipes within the collection. The editor opted for a thematic order: the recipes are re-organized by subject, a choice that aligns well with the structure of most contemporary books of secrets. The resulting volume is divided into three books, which deal respectively with medical recipes; wines and distilled waters; and secrets on alchemy and other crafts ‘that serve for curiosity and delight’.⁴⁹ Within each book, secrets are subdivided into coherent sequences: for instance, the chapters of the first book are regrouped depending on the typology of the medicine produced (oils, ointments, bandages, pills).

The new arrangement certainly makes the book more easily accessible; however, it also entirely ignores the distinction between tested and untested secrets. Certain and uncertain knowledge are now intermixed, thus overshadowing the epistemological criterion that guided Di Maria’s edition.⁵⁰ In his short letter to the readers, Borgarucci neglects to mention this aspect altogether,

⁴⁶ On the ‘probatum est’ as a ‘tag’ or efficacy phrase, see Claire Jones, ‘Formula and Formulation: “Efficacy Phrases” in Medieval English Medical Manuscripts’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 99.2 (1998), 199-209; Martti Mäkinen, ‘Efficacy Phrases in Early Modern English Medical Recipes’, in Irma Taavitsainen and Päivi Pahta (eds), *Medical Writing in Early Modern English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 158-79; Miriam Criado-Peña, “‘Probatum Est’: The Medical Recipes in London, Wellcome Library, MS 3009”, *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 20.1 (2021), 258-77.

⁴⁷ Mäkinen, ‘Efficacy Phrases’, 159; see also Jones, ‘Formula and Formulation’, 206.

⁴⁸ See Valentina Pugliano, ‘Pharmacy, Testing, and the Language of Truth in Renaissance Italy’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 91.2 (2017), 233-73: 234.

⁴⁹ ‘secreti et ricette che servono per curiosità et diletatione’. Pseudo-Fallopia, *Secreti diversi* (1565), fol. *2r.

⁵⁰ A good example is offered by the section dedicated to the preparation of pills against various ailments (*Ibid.*, 37-50). Here Borgarucci regroups the secrets corresponding to chapters 93, 94, 89, 178, 446, 41, 45, 40 of the *princeps*. Among them, only the last three chapters contain secrets presented as certain by Di Maria, which can be identified as such both for the early occurrence in the book and for the stylistic features highlighted in the previous paragraph. The first three might still belong to Fallopia the experimenter, but the central two had undoubtedly been included among the untested

focusing instead on the inconveniences caused by the first edition and on the greater usefulness of his own volume. As a consequence of Borgarucci's intervention, readers are no longer aware of the presence, in the book, of both truthful (tested) and only verisimilar (untested) secrets. The only clue to some sort of validation from a reliable authority comes from the title: 'Secrets [...] gathered by Falloppia and *approved* by other physicians of great fame'.⁵¹ A similar phrasing also appeared on the title-page of the *princeps*: 'Secrets [...] gathered by the most excellent Gabriele Falloppia, and *tested* by various people'.⁵² However, this opening statement was nuanced by Di Maria's preface, which pointed out that not all secrets have actually been tried out. Without this explanation, the validation advertised in the title (which in Borgarucci's case is only presumably an empirical one, as the word 'experimented' is substituted with the less relevant 'approved') seemingly extends to the whole collection. Only a trace of the original distinction remains, as Borgarucci underlines the centrality of curiosity and delightfulness in the third book, which still largely consists of secrets that were originally presented as untested. Yet the delightful nature of these secrets is not coupled with their lack of empirical certainty anymore. In summary, whereas Di Maria appeared to be primarily concerned with the *reliability* of secrets validated by experience, Borgarucci is mostly interested in the *readability* of the book.

Finally, the absence of a distinction between certain and uncertain knowledge might also help explain the aforementioned removal of a few 'magical' secrets from the second edition. Di Maria had included them in the second part of the *Secreti*, therefore presenting them as untested recipes with no pretence of truthfulness. Conversely, Borgarucci, who overlooked the difference between tested and untested secrets and presented (in the title-page) the whole book as 'approved' by Falloppia and other famous physicians, might have struggled to make these wonderful recipes fit

into the collection.⁵³

Because of its unusual organizational choices, Giovanni Antonio Di Maria's edition is extremely interesting; its *dispositio* enriches the *Secreti* of nuances that are not present (or not as evident) in other books of secrets from the same period. From this perspective, Borgarucci's intervention 'flattens' the collection, removing its most innovative element – the organization guided by an epistemological criterion – and framing the secrets within a more conventional structure, guided by a thematic criterion. Yet, Di Maria's edition was revised after only two years, while Borgarucci's version was successful enough to be translated into German, and reprinted by various publishers (most notably Valgrisi) for almost two centuries. In order to understand why Di Maria's edition might have been perceived as inadequate, while Borgarucci's had such good fortune, we have to take into account the communicative efficacy of both versions.

A major problem with the first edition is that Di Maria's promise to distinguish between tested and untested secrets is not fulfilled in the actual structure and organization of the materials. As noted above, readers encounter an uninterrupted sequence of chapters, with only a table of contents to facilitate their access to the book, and thus they cannot easily pinpoint where exactly the shift from tested to untested secrets takes place. Moreover, although it is sometimes possible to regroup secrets in short clusters, it is difficult to find a clear rationale guiding the internal arrangement of the whole book.

To give only one example of how chaotic the first edition could appear, metallurgy is dealt with on multiple occasions, but more consistently in four clusters: chapters 59-62, 216-240, 365-386, and 412-443. The preface may lead the reader to think that at least the first two clusters reveal tested

secrets by Di Maria, as the shifted focus of the chapter (gathering multiple recipes for the same purpose instead of focusing on a specific remedy) also suggests.

⁵¹ 'Secreti [...] raccolti dal Falloppia, et *approbati* da altri medici di gran fama'. Pseudo-Falloppia, *Secreti diversi* (1565). My emphasis.

⁵² 'Secreti [...] raccolti dall'eccellentissimo Gabriel Falloppia, et da varie persone *esperimentati*'. Pseudo-Falloppia, *Secreti diversi* (1563). My emphasis.

⁵³ The issue might have been particularly pressing in the aftermath of the Tridentine Council. The fact that most of the omitted recipes brought the *Secreti* rather close to magical practices might have encouraged Borgarucci to exclude them from the second edition. See Celani, '(Un)natural Conceptions', 133.

secrets, as they occur roughly in the first half of the book; however, only chapters 59-62 can be recognized as empirically validated recipes. As with most secrets revealed in the first folios of the volume, here the *persona* of 'Fallopia' is very much present, giving precise instructions, referring to his own experiences, and narrating the circumstances in which he had acquired the recipe. Conversely, in the other chapters Fallopia's first-person narrative disappears, while most secrets tend to give rather short and sometimes vague instructions, without supporting them with claims of empirical proof. Moreover, while in the first cluster each chapter teaches a specific secret (focusing on the means), most chapters belonging to the other three clusters gather multiple recipes on the same topic (focusing on the goal).

It is up to the reader to recognize these differences and to understand them, in light of the preface, as a marker of the shift from tested to untested secrets. Such an understanding requires a certain effort, as the reader would have to read and compare secrets from both sections in order to realize which ones contained reliable knowledge, and which ones did not. In other words, while the access to the recipes is facilitated by the table of contents, it is not so simple to evaluate them according to the editor's intentions. Although secrets at the very beginning and at the very end of the collection can be easily identified as tested or untested, more attention is needed to grasp the epistemological value of what stands in the middle.

A second weakness of the first edition is its divergence from the contemporary trends of the marketplace. Di Maria arranged the *Secreti*, and asked his readers to engage with it, in ways that differed from other books of secrets, and probably also from the expectations of the contemporary audience. We can acquire a glimpse into how Renaissance readers approached vernacular books of secrets through Borgarucci's contemptuous preface, which states that 'many [readers] were sick of having to read the whole book, from the beginning to the end, in order to benefit from some of these miraculous secrets'.⁵⁴ Borgarucci's judgment is too severe and certainly partial, as his critique aims to legitimize his own revision of the *Secreti*. However, it also suggests that books of secrets were mainly conceived as texts serving contingent needs: finding a cure for a certain disease, knowing how to temper a certain metal, learning how to produce a certain pigment, and so on. While the possibility that someone read these books from the first to the last page cannot (and should not) be ruled out, they lend themselves more easily to a fragmentary reading – a feature that they share with other reference texts such as encyclopaedias and dictionaries. Di Maria's edition probably failed to satisfy this need; on the contrary, its disposition required a kind of reading that was already too systematic and attentive, during which readers had to be constantly aware that, depending on where a certain recipe appeared, it could reveal either truthful or merely plausible information.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This essay has aimed to read pseudo-Fallopia's *Secreti diversi et miracolosi*, a text that is still largely neglected by modern historiography, from the perspective of the communicative intentions and strategies of its editors. To address this issue, it has dealt primarily with the prefatory materials and the distribution of contents within the collection, which represent the major differences between the first and second editions.

As Helen Smith and Louise Wilson have pointed out, 'paratextual elements are in operation all the way through the reader's experience of the text, not merely at the start, and they continuously inform the process of reading, offering multiple points of entry, interpretation, and contestation'.⁵⁵ This is particularly true for polytexts such as the *Secreti diversi*, whose order and structure highlight the editors' attempt at orienting the readers' understanding of the book. In line with Genette's

⁵⁴ 'a molti per avanti induceva nausea, tutte le volte che volendosi prevalere d'alcuni di questi miracolosi secreti, erano necessitate a discorrere tutto 'l libro dal principio al fine'. Pseudo-Fallopia, *Secreti diversi* (1565), fol. *2r-v.

⁵⁵ Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, 'Introduction', in Smith and Wilson (eds), *Renaissance Paratexts*, 6.

inclusive statement that ‘tout contexte fait paratexte’,⁵⁶ the *dispositio* of the recipes gathered in the *Secreti* can be understood as a further paratextual feature.

The organizational criteria underpinning the two editions considered here seem to promote different modes of reading and to imply distinct understandings of this work. Empirical certainty constitutes the pivot around which Di Maria arranges the secrets of the first edition. The message conveyed by the editor’s preface, and above all by the different narrative, rhetorical and stylistic features of the secrets occurring in the first and second portions of the book, is that only experience produces certain and reliable practical knowledge. In the absence of empirical validation, the recipes gathered by ‘Fallopia’ convey uncertain knowledge, which, however, should not be entirely rejected: such secrets can still be delightful (as matters of wonder, from time to time being enriched by narrative inserts) and useful (as private and formative reading, as well as in social encounters), while also representing a repository for new possible experiences.

However, Di Maria’s epistemological criterion, which is mainly concerned with the reliability of the secrets revealed, represents an exception among contemporary titles of the same genre. In most books of secrets, the focus is rather on the readability, achieved not only through indexes and tables of contents but also through a user-friendly disposition of the materials within the collection. To this end, books of secrets are often organized by subject and divided into multiple sections, each one dealing with an art or craft, which in turn can also be coherently arranged by clusters devoted to specific topics. Moreover, besides the editor’s prefatory statements, the actual *dispositio* of the first edition does not clearly indicate the transition point from the first to the second group of recipes, which undermines the communicative efficacy of the work. In the end, the structure of the book does not enable the reader to identify immediately tested and untested secrets. Rather, the recognition (and thus the correct understanding of the epistemological value) of the two types of secrets largely depends on internal features, which require a consistent analytical effort on the part of the reader.

The second edition spares this effort to the reader: it averts altogether the distinction between tested and untested secrets, while the title page advertises all secrets as approved by Fallopia and other illustrious physicians. In this remark, and by reorganizing the collection thematically, Borgarucci aligns with the contemporary marketplace and creates a product with which readers were likely to be more familiar. The user-friendliness of his edition also constitutes the main topic of his letter to the readers: on this point he had an easy argument to motivate his revision, since Di Maria’s arrangement of the recipes did not match the prefatory claims, resulting in a poorly structured text.

In the end, the second edition was more effective in terms of communication and accessibility than the *princeps*. The very need for such a thorough revision, only two years after the first edition, and the success of Borgarucci’s version suggest at least two considerations. First, sixteenth-century users of books of secrets mostly saw these works as reference books which were meant to be easily consulted. Second, empirical certainty was often a matter of self-presentation (as something that would appeal to the targeted audience) more than a practice that was actively pursued by the compilers of vernacular books of secrets. By ignoring Di Maria’s attempt at differentiating tested and untested secrets on an epistemological level, Borgarucci altered the meaning of the collection as well as the value of the individual recipes, downplaying the centrality of experience in the knowledge-making process.

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APPENDIX⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Genette, *Seuils*, 13.

⁵⁷ In this appendix, I have marked in bold the initials of each recipe listed in the right column, which is illustrative of the heterogeneity and accumulative tendency of the second part of the *Secreti*, in contrast with the first part, which is exemplified by the recipe on the left column (on this issue, see *infra*, pp. ??).

Divine water to cure eye ailments. Chapter 16 (fols. 11v-12r).

Take holy thistle
Eyewort
Fennel
Sea squill⁵⁹
Breadcrumb
Cinnamon of each IIII ounces

And all aforementioned things shall be infused in XVI pounds of good and aged white wine, and let them stay under horse manure for eight days; then distill by wind furnace, and, once V pounds of substance have come out, interrupt the distillation; then add to this product II ounces of distilled oil of honey, and III carats of the purest musk dissolved in IIII ounces of rose water; then let it rest for 40 days, and it will be ready. And this serves all disorders of the eyes, instilling two drops in them each day at night and in the morning. And I know for sure that queen Giovanna, mother of the indomitable emperor Charles V of Austria, used this water, and lived a very long time with perfect eyesight. And I received this noble secret from a Spanish doctor named Rodorico Cariglio, physician of the most reverend Spanish cardinal Pazecco⁶⁰ when they came to the [thermal] baths of Abano, and he left me this and many other secrets *in scrittis*, which are beautiful. And with regard to preserving eyesight, I believe this to be the best thing there is; for he who is deprived of light is deprived of the world, as one can plainly see. And in this way I praise the aforesaid water, having experienced it myself with diverse bodies and complexions, in which it always worked divinely; and [it] will

Water for the eyes, perfect against all sight disorders, cataracts, against *albugine*, *albola*,⁵⁸ excrescences, and all other eye ailments. Chapter 150 (fols. 80v-81r).

Take marcasite and put it into the fire, and let it heat well; and when it is red-hot, cast it in good old oil. Then take it out and heat it again, and cast it in said oil; and do this five or six times, and if it [the oil] were oil of brick it would be better. Then, grind this stone [the marcasite] finely, distill it in an alembic or in a flask, and collect the result. Then take what sediment remains at the bottom [of the alembic or flask], grind it, and dilute it in what has come out [of the distillation]. Put everything again into the alembic, and the more you do so, the more perfect the water will be. Instill this water in the eyes, and there is no ailment that it does not cure. **Again**, take rock salt, pepper, and grind everything well; take juice of root and fennel,⁶¹ and dilute all these things in strong vinegar; and when you go to bed, soak a cloth in this compound and place it on your eyes, and it will be of great benefit. **Again**, take absinth juice and mix it with honing and egg white, and put it in your eyes, and it will remove any eye-stain.⁶² **Again**, take sparrow-hawk droppings and grind them well, and put them in the eye and around it. **Again**, take rue and soak it in warm wine, and drink that wine; and if your eyes were dark and blurred, it will make them clear and beautiful, and restore your sight. **Again**, if your eye is swelling for a hit, or for rheumatic causes: take cumin and rosemary; crush the roses; then, have an apple and cook it; mix all these things together with warm wine, and put it on the eye. **Again**, take a glass of rue juice and one of good wine, and put three ounces of tutty,⁶³ and let it boil in a carafe for one hour; and put in your eyes what

⁵⁸ Both ‘albugine’ and ‘albula’ may be intended as synonyms for modern-day corneal leucoma.

⁵⁹ Holy thistle (‘cardo santo’), eyewort (‘eufragie’) and sea squill (‘cepolla squilla’) are common names of some widely used medicinal plants (respectively *Cnicus benedictus*, *Euphrasia officinalis*, and *Drimia maritima*).

⁶⁰ Pedro Pacheco de Villena (1488-1560), cardinal and viceroy of Naples between 1553 and 1555. His physician might be identified with a certain Rodrigo Carrillo who studied medicine at the University of Alcalá between the late 1530s and the early 1540s. See Rafael Ramis Barceló and Pedro Ramis Serra, *Actos y grados de la Universidad de Alcalá (1523-1544)* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2020), 364-5.

⁶¹ ‘succo di radice et di finocchio’. However, this might be an misspelling for ‘succo di radice di finocchio’ (juice of fennel root).

⁶² ‘macula’, a kind of corneal scar.

⁶³ ‘tutia’, a byproduct resulting from the processing of zinc, which presents itself as a grey powder.

similarly work for all those who will try it with the desire of conserving their sight for a long time.

remains, and there is no ailment that it does not heal. **Again**, for those whose eyes are red: take a pomegranate and cook it under the ashes, and when it is cooked squeeze out its juice; and take rose water, three times more than the juice, and a bit of powder of gum arabic, and put all these things in a glass ampoule; this collyrium is good for all disorders of the eye. **Again**, [...]