

**‘AGAINST THE PAIN OF THE ~~SLEPE~~ SPLENE’:
ERRORS AND CORRECTIONS IN THE
MANUSCRIPT COPIES OF *THE SECRETS OF
ALEXIS OF PIEDMONT* AND *A NIEWE HERBALL
OR HISTORIE OF PLANTS***

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Received: November 8, 2023

Accepted: May 1, 2024

Abstract: The present paper analyses the scribal errors and corrections in two treatises held in Glasgow University Library, MS Ferguson 7, which are, up until the present-day, the only known manuscript copies of the Early Modern English printed scientific compositions entitled *The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont* and *A Niewe Herball or Historie of Plants*. The study aims to account for any variation between the pieces, as well as to evaluate the degree of scribal carefulness in carrying out an appropriate copying process. It thus endeavours to shed some new light on the likely value of the treatises and the intended purposes of their reproduction in the manuscript.

Keywords: Scribal Errors and Corrections; Manuscript Copies; Early Modern English; *The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont*; *A Niewe Herball or Historie of Plants*

Resumen: El presente artículo analiza los errores y las correcciones de los escribas en dos tratados hospedados en el MS Ferguson 7 de la biblioteca de la Universidad de Glasgow, que son, hasta la fecha, las únicas copias manuscritas de las composiciones científicas impresas tituladas *The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont* y *A Niewe Herball or Historie of Plants*. El estudio pretende dar cuenta de cualquier tipo de variación entre los documentos, así como evaluar el grado de cuidado por parte de los escribas en llevar a cabo un adecuado proceso de copia. De este modo, se pretende arrojar nueva luz sobre el valor de los tratados y de sus posibles propósitos de reproducción en el manuscrito.

Palabras clave: Errores y Correcciones Escribaniles; Copias Manuscritas; Inglés Moderno Temprano; *The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont*, *A Niewe Herball or Historie of Plants*

1. INTRODUCTION¹

In his well-known dictionary devoted to explaining both common and specific concepts within the academic field of manuscript studies, Beal defines a “copy” as the form of “written document in which is transcribed the text of another document; hence a reproduction or duplicate of the text rather than the original” (90). The practice of copying a document—or parts of it—into another has been, from a diachronic perspective, routine throughout the whole of the historical periods of the English language, especially of those that preceded the advent of William Caxton’s printing press in England (see Calle-Martín, “A Middle English Version” 246, “The Late Middle English Version” 36; Calle-Martín and Romero-Barranco 308). This event made the manual reproduction of a document superfluous, at least to some extent (see Taavitsainen et al.; also Lorente-Sánchez, “A Semi-Diplomatic Edition”)² in view that such a custom remained relatively commonplace in Early Modern English, yet its incidence also started to experiment an ongoing decrease that continued over the course of the years. Regardless of the date of writing, as well as other factors such as the document-typology and the scribal motivation towards its composition, the copying of a text or a collection of texts into an individual manuscript was but one of the processes that preceded the eventual production of the entire volume (Wakelin 43).

When the duty of copying a text was achieved, scribes had the regular habit of reading their pieces again in order to identify and, as such, to correct any likely errors that they could have made while handwriting. This task was operated, on an important number of occasions, by senior members of the scriptorium, who, on average, possessed a wider textual acquaintance and knowledge within the field (Clemens and Graham 35).³ In themselves, the emendations did not only reflect the level of expertise and aptitudes that scribes and/or correctors acquired to avoid the appearance of mistakes in their copies, but also an outstanding concern in attempting to learn from them so as to render an accurate transcription of the original sources. In many cases, however, errors were inevitable to occur inasmuch as one of the individuals involved in the production of a text could undoubtedly miss them all over the complete set of writing lines, particularly if the document to copy had been disseminated in a substantial quantity of witnesses (Wakelin 3; also Petti 29-30). Textual corrections and editorial emendations are, in the light of the above mentioned, matters of prominent value within

¹ The present research has been funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness (grant number FFI2017-88060-P) and the Autonomous Government of Andalusia (grant number UMA18-FEDERJA-129). These grants are hereby gratefully acknowledged. I am also thankful to both the editor and the two anonymous reviewers of the journal for their valuable comments and feedback, which have improved the final version of the article.

² Note that, although it also encompasses the numerous duplicates of the same printed piece, the term “copy” is referred to in this paper as the transcription by hand of an original or a group of texts, either printed or handwritten, into a different volume.

³ According to Petti, they were the same scribes who devoted an outstanding portion of their time rectifying the errors they committed when transcribing, whilst the “duty of checking and amending the copies by comparison with the exemplar was carried out by the corrector” (28). He also notes that by the beginning of Early Modern English “the role of official manuscript corrector had virtually disappeared to be replaced by proof-reading[,] which was carried out, albeit sometimes sporadically, in the printing house” (also Romero-Barranco, “Hunterian Collection” 298).

historical palaeography, which is equally useful to the broader fields of textual criticism and editing, so to literature in general, and, consequently, to philology. The main reasons for it arise from the fact that by understanding the manners and the causes for the occurrence of errors in a text, the editor may be given the opportunity to recognise them, to emend them and, eventually, to analyse the stemmatology of a specific volume, among other questions (Petti 29-30; also Marqués-Aguado 53-55).⁴ According to Wakelin (16),

[t]he practicalities of correcting involve making a choice about one’s copy, so in the moment of correcting scribes think consciously . . . about the details of the text. It is not, therefore, inappropriate to interpret their intentions and speculate about what their thoughts were. It is also important to counterbalance counting—which might suggest that scribes were the unwitting carriers of wider cultural trends—with attention to individual people’s efforts and their agency.

While not as widely addressed in the academia as other palaeographical subareas like punctuation or script classification, the importance of scribal errors and corrections can likewise be viewed in an array of scientific publications that have approached the topic from several and varied perspectives. Such works comprise papers purported to describe the physical traits of manuscripts in order to establish their dates of production (Romero-Barranco, “Hunterian Collection” 298-302), specialised contributions focusing on the distribution of the diverse errors and methods of correction in different handwritten copies of a same treatise (Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors”; Marqués-Aguado), as well as both electronic and printed scholarly editions of never-before unexplored manuscripts from the Middle English (Calle-Martín and Miranda-García 36-37; Romero-Barranco, *Constantinus* 13-14) and the Early Modern English eras (Criado-Peña, *Physicall and Chyrurgical* 31-32; Calle-Martín, *A Middle English Commentary* 32-33; also Esteban-Segura, “Digital Editing”). Apart from helping trace back the origins of certain texts, all of them have provided us with faithful and empirical evidence about the classes of errors coupled with the actual correction procedures appearing in manuscripts produced in different periods of the history of English. These have come to confirm that the phenomena “vary considerably in nature and range according to the class of manuscripts, its exemplar, if any, and the circumstances under which it was written” (Petti 30; also Beal 360).⁵ Taking this into account, the present

⁴ The concept of *stematology* is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* as the “study which attempts to reconstruct the tradition of the transmission of a text or texts (esp. in manuscript form) on the basis of the relationships between the readings of the various surviving witnesses.” Beal (399), in turn, remarks that this attempt is carried out in the form of a genealogy tree, i.e. the *stemma*, to “trace the pattern, sequence, or order of transmission and the relationships between the extant texts, as well as those postulated but no longer in existence, establishing which text is copied or derived from which and, if possible, which one is the earliest.”

⁵ In fact, in his synoptic critical edition of Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 328 and Manchester University Library, MS Rylands 1310, housing respectively a Middle English and an Early Modern English version of John Arderon’s *De iudiciis urinarum*, Calle-Martín (*A Middle English Commentary* 33) observes that “the early Modern English version of the text . . . is more limited in terms of the number and typology of emendation techniques, as it stands out for being a more elaborated copy than its mediaeval counterpart.”

paper endeavours to analyse the scribal errors and corrections in the manuscript copies of two Early Modern English printed scientific compositions, that is to say, *The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont* and *A Niewe Herball or Historie of Plants*, which up to what we know have only been preserved in handwriting in Glasgow University Library, MS Ferguson 7 (folios 1r-20v and 23r-48v; 59r, respectively). The paper thus seeks to carry out a thorough scrutiny of the errors and corrections attested in the copies in order to assess any variations between them, both in terms of the quantity and the types of mistakes and emendations. At the same time, it also aims to evaluate—based on the comparison between the results obtained and the information already available in the specific literature—the degree of scribal carefulness in performing an appropriate transcription of the texts, which may ultimately throw some new light on their likely value and the intended purposes of their reproduction in the manuscript (see, among others, Calle-Martín and Miranda-García 36; Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors” 105; Romero-Barranco, *Constantinus* 14).

To these purposes, the article has been divided with a similar structure to other scholarly contributions of the nature (see Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors”; Marqués-Aguado), that is, into four sections, as follows. Section 2 below introduces the treatises object of examination, providing a description of the volume where these are held and of their contents, together with a succinct account of the primary printed collections from which they stem. Afterwards, the methodological process carried out in the retrieval of instances is presented in section 3. Section 4 then supplies a taxonomy of those scribal errors and corrections identified in the texts, followed by the corresponding analysis. A summary of the findings, along with some conclusions, is finally offered in section 5.

2. THE MANUSCRIPT AND THE TREATISES: A DESCRIPTION

MS Ferguson 7 (shelf mark ‘GB 247 MS Ferguson 7’) is stored in the Archives and Special Collections Department of Glasgow University Library.⁶ More specifically, it is part of the individual library of manuscripts and printed books of John Ferguson, a distinguished Professor of Chemistry at the University of Glasgow for slightly more than four decades. His collection consisted of circa 18,000 volumes related to alchemy, chemistry and general medicine produced in-between 1200 and 1900 (see *The Alchemy Website*), most of which came into possession of the Scottish institution in 1921, a few years after he deceased as a consequence of a cardiac problem (de la Cruz-Cabanillas, “Medical Recipes” 115; also Weston 1-3; Lorente-Sánchez, “Dating” 26).

MS Ferguson 7 (henceforth *F7*) is a volume written in the early seventeenth century made up of a series of scientific treatises, out of which the manuscript copies of *The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont* and *A Niewe Herball or Historie of Plants* are included.

and typology of emendation techniques, as it stands out for being a more elaborated copy than its mediaeval counterpart.”

⁶ See http://www.gla.ac.uk/collections/#!/details?irn=265620&catType=C&gdcEvent=hierarchy_item_view.

These two works were extremely popular throughout the Renaissance, as the prominent figure of editions and adaptations proves, not only in English, but also in other languages such as French or Spanish, to name but only a few (see Arber 82-84, 124-26; Stijnman 35-47). Originally composed by Girolamo Ruscelli, the first is a specific type of recipe collection properly known as “book of secrets.” The second, in turn, is a clear prototype of an herbal of the time developed by the plant specialist Rembert Dodoens.

Catalogued in the electronic record of the University Library as *Secreti* and *Niewe Herball*, respectively, the two texts constitute almost three quarters of the entire *F7*, the former encompassing folios 1r-20v and the latter folios 23r-48v; 59r. When it comes to *Secreti*, the treatise has been recently witnessed to feature a limited amount of the contents of the English printed book, with only 194 recipes from the original version (see Lorente-Sánchez, *Corpus Compilation*), which adds up to 1,246. The roots of this medical piece in the Country date to approximately the last trimester of 1558, moment when it was translated from a French edition released in 1557, which was also translated from the original 1555 Italian print publication. The text in *F7*, however, has been copied from posterior editions of the collection, given that almost a fourth segment of its material comes from a version issued in 1568 (see Ruscelli, *reuerende Maister*)—as the title of the treatise denotes (figure 1)—, whereas the rest seems to derive from other parts of the book that saw the light in the decade of the 1560s (de la Cruz-Cabanillas, “Secrets” 34-36; Lorente-Sánchez, “Dating” 24-26; also Ruscelli, *thyrd and last parte*; Ferguson; Stijnman).



Figure 1. Title of the *Secreti* treatise. “The Secretes of þe most reuerend master Alexis of piemount. 1568.” (folio 1r, line 1)

As far as *Niewe Herball* is concerned, the text has likewise been found to comprehend a confined portion of the primary printed edition insomuch that it reproduces 198 plant categorisations and explanations, whilst the source piece extends to 571, a number nearly three times higher than in our document. As opposed to the other copy under examination, this treatise comes from just a unique version of the printed book, namely, its earliest English edition, issued for the first time in Antwerp in 1578 (see Dodoens; Barlow 138-139). This printed translation has its origins in a French version released twenty-one years before, which is, in fact, another translation of the primary piece published in 1554 and rendered in Flemish (Arber 82). Even though other later editions printed in English exist, the beginning of the *Niewe Herball* treatise reveals that the scribe utilised the earliest version as source of transcription, since the date 1578 may be viewed at the end of the second line of folio 23r (Lorente-Sánchez, “Dodoens’ Herbal” 148).

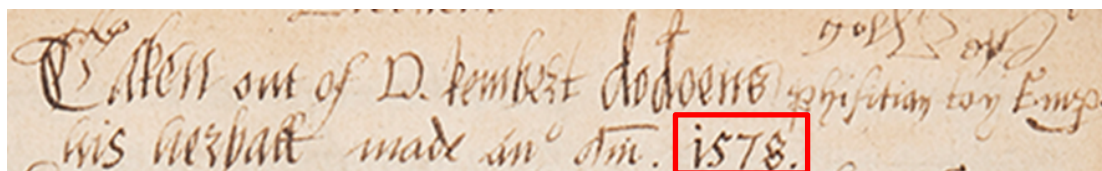


Figure 2. Title of the *Nieuwe Herball* treatise. “Taken out of Doctor Rembert Dodoens phisitian to ye Emperour. his herball made anno domini. 1578.” (folio 23r, lines 1-2)

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study relies on the survey of the digitised images of *F7*, currently part of the research project entitled *The Málaga Corpus of Early English Scientific Prose (MCEESP)*, which is conducted by a group of researchers from the University of Málaga in association with other scholars from different Spanish and international universities.⁷ The project tackles the compilation of documents from the 1350-1900 period ascribed within Voigts’ (322-23) threefold classification of early scientific writing, that is, recipe collections, surgical texts and theoretical treatises; all of it to allow for the analysis of different forms of language variation from a chronological point of view.⁸

The texts of *F7* represent a portion of the material appertaining to the Early Modern English component of the *MCEESP* (Calle-Martín et al.), which, on the whole, comprehends around seven hundred and fifty thousand words of pieces of medical nature from the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. This constituent pursues, on the one hand, the electronic edition of the scientific volumes it includes, where the digitalised images of these are supplied together with their complementary semi-diplomatic transcriptions. On the other, it also aims to provide users with a raw, a normalised and a POS-tagged corpus from these witnesses. The material stems from 21 medical manuscripts from five collections allocated in different noteworthy academic institutions, including the Hunterian, Ferguson and General Collections at Glasgow University Library (9 manuscripts), the Wellcome Collection at the Wellcome Library in London (11 manuscripts), and the Rylands Collection at the University of Manchester Library (1 manuscript).⁹

It is worth mentioning that some of these handwritten compositions and, as such, their transcriptions have already been object of analysis about diverse aspects of English at various linguistic levels, comprising orthography (Tyrkkö; Criado-Peña, “Orthographic Standardisation”), punctuation (Thaisen, “Transparently

⁷ Employed for illustrative purposes, the adapted Figures presented throughout the whole paper also stem from the digitised pictures of the manuscript available in one of the *MCEESP* official webpages (<https://modernmss.uma.es/thetexts/>). These images form part of the project since the beginning of 2019, after having the compilers contacted the Archives and Special Collections Department of Glasgow University Library, paid the required fee, and obtained the corresponding permission for their electronic reproduction. They are reproduced in the article Courtesy of University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections, Ferguson Collection, MS Ferguson 7. © Glasgow University Library, Archives and Special Collections Department, as the owner of the manuscript.

⁸ See <https://varieng.helsinki.fi/CoRD/corpora/SciProse/>.

⁹ See <https://modernmss.uma.es/> for further information and details on each of the available manuscripts.

Hierarchical”; Criado-Peña, “Punctuation Practice”) and syntax (Romero-Barranco, “Linguistic Complexity”), among others. Our study, however, only focuses on the careful examination of the electronic images of *Secreti* and *Niewe Herball*. While the transcriptions of the two treatises are as well available on the project’s webpage and, as shown in (1), annotated with HTML tags to facilitate the retrieval of occurrences via the labels `<s>/</s>`, some of the mistakes made by the scribes remained unperceived at the moment of correcting (see section 4.1), ergo unrecorded in the transcriptions. Moreover, some specific correction-types (see section 4.2.2) cannot be either represented in them, thereby turning on the sole transcriptions would make us miss a number of instances, as these are not reproduced in the files.¹⁰ Thus, the minute reading of the images permits a more accurate detection of the scribal errors and corrections taking place in the texts, which facilitates their eventual classification and evaluation of their incidences.¹¹ To ease the process, all errors and corrections, together with the folio and the line(s) of it where they arise, have been annotated in an independent document when identified throughout the manuscript examination and checked various times to avoid both skipping valid instances and including any unnecessary occurrences. For this reason, some manuals on Early Modern English palaeography have been consulted for the sake of an accurate identification and sorting of instances. Overall, the entire methodological procedure has been straightforward given the high quality of the images coupled with the good state of conservation of the volume, despite some sporadic traces of slight deterioration.

(1)

a) “. . . then take the skin, and fold *him* in the middle, rubbing him well ~~in the middle~~ on both sides, with þe said soden beryes *which* remain in the pan and after *with* raw alom powder. this done take the ashes of shepes dung burned, and weet it *with* the said colour þat you streined into the said vessell, and rub the skin well on euery side, then clere *him* again of the said greines, and wash *him with* clere water, and set *him* to dry *without* wying *him*: finally cast on him two glasfuls of the said ~~water~~ lycour, and it will be a perfett grene.” (*Secreti*, folio 8v, lines 17-24).

b) then take the skin, and fold hi<i>m</i> in the midle, rubbing him well <s>in the middle</s> on both sid<i>es</i>, w<i>i</i>t<i>h</i> þe said soden beryes w<i>h</i>c<i>h</i> remain in the pan, and after w<i>i</i>t<i>h</i> raw alom powder. this done take the ashes of shepes dung burned, and weet it w<i>i</i>t<i>h</i> the said colour þ<i>a</i>t you streined into the said vessell, and rub the skin well on euery side, then clere hi<i>m</i> again of the said greines, and wash hi<i>m</i> w<i>i</i>t<i>h</i> clere wat<i>er</i>, <i>and</i> set hi<i>m</i> to dry w<i>i</i>t<i>h</i>out wying hi<i>m</i>: finally cast on him two

¹⁰ To palliate this defect in her analysis of the phenomena in three different copies of a mediaeval antidotary, Marqués-Aguado identified certain errors “through the lemmatisation and tagging of the texts for the compilation of the [MCEESP], since this process required delving into the texts and their intricacies to provide suitable lemmas and tags” (57-58).

¹¹ The transcriptions are only used in this paper for the reproduction of examples, and are presented with slight modifications to the original MCEESP file for clarity purposes.

glasfuls of the said <s>water</s> lycour, <i>and</i> it will be a p<i>er</i>fett grene.

4. ANALYSIS

The identification and description of the phenomena in two Early Modern English handwritten specimens should be preceded by an overview of the various types of scribal errors and emendations that could be observed at the time. On the words of Beal, “[e]rrors made by scribes in the copying of manuscript texts take many forms, most of them familiar to those who engage in any kind of transcription work” (360). Unfortunately, however, the establishment of what specifically comprises an error was on an important array of occasions problematic, regarded in late Middle and Early Modern English as an ambiguous task. This was due to the lack of spelling and punctuation rules, the unsystematic use of syntax and grammar, and—as previously mentioned—the ample divergence of mistakes as for the typology of manuscripts and the circumstances whereby they were produced (Petti 29-30; also Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors” 106; “Digital Editing” 154-55). Notwithstanding these complexities, certain sources devoted to the palaeography and edition of early English manuscripts (see Hector 49; Moorman 57) coincide in that there exist two broad categories of scribal errors. The first group includes those errors that scribes have unconsciously skipped and so “left for us to detect,” and the second covers those they have identified and consequently emended (Hector 49; also Romero-Barranco, “Hunterian Collection” 298-99).

Bearing this distinction in mind, the present section has been divided into two subsections. Section 4.1 pays attention to the unnoticed “spontaneous errors” (Moorman 57) that the scribes of *F7* have overlooked to correct, offering a description of their basic characteristics alongside their recurrence in the texts. Section 4.2, in turn, tackles those mistakes that have been discerned and yields an illustration of the different mechanisms of rectification employed to fix them, coupled with their corresponding distributions.

4.1 Unnoticed errors

As one might expect from the errors that have remained unnoticed over time, they are usually the result of mere writing accidents that could occur when scribes underwent their copying labours in not the most suitable working conditions, that is, in those cases wherein they were susceptible to “failing concentration, wandering attention, tiredness, or plain carelessness” (Beal 360). Nevertheless, sometimes they may also arise from the illegibility and/or ambiguity of the material comprised within the volume(s) used by the scribes as reference to compose their treatises. In other words, while attempting to transcribe hands they could not understand, they could make “the same sort of mistakes as we make in those circumstances ourselves” (Hector 49). According to Moorman (57-58), the majority of errors within this category consists of (i) alterationsof

single letters as a result of possible confusions between those that are similar in shape; (ii) omissions of a letter or set of letters; (iii) additions of a same letter or set of letters; (iv) transposition –i.e. the reversal of word order; (v) erroneous letter(s)-division; and (vi) mistakes in abbreviations (also Hector 49; Petti 30; Beal 360-61). As far as the texts of *F7* are concerned, only omissions, alterations and additions have been found.¹²

4.1.1 Omissions

First, omissions comprise the unintentional exclusion of different units within the writing lines, which may range from an individual letter to entire phrases and/or sentences. Even though there are no specific motives for this kind of error to emerge in a handwritten piece, Petti (30) claims that “it is usually caused by the scribe resuming his copying at the same word or phrase, which occurs a little further on from where he left off, an error known as *homoeoteleuton*.” Also labelled in some specialised books on manuscript studies as “eyeskip” (see Clemens and Graham 35; Beal 361), this form of error “makes reference to the situation in which the letters missed out are in close proximity to similar ones” (e.g. the omission of “~~pe~~” in the sequence “of ~~pe~~ ne~~pe~~r party” because of its resemblance to the second syllable of “ne~~pe~~r”) (Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors” 107). On the other hand, sometimes the omission arises when the copyist reproduces a unit just once whereas in the original occurs two times, a type of exclusion technically known as “haplography” (e.g. “intendo” instead of “intendendo”) (Hector 49).

When it comes to the material under scrutiny, both *homoeoteleuton* and *haplography* are observed to be non-existent, yet other sorts of omission seem to take place. Even so, there is no unequivocal evidence to confirm whether these happen accidentally or, as recent research has suggested (see de la Cruz-Cabanillas, “*Secrets*” 38-42; Lorente-Sánchez, *Corpus Compilation* 153-219), they emanate from the deliberate linguistic personalisation conducted by the scribes when transcribing several passages of the printed editions in their treatises. For instance, sentences in (2a) and (3a) show two fragments where the scribe of *Secreti* omits the adjectives “sayd” and “fine” before the nouns “leaves” and “pouder,” despite being included in the printed version of the text, as illustrated in (2b) and (3b). While these examples indicate clear omissions of certain units in the manuscript copy, one is unable to determine the scribal wilfulness in excluding them, and, as such, they should not be treated as cases of unnoticed errors in the analysis. Our study, therefore, only considers all those occurrences in which evident unintentional omissions are attested, such as that reproduced in figure 3, where the letter <n> of the adverb ‘then’ is missing, and so read in the manuscript as “the.”¹³

¹² Note that the order hereafter followed is based on the frequency of appearance of these errors in the texts, that is to say, from the most to the least recurrent.

¹³ Note that the square brackets [] are employed to denote the letter or set of letters that are omitted in each specific case.

(2)

a) “now must þe pacient be in his bed with his bealye downward, bycause ye must lay the leaues upon þe emoroides, . . .” (*Secreti*, folio 1r, lines 21-22).

b) “Nowe, must the pacient be in his bed with his belly downward, because ye must lay the **sayd** leaues vpon the Emorhodes, . . .” (*The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont*, 1568, folio 9r, lines 20-22).

(3)

a) “It is a remedye proued *and* tried, to blow with a reed in his throte pouder of plantain leaues dried.” (*Secreti*, folio 14v, lines 2-3).

b) “It is a remedie proued and tried, to blow with a reede in his throte **fine** pouder of Plantaine leaues dried.” (*The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont*, 1566, folio 3v, lines 19-20).

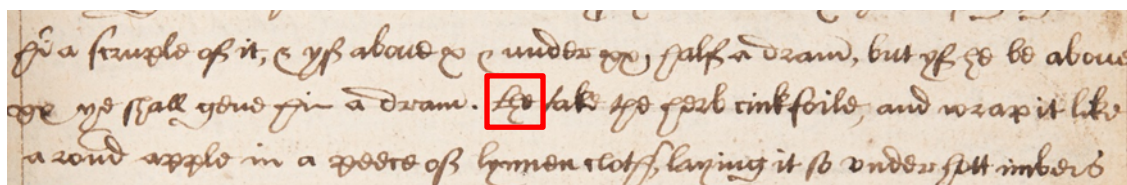


Figure 3. Omission in *Secreti*. “him a scruple of it, and yf about x and under xx half a dram, but yf he be about xx ye shall geue him a dram. **the[n]** take the herb cinkfoile, and wrap it like a round apple in a peece of lynnene cloth, laying it so vnder hott imbers” (folio 7r, lines 9-11)

As reproduced in table 1 below, a total of 18 occurrences of accidental omissions are witnessed in the two treatises of *F7*, with a different distribution in quantitative and qualitative terms. From a quantitative viewpoint, most of these errors are viewed in *Niewe Herball*, where they amount to 15 instances, five times as many as in the other text, where they are confined to just 3 occurrences.

Table 1
Number of omissions in the treatises of *F7*

	<i>Secreti</i>	<i>Niewe Herball</i>	TOTAL
Omissions	3	15	18

From a qualitative standpoint, some differences are likewise observed as regards the types of omission attested in the treatises. In *Secreti*, this unnoticed error uniquely comprehends the fortuitous exclusion of a single letter from a word, normally when the said letter should appear in final position (2 instances), as exemplified in figure 3 above, though it also takes place once word-initially, as shown in (4). In *Niewe Herball*, by contrast, the omission of an individual letter is more regularly found in medial position, as in (5), being negligible in any other part of a word. Apart from this, the largest number of omissions in this treatise comprises the lack of a curtailment mechanism (see Tannenbaum 124) as an indicator that some words—and hence the letters they

include—are abbreviated. Although the scribe generally tends to make use of diverse abbreviation devices for such a purpose (see figures 4 and 5), there are 10 occasions wherein, possibly motivated by a rapid copying procedure, he fails to incorporate them, as illustrated in (6).

(4) “. . . some hauing taken of the said pouder ouer night, found them selues in the morning so well, that they rose up, clothed them selues *and* walked, *and* finally were healed [t]hrowlye.” (*Secreti*, folio 7v, lines 1-3).

(5) “It is a lowe herbe about a span longe, somthing like to ysop, with **ma[n]y** square braunches, the leaues are broder then ysop leaues, *and* longer then lesse centaury leaues.” (*Niewe Herball*, folio 37v, lines 25-27).



Figure 4. “women.” (*Niewe Herball*, folio 24v, line 24)



Figure 5. “maner” (*Niewe Herball*, folio 26v, line 13)

(6) “. . . and yf not onelie taken inwardlie, but also laid to outwardlie, vpon þe region of þe bladder in **man[er]** of a fomentacion or warm bath.” (*Niewe Herball*, folio 25v, lines 20-22).

4.1.2 Alterations

Second, alterations can be either involuntary, resulting from the lack of understanding of the source copy, or planned, carried out in most cases with the objective of modifying its meaning or altering its numerous connotations (Petti 30; also Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors” 109). The most regular sort of alteration in historical English manuscripts, and so in *Secreti* and *Niewe Herball*, is simple “mistranscription,” which may be caused, according to Marqués-Aguado (60),

by the scribe’s difficulties to understand the handwriting of the exemplar, its dialect or language; by the confusion of letterforms (for instance, the ever-present problem of minims); by the misunderstanding of abbreviations or even numerals; [or] by an awkward word division in the exemplar.

Figure 6 below presents an instance of mistranscription in which the scribe of *Niewe Herball* uses the erroneous term “docoction,” instead of “decoction,” in order to refer to the extraction of specific healing substances from plants and herbs.¹⁴

¹⁴ The etymology and the different spelling forms of those potential instances of mistranscription have been consulted via the *OED* and the *Middle English Dictionary (MED)* to check whether they are actual alterations or, on the contrary, mere orthographic variants of the words in question. In the particular case of “decoction,” the term is a borrowing from the Old French “decoction, -coccium,” to which it came through the Latin “dēcoctiōn-em.” It is defined as “[a] liquor in which a substance, usually animal or vegetable, has been boiled, and in which the principles thus extracted are dissolved; spec. as a medicinal agent” (*OED*). As for its orthographic forms, the *MED* records the variants “decocco(u)n,” “decoctio(u)n,” “dedkokcioun” and “decoaccioun.”

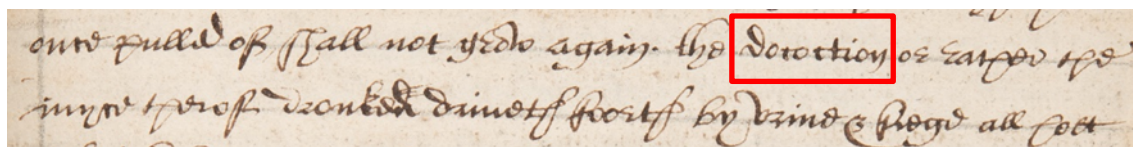


Figure 6. Alteration in *Nieuwe Herball*. “once pulled of, shall not yedo again. the **doctoion** or rather the iuyce therof dronken driueth fourth by vrine *and* siege all hott” (folio 24r, lines 4-5)

On quantitative grounds, 9 instances of alterations are identified in our material. Even though the frequency of appearance of these errors is again more recurrent in the *Nieuwe Herball* treatise, the difference as regards *Secreti* is minimal insomuch that they are seen to occur 5 and 4 times, respectively. Compared with other medical manuscripts written at diverse points of the fifteenth century (see Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors” 109-111; Marqués-Aguado 64-65, 68-69, 71-72), the texts of *F7* present a substantially lower figure of alterations, which may be justified in terms of the legibility of the source piece. Whilst the documents object of study are taken from printed excerpts, in themselves easy to read and hence to copy, the higher quantity of alterations in manuscripts deriving from earlier handwritten witnesses stem—as previous research has demonstrated—from the problems that the scribes could face in trying to understand the scripts of the original document(s).

Table 2
Number of alterations in the treatises of *F7*

	<i>Secreti</i>	<i>Nieuwe Herball</i>	TOTAL
<i>Alterations</i>	4	5	9

Qualitatively speaking, on the other hand, the analysis shows that there is no variation between the treatises as to the manner alterations materialise, given that only mistranscriptions of single letters are spotted, as exemplified in (7) and (8), where the conjunction “but” and the noun “foote” are rendered as “bet” and “foole,” respectively.

(7) “. . . the next morn, strayn the clearest through a lynneth cloth putting to it for euery pott of water, *half ounce* of brasell scraping and let them seth well in it; **bet** yet they must be boyled first in alom . . .” (*Secreti*, folio 19v, lines 3-5)

(8) “. . . the leaf is of a red purple colour, after it putteth furth a straight stem of a **foole** long or more *with diuers* braunches on the sides, þe leaues growing on them . . .” (*Nieuwe Herball*, folio 35r, lines 23-25)

4.1.3 Additions

Finally, additions always involve in *F7* errors of “dittography,” i.e. the repetition of words, phrases, or syllables as a consequence of the defective use of sight, lapses of memory and understanding, along with the scribes’ physical and mental tiredness (Petti 30; also Beal 360). This type of error arises when after “having correctly copied in full

a passage in which the same word or phrase occurred twice, the scribe’s eye went back from the second to the first occurrence in his exemplar, causing him to copy the passage a second time” (Clemens and Graham 35). Figure 7 reproduces an example of dittography in *Secreti*, where the preposition “of” is twofoldly repeated in the twenty-sixth line of folio 20v.

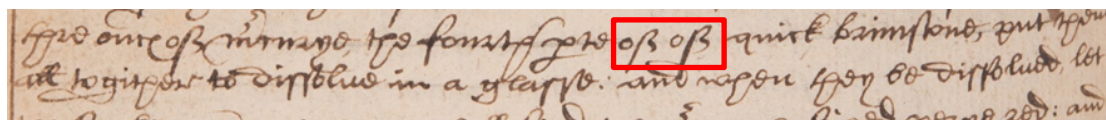


Figure 7. Addition in *Secreti*. “three ounces of mercurye, the fourth parte **of of** quick brimstone, put them all together to dissolue in a glasse: and when they be dissolued, let.” (folio 20v, lines 26-27)

As can be viewed in table 3 below, additions are the least frequent sort of unnoticed error in *F7*, with only 6 instances. Nevertheless, contrary to omissions and alterations, they are more commonly seen in *Secreti*, where the number of occurrences totals 4, whereas in *Niewe Herball* it is reduced to 2.

Table 3
Number of additions in the treatises of *F7*

	<i>Secreti</i>	<i>Niewe Herball</i>	TOTAL
Additions	4	2	6

Regarding the typology of addition, still all the occurrences in the material involve the repetition of words, *Secreti* presents a greater degree of variation than *Niewe Herball* as concerns the way these are displayed. In the first of these texts, half of the repeated units are identically supplied, but the rest are presented distinctly, as in (9), in which the number “four” appears twice in a row: one of them in the form of a digit, and the other spelt. In the second, by contrast, the duplicated words are always provided in the same shape, as reproduced in (10).

(9) “. . . take the said water of alome, *and* anynt *your* vessel *with* it *and* let it drye. do thus thre or **4 foure** tymes, *and* leaue it open *pat* the bottom may be the better . . .” (*Secreti*, folio 20v, lines 16-18)

(10) “. . . at the top wherof grow floures in little tuftes, thick sett **like like** to scabious of a light blew colour. after the falling of *which* floures, *commeth* the seed . . .” (*Niewe Herball*, folio 37r, lines 8-10)

4.2 Noticed errors and their corrections

Errors classified within the category of undetected have been traditionally claimed to be outstandingly more numerous than those belonging to the group of noticed and corrected (Moorman 57). In our treatises, however, this view comes to be contradicted insofar as identified and emended errors are observed to occur more widely than unnoticed ones. This is, indeed, a sign that the presence of mistakes in historical pieces

depended on a number of factors, such as the audience expected to read them, the copyists’ concern in furnishing a correct reproduction of the contents, their writing pursuits, and the degree of “preciousness” they attempted to ascribe to the composition, among others (Calle-Martín and Miranda-García 36; also Wakelin 102).

The emendation methods could also differ according to the period in which the handwritten volumes are produced, but, above all, the grade of visibility of corrections that the scribes aimed to reflect in their works (see Wakelin 102). Hector (49-50) notes that the correction techniques employed in early manuscripts generally encompass (i) deletions, which are additionally subdivided into erasure, cancellation, expunction, underlining and obliteration; (ii) vacations (see Petti 29; also Tannenbaum 147); and (iii) insertions. Petti (29), in turn, likewise distinguishes the emendations known as dissolutions and alterations, each of these used in distinct rectification contexts and for rather different purposes. When it comes to *F7*, three kinds of scribal corrections have been detected, namely deletions, insertions, and alterations.

4.2.1 Deletions

Deletions are the main sort of scribal correction in the copies under study, consisting “in the ruling out of a letter or word(s) of a text” (Calle-Martín and Miranda-García 36). As previously stated, several forms of deletion coexisted among historical handwritten artefacts, their choice being usually subjected to the formality of the volume and to several of its codicological features, for instance, the ink-type, the material of the writing surface and the amount of space available (Petti 29). *F7* presents three deletion techniques, that is, cancellation, erasure and expunction. Table 4 then summarises their distributions in the two treatises.

Table 4
Number of deletion methods in the treatises of *F7*

	<i>Secreti</i>	<i>Niewe Herball</i>	TOTAL
<i>Cancellation</i>	27	43	70
<i>Erasure</i>	14	15	29
<i>Expunction</i>	1	0	1
TOTAL	42	57	99

First, cancellation is the predominant type of deletion method in the texts, *Niewe Herball* in particular, followed at an ample distance by erasure and expunction. Whilst it could be implemented in diverse manners, from simple straight or curled lines to crosses resembling the letter <x> over the elements to delete (Petti 29; Wakelin 109), cancellation is always carried out in our material via horizontal and diagonal lines that may be rendered either single or double depending on the scribes’ idiosyncrasy.

It is employed similarly in the two pieces, mostly for the elimination of words and individual letters, as reproduced in Figures 8 and 9, respectively. Notwithstanding this general trend, there are some instances in both treatises where the copyists make use of cancellation with longer fragments to correct errors of dittography (Figure 10), a fact which might explain the low regularity of this type of mistake in the treatises.

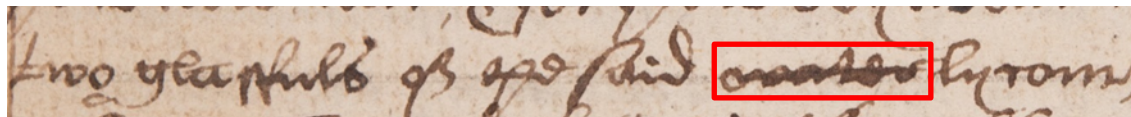


Figure 8. Cancellation in *Secreti*. “two glafpuls of the said ~~water~~ lycour.” (folio 8v, line 24)

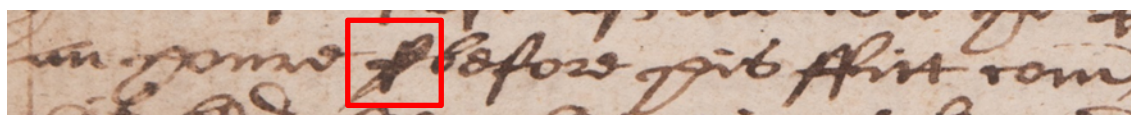


Figure 9. Cancellation in *Secreti*. “an houre ~~f~~ before his Fit com.” (folio 2v, line 32)

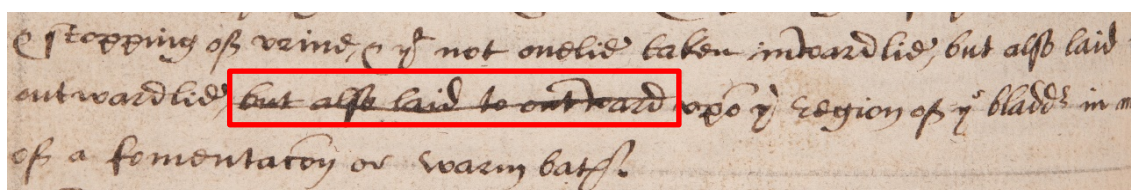


Figure 10. Cancellation in *Nieuwe Herball*. “and stopping of vrine, and þat not onelie taken inwardlie, but also laid to outwardlie, ~~but also laid to outward~~ vpon þe region of þe bladder in man[er] of a fomentacion or warm bath.” (folio 25v, lines 20-21)

Erasure, in turn, is the second most frequent method of deletion in the pieces, and it principally involves the elimination of an error from the writing surface with a penknife or an akin instrument and the subsequent inclusion of the correct letter(s) in its place (Clemens and Graham 35; Wakelin 102-03). In some other cases, the erased place can be left empty, which, like most corrections of this type, “increases in legibility quite considerably under ultra-violet light” (Petti 29). From a chronological viewpoint, erasure is the most prevalent form of emendation in Middle English (see Marqués-Aguado 65), since it reflects a minor degree of correction visibility in comparison with other scribal techniques (Wakelin 102-04). In Early Modern handwriting, its usage seems to decrease as soon as paper—less suitable for erasure than parchment, for instance—started to be usually employed as writing material (Hector 49; also Petti 29).

Despite *Secreti* and *Nieuwe Herball* are written in paper, erasure exhibits a relatively regular incidence (14 and 15 instances, respectively), used among others for the rectification of such mistakes as the presence of the wrong letters as parts of a word, the erroneous visual representation of these, and the incorrect inclusion of certain symbols, as in figures 11, 12 and 13. As shown, it is identified through the different levels of tonality around the place of correction produced by the spread of the ink while erasing (see Hector 49-50; Romero-Barranco, “Hunterian Collection” 300), which is something generally noticeable in the several types of writing surfaces, paper included.¹⁵

¹⁵ Curiously enough, however, in his survey of some emendation techniques in a sample of manuscripts from the Henry E. Huntington Library, Wakelin (105, 107) finds that “[e]rasures on paper are only



Figure 11. Erasure in *Secreti*. “must” (folio 6r, line 29)



Figure 12. Erasure in *Niewe Herball*. “and” (folio 27r, line 2)



Figure 13. Erasure in *Niewe Herball*. ‘cruciata. it is drye’ (folio 44r, line 25)

Finally, expunction—also known as subpunction—entails the placing of either one or a series of dots under those letter(s) to be removed. Used more regularly for small deletions as a neater complement to cancellation, this method was in vogue among manuscripts produced in the mediaeval period, though it was seldom viewed by the beginning of the Renaissance (Petti 29; Clemens and Graham 35; also Hector 50).¹⁶ As early seventeenth-century handwritten works, expunction only occurs on a single case in *Secreti* as a means to avoid the repetition of the preposition ‘with’ in the sixth line of folio 1v (figure 14) (see Romero-Barranco, “Hunterian Collection” 299-300).

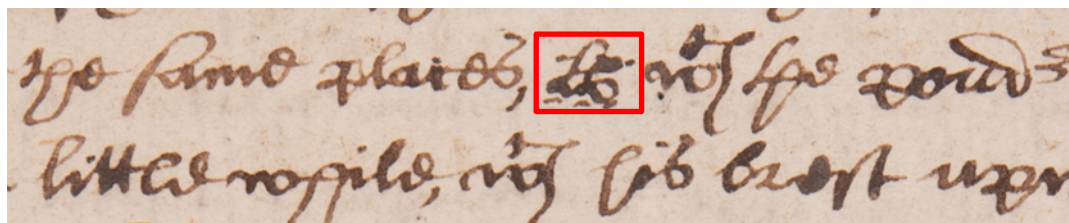


Figure 14. Expunction in *Secreti*. ‘with’ (folio 1v, line 6)

4.2.2 Insertions

Insertions deal with the incorporation of word(s) and/or letter(s) that the scribes excluded in their texts, possibly as a result of unintentional slips while carrying out their copying duties (Calle-Martín and Miranda-García 37). Even though this form of correction could be directly implemented on the line—especially on those occasions wherein small omissions are concerned—, it is usually represented above the line (i.e.

frequent in a copy of some medical works, where what look like erasures are so white that they might have been made by daubing something on the page instead.”

¹⁶ As some studies have confirmed (see Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors” 114-115; Marqués-Aguado 65; Calle-Martín, *A Middle English Commentary* 32), expunction could be used in Middle English jointly with cancellation, as well as with other deletion practices such as obliteration. Clemens and Graham argue that the combination of various types of deletions in a handwritten text might have not been necessarily carried out by its own writer, “the two corrections of the same error having perhaps been added at different times” (35).

interlineation), either directly over or slightly to the right of the position they were planned to appear, with the caret (^) indicating, in several cases, the specific place of insertion (Petti 29; also Hector 50; Wakelin 113).¹⁷ As far as the material under scrutiny is concerned, the analysis shows no significant differences between the treatises, neither on quantitative nor qualitative grounds. As illustrated in table 5, insertions display a similar distribution in the texts, where they are almost at all times rendered in interlineated position to denote the incorporation of letter(s) and word(s) (figures 15 and 16). The only exception is observed nearly at the end of folio 2v, given that an instance of this correction is observed below the line (figure 17). Regarding the caret, the symbol is also almost equally spread, as it is viewed 7 and 8 times in *Secreti* and *Niwe Herball*, respectively. In the rest of the instances, however, its use is disregarded, such an absence being commonplace in Early Modern English handwriting, often determined by the particular tastes of copyists (see Tannenbaum 147).

Table 5
Number of insertions in the treatises of *F7*

	<i>Secreti</i>	<i>Niwe Herball</i>	TOTAL
Insertions	14	17	31



Figure 15. Insertion in *Secreti*. “f/e\lon” (folio 5r, line 19)

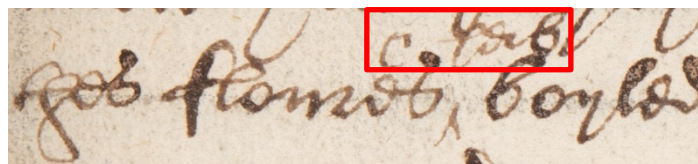


Figure 16. Insertion in *Niwe Herball*. “thes floures /and herb\ boyled” (folio 32r, line 14)

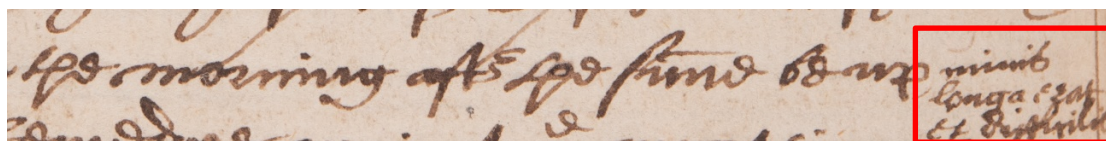


Figure 17. Insertion in *Secreti*. “the morning after the sunne be up, minis \longa erat et difficilis/” (folio 2v, line 29)

4.2.3 Alterations

Alterations were used to modify an erroneous letter by “*superimposing* or *superscribing* the correct letter on the deleted one, especially when the two letters shared common

¹⁷ Note that this normally applies to those instances where a confined number of units are incorporated. According to Hector, “where more material has to be added than can be conveniently interlined it is entered in the margin and distinguished by a mark or device of which a duplicate is drawn at the point of insertion” (50).

features” (Petti 29; also Calle-Martín, *A Middle English Commentary* 32). If compared with the rest of methods, they are probably one of the least aesthetically appealing emendation techniques employed in historical handwritten volumes, to such an extent that its usage is sometimes sporadically seen in manuscripts from both the Middle English (see Esteban-Segura, “Scribal Errors” 116; Marqués-Aguado 66) and the Early Modern English periods (see Romero-Barranco, “Hunterian Collection” 300; Calle-Martín, *A Middle English Commentary* 33).

In this same fashion, alterations are the scribal emendations presenting the lowest recurrence in our material; still, they are witnessed 7 times, 3 of which in *Secreti* and the other 4 in *Niewe Herball*. Figures 18 and 19 provide two examples of alterations where the letter <g> is superimposed over another consonant, presumably the letter <k>. ¹⁸

Table 6
Number of alterations in the treatises of F7

	<i>Secreti</i>	<i>Niewe Herball</i>	TOTAL
<i>Alterations</i>	3	4	7



Figure 18. Alteration in *Secreti*. “thinge” (folio 7v, line 33)



Figure 19. Alteration in *Secreti*. “begon” (folio 13v, line 37)

5. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The present paper has analysed the distribution of the scribal errors and corrections in the *Secreti* and *Niewe Herball* treatises held in Glasgow University Library, MS Ferguson 7, i.e. two handwritten copies of the Early Modern English printed scientific works entitled *The Secrets of Alexis of Piedmont* and *A Niewe Herball or Historie of Plants*. The survey has also meant to account for any similar or variable patterns between the pieces, as well as to conclude their possible value and the purposes of their reproduction in the volume.

In comparison with the numerous forms of unnoticed errors that could be found in early English handwriting—including manuscripts belonging to the scientific

¹⁸ In most instances, together with the superscription, the scribes also tend to cross out the letters they intend to remove, probably for clarity reasons.

genre—, the study has illustrated that the material under scrutiny encompasses a more restricted typology of mistakes, with only instances of omissions, alterations and additions. Such a low presence of errors in the texts may stem from the printed format of the composition wherefrom they derive. Contrary to those treatises using other handwritten specimens as copying sources, which, as Marqués-Aguado points out, may provide scribes with serious difficulties in attempting to comprehend the hands of the primary exemplar(s), printed documents are rendered in a legible and standard typography, so quite straightforward to understand and to copy. Except for additions, all the errors are observed to occur more recurrently in *Nieuwe Herball*, possibly as a result of a rapid transcription process undertaken by its writer.

Noticed errors, on the other hand, outnumber those from the other broad category in our material, where they are seen to be corrected by way of deletions, insertions and alterations. Whilst there is some deal of variation, the analysis has supplied us with a similar picture between the treatises, both as regards the quantity of corrections and the contexts in which they are used. On the whole, although the copies are—in the light of various of their physical features (see Lorente-Sánchez “Dating”; “Dodoens’ Herbal”)—relatively well-presented throughout the pages of *F7*, the amount of corrections witnessed in them leads us to assume that the scribes were not entirely concerned about their aesthetical appearances and, as such, that they were designed for a practical private purpose, as had already been suggested in recent research by de la Cruz-Cabanillas (“*Secrets*”) and Lorente-Sánchez (*Corpus Compilation*; “Dodoens’ Herbal”), for instance. This tentatively comes to indicate that the texts were probably not conceived as valuable as other early English compositions, a view reinforced among others by works such as Calle-Martín and Miranda-García’s, Esteban-Segura’s (“Scribal Errors”) and Romero-Barranco’s (*Constantinus*), in which it is remarked that the fewer number of corrections a copy contains, the more precious was supposed to be.

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