

RUSCELLI'S BOOK OF SECRETS IN CONTEXT: A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY VENETIAN 'MUSEUM IN MOTION'

Stefano GULIZIA*

Abstract. This essay discusses the emergence of empirical practices both in houses of craft and medicinal laboratories in Venice during the 1550s, a period in which, with the fortunate collection of the *Secrets of Alexis* anonymously published by the relentless polymath Girolamo Ruscelli, the Venetian world had firmly sided with the printed word as a strategy of scientific information and communication, progressively pushing manuscript communication to the verge of irrelevance. As I argue, it was a diffuse sense of saturation in the Venetian marketplace of similar 'galleries' and 'theatres' – a phenomenon traditionally ascribed to the rise of the early modern museum – that gave Ruscelli his reputation as a master of *virtual witnessing*. I present here some examples of commerce and collecting, translations, and visual adaptations in print as representative of epistemological changes taking place within commercial and long-distance networks, and I examine the type of gathering activities both institutions and people deployed as they extended the technological and cognitive jurisdictions of media within the printing house.

Keywords: early modern museum, Girolamo Ruscelli, global exchange, printed culture, openness vs. secrecy, *Secrets of Alexis*, sociability, Spain, urban networks, Venice

Introduction: Knowledge and Sociability as Tools for the Printing Press

As William Eamon first suggested,¹ every study of Girolamo Ruscelli (1500-1566) and his literary pseudonym Alessio Piemontese is, in some sense, the study of a nexus between an ideal of virtuosity in experimental techniques and the often sordid conditions of labour in the book trade.² Indeed, the technological advance and cognitive jurisdictions of the printing atelier neatly frame Ruscelli's career; scraps of editorial and bibliographical erudition, perhaps, offer a better anchor for a study of Ruscelli than a more traditional evaluation of the pitfalls of his charismatic trajectory as a 'perfect' courtier. This suggests me to ask whether, and to what extent, the figure of the 'professor of secrets' can be taken as paradigmatic of the type of migrant broker, intellectual, and proof-editor on which the business of printing books was ultimately based.³ And such view, in turn, leads to three underlying questions.

* City University of New York. Bronx Community College, Modern Language, Colston Hall, Room 207, 2155 University Avenue, Bronx NY 10453. Email: sgulizia@gmail.com.

Is Ruscelli, first of all, a typical writer-for-money? I shall attempt to answer this question in the affirmative.⁴ In addition, does his innovative position in the field of natural wonders bear a testimony, however spurious and self-taught, to the rise of a shift in the sixteenth-century business of making books? If so, and to the extent that it is prudent to conjecture as much, the situation derives, as I observe in this study, from the unique way in which upon Ruscelli converge different *personae* – the craftsman and the master map-maker, to name only two. By commenting on the printing house as a place of experiment, I shall suggest that the printed book performs many of the same tasks that the museum performs; so that the ‘book of secrets’, too, is like a ‘gallery of words’. Finally, can this very set of circumstances be described, as I will myself claim in this study, as something specifically and distinctively Venetian?

This simple set of questions becomes particularly significant in light of William Eamon’s most recent reappraisal of this tradition of writing,⁵ from which I begin here my own analysis. By underlying the slippery and opaque nature of secrets and recipes as historical sources in the larger narrative on the origins of modernity, Eamon insists that such early collections and anthologies of ‘experiments’ are, perhaps, even more relevant to the ethics of publicity than to science per se. On the one hand, there could be no doubt that Ruscelli’s book of secrets was predicated (and sold) on the premises of its dramatic rejection of medieval esotericism and its equally bombastic declaration of public usefulness;⁶ on the other, as Eamon himself cleverly seems to suggest, this was little more than a verifiable Renaissance topos. “In retrospect,” Eamon writes, “Alessio’s most important contribution to early modern science was not his compilation of experiments but his discovery that publishing secrets was ethically superior to concealing them from the unworthy. In the age of printing, that reversal would be decisive.”⁷ In this essay I accept and develop Eamon’s revisionist articulation in such a way that my central claim about Girolamo Ruscelli can be understood, to an extent, as a study of the self-fashioning of a scholarly *persona* in printed books. Moreover, since the printed books I am interested in are all Venetian, I also expand Eamon’s position into further contextual ground, striving to depict at least some threads in the complex web of philosophical debts that links Ruscelli’s relentless activity to independent yet competing disciplines of knowledge of his time: my commentary on these matters derive from the idea that the books of secrets are one of the *loci naturales*, as it were, where the effects of the marriage between medicine and philosophy, or printing and science, were most evident in Venice.⁸

Print, Craft Secrecy, and the Production of Space

Before we begin a longer examination of some of the problems posed by Girolamo Ruscelli’s collection in the Venetian marketplace of print, and their relative solutions, it is perhaps appropriate to briefly characterize the instances of turbulence and innovation that characterized the writer’s arrival in the lagoon. A sketch of the remarkably vivacious and multifarious features that his printed *persona* projected in the city culture will enable us better to put the approaches and proposals of the books of secrets in context, and to evaluate their real significance; in my view, as we shall see shortly, the fact that the inception of the composite editions of Ruscelli’s *Secrets*, in its

first and second ('augmented') edition, is something that belongs to the history of Venice is quite important. This new experimental culture manifested itself in two ways: first, when taken at face-value, the *auctoritates* of this genre revived a long humanistic tradition of bitter polemic, gossip, and envious remarks to the effect that the natural counterpoint of secrets and revelation was conflict and rivalries – a degraded world of scoops and editorial revenge; and secondly, once this line of inquiry was pursued even more aggressively into print, the formal traits of the 'master' of secrets became so pressing and successful to be virtually indistinguishable from the sustained commitment of a press consultant. In this respect, Ruscelli's versatility came to embody, like Filippo De Vivo puts it, "the close connection between the printing press and Venice's requirements for eloquence."⁹ The process, though, was far from a linear one, as one could easily observe by breaking down the successive stages of the writer's career.

From the second half of the 1540s onward, when Ruscelli arrived in Venice in search of a job as a professional writer, his work was constantly reshaped by the difficult convergence of literary and geopolitical adventurism on one side, and by the imperative of being profitable on the other. Already in 1540, Girolamo Ruscelli was, by all accounts, a model courtier; not long after his early education at the University of Padua, he entered the service of the powerful marquis Alfonso d'Avalos in Naples, and his courtly success was, in turn, immortalized by Torquato Tasso in his dialogue *Minturno*.

For some, however, Ruscelli was neither a perfect courtier nor a master in the secrets of nature, but simply an emblem-maker. Ruscelli's authority on emblems is evident in a writing manual by Giovanni Battista Palatino (1515-1575), the *Libro nuovo d'imparare a scrivere* (Rome, 1540).¹⁰ Palatino's goal is to offer an exhaustive collection of calligraphic models.¹¹ A second and related goal, apart from typographic innovation, is also to advertise with obvious pride, through this book, the author's status as a 'Roman citizen': Palatino was born in Rossano, Calabria, but moved to Rome where he secured the support of local patrons, until he became secretary of the Accademia dei Sdegnati (the scornful). Amongst the pages of Palatino's manual is a visual poem, or a *sonetto figurato*. The woodcut (see figure 1) depicts symbols and fragments from the body of the beloved as scattered and fluctuating in between the lines. This fantasy, ingeniously poised between the magical attributes of a body and a fully-fledged, fetishistic vision, is particularly poignant in itself, for it tells us something important about early modern attitudes of reading: that a reader with a knowledge of nature and emblems is better equipped to discover the 'figure of desire' hidden in the discourse.¹² But it is equally remarkable that, in employing Ruscelli's authority, Palatino is insisting on the idea that its outlook could rightly be described as *emblematic*. This subtle shift toward the emblematic view should give us pause. If underneath this vision, as William B. Ashworth suggested, "is the belief that every kind of thing in the cosmos has myriad hidden meanings and that knowledge consists of an attempt to comprehend as many of these as possible,"¹³ then Ruscelli's entrepreneurial vigour was understood in sixteenth-century Venice as a complex web of significations in which the natural macrocosm is mirrored by the microcosm of man and his social aspect.¹⁴

In what follows, I legitimize this hypothesis of reading by tracking how the printed *persona* of Ruscelli collapsed at least three available figures or options open to those who sought credibility in print—three options which, in fact, were seen as distinctively Venetian because of their famed, feverish intensity and in the way they reflected the environmental problems of a specific geoscape: the figure of the vernacular anthologist, that of the Renaissance *magus*, and the technical cosmographer. At the time when Ruscelli's book of secrets collected a cornucopian knowledge, the Venetian marketplace was at once indiscriminant in its ability to let everything enter, and hierarchical in its privileging of the extraordinary. The thrill of wonder, and of the exotic, were sensations cultivated *ad infinitum*. As long as Venice could find abundance of printers capable of building, equipping, handling, and shipping printed books, international trades could be safely increased, and coordinated with other forms of testimony such as on-site reporting and local knowledge. In his various suits as an editor and publisher, a naturalist and emblem-maker, Ruscelli well represents early modern procedures and discourses that privilege eye-witnessing; he responded both to the advent of print and to the problems of craft secrecy.¹⁵

In fundamental ways, therefore, my treatment of Girolamo Ruscelli is a traditional case-study in the field of 'information overload',¹⁶ while it also activates Arjun Appadurai's notion of an 'object in motion'¹⁷ to explain how, by the early 1560s, Ruscelli was to the eyes of Venetians a man capable of transporting readers into a vicarious scene of reality. In other words, a master of *virtual witnessing*. Here I take the concept of virtual witnessing away from a Foucauldian form of disciplinary impulse, and connect it instead to a scribal technology of collecting, copying and tracking;¹⁸ it is possible, I think, that future and fine-grained studies of the books of secrets will benefit from a consideration of the their textual building-blocks, not only in the form of excerpts and commonplaces, but also as equivalent to other early modern storehouses of proverbs, maxims, and quotations where a large quantity of detailed information could be retrieved for discussion and collaboration.¹⁹ In a way, the *editio princeps* of Ruscelli's book of secrets already offers a strong analogy, in its circulation as a loose encyclopaedic text both in Italian and Castilian, between a thesaurus of social and experimental life, and as a repository of pseudo-medical and thaumaturgical traditions.

For the present, however, it is convenient to stick to Ruscelli, and to sample the various ways in which the Viterbian humanist was called upon to display his erudite subtlety and his instinctual yet precarious understanding of trading entrepreneurship for the benefit of a coalescing and pervasive 'public sphere' in sixteenth-century Venice. In the following pages (section 3), I utilize an array of bibliographical documentation ranging from title-pages to emblematic coat of arms, and from printers catalogues to urban signage, to plunge into the concrete organization of intellectual labour in the age of the Venetian polymath and to ask a question that has not attracted the scholarly attention it undoubtedly deserves: how much of this atmosphere is reflected in the printed collection of secrets? Within this framework, I will try to show, in turn, that (a) in the year 1555 – a real turning point in our story as much as in Ruscelli's Venetian trajectory – his decision to publish his book of secrets was the culmination of a series of commercial misfortunes, while, at

the same time, it also participated in a celebration into print of an already legendary first season of vernacular achievement on behalf of Venetian printers and their entourage. And, more specifically, that (b) *I Secreti di Alessio* and a massive 524-page anthology edited by Ruscelli the year before, with the imposing title *Tempio alla signora donna Giovanna d'Aragona*,²⁰ demand to be read and understood together.

Experiments and Secrets in the 'Golden Age' of the *Poligrafi*

The first and in many ways most basic strategy for this section of the essay is to engage with a bit of social history concerning the printer of Ruscelli's collection, Sigismondo Bordogna (fl. 1555-85).²¹ Like many in his profession, Bordogna came to Venice as a foreign immigrant, in his case from the mountainous outskirts of Bergamo. If, in sixteenth-century Venice, reading was located between silence and sound, this was even more true for the Bergamasque printer, who positioned his bookstore near St Mark's by the Rio della Canonica, which provides an aquatic entrance to Doge's Palace, with a rudimentary image of Hercules functioning as the shop's sign.²² A lesser-known figure in the printing trade, he still appeared in a record of April 27, 1572, documenting a reunion of the book-guild dedicated to establishing new rules for workers of the press, in which Bordogna served as a treasurer alongside fellow printer Francesco Rampazetto, who was then prior of the guild.²³ Bordogna's financial collaboration with Rampazetto is important for Ruscelli and his book of secrets, as we will see shortly. By the early 1570s, anyway, Bordogna's reputation and his editorial output were progressively put to the service of a vein of communal identity and celebration in the wake of the Holy League victory against the Ottoman fleet;²⁴ this is perhaps better seen in Bordogna's continuous interest for the kind of multilingualism pioneered by the playwrights Ruzante and Andrea Calmo, which was in its own way a clear celebratory gesture toward the local, linguistic richness of Venice.²⁵ Such editorial trend culminated in another fortunate anthology of poetry, *The Caravan*, edited in 1573 by Modesto Pino, including a selection in Venetian dialect and a 'transmutation', in Ludovico Dolce's fashion, of the first canto of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*.²⁶ Back in 1555, however, and before Lepanto, Girolamo Ruscelli could not have known that Bordogna's caravan would recall the centrality of land routes to the East for Venice's economy or that the mountaineer from Bergamo would later become a patriotic trumpet. But, linguistic parades and triumphs aside, it must have been clear to him – who came from the Spanish Kingdom of Naples – that by decloaking the secrets of nature he was implicitly authorizing their grafting into Venice's printing history and its body politic.

It is instructive, I submit, to reflect further on how a Bergamasque immigrant at the outset of a small-scale printing career came to collaborate with Ruscelli, who by then was already one of the city's busiest editors, as well as linguist, polygrapher, geographer and emblem-maker. First of all, the 1555 edition of Ruscelli's book of secrets was attributed to a fictional priest from Piedmont; that the experimental collection appeared pseudonymously was only a sensory omen of more concealment to come.²⁷ Ruscelli knew he needed to be prudent about publishing secrets to prevent troubles for his friends in Naples – former fellows of the *Accademia Segreta*, a laboratory or common house of experiments. Anonymity was required since the

academy was disbanded in 1547, possibly closed down by the Spanish viceroy Pedro of Toledo, at the end of a simmering period of tension and tumult caused by Toledo's determination to curb the ambitions of the local nobility and their riots against the introduction of an Inquisition office in town.²⁸ A cloak of secrecy, moreover, was just the way in which many of these naturalist groups operated: Ruscelli's academy, for example, adopted elaborate rules to insure that its deliberations would remain secret.²⁹ In this respect, the choice of Bordogna's printing house was an almost ideal compromise. It afforded Ruscelli the service of a young, inexpensive bookman, who was also centrally located in Venice.

At the time when Ruscelli's book of secrets entered the printer's catalogue, as a grubby octavo edition, Bordogna's output was concentrated on several works coming from Ferrara: two epideictic *Orationes* – one in praise of civic harmony and the second in praise of Tuscan language – written by the courtier Lelio Manfredi,³⁰ and Mario Equicola's rhyming dictionary, the *Institutione al comporre in ogni sorta di rima*. Manfredi was conspicuous as the author of one of the most ubiquitous Spanish translations published in sixteenth-century Venice: Diego de San Pedro's *Cárcel de amor*,³¹ whose introduction to the lagoon was supported by Isabella Gonzaga of Mantua.³² As for the *Institutione*, it is very likely that Ruscelli, himself editor of Equicola and author of rhetorical manuals, supervised the edition; in fact, it is possible that this enterprise provided Ruscelli and Bordogna the first template for conversations concerning the publication of the book of secrets.

These tiny, seemingly erudite details are really crucial if one wants to situate the *Secreti* in its historical context and especially to understand how an avatar of courtly experimentalism had to come to terms with the tissues of a different intellectual milieu organized and mediated by print culture.³³ Different facets of the editorial work of busy polymaths like Ruscelli – rhetoric and natural philosophy, cosmography and map-making, advertising and correcting – cannot be artificially severed, whatever our current division of academic labour dictates. From this point of view, the aforementioned collaboration between the printers Bordogna and Rampazetto is very significant. As many other music printers, Rampazetto's press flourished during the 1560s, which is roughly the same age of the first diffusion of books of secrets in print. Jane Bernstein has observed how for some of his musical activities Rampazetto worked as a co-printer of the more experienced house of Scotto, a crucial atelier in the history of the Venetian press.³⁴ The Bordogna house should be properly seen as a subset of this larger network of printers. From one house to another, it was not only personnel that moved, but also concrete woodblocks and other typographical materials, which represented a valuable form of capital: this is the case of a vignette of the Trojan horse from Scotto's 1545 edition of Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*, which Rampazetto reuses in his 1560 edition of Virgil's *Aeneid*,³⁵ and of a floriated 'S' that reappears in his 1554 edition of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* as well as in another edition to which I now turn. This is an inadequately studied collection of 'secrets' on perfumes and dyers, printed by Rampazetto in 1560 with the title *Notandissimi secreti de l'arte profumatoria* and containing also a practical illustration on how to use a furnace (see figure 2).³⁶

The immediate conclusion is that Ruscelli's publishing contract for his book of secrets was neither an isolated phenomenon nor a casual one, and in a few years Venetian readers went from Bordogna to Rampazetto, as from the older *Secreti* to the *Notandissimi secreti*. This effect of juxtaposition and saturation is at once a typical feature of the Venetian marketplace in print at mid-century, and a specific currency, to use a term by Elaine Leong, of its medical sector.³⁷ In the same cluster of preoccupations one should also consider many other editions, whose printers or financial sponsors were part of the same urban network of Girolamo Ruscelli or, at the very least, conversant with him. For the sake of brevity, I will only cite two major examples. The first is a collection of pharmacopeia, the *Ossevationi di Girolamo Calestani nel comporre gli antidoti, et medicamenti, che piu [sic] si costumano in Italia*, which receives eight new editions between 1562 and 1589 and is relevant to our discourse because the printer, Francesco de' Franceschi (also known as Francesco the Senese) collaborated with Ruscelli and printed (in quarto) his tract *Le imprese illustri*. The second is *Gli ornamenti delle donne*, written by the doctor Giovanni Marinelli with a female readership in mind and also printed by Francesco de' Franceschi in 1562.³⁸

Given this wide-spread scenario in the immediate aftermath of Ruscelli's fortunate collection, it comes as no surprise that, soon after 1555, financial speculators and investors flocked to reprint his book of secrets. The first of them was the printer Comin da Trino, who was an expert in technical textbooks, with a typography near S. John Chrysostom in Cannareggio, and a frequent collaborator in the greater orbit of Giolito.³⁹ By 1563 Ruscelli's book of secrets reached Spain. A royal physician of the emperor Philip II, Diego Santiago Olivares, prepared a translation in Zaragoza based on Bordogna's first edition, whose simple title-page with the front of a Greek temple introduced the experimental anthology to colonial readers in the New World for decades.⁴⁰ At this juncture, the transnational diffusion of Ruscelli's collection paralleled and rivalled, in a sense, the international channels of spice and medical confections originating from the lagoon.

In 1567 a revised collection of *Secreti nuovi* was printed by the heirs of Sessa. For the first time, the book appeared under the author's real name and with a dedication by Francesco Sansovino, who fondly recalls Ruscelli's alchemic pursuits as a token of their mutual affection. By 1567, the features of Ruscelli's proficiency had been duly acknowledged by Venice's leading intellectuals. Ludovico Dolce promptly discharged the obligations of friendship in 1561, when he honoured Ruscelli by including him in the list of learned men at the beginning of the Fourth canto of the *Trasformationi*, his adaptation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, then at its sixth reprint. In his 1562 collection of *Imprese*, Dolce also unpacked the name of Ruscelli, meaning 'creeks' in Italian, as the skilful roots of a prosperous tree; but this admiring, euphemistic emblem came only after the meteoric success of Ruscelli's translation of Ptolemy's *Geography*,⁴¹ when his newly-drawn maps were the talk of Venice and it became impossible for Dolce to excoriate Ruscelli at great length or to create a hostile environment for him among the press's competing entourage, as he did more effectively in other cases.

It is important to dwell on these printing rivalries in the history of production of occult knowledge, for this field was orchestrated by the issue of credibility. It was,

at least in part, because he was frustrated by the inability to see his scientific writings into print during his years in Naples, and worried by the relative lack of success of his subsequent literary projects, that Ruscelli decided to persevere in seeking publication for his secrets. In this sense, credibility and popularity were just two faces of the same coin – two intertwined facets deriving from the overarching necessity of every printed author to double himself as a freelance scholar. The situation that Ruscelli found in Venice did nothing but intensify such awareness. Here it would be enough to recall two illustrious examples, that of Francesco Sansovino and of Ludovico Dolce, who came to fulfil and symbolize, respectively, the role of the city's 'popular' historian and the self-appointed arbiter of taste.⁴² Like Ruscelli, Sansovino was not Venetian by birth, but could count on the powerful backing of Gabriel Giolito's printing house, and on his father's acclaimed and state-funded renovation of Venice's architecture. As for Dolce, the fact that he was singled out, among Pietro Aretino's associates, for his 'quick' and 'fertile' intellect demonstrates that the Venetian world of the *poligraf*, which Ruscelli was so eager to tap into, was still determined by and large by ideals of prolific production, marketing, and *prestezza*, or speed in execution.⁴³

In a famous letter to Benedetto Varchi (15 May, 1555), Ludovico Dolce reacts to Ruscelli's book of secrets by unleashing what seems, at first glance, a petty humanistic exercise of invective. In truth, Dolce has the subtler plan to deflect Ruscelli's scientific efforts into a parodic catalogue of trades, a miniature encyclopaedia of distorted professions. Ruscelli is seen there as a pedantic part-timer of the pen, who "after a thousand ridiculous remedies typical of a charlatan... has finally been reduced to the art of pimping" to make his daily bread.⁴⁴ For all his sarcasm, Dolce shows a remarkable awareness of Ruscelli's career: an underground brothel is the final stage of a long journey in which the experimental workshop of the secrets was relocated from Naples to Venice, via Rome; and while Dolce may not oppose the idea that secret crafts became public in the early modern period, in his vitriolic anti-Ruscelli letter the printed word is synonymous with prostitution and commodification. It is quite possible that Dolce was aware of a most unusual arrangement that Ruscelli offered the printer Plinio Pietrasanta to live in the same apartment, which he did from 1553 and 1557, and to print his works from the basement in exchange of a salary. If it is so, then the well-informed Dolce took the sting of his pun on printing as pimping to retort against Ruscelli the author's own catoptric fascination, his mastery of riddles and ciphers.⁴⁵

Dolce's careful chastising elucidates, in a reverse fashion, how earlier in the 1550s Girolamo Ruscelli lost no time trying to maximize the scholarly yield out of his well-publicized literary curiosities. There are further observations to be made, which are useful to connect, once again, Ruscelli's editorial zeal with his knowledge of natural philosophy, and allow us to set up a certain episode in the history of Venetian Petrarchism as an immediate prelude to the publication of the book of secrets. At some point early in the decade here in exam, Ruscelli suggested the printer Domenico Giglio to adopt as his printing device the image of a crow and a scorpion, taken from Andrea Alciato's fortunate collection of emblems (where it is the no. 173) and symbolic of revenge.⁴⁶ It was Ruscelli's retaliation against Dolce, but especially Giglio's challenge to Giolito, the employer of Dolce. Between 1550 and 1553 both

Giglio and Giolito had advertised three Petrarch editions with different, and equally distinguished, commentaries (Dolce, Vellutello and Gesualdo). These three editions were recognizable by their different book-format. This operation, though, amounted to a spectacular yet ultimately detrimental commercial war – it was impossible to say which copy reacted to which. For the last of his editions, Giglio recklessly decided to reprint the arresting woodblock, a sumptuous title-page with a double portrait of Petrarch and Laura, which had already been used previously in Venice,⁴⁷ but without calculating possible material losses. The consequences of this financial speculation were disastrous. The printer then enlisted his brother's help in a desperate attempt to revive the atelier's aggressive logic of competition against the vast Giolito firm. Significantly, the two Giglio, Domenico the elder and Geronimo, tried to carve a niche for themselves in the Spanish book trade,⁴⁸ an area in which Venetian urban networks hailed Giolito's editions to be an absolute benchmark, but their commercial scheme failed and brought them to the brink of bankruptcy.

The pivotal role that Girolamo Ruscelli played in the controversies surrounding the commentaries to Petrarch and in the competition between the printing firms of Giglio and Giolito should be properly underlined. Ever a careful observer of architectural conventions in print, Ruscelli revealed in 1554 his awareness of the importance that temple-devices had achieved in title-pages. This was the year in which, right after he had already edited a posthumous edition of Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*, Ruscelli decided to issue another mammoth anthology with a virtually unprecedented number of pages, the *Tempio alla signora donna Giovanna d'Aragona*.⁴⁹ While it ostensibly eulogizes Giovanna Colonna as a goddess, Ruscelli's *Tempio* is packed with an all-star cast that was supposed to attract lustre and take advantage of a diffused sense of saturation in the printed marketplace of similar 'galleries' and 'theatres'. After all, the sales of anthologies of contemporary poetry had reached their peak by the mid-1550s. Contrary to the writer's own expectations, however, and despite a first wave of subscriptions sold to buyers before the book hit stands and stalls – possibly through a patient word-of-mouth catering in retailing areas like the Rialto – the volume turned out to be a flop. When seen one next to the other, Giglio's near-bankruptcy and Ruscelli's complete miscalculation were the circumstances that immediately forced Ruscelli to accelerate his plans for the publication of his book of secrets and for making it as profitable as he could possibly manage.

As I suggested before, the *Tempio* and the book of secrets are similar, and should be accounted for together. They are printed representations of a collective trend toward openness, sociability and publicity; and the latter is the financial counterpoint to the former. Their pages extending out to citizen and patrician hands alike, these two books also herald a new spatial framework, in print, for the early modern museum, which, according to normative descriptions and available definitions used by contemporaries, oscillated at the time between a gallery of languages and a room of promenade (*stanza da passeggiare*), where one kept pictures and things of value. Ruscelli placed the potential of a 'museum in motion' under the sign of curiosity. That such notion of museum failed in literature but not in medicine shows how Ruscelli captured a transformation in the idea of collecting *before* humanistic convention fully reflected this change, but *after* a growing self-consciousness of those who visited

gentlemen's houses, pharmacies and barber-shops had already made mastery of nature an appreciated cultural possession.⁵⁰

Conclusions: Galleries of Words

To sum up, one of the findings of this research derives from my insistence on the interrelated nature of Ruscelli's editorial labour and the palimpsestic characteristics of his book of secrets – where the adjective 'palimpsestic', though relevant in studies of scribal culture, stands here as a signpost for activities of both textual juxtaposition and historical supersession in the age of the printed book.⁵¹ In its Neapolitan years, Ruscelli's house of secrets was, at least in part, a 'pansophic', represented by Salomon's utopian vision of the type later House in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*; yet it was because of Venetian networks and artisanal knowledge at the street-level that this laboratory was diffused in the way it was shaped. This newly urban identity impressed upon Ruscelli's experimental society by the 1555 printed edition made it a house of crafts, much like a perfume shop in Venice. If one breaks down the typology of the originary 350 recipes, later implemented to 1.245 in the posthumous edition, it is evident that the largest cluster of secrets involves perfumes and soap, the second paints, pigments and dyes, and then skin and facial treatments. Contrary to the 1567 collection, which mostly manufactures chemical remedies, the 1555 edition bears the mark of a workshop of beauty and, as such, the distinct effect of a prominent Venetian industry – a dizzying, exhilarating, maddening effect. One could argue as well that Ruscelli almost wanted to use printing as magic, but I think that the most relevant conclusion to be drawn suggests that the way in which he emphasized parallels between sings of language, cosmos, and experimental technique gave the citizens who inspected his printed recipes the ability to experience an illusion of intimacy they had formerly enjoyed upon entering upon an apothecary's room, filled with wardrobes and cabinets of curiosities.



Figure 1. Giovanni Palatino, emblematic sonnet from the *Libro nuovo d'imparare a scrivere* (Rome: Benedetto Giunta, 1540), Newberry Library, Chicago (Photo of the author).

At the centre of Ruscelli's Venetian speculation was always the question of the 'museum' and its ability to create patterns. For a humanist who wanted to celebrate the power of words, spinning etymologies and deciphering genealogies only increased an esoteric, antiquarian indebtedness to the past; a collection of secrets organized as a sort of theatre in print – according to the same principles already experimented during Ruscelli's long dealings with Petrarchism – would simply prove to be the best genre to accommodate all of these transformations. By all this, I simply would like to stress how Ruscelli's book of secrets, a product of the first wave of travel and exploration, linked map-making and occult knowledge under the same aegis of curiosity, encyclopaedism, and geographic quest. In this regard, too, Dolce's and Ruscelli's bickering did nothing but anticipate Galileo's caustic labelling of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* as an 'insignificant study' (*studietto*), which he judged inferior to the 'royal gallery' (*galleria regia*) formed by Ariosto's poem. As Paula Findlen notes, this is the same gallery that had replaced the humanistic study as the normative form of the museum, which means that the books of secrets could be profitably studied in terms of synoptic organization and from the point of view of how they reflected the conflicting jurisdictional claims of printing, scanning, walking, and note-taking upon them.

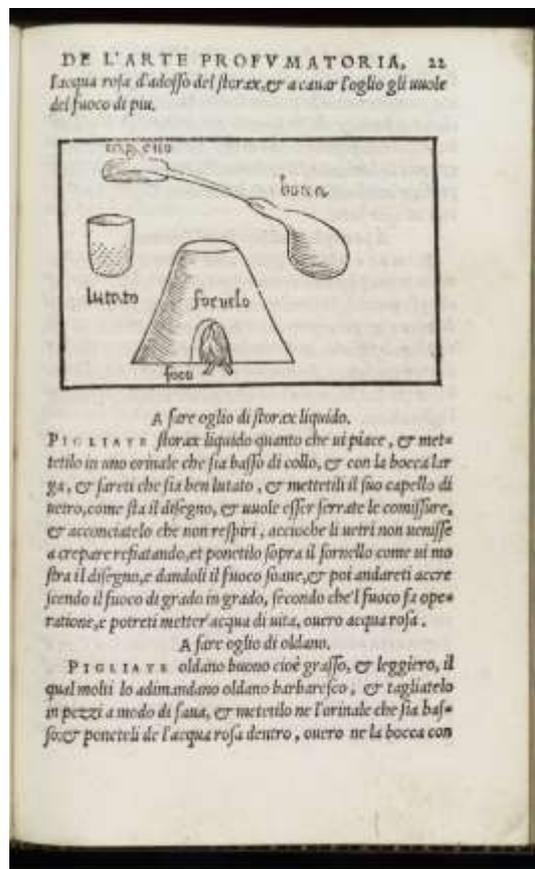


Figure 2. Illustration of a furnace from *Notandissimi secreti* (Venice: Francesco Rampazetto, 1560), courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

Acknowledgements. Many thanks to Seth Kimmel, Pier Mattia Tommasino, Daniel Hershenzon and Jacomien Prins for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article, and also to Cesare Pastorino and Dana Jalobeanu for their encouragement during different stages of the work. Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the audience of the American Association for the History of Medicine, particularly Vincent Van Roy, at the 2011 meeting in Philadelphia, where I presented parts of this research.

References

- ¹ In Eamon, W. and Peheau, F., "The Accademia Segreta of Girolamo Rucelli: A Sixteenth-Century Italian Scientific Society," *Isis* 75 (1984): 327-342, Rucelli is described as someone who "continually experimented on all the secrets that we could recover from printed books or from ancient and modern manuscripts" (339-40). See also Eamon's later and indispensable monograph *Science and the Secrets of Nature. Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), esp. 134-167.
- ² Shanahan, J., "The Indecorous Virtuoso: Margaret Cavendish's Experimental Spaces", *Genre* 35 (2002): 221-252, offers a suggestive, albeit late example, of early modern science as a "spatial amalgam of stage and laboratory" (226).
- ³ Eamon, W., *The Professor of Secrets. Mystery, Medicine, and Alchemy in Renaissance Italy* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2010). On the linguistic intermediaries of the book trade, see Grafton, A., *The Culture of Correction in Renaissance Europe* ("Panizzi Lectures," British Library, 2012).
- ⁴ There is no need to discuss here the larger issue of the relation between the secrets and the 'disenchantment of the world', to put it with Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1930]; repr. London: Routledge, 1992, 61), though it is clear that printing and polygraphy are in themselves a commercial trading of expertise and an instrument to think early science; for a persuasive argument about the press in a polyhistor's world, Nick Wilding, "Publishing the Polygraphy. Manuscript, Instrument, and Print in the Work of Athanasius Kircher", in *Athanasius Kircher. The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, ed. P. Findlen (London: Routledge, 2004), 283-296.
- ⁵ Eamon, W., "How to Read a Book of Secrets", in *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500-1800*, eds., E. Leong and A. Rankin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 23-46.
- ⁶ Since the printed edition demanded in the preface to be understood "... non solamente da grandi huomini per dottrina, & da gran Signori, ma ancora da pouere femine, d'artegiani, da contadini, & da ogni sorte di persone." Piemontese, A., *I Secreti del reverendo donno Alessio Piemontese. opera utile et necessaria universalmente a ciascuno* (Venice 1555, fol. A2v).
- ⁷ Eamon, W., (2011), 45.
- ⁸ A strong argument about the mutual influence of recipe-like format in the printing industry and in the circulation of experimental knowledge could be constructed for Venice, too, by way of analogy to what Peter Dear, "Totius in verba: Rhetoric and Authority in the Early Royal Society", *Isis* 76/2 (1985): 145-161, has already observed.
- ⁹ De Vivo, F., *Information and Communication in Venice. Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 21-22.
- ¹⁰ This edition was printed by Benedetto Giunta on behalf of Baldassare Cartolari from Perugia; see Casamassima, E., *Trattati di scrittura del Cinquecento italiano* (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1966), 9-15.
- ¹¹ Bolzoni, L., *The Gallery of Memory. Literary and Iconographic Models in the Age of the Printing Press* (Toronto: University Of Toronto Press, 2001), 86-89.
- ¹² On the fetishistic imagination see *The Body in Parts. Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. D. Hillman and C. Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), esp. 81-107.

¹³ Ashworth, Jr. W. B., “Natural history and the emblematic world view”, in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, eds. D. C. Lindberg and R. S. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 303-332: 312.

¹⁴ The relationship between man and the divine informed Seneca’s justification of undertaking of natural history: Seneca, L. A., *Natural Questions*, trans. Harry M. Hine (Chicago: University OF Chicago Press, 2010), 6-13.

¹⁵ As Davids, K., “Craft Secrecy in Europe in the Early Modern Period: A Comparative View”, *Early Science and Medicine* 10/3 (2005): 341-348, reminded us, the issue of secrecy versus openness is a hybrid theme, to be handled at the intersection of intellectual history, technology, and social life. See also Long, P. O., *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship. Technical Arts and the Culture of Knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), esp. 11-15.

¹⁶ Blair, A. M., *Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Appadurai, A., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Ever since Elizabeth Eisenstein had illustrated, in her classic study *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, of 1979, the stability imposed on the written word by print, scholars have been reluctant to concern themselves with the transnational features of the printer’s craft, but this was a significant development, and certainly crucial in the case of Ruscelli, who made a living as a map-maker: see now Roberts, S., *Printing a Mediterranean World: Florence, Constantinople, and the Renaissance of Geography* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Harkness, D. E., *The Jewel House. Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 181-210, emphasizes an affinity between early modern cities and activities such as surveying, bookkeeping, and note-taking; see also Shapin, S. and Schaffer, S., *Leviathan and the Airpump. Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 20-24.

¹⁹ Yeo, R., *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

²⁰ Bianco, M., “Il Tempio a Geronima Colonna d’Aragona, ovvero la conferma di un archetipo”, in *I più vaghi e più soavi fiori. Studi sulle antologie di lirica del Cinquecento*, eds. M. Bianco and E. Strada (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2001), 147-196.

²¹ Cioni, A., “Sigismondo Bordogna”, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, v. 12 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1971), 509-10.

²² For street designation and shop signs, see Gordon, A., “‘If my sign could speak’: The Signboard and the Visual Culture of Early Modern London”, *Early Theatre* 8/1 (2005): 35-51.

²³ Cioni, A., (1971), 510. On the role of the book guild, see Armstrong, L., “Benedetto Bordon, ‘Miniator’, and Cartography in Early Sixteenth-Century Venice”, *Imago Mundi* 48 (1996): 65-92, and Romano, D., “Aspects of Patronage in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Venice”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 46/4 (1993): 712-733.

²⁴ Wilson, B., *The World in Venice. Print, the City, and Early Modern Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 140-185, discusses the effect of this momentous Mediterranean victory in the city’s production of political pamphlets and fashion plates.

²⁵ Andrea Calmo’s collection of “fisherman poems”, the *Bizzarre, faconde et ingeniose rime pescatorie*, first published by Bordogna in 1559, was a particularly steady success. Shiff, J., “*Lingua Zerga* in the Grimani Banquet Plays”, *Italica* 66/4 (1989): 399-411, discusses a theatrical production that entertained Doge Marino Grimani and whose texts were produced in print by Francesco Rampazetto.

²⁶ Terpening, R. H., *Lodovico Dolce: Renaissance Man of Letters* (Toronto: University of Toronto

Press, 1997), 18-19, with observations on Ruscelli himself.

²⁷ On these conventions of publication, see Rhodes, D. E., *Silent Printers. Anonymous Printing at Venice in the Sixteenth Century* (London: British Library, 1995).

²⁸ Eamon, W. and Peheau, F., (1984): 327-342.

²⁹ On the 'appropriate time' to reveal secrets, see Eamon, W., (2001), 29.

³⁰ While the *Orations* ultimately consist in a plagiarism from the Roman reformer Aonio Paleario, this edition proves the strong cultural continuity in Venice of the type of vernacular evangelism which was championed by Antonio Brucioli a generation earlier, and sustained by printers such as the Arrivabene brothers. On Brucioli, see Barbieri, E., *Le Bibbie italiane del Quattrocento e del Cinquecento* (Milan: Editrice Bibliografica, 1991), and Cummings, A. M., "Musical References in Brucioli's *Dialogi* and Their Classical and Medieval Antecedents", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71/2 (2010): 169-190; on the Arrivabene industry writes Tommasino, P. M., *L'Alcorano di Macometto. Storia di un libro del Cinquecento Europeo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), esp. 59-85, where he identifies a hub of 'movable' encyclopaedism as the basis of linguistic and historiographic orientalism.

³¹ Flightner, J. A., "The Popularity of the *Carcel de Amor*", *Hispania* 47 (1964): 475-478; Bouza A., F. J., *Communication, Knowledge and Memory in Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), uses this epistolary novel to make suggestive remarks on the scribal intimacy projected by its textual apparatus – an argument which resonates with my own conclusions, in this essay, about Ruscelli's awareness of temple-devices.

³² It would be important to examine in further detail how a group of Spanish *conversos* in Ferrara took advantage of the Venetian press, since their scientific and literary interests converged on a number of texts of which Ruscelli's *Secreti* was integral part.

³³ Rankin, A., "Becoming an Expert Practitioner: Court Experimentalism and the Medical Skills of Anna of Saxony (1532-1585)", *Isis* 98/1 (2007): 23-53.

³⁴ Bernstein, J. A., "Financial Arrangements and the Role of Printer and Composer in Sixteenth-Century Italian Music Printing", *Acta Musicologica* 63/1 (1991): 39-56, esp. 43-7.

³⁵ See Kallendorf, C., *Virgil and the Myth of Venice: Books and Readers in the Italian Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³⁶ On this tradition see Edlestein, S., "Dyeing Fabrics in Sixteenth-Century Venice", *Technology and Culture* 7/3 (1966): 395-397, and Smith, P. H. and Beentjes, T., "Nature and Art, making and Knowing: Reconstructing Sixteenth-Century Life-Casting Techniques", *Renaissance Quarterly* 63/1 (2010): 128-179, esp. 131-2 (also about Ruscelli).

³⁷ Leong, E., "Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge in the Early Modern 'Medical Marketplace'", in *Medicine and Market in England and Its Colonies, c. 1450 – c. 1850*, eds. M. Jenner and P. Wallis (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 133-152. For currency as a vehicle of editorial success, see Grendler, P. F., "Form and Function in Italian Renaissance Popular Books", *Renaissance Quarterly* 46/3 (1993): 451-85.

³⁸ On Marinelli, Cox, V., "The Single Self: Feminist Thought and the Marriage Market in Early Modern Venice", *Renaissance Quarterly* 48/3 (1995): 513-51. Schiebinger, L., "Gender in Early Modern Science", in *History and the Disciplines. The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. D. R. Kelley (Rochester: The University of Rochester Press, 1997), 319-334, offers a seminal research on women as consumers of science, to be integrated with Leong, E., "Making Medicines in the Early Modern Household", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 82/1 (2008): 145-168.

³⁹ On this printer see Michielin, C., "Il processo a Comin da Trino e Andrea Calmo", *Quaderni veneti* 22 (1995): 9-30, Veneziani, P., "La marca tipografica di Comin da Trino", *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 65 (1990): 162-73, and Richardson, B., *Printing, Writers and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 34-35. The standard treatment of the Giolito

press is Nuovo, A. and Coppens, C., *I Giolito e la stampa nell'Italia del XVI secolo* (Genève: Droz, 2005).

⁴⁰ Eamon, W., (1994), 140, lists a staggering number of editions and translations of the original book by Alessio Piemontese; see also Rey Bueno, M., “Primeras ediciones en castellano de los libros secretos de Alejo Piamontes”, *Pecia Complutense* 2/2 (2005): 26-34. Portuondo, M. M., *Secret Science. Spanish Cosmography and the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) writes about the transatlantic dimension as well.

⁴¹ The volume was printed by Valgrisi in 1561 and republished a year later in Spanish. See Fahy, C., “The Venetian Ptolemy of 1548”, in *The Italian Book 1465-1800. Studies presented to Dennis E. Rhodes on his 70th Birthday*, ed. D.V. Reidy (London: British Library, 1993), 89-115.

⁴² See Zilli, L., “Francesco Sansovino compilatore della *Historia universale de Turchi*”, in *L'Europa e il Levante nel Cinquecento*, ed. L. Zilli (Padova: Unipress, 2001), 49-63; on the *renovatio urbis*, Jonhson, E. J., “Portal of Empire and Wealth: Jacopo Sansovino's Entrance to the Venetian Mint”, *The Art Bulletin* 86/3 (2004): 430-458.

⁴³ Conley, T., *Tintoretto: Tradition and Identity* (London: Reaktion, 1999), 69-99, still presents the best discussion and recapitulation of these ideals.

⁴⁴ I am using the translation of Terpening, *Lodovico Dolce*, 18, who in turn depends from Trovato, P., *Con ogni diligenza corretto. La stampa e le revisioni editoriali dei testi letterari italiani, 1470-1570* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991).

⁴⁵ Since Pietrasanta's small underground typography carried the mark of the Virtue (in alternance with another salamander image), Dolce's insisting joke on Ruscelli's 'virtues' appears to be further dismissive of the humanist's low-life printing allies.

⁴⁶ Selig, K. L., “The Spanish Translations of Alciato's *Emblemata*”, *MLN* 70 (1955): 354-359.

⁴⁷ It was the merchant Giovanni Battista Pederzano, deeply involved in commerce with Spain, who had originally financed it in 1549.

⁴⁸ Among the titles published are Antonio Guevara's *Menosprecio*, a supplement to Pedro Mexía's *Silva de varia lección*, and a so-called 'fifth book' of the *Amadís de Gaula* cycle, *Le prodezze di Splandian*, attributed to Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo. See Pallotta, A., “Venetian Printers and Spanish Literature in Sixteenth-Century Italy”, *Comparative Literature* 43/1 (1991): 20-42.

⁴⁹ For these anthologies and the female salons of early modern Venice, see Robin, D., *Publishing Women: Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁵⁰ My observations blend here with the classic treatment of 'sites of knowledge' by Findlen, P., *Possessing Nature. Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 97-150. For a new interpretation of the Venetian dynamics of collecting, which de-emphasizes the traditional notion of 'patrician emulation', see also Schmitter, M., “Virtuous Riches: The Bricolage of *Cittadini* Identities in Early-Sixteenth-Century Venice”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 57/3 (2004): 908-69.

⁵¹ For an intriguing discussion of palimpsests see Harris, J. G., *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2009), esp. 13-19 and 150-52.