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Writing for Women at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century

Hugh Platt's *Delightes for Ladies*

by

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Writing for Women at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century

Hugh Platt's *Delightes for Ladies* *

Doina-Cristina Rusu **

*This article analyses the books of secrets and recipes written for women in the early modern period, taking as a case study Hugh Platt's *Delightes for Ladies*. By comparing this book with the more famous *The Jewell House of Art and Nature* composed by the same author for a general audience, several conclusions can be drawn. First, there is a gender demarcation in both the form and content of the books: while women were expected to put the recipes into practice, men were assumed to be interested in various other aspects of transforming nature, not only the very practical one. Second, through these books of recipes women were introduced to the experimental practices of the Elizabethan period. Even if simplified and devoid of the more philosophical elements, the recipes contained in these household books encompass the same type of practical natural knowledge and techniques for changing nature.*



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1. Introduction

In the second half of the sixteenth century, a new kind of literature started to appear: books dedicated to a female audience, whether religious, fictional or practical guides. Although the importance of the emergence of these types of books in regard to gender studies has been previously noted¹, current scholarship lacks a comparison between the books dedicated to the general public (particularly men) and the books dedicated exclusively to women. The current essay aims to start filling this gap. Because it had been argued that the most important changes appear in the field of the books of recipes², the two books used as a case study are Hugh Platt's *Delightes for Ladies* (1600) and *The Jewell House of Art and Nature* (1594). There are several reasons behind this choice. First, compared with the religious or fictional texts, the books of recipes (part of the practical guides) were very much connected to natural knowledge and experimental science, fields which were seen as exclusively governed by men. Second, Platt was one of the most important figures of the Elizabethan science and his *Delightes for Ladies* was one of the first books published for a feminine audience³. Third, having the same author, some of the recipes coincide, and thus, though a comparison between the two books, one can study the exact transformations of the texts when transferred to the context of a book written for women. Further, these transformations can bring us valuable information on the one hand on the way in which male contemporaries perceived women,

¹ For a general discussion about books published for women in the early modern period see Suzanne Hull, *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1988) and Maureen Bell, "Women writing and women written" in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. John Bernard and D.F. McKenzie, vol. IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 431-450.

² According to Lynette Hunter, Platt's *Delightes for Ladies* (1600), together with Markham's *Country countenments of the English Huswife* (1615), presage the "construction of separate books for audiences of different sexes, subsequently printed as one" and represent "a significant development in the role of the book" (Lynette Hunter, "Books for Daily Life: Household, Husbandry, Behaviour" in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. John Bernard, D.F. McKenzie, and Maureen Bell, volume IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 527).

³ Gilly Lehmann states that at the end of the sixteenth century there were 12 titles and 29 editions on the market (*The English Housewife. Cookery Books, Cooking and Society in the Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2003), 30).

their interest and contributions to natural knowledge, and on the other hand on the roles and gender separation in the household.

But there is another way in which the comparison can be used, this time by focusing on the similarities between the two texts. In this context, one can see how the books of recipes introduced women in experimental philosophy and, if we take the particular example of distillations, in alchemy. It was argued that natural knowledge, in its transition from the medieval monasteries and universities to the modern academies and laboratories passed through the household, which was in the first place a feminine space¹. In drawing these conclusions, Deborah Harkness referred to the wife of the mathematician John Dee. However, I consider there were few women who, like Jane Dee, got in touch with natural knowledge through the occupation of their husbands. Instead I claim that the majority of them interacted with science through the books of recipes they were using for the daily activities.

By analysing the transformations, it will be argued that there are two types of differences: differences concerning the content, and differences concerning the form. Concerning the difference in the form, the second announced difference, it will be shown that all the features of the *Delightes for Ladies* leads to the concept of enjoyment, while *The Jewell House* seems to be more directed toward practice and knowledge, though in fact the proper compositions of the two books were very similar. Concerning the content, there is a general gender demarcation: the majority of the activities considered to be specific for men are not to be found among the recipes from the *Delightes for Ladies* or in household books written for women in general². On the other hand, there is a great number of recipes which coincide, dealing with distillations, cooking, or preserving food, which are specific feminine activities. This leads to two possible conclusions. First, the fact that Platt (as well as other authors) included such

¹ Deborah Harkness, "Managing an Experimental Household: The Dees of Mortlake and the Practice of Natural Philosophy", *Isis*, 88/2 (1997): 247–62. The same idea of the household as a place to science can be found in Alix Cooper's "Homes and Households", where natural inquiry is presented as a family project, which includes women, children, domestic servants, etc. (see Alix Cooper, "Homes and Households", in *Cambridge History of Science*, ed. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 224–237).

² Activities such as gardening, hunting, fishing, making tools or working with metals were clearly male.

topics as comfits, cookery and household management in the books of secrets and recipes might cast doubt on the division of household roles and knowledge, as Leong and Rankin claimed¹. Second—and this is what I will argue—the gender division is much more subtle than a demarcation in the topics. My thesis is that Platt’s general books (such as *The Jewell House of Art and Nature*) are written on two distinct levels. Certain recipes are written for women, and Platt is clear on this point. Nevertheless, the fact that there are differences between the way in which recipes are recorded in the two types of books lends support to the conclusion that those elements which disappear when the recipes are transferred to a book for women were, in fact, intended for male readers. In this way, the recipes were written to be put in practice by women, while the more theoretical fragments were dedicated to the male readers as a framework for explaining or further investigating various phenomena. Such a reading reveals that there was no change in the household roles of men and women in the early modern period, but the emphasis should be placed on the way in which the author expected the reader to use the content of such a book with respect to their gender role, in other words, with respect to their capacities and interests as constructed in the Elizabethan society. While women are given only the necessary information to put the recipes into practice, male readers were perceived by the author as being more interested in the theoretical framework, and also in the possible development of various recipes, both aspect having the function to lead to a more profound knowledge of nature.

However, if the presence of the recipes on topics specific to women in the general books were questioned, little or no attention had been given to the presence of the recipes related to mail activities, such as distillations, in the household books. If the books of recipes introduced women to experimental practices, it means that the relation between women and Elizabethan science should be re-evaluated². This paper will especially focus on this issue and will

¹ Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin, “Introduction: Secrets and Knowledge”, in *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500-1800*, ed. Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin (Aldershot: Ashgate Publisher, 2011), 19.

² For example, Shapin argues that the man of science in the early modern period was “almost always male” and that “the system of exclusions that kept out the vast numbers of the unlettered also kept out all but a very few women” (Steven Shapin, “The Man of Science”, in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

show that even in the context of those specific transformations and gender roles concerning natural knowledge, the techniques used to change nature are similar or identical in the books of secrets written for women and in those written for men.

This analysis does not inform us of the ways in which women were involved in the production and transmission of knowledge¹, since this is not the aim of this article. Rather than having a pretention of exhaustively treating these topics, this paper offers insights into the manner by which their male contemporaries perceived women and their interests at the beginning of the modern period through writings that offered practical advice on households and how by the books of recipes they first had contact with the experimental practices of the Elizabethan period.

This article has four main parts. First I introduce Hugh Platt and the tradition of books of recipes which include two works, *The Jewell House of Art and Nature* and the *Delightes for Ladies*. In the following two sections, I shall provide a comparison between the two books with respect to their form and general content. In the last part of the article, I shall make a comparison between *The Jewell House of Art and Nature* and the *Delightes for Ladies* as regards their individual recipes. I shall present what I consider to be the most important two

2006), 179). Londa Schiebinger discusses the relation of women to science, but only in respect to the members of learned circles, to astronomy and to the production of natural histories, as employees of workshops and laboratories. She does not discuss the scientific practices they were supposed to perform on a daily basis as part of the household activities (see Londa Schiebinger, "Women of Natural knowledge", in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 192-205).

¹ This topic started to be of interest in the literature of the last years. Several studies discuss women's contribution to science through their manuscripts or published writings: Jennifer Stine, *Opening Closets: The Discovery of Household Medicine in Early Modern England* (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1996); Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton, eds., *Women, Science and Medicine 1500-1700: Mothers and Sisters of the Royal Society* (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 1997); Deborah E. Harkness, "Managing an Experimental Household":247-62; Lynette Hunter, "Books for Daily Life", 514-532; Susan Broomhall, *Women's Medical Work in Early Modern France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Alisha Rankin, "Becoming an Expert Practitioner: Court Experimentalism and the Medical Skills of Anna of Saxony (1532-85)", *Isis*, 98/1 (2007): 23-53; Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle, eds., *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Elaine Leong, "Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipe, Gender and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern English Household", *Centaurus* 55 (2013): 81-103, etc.

differences between the two books, namely, the exclusion of their more theoretical parts and their suggestions for further experimentation or establishing correct measurements.

2. Hugh Platt and the books of secrets and recipes

Hugh Platt (1552-1608) was one of the most important figures in Elizabethan science. Platt was part of a very complex network of investigators of the natural world—physicians, apothecaries, alchemists, metallurgists, herbalists, gardeners, glass makers, etc. His declared aim was the improvement of human life in a very difficult period, i.e., the famine of the 1590s. Platt’s books were collections of recipes from all these different domains. However, Platt was not only a collector of recipes, but a busy experimenter himself, and the owner of a shop where he used to sell several of his own ‘inventions’. His own printed books serve as a testimony to his prodigious pursuits, but so do the many books within his own library, which include annotations in the margins, and especially the great number of notebooks containing recipes, experimental reports, translations, list of queries, etc¹. Though relatively neglected in the secondary literature, Platt was a well-known writer in his time and a source for later natural philosophers, an emblematic actor on the stage of Elizabethan knowledge of the natural world².

¹ Taking notes and making annotations in the margins was a very important activity in the early modern world, which draw scholarly attention lately. On this see, for example, Ann Blair, “Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload ca. 1550-1700”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 11-28; Lorraine Daston, “Taking Note(s)”, *Isis* 95/3 (2004): 443-48; Ann Blair, “The Rise of Note-Taking in Early Modern Europe”, *Intellectual History Review*, 20/3 (2010): 303-316; Ann Blair, *Too Much to Know. Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), Katharine Park, “Observation in the Margins, 500-1500”, in *Histories of Scientific Observation*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lumbeck (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 15-44; Gianna Pomata, “Observation Rising: Birth of an Epistemic Genre, 1500-1650”, in *Histories of Scientific Observation*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lumbeck (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 45-80.

² There are a few studies analysing Platt’s writings, as well as the natural knowledge that allegedly results from them. Deborah Harkness’ *The Jewell House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) discusses Platt in the general context of Elizabethan science in the streets of London, and, furthermore, contends that Bacon stole Platt’s idea of science and made it into what is now considered “Baconian science” (see the final chapter of her book).

The Jewell House of Art and Nature, Platt's masterpiece, was one of the most widespread books of secrets in England in the early modern period.

Platt's books pertain to the genre of books of secrets and recipes. There were practical guides teaching the reader 'how-to', which became popular in the second half of the sixteenth century¹. These books were collections of recipes, offering advice on how to obtain various objects and substances useful in daily activities within the house or garden. Their intended audience was in general the lower aristocracy, artisans and craftsmen, but also citizens of the cities who needed to put in practice the various recipes contained in these books. Because their aim was to change and transform nature and were based on experimental practices, these books started to be seen as containing a kind of pre-scientific knowledge. One of the most discussed features of this genre is the relation between openness and secrecy, which distinguishes books of recipes and books of secrets respectively. Nevertheless, William Eamon argues that it is quite difficult to distinguish between these two genres, claiming that the main difference has more to do with the way in which the author presents his knowledge and its transmission, either as practical knowledge or as the disclosure of a secret, and not with the proper content of the books *per se*, which is very similar. Another distinction has to do with the presence of the experiments on distillation, which is specific to books of secrets, but less present in books of recipes because of its association with alchemy, an esoteric knowledge². This is why in

See also Malcolm Thick's monograph, *Hugh Platt. The Search for Useful Knowledge in Early Modern London* (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2010), and Ayesha Mukherjee's series of articles on Platt.

¹ On the books of secrets and recipes and the role they played in the history of science in the Renaissance and early modern period see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature. Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); *The Professor of Secrets. Mystery, Medicine and Alchemy in Renaissance Italy* (Washington: National Geographic Society, 2010); Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin, eds., *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500-1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

² As Eamon states: "In terms of content, there is in fact little that distinguishes this body of texts from the books of secrets, except that they were smaller and perhaps less pretentious. On closer inspection, however, there are some important differences. For one thing, alchemy (in particular, distillation) typically occupies a more prominent place in the books of secrets than in household recipe books. This is not to imply that alchemy is absent from the household recipe books. Yet, for the professors of secrets, alchemy was not just a tool but a means to experiment on nature; which leads to a second difference between the two genres: Books of secrets typically represented themselves as serving natural philosophical ends as well as utility" (Eamon, "How to Read a Book

what follows I shall use the terms ‘books of secrets’ and ‘books of recipes’ in an interchangeable way.

The household books, dedicated to women, belong to this genre¹. This form of literature that will become widespread only in the second half of the seventeenth century, which makes Platt’s *Delightes for Ladies* one of the first books in this type of literature. Household books contained recipes to make food, things necessary in the house (such as ink, soaps or perfumes) and medicines. Though it had been debated how much or whether women were involved in the production of all these things², I consider that substantial arguments had been brought to endorse the idea that women were involved in putting the household recipes into practice and this paper, though the comparison between the books written for men and those written for women, will bring more arguments for this claim.

Turning back to Platt’s writing, *Delightes for Ladies, to adorne their Persons, Tables, closets and distillatories with Beauties, banquets, perfumes and waters* was published in 1600 and went through more than twenty editions in the following fifty years³. The book was printed on relatively cheap paper, and because of

of Secrets”, in *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500-1800*, ed. Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin (Aldershot: Ashgate Publisher, 2011), 35).

¹ Lynette Hunter argued that the household books have three main sources: the Renaissance books of secrets for men, the husbandry and estate management books and the medieval books on food and diet (Lynette Hunter, “Women and Domestic Medicine. Ladies Experimenters 1570-1620”, in *Women, Science and Medicine 1500–1700: Mothers and Sisters of the Royal Society*, ed. Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 95-95).

² Mark Girouard suggests that from the Middle Ages until the seventeenth century women were not much involved in the household, except for nursemaids and laundresses (see Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House. A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), 27-28). Lehmann suggests that mistresses and upper servants prepared both confectionary and remedies, and probably women were involved in cookery as well (Gilly Lehmann, *The English Housewife*, 32-33).

³ The year of publication is not certain. However, the book was registered on October the 5th in the Stationer’s Register (See *A Transcript of Records*, vol. III, p. 148). Curiously enough, the name of the author is not recorded, but only Peter Short, the publisher, who registered the book. Starting from 1608, the book is bound together with *A closet for Ladies and Gentlewomen*. The book is anonymous, but few authors consider this book as pertaining to Platt, because in a few editions the two books have been bound together. As Johnna H. Holloway argued in the introduction to the modern edition of this book, it is very unlikely that Platt is the author of this second book (online edition at <http://medievalcookery.com>, 2011, 11-12). I shall not discuss this point in the article, but look only at the first edition of the *Delightes for Ladies*.

this it was probably affordable for low gentlewomen, and thus not only for the aristocracy¹. As well as the other books written by Platt, it can be said that the *Delightes* is a collection of recipes, with a practical aim, namely, to provide the reader 'how-to' knowledge. Both Malcolm Thick and Ayesha Mukherjee argue in favour of the idea that Platt's books cannot be included in the books of secrets tradition, since Platt's recipes have the intended function to unveil secrets which aim to improve human life². Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, on a few occasions, especially in *The Jewell House*, Platt does not wish to unveil some types of secrets³. However, this does not happen in the *Delightes*, and one of the causes might be the fact that the kind of knowledge on display was not the subject of craft knowledge, nor the wisdom of mysteries⁴.

¹ As Hunter noticed, "Although poorly printed, this duodecimo has decorative borders on every page, giving it an aesthetic appeal, and a good index to receipts, alphabetically arranged by ingredients with page numbers for each section. Although ostensibly addressed specifically to an aristocratic and gentrified audience it was presumably cheap enough to make it a practical and affordable book for women much lower down the social scale." (Lynette Hunter, "Books for Daily Life", 523).

² Thick's conclusion regarding the *Delightes* is that "this is not a book of secrets, rehashing untried recipes from other printed sources, nor it is a work based largely on classical authors. Platt's ideas come, in the main, from contemporary experience: his own, his friends' and those of tradespeople whose living depended on the success of the secrets they divulged to him" (Thick, "A Close Look at the Composition of Sir Hugh Platt's *Delightes for Ladies*," in *The English Cookery Book*, ed. Eileen White (Totnes: Prospect Books, 2004), 69). In the same register, Ayesha Mukherjee states, in analysing the way in which Platt changes the context of Della Porta's secrets, that "a secret utilized in an actual and current context was a secret demystified" and that, moreover, "the very structure of the rhetorical question replicates the process of disclosure" (Ayesha Mukherjee, "The Secrets of Sir Hugh Platt", in *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500-1800*, ed. Elaine Long and Alisha Rankin (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), p. 84).

³ For example, in a recipe on clarifying salad oil, Platt concludes by saying "I do know a means how to make deiection of the Lee or faeces of the best sallet oyle, that commeth ouer, whereby the same will become most pure and cleer, but I feare that Saturne would frown upon me (if without his leaue) I should so bodily entermeddle with his charge" (*The Jewell House*, C 40). Mukherjee argues that Platt's book might also have been an advertisement of the shop of the same name, where his 'inventions' and the results of his recipes were sold (Ayesha Mukherjee, "The Secrets of Sir Hugh Platt", 69-86).

⁴ On the influence of both craft secrecy and the occult sciences on the books of secrets, see Pamela Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship. Technical Arts and the Culture of Knowledge from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).



3. The Delightes for Ladies between practice and enjoyment

Before analysing in more detail the content of the book and some of its recipes, I would like to discuss the more general aspect of its form, specifically how they compare with the title, preface, material appearance, and the style of *The Jewell House*.

I shall start with the title. It is relevant that the title suggests that the recipes are for women's delight. The complete title of the book is *Delightes for Ladies, to adorne their Persons, Tables, closets and distillatories with Beauties, banquets, perfumes and waters*. As can be noticed, the title puts the accent on the beauty, either of the persons themselves, or their tables, closets and distillatory. There is a connection worth making here: as in the case of gardening, the activities performed by women are seen as being part of the activities that produce pleasure, with the practical side being seen as less prominent, even though the recipes are very practical¹. Of course, this does not appear to be the case if we look closer at the content of the distinct experiments. The majority of these experiments aim at producing their results in a short time period, making them with cheaper ingredients, or using as much raw products as can be found in a typical household of the period. In other words, the aim of the book has little to do with what we today consider to be aesthetics, but, instead, with the economy of housekeeping. Maybe there is an exception as regards cosmetics and perfumes, but this

¹ On this topic, see Rebecca Bushnell, *Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern English Gardens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), chapter 4. The author stresses that the role of women in gardening had more to do with delight and less to do with profit, unlike the case of men. However, she emphasizes here that women frequently participated in this type of labour, often without being paid. This example is relevant because, as in the case of Platt, books dealing with gardening, when written for a feminine public, were considered to deal with beauty and delight, not with profit, and even less with studying nature or inventing new objects.

section of the work is not very much developed in comparison with the others, and thus it becomes clear that these topics are not significant to Platt's plans. It is even more surprising if we compare the *Delightes* with *The Jewell House*, where one can find examples of less practical recipes¹, although it is true that the general aim of the latter book is also far removed from producing wonder and astonishment. In other words, while the *Delightes* is presented as something producing pleasure, even though it only contains very practical advice, *The Jewell House* is presented as something very practical, despite containing recipes producing pleasure and wonder.

The very same pattern can be noticed in the corresponding prefaces of the books. *The Jewell House* starts with a dedication to the Earl of Essex, whom Platt would have liked as his patron, and continues with a *Preface* to the reader in which he explains the reasons behind writing such a book, criticizing the authors of natural magic for not sharing their secrets with a public who needs them. *The Jewell House* is the only one with a dedicatory, all the other Platt's books lacking one, but nevertheless they all begin with an introduction exposing the reasons leading to publishing the book, namely, the charity behind this enterprise. In Platt's view, human life can only be improved by sharing knowledge and teaching people how to better use the possible resources at hand. *Delight for Ladies* starts in a very different way, with a poem exposing the main themes of the book, emphasizing the delight women should find in the recipes he offers. Even more, Platt introduces here his muse, who dreams of being a lady that arises each morning content after practising his recipes.

In the same context of pleasure and beauty, it should be noticed that the *De-*

¹ For example, how to: make a ring to see the other players' cards, carry gold in a secret manner, write a letter secretly, walk on a scaffold without falling, make strange shapes in a glass, write blue and red letters at the same time, make an egg stay on one of the ends without falling, keep several types of wine in one glass without mixing, the art of memory, etc. It is true that Platt's book does not have the appearance of Della Porta's, for example, which had been compared with the stage of a theatre (Sergius Koderá, "The Laboratory as Stage: Giovan Battista della Porta's Experiments", *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 3/1 (2014): 15-38), nor with Ruscelli's, which was seen as a museum in motion (Stefano Gulizia, "Ruscelli's Book of Secrets in Context: A Sixteenth-Century Venetian Museum", *Society and Politics* 8/2 (2014): 8-22), but there are nonetheless aspects of Platt's book that aim to produce wonder and describe curiosities to the reader. This does not mean that the book's main goal was to produce certain feelings in the reader, but, as argued above, to be used for practical purposes.

lightes is Platt's only book that has beautiful margins, with geometrical figures. By contrast, the others—and this will be fully discussed in the next section of the article—have wide margins, where the reader can note many diverse things, such as the success or failure of a recipe, or various developments pertaining to a given recipe¹.

Maybe less importantly, but still worth being mentioned, are those differences regarding style. *The Jewell House* contain personal stories and the frequent use of the first person. It can be thus assumed that the writer has a personal relation with the reader when he expresses himself in this manner, rather than when he records recipes in a completely impersonal way, as is the case in the *Delightes*. Moreover, *The Jewell House* also contains expressions and quotations in Latin, and even one entire experiment in Latin², which are completely absent in the *Delightes for Ladies*. This distinction is relevant with respect to the expected readership of the two books, and it strengthens the argument advanced by Lynette Hunter that the *Delightes* was written not only for the aristocracy, but also for women from the lower levels of society³.

Though I consider these differences to be less important than those concerning the content of the different recipes, they nevertheless offer an insight as to how Hugh Platt saw his feminine readership. The titles, dedication, and margins of the book all centre on the idea of enjoyment. However, the very content of the book concerns the practical, even more than the content of *The Jewell House*, with the latter presented by its author as a practical guide. Gender division becomes more obvious if we look at the contents of the two books.

¹ I refer here to the editions printed during Platt's life. I did not consult later editions because I do not consider them relevant for the given discussion, since it was not Platt's intention to design them in one form or another. On the importance of *marginalia* see above, footnote 10.

² Although it does not concern the present article, the fact that such quotations and recipes appear in *The Jewell House*, while the book is nevertheless written in English for a more general readership that lacks knowledge of Latin, seems to suggest that Platt was writing the book for two different audiences, with only the aristocratic one being able to understand everything in it.

³ It is a well-known fact that, in the second half on the sixteen century, many aristocratic families started to educate their daughters in learning Latin and Greek in order to achieve better marriages.



4. Comparing the content of the *Delightes for Ladies* and *The Jewell House*

If the differences in style denote a dissimilarity in attitude towards a feminine and a masculine audience respectively, this becomes more obvious in what regards the content of these two books and it is very much connected to the gender roles in the household.

Delightes for Ladies is composed of four parts, first on preserving, conserving, and candying food, second on distillations, third on cooking and housewifery, and fourth on powders and beauty recipes¹. Turning to *The Jewell House of art and nature*, it has a different structure: it is composed of five different books, the first containing 103 experiments from a very diverse array of arts and practices, from the preservation of fruits to the making of gold; from making wax to speaking by signs; and from the art of memory to refining sugar, to give just a few examples. The remaining four books are concerned with one single topic each: husbandry, distillations, producing metals, and inventions, respectively. Although there is one single section common to both books, the one on distillation, it is very significant that several experiments from the first book of *The Jewell House* are also found in the other three books of the *Delightes for Ladies*. None of the recipes from the three books on husbandry, producing metals and inventions are duplicated in the *Delightes*, since these are not activities specific to women².

¹ There is a total of 175 recipes, out of which 73 on preserving and candying, 25 on distillations, 41 on cooking and 36 on beauty recipes.

² Here appears another difference between the two books, though not as important as the others mentioned above. *The Jewell House* contains images, either of instruments or of processes. There are no images in the *Delightes for Ladies*. It is also true that no image is attached in *The Jewell House* to the recipes that are later transferred to the *Delightes*.

In both a chapter of his book and in an article dedicated to the *Delightes for Ladies*, Malcolm Thick compares the printed version and the existing manuscripts in order to find the provenience of several recipes. He argues that all the experiments on cookery are taken from other sources, because this was not one of Platt's interests; and that 23 out of 73 recipes on preservation are also taken from various sources¹. It is significant, as Thick also notices, that Platt rewrites the same experiment more than one time, varying some of the experimental parameters, and this is clearly the consequence of his own experimentation, even when the experiment is based on a different source². Thick also mentions that the experiments in the *Delightes for Ladies* taken from *The Jewell House of Art and Nature* are considerably altered, but unfortunately he does not develop this claim. This will be the subject of the following section, where I shall compare individual recipes. Surprisingly enough, and contrary to Thick's opinion, the recipes themselves are not changed: in some cases the quantities are given more precisely, and in others, additional information at the end of the experiment is missing in the *Delightes for Ladies*. However, in each particular case, the recipe itself, in terms of ingredients and its steps, is identical.

Before comparing those recipes which are found in both works, I want to draw the attention to the books on distillations, the only section in common in both the *Delightes for Ladies* and *The Jewell House*. As a general remark, it should be mentioned that the book on distillations from the *Delightes for Ladies* is more basic. There are recipes on how to make *aqua vitae*, *aqua fortis*, *aqua composita*, etc., which are only used in the other book, but their recipe is not given there. On the contrary, the recipes from *The Jewell House* are more advanced on the use of these substances for other distillations, giving the impression that the readers are assumed to be familiar with them and that they represent basic

¹ Thick, "A Close Look", 57 and ff.

² This feature of his practice is what distinguish his writings from commonplace books, although it is also true that in this type of writing there are several variations, and that they are much more complex than what was commonly accepted in earlier scholarship. On the topic of commonplace books, see, for example, Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books and the Structuring of the Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), Earle Havens, *Commonplace Books: A History of Manuscripts and Printed Books from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), Richard Yeo, *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

ingredients. This might have to do with William Eamon's claim that distillation is more specific to books of secrets than to books of recipes, because it was a type of knowledge associated with alchemy¹. We can thus infer from this that women need more help in producing what was otherwise a more basic ingredient because it was assumed they did not have that kind of knowledge possessed by men. In fact, the connection between these recipes and the books of secrets is given in the title of the book: "Secrets in distillation", while all the other titles only contain the name of the processes². Nevertheless, this section seems to occupy a special place in *The Jewell House* too: the title of the book is "The third Booke containth fivers chemicall conclusions concerning the Art of Distillation, with many rare practices and uses thereof, according to the Authors owne experience". The idea of rareness and secrecy is also emphasized in this writing written for male audience.

But even if distillation techniques are more basic in the *Delightes* and more complex and developed in *The Jewell House*, it seems that distillations occupy an important role in the household, and that the welfare of the household depended in part on women's capacity to put these recipes into practice.



5. Rewriting for Ladies

Comparing the individual recipes which appear in both books, there are two main differences which I consider to be relevant from a philosophical point of view. The first one is the addition of queries, namely questions and advice regarding further variations and developments of the experiments, very often

¹ On this issue, see Eamon "How to Read a Book of Secrets", 35, and section 2 above.

² The first is "The art of Preserving, conserving, candying, etc.", the third is "Cookery and huswiferie", and the last "Sweet powders, oytments, beauties, etc."

present in *The Jewell House*, but which are taken out from the *Delightes for Ladies*. They appear neither in the recipes transferred from *The Jewell House*, nor in the others. The second difference, which concerns some explanations and philosophical considerations on the processes described in the recipe, is also missing from the *Delightes for Ladies*. Let me detail these two features: the queries and the explanations of the processes which are taken out of the *Delightes for Ladies*.

It should be mentioned here that many of the recipes found in both writings are (almost) identical as regards their proper instructions and practical information. The small differences can be the result of rewriting and adjusting their formulation, as we will see in the various examples discussed in detail further in this section. In other cases some details are added, offering more precise advice or quantities. For example, in the case of drawing the spirit of honey, one can observe that Platt added some quantitative measurements to the initial recipe, which originally just stated “sufficient store of honey”¹. In the *Delightes*, in contrast, he is very clear in advising that honey should constitute a fifth part of water. Though these ‘refinements’ of the recipes could be seen as results of experimentation in the time between publishing the two books, given the general context of transferring recipes, one can assume that in fact Platt is mentioning the exact quantities in the book for women as a way of simplifying their work and assuring that only in this way they will be able to reproduce the recipe².

Turning now to the issue of queries, in general, the books of secrets and recipes did not encourage the reader to vary the recipes or to experiment further. On the contrary, the authors were clear about that if a recipe was not successful, this was probably the reader’s fault in not following the instructions³. As Ayeasha Muckerjee states, Platt distinguishes himself from this tradition in advising the reader to “further experiment”, a practice that he personally adopted with respect to those recipes taken from other sources. Analysing *The Jewell House*, I found two different types of queries. The first one advises changing something in the recipe and observing the consequences: if it works

¹ *The Jewell House of Art and Nature*, 31.

² I would like to thank Claudia Dumitru for raising this point to me.

³ In general this was not what the readers were doing, and from the marginalia we can notice that they were often varying and modifying the recipes, or writing comments (see Eamon, “How to Read a Book of Secrets”, 34-38).

and the result is the same, or if it works and the result is improved. A second type of query deals with measurements and finding the right quantities. Platt gives clear advice on methods to determine whether some processes can be held constant while using less material¹.



As for the explanations, which is the second main difference, it is clear that Platt was not much interested in finding the causes of the processes or objects he was producing. Instead, his main concerns were the very process of discovering new recipes, and finding the cheapest or easiest way to obtain a product. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that he was not at all interested in matter theory or causal explanations of the produced phenomena and objects; i.e., some of the phenomena described are provided a very superficial explanation and an attempt to discover the causes involved².

Let us now turn to the *Delightes for Ladies* and see how these elements appear, or better yet, how they disappear when transferred in his writings. I shall discuss at length a few examples, which I consider to be conclusive for illustrating my claim. First, in both books there is a recipe on making cakes without spices and sugar. Here are the two texts:

¹ There will be several examples of the first kind in the following discussion. For the second type, see for example the recipe on preserving fresh water (“Qre. What proportion of spirite of Wine, or Aqua vite well rectified, will defende water from corruption”, A 11).

² For example, in a recipe on how to keep diverse liquors in one single glass without their mixing, after presenting the way to accomplish this task, Platt adds: “and so you should have each liquor or wine to flote upon the other without mingling together, because the fall thereof is broken by meanes of the gentle pouring upon the trencher. Some holde opinion that the same may also be performed with a round toste. But I think you may have a special care herein, that the heaviest liquor to lie in the bottome, and that you proceed from lighter to lighter, so as in the lightest or most areous or fierie bee placed the uppermost, for each thing desires to bee in his naturall place” (*The Jewell House of Art and Nature*, A 98, 81). Using an Aristotelian framework, Platt explains how the liquors do not mix with each other because they have different natural places, the heaviest being at the bottom and the lightest on top. Examples like this one can be found more than once in *The Jewell House*.

SWEET AND DILICATE CAKES WITHOUT EITHER
SPICE OR SUGAR

Slice great and sweet Parsnep rootes (such as are not seeded) into thin slices, and hauing washed and scraped them cleane, then drie them and beate them into powder, searching the same through a fine fearce, (*Qre. If there might not be som means found out for the grinding of them, whereby to make the greater riddance or quantitie.*) Then kned two parts of fine flower with one part of this powder, and made some cakes thereof, and you shall finde them to taste verie daintily. I have eaten of these cakes diuerse times with verie great goof liking.¹

CAKES WITHOUT EITHER
SPICE OR SUGAR

Scrape or wash your Parsneps cleane, slice them thine, drie them vppon canuas or networke frames, beat them to powder mixing one thirde thereof with two thirds of fine wheat flower, make vp your paste into coates, and you shall find them verie sweet and delicate.²

There is no doubt that we are looking at the same recipe, although a bit reduced in its second version. The difference consists in the missing parenthesis, containing the query and the final phrase along with Platt's personal confession of how much he enjoyed eating this kind of cake. If this example is not very conclusive, on the basis that he may have discovered that there is no method for grinding them³, then let us look at another example. The recipes on making rose water at Michaelmas are almost identical. What is significant is that the final part from *The Jewell House of Art and Nature* is completely missing from the *Delightes for Ladies*. This part contains an inquiry on the spirits arising during separation, another method seen as being more productive, though

¹ *The Jewell House of Art and Nature*, A 28, p. 31. My emphasis.

² *Delightes for Ladies*, A 60.

³ There is one recipe where the query is transformed into another technique and presented as such. This is the recipe on clarifying salad oil: "Qre. If the oyle had benne beaten the lasye time in rosewater wherein cloues, or nutmegs had benne infused before" (*The Jewell House of Art and Nature*, 39) becomes "I think if the last agitation were made in Rosewater, wherein also cloues or Nutmegs had been macerated, that so the oyle woulde bee yet more pleasing" (*Delightes for Ladies*, C 36). It is nevertheless true that Platt had not been experimenting and refining the recipe in the meantime since he is still not sure on the result, but it is presented as his opinion. However, it is not presented as a query to be tried out by the reader. Although it might seem similar, the different ways of presenting the recipes are very telling as regards his relation with the reader.

Platt considers that the ordinary one remains preferable if various conditions are fulfilled; and, finally, yet another method, which is not evaluated by Platt but just mentioned¹.

A very similar example is the experiment with distilling wine vinegar or aliger. The last part, concerning practical medical advice is missing from the *Delightes for Ladies*². The experiment on drawing the true spirit of roses is even more interesting. It follows the same model as the previous examples. The recipes are identical with the exception of the last part, which is excluded from the *Delightes for Ladies*. This concerns a further development of the previous experimental set-up and, again, with the explanations of the natural processes under study. The experiment in the *Delightes* concludes by stating that “You may also ferment the iuice of Roses onely, and after distill the same”³. The experiment in *The Jewell House*, however, is longer:

“Also if you ferment the iuice of Roses only without any leaues mixed with them, you may draw an excellent spirit from the same, or if you keepe the iuice of damas roses onely in close vessels well seasoned with the rose, it will yeald s delicate spirit after it hath wrought it selfe to a sufficient head, by the inward rotation, or circulation of Nature, but this worke asketh a longer time before

¹ “Qre. If any spirit will ascend, if you make separation of that which first ariseth from the rose-leaues kept as before. Some for the more expedition in rose-water do firth expres the iuce, and then distill it, and afterward they do distill the expressed leaues, and so they dispatch more with one still then others do with three or four. I haue seene very good rose-water drawn this way, but yet I take the ordinarie way to be more kindly especially if the head of your still be made like a Limbecke with a large bucket to hold store of cold water. And some commed the distillation of the rose, violet, cowslip, etc. that is performed by a descensorie, hauing also a cooler of cold water about it, which at a certain cock you may emptie as it heateth from time to time, and fill with fresh water again” (*The Jewell House*, B 30). As in the above-mentioned example of honey, here too the quantities are given in detail in the *Delightes*.

² “Here I could also advice, or wish al Ladies, and gentleomen to haue all their vinegar serued in at tables in sawcers or glasse, or purslaine, because if it be strong, and cintinew longe in a pewter sawcer, it hath an intencion towards ceruse, which I cold never heare commended either for wholesome meat or sawce for mans stomacke. But it may be thi is but one doctors opinion, & that of such a onr as neuer deserved his degree in scholes; and therefore I shall leaue for same at large vntill som better clarcke do hereafter confirme this greene conceipt. Here I cannot omit the profitable obseruation of one of our London Chimists, who after hee had drawn good spirit out of wine from muskadell, did by sunning of the same also make good vinegar the farcicall parte thereof” (*The Jewell House*, B 35).

³ *Delightes for Ladies*, B 17.

you can proceede to distillation. The laste way and beste way of allother that I knowe, is by outward fire to stirre vp the moist, and inward fire of Nature, till the same be growne to the fullness of a rose wine. And then you haue brought it to a wine then euery Apothecary, and ordinary practicioner in this art will easily diuive the spirit from him, but they will al stagger in the firste digestion, and though they should either reele, or fall, I may not lende them my heling hand, otherwise then I haue donner already, vnlesse I were assured that they were of the number of *Hermess* sonnes, and not begotten by some base Alchemist”¹.

Also, in the recipe C 35 on preserving the juice of oranges, lemons and other fruits for a whole year, the method presented is identical, but *The Jewell House* continues with what is considered to be “a better way than this by many degrees (although this bee sufficient for ordinary use)”, and this advice is not given in the *Delightes for Ladies*. This seems to be stranger than in the other case, because it is not only another way, but a more profitable one, i.e., from which the ladies reading the book could benefit. However, what follows in *The Jewell House* might give us an indication of the reason why Platt decided not to include it in the *Delightes*. It is a philosophical explanation of the preservation of bodies: “for the long and true preservations of all juices, and liquors, whatsoever, that have no digestion, or decoction already, wherein neither oile, nor any outward helpe is required, but only a trew, and philosophical rotation whereby the inward fire of nature may bee stirred uppe in every vegetable, to defende itselfe sufficiently againste all putryfying whatsoever”. Platt then explains how he achieved such results, using again the first person, and concluding: “But because such secretes are fitter for a philosophers laboratory, then a gentlewomans closet, I shall not here offer that disgrace unto nature, to discover any magistery upon so base an occasion”². The experiment ends with his promise to describe techniques for the preservation of fruits in his future writings.

This recipe is important not only because we can see once again how theoretical explanations are removed from the *Delightes*, but also because it states, very clearly, that *The Jewell House of Art and Nature*, or at least certain recipes, is supposed to be read and used by women. As is evident, we face a paradox. If *The Jewell House* is also read by women, then why did Platt transform the

¹ *The Jewell House*, C 42-43.

² *The Jewell House*, C 37.

recipes this much when transferring them in the *Delightes for Ladies*? Put it differently, if *The Jewell House* was written for a masculine public and the *Delightes* for a feminine one, it would be very easy to understand the role of these transformations: in short, they were not suitable for a feminine audience. But if the same recipes are written for women in *The Jewell House*, then why the need to take out these particular items? We cannot assume Platt changed his style of writing, because *Floraes Paradise*, published in 1608 just before his death, thus after the *Delightes*, is written much more in the style of *The Jewell House*, with some theoretical explanations, even if only a few, and several queries for the readers. We must therefore conclude that these features were taken out of the *Delightes* because that work was *only* intended for a feminine readership. But, if this is the case, then what is their exact role in the original writing?

It becomes easier to answer these questions if we look at the several references directed to “Ladies readers” from *The Jewell House*¹, and to allegations of the presumed limitation of their capacity to understand and even perform some of the experiments. The first experiment in the book, which discusses techniques for preserving fresh fruits, offers an important example. Similar recipes are to be found in the first part of the *Delightes for Ladies*, even though the recipes are not identical as in the other cases discussed above. In the middle of the text, Platt adds:

now me thinks I see a whole troupe of gallant dames attending with their listening eares, or rather longing with their great bellies, to learne some new found skil, how they may play at chopcherrie, when cherrie time is past. Wel, to give these Ladies some conent, I shall wrapped up as ever any of the Sybels did their fatall prophesies, wherein I shall make them as cunning as my selfe (saving onelie that I will resevue one strange venue to soile a scholler withal if need be). The secret is short, let one element be included within another, so as the one may have no accesse nor participate with the other. But his paradventure is too philosophical for women. Then receive it Ladies with plaine tearmes into your open lappes².

It was demonstrated in this section that some of the recipes from *The Jewell*

¹ It could be surprising that the only references are to be found in those recipes which are later transferred to the *Delightes for Ladies*.

² *The Jewell House*, A 3. The recipe continues with advice on using glasses to keep cherries fresh when still on their branches.

House were supposed to be read and put into practice by women. They were related to the household, a specifically feminine domain. Strangely enough, when moved to a book dedicated only to women, the *Delightes for Ladies*, the same recipes are recorded differently. However, I doubt that the simple fact that such recipes were part of the writings dedicated to a male audience could lead to the conclusion that the roles in the household should be questioned, since references to women were very clear in these recipes. What I consider to be intended for male readers are exactly those parts removed when the same recipe is transferred to a book for ladies: otherwise, changing the recipes would be senseless. These exclusions are two important features of Platt's *science*, an attempt to provide the causes of the phenomenon under study as well as queries for further development of the recipes.

6. Conclusion

As established in this article, the differences between the general texts and the ones dedicated only to women can be found in both the form and the content. For the first, the aesthetical and playful side of reading and using such a book is what is stressed in the *Delightes for Ladies*, while the other books clearly declare that they are oriented towards putting the recipes into practice. Nevertheless, this feature is in opposition with the results of an analysis of the content. While the *Delightes* is composed of only very strict recipes, the others also have less practical elements. In this sense, we can affirm that there is a tension between the intention as presented by the author and the content. These elements are tricks of natural magic (not in a large numbers, but still present), and especially elements of natural philosophy, speculations, measurements or advice for further development of the recipe. When books start to be specialized, these last elements disappear from them, since only women were reading and using them. I consider that these conclusions can be drawn only after a detailed analysis of the specific books and, in this respect, Platt's writings represent one of the best sources of information. The *Delightes for Ladies*, put in the context of Platt's recipes books, gives us information on the roles of women in the Elizabethan world as housekeeper, and especially as readers. By looking at the elements removed when transferred to the *Delightes*, it becomes clear

how their male perceived what were the interest and capacities of their female contemporaries, namely as not being interested in, or able to understand, the more theoretical and philosophical elements, and as not being suitable to act as continuators of the scientific investigation¹.

But equally important to this is the fact that, while taking out certain elements, the types of recipes written for men and for women are very similar. There is no difference between the recipes written for women, which are later moved to the *Delightes*, and the rest of the recipes written by Platt and which are addressed to men only. Put differently, if I have proved in the last section that it is not the case that the inclusion of women-related recipes in *The Jewell House* denotes a change of the roles in the household in the sense that men practice what were supposed to be female activities, and that on the contrary, gender separation could be noticed both at the level of the respective forms and contents of the two books, as much attention should be given to the relation between women and the experimental practices they were conducting as a result of using these books of recipes.

Delightes for Ladies, as other household books, contained a great number of recipes on distillations, which were specific not only to *The Jewell House* and other books of secrets, but to alchemical treatises, considered to be an exclusive male domain. It also contained beautifying recipes which were specific to the tradition of Renaissance natural magic, Giambattista della Porta's book *Magia naturalis* being most probably Platt's source for these recipes². The recipes on the preservation of fruits and vegetables are similar to those one can find in

¹ This should not be surprising if we think that in the Renaissance, as Ian Maclean shows, "women were associated with the privation of meditative powers (*contemplationis defectus*) which makes them, with rustics and the simple-minded, well suited to devoutness, but ill suited to intellectual disciplines" (Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 64).

² Della Porta's *Magia naturalis* was one of the most important sources of Platt's books in general (see Mukherjee, "The Secrets of Sir Hugh Platt"), though his influence on the *Delightes* has not been yet studied. Della Porta has a chapter dedicated to beautifying women (book 9, pp. 362-396 in the Latin edition and pp. 233-253 in the English one), where he presents techniques on how to dye hair, whiten the face, take away spots, etc. Even if this book was not Platt's source, or not his only source, it is nevertheless important that natural magic and household books had the same topics of inquiry.

Francis Bacon and the tradition of experimental philosophy¹. Though more research should be done in order to establish women's contribution to the history of science, it becomes nevertheless clear that through the books of recipes written specifically for them women were introduced to the experimental practices of their time. It is true that the recipes written for women were presented in a context where delight seems to be more important than practice, in which there is a clear gender demarcation concerning topics and women were considered to lack the capacity for acceding to the more philosophical elements. But at the same time it is nevertheless relevant that the books of secrets and recipes written for female audience were very similar to those written for men in the techniques and practical knowledge transmitted through them.

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¹ The similarities between Platt and Bacon had been studied by Deborah Harkness in the last chapter of *The Jewell House*. On Bacon use of Platt's experimental reports, see Doina-Cristina Rusu, *From natural History to Natural Magis. Francis Bacon's Sylva Sylvarum*, PhD diss. Radboud University Nijmegen and The University of Bucharest, 2013, 143–153. For a more specific comparison on Platt and Bacon on the preservation of fruits, see Dana Jalobeanu, "Bacon's Appels: A Case Study in Baconian Experimentation", in *Motion and Power in Francis Bacon's Philosophy*, ed. Guido Giglioli and James. A. T. Lancaster, with Sorana Corneanu and Dana Jalobeanu, forthcoming 2015.

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- (being a present, easie, and pleasing remedy in violent feavers, and intermitted agues) as also of some other rare inventions, fitting the times (London, 1608).
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Dutch School, 17th century, Trouble Comes to the Alchemist, Fisher Collection, Chemical Heritage Foundation, photograph by Will Brown (<http://tinyurl.com/trouble2alch>).