Across the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a number of London merchants compiled handwritten collections of prose and verse texts in English, Latin, and French. Robert Fabyan, a draper (d. 1513), filled his self-titled *Concordance of Storyes* with prose narratives from the time of Brutus to the Tudor era, incorporating Latin verse (metrical and rhymed), French-derived *balade* stanzas, and English poetic forms into its chapters. Richard Hill, a grocer (fl. 1503–1536), recorded personal and historical notes in his account book while copying out English and French letters and mixed-language poetry. John Colyns, a mercer (fl. 1517–1539), gathered into his personal manuscript multilingual poems, London ordinances, and treatises on bookmaking.¹

Chapter 5

Mary-Rose McLaren has grouped some of these collections together as “London Chronicles,” suggesting that the manuscripts compiled by Hill (Oxford, Balliol College MS 354), Colyns (London, British Library, Harley MS 2252), and haberdasher Robert Arnold (commonly known as Arnold’s Chronicle or The Customs of London, first printed in Antwerp in 1503) share common sources in French and Latin that have since been lost. Although discussing such manuscripts as “London chronicles” usefully draws attention to these merchants’ shared investments in the city and in history writing, such a category has the potential to obscure the profound generic diversity of the texts that each collection incorporates—including literary, legal, and instructional materials.

Rather than attempting to address these compilations under a single category of textual practice—e.g., as literary anthologies, manuscript miscellanies, commonplace books, or examples of vernacular chronicle writing, as others have done—I would like to stress how their internal generic and linguistic heterogeneity shapes their manifold functions. Even a cursory look through any one of these books suggests that each one fulfilled a number of purposes for its multitasking merchant-compiler. An individual book could serve as a chronicle, account register, lyric anthology, and repository for practical documents and notes. In other words, these merchants’ collections were not only multilingual but also multifunctional.

This chapter maintains that each of these collections is best examined on its own terms as an idiosyncratic textual and linguistic universe. As Mark Amsler remarks in a different context: “multilingual writing [in many cases] goes beyond simply juxtaposing languages to imaginatively and performatively creating and enacting textual spaces as contact zones.”


3. Alexandra Gillespie identifies a more diffuse phenomenon of “citizens’ notes” that would include figures like Hill. “Stow’s ‘Owlde’ Manuscripts,” in John Stow: English Past, eds. Gadd and Gillespie (2004), 63, see also footnote 44.


6. Mark Amsler, “Creole Grammar and Multilingual Poetics,” in Christopher Klein-
In this respect, we can explore each collection as its own dynamic contact zone, a textual space where languages meet, inform, and transform each other. My readings attend most closely to acts of code-switching (i.e., instances of movement across different languages) throughout these collections. By focusing on such moments, I reveal how these merchants engage in what we would now call translation theory and comparative literary analysis. Throughout this chapter, I trace how these merchants characterized their own acts of multilingual compilation and created spaces for theorizing their divergent modes of translingual writing. These merchant-compilers exhibit a range of literacies and different linguistic capacities, yet they all illustrate the creative potential inherent in translingual writing practices.

Robert Fabyan (Draper): *Compilatio* as Craft

The work of the London draper Robert Fabyan is perhaps as good a point as any for discussing translingual compilation. Fabyan conceived of his project, which he entitled the *Concordance of Storyes*, as a coherent whole, and Fabyan is methodical and wide-ranging in his chronological sweep across history. The two-volume *Concordance*, which survives across a few manuscripts and early print editions, provides a combined history of England and France spanning from Brutus to the Tudors, with the later chapters offering a London-centered perspective on historical events. What is most intriguing about the *Concordance* is the degree to which Fabyan interjects first-person reflections upon his poetic craft and the cultural status of

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8. Fabyan’s *Concordance of Storyes* survives across two different manuscripts and a few early print editions, including those of Richard Pynson in 1516 (STC 10659), William Rastell in 1533 (STC 10660), and others. The surviving manuscripts are Holkham MS 671 (containing volume 1) and London, British Library MS Cotton Nero C.xi (containing volume 2). These manuscripts feature a shared decorative pattern of large paste-down woodcut initial letters, as well as a common hand sometimes identified as the autograph hand of Fabyan, although this hypothesis has been questioned by McLaren (see p. 26 and following). On the “interpenetration” of manuscript and print features “in the form of hybrid books,” see Boffey, “London Books,” 436–37.
compilation itself. As I shall discuss, Fabyan develops a clear literary persona throughout his project, and he exploits poetry to think through his role as a literary artisan (or, at the very least, textual mediator). His pervasive metaphors of cross-fertilization and organic growth offer dynamic alternatives to linear, developmental models of history, and Fabyan thoughtfully explores the difficulty of synthesizing materials across different languages in order to fashion a new textual assemblage.

Before examining Fabyan’s verse, it is worth noting that an intricate textual apparatus lends coherence to the collection as a collection. Fabyan’s project spans two volumes. The first extends from Brutus to William the Conqueror, providing a macro-level view of the reigns of England and France; the second spans the reign of Richard I to Henry VII, adopting a more local orientation. The shift to a London-centered perspective in the second volume is explained in the preface. Fabyan announces that this volume’s chapters will not proceed in order of regnal years but in sequence by the tenure of London mayors; i.e., each chapter bears a heading that lists the names of London’s mayor and other officials (bailiffs, and sheriffs) in the given year.9 Surviving early copies of this work—one of which might bear Fabyan’s handwriting—begin each volume with a concordance to orient the reader as well. This paratext highlights, in tabular form, the differences between the first and second volumes. The table before the first volume lists names of rulers in chronological order, foregrounding the organizational scheme of subsequent chapters.10 At the start of the second volume, a concordance arranges its entries alphabetically according to more thematic topic headings. All in all, this textual apparatus suggests that Fabyan—or someone close to him—perceived the Concordance as a resource for future readers, presenting it as more than a sequence of “storyes.”11

9. “Now, for as moche as we be comyn to the tyme that offycers were chosen and chargyd with the rule of the cytie of London, it is necessary that here we do shewe what offycers they were, and of the name that to them was admitted and gyuen. . . . Wherefore nowe I shall . . . contynewe the names of all offycers, as wele baylyues, mayres, and shryues,” and each is listed according to their terms in office (Ellis, 293, fol. 1). For ease of reference, my quotations follow the 1811 edition by Ellis, and I have silently expanded abbreviations in the text. Henry Ellis, ed., The New Chronicles of England and France, in Two Parts, by Robert Fabyan. Named by himself the Concordance of Histories (London: for F. C. and J. Rivington et al., 1811).

10. This table in the Holkham manuscript is in Latin (see Ellis, vii), but Pynson’s 1516 edition reproduces it in English instead.

11. It is possible that Fabyan, a draper, exploited his connections to the Guildhall. See the introduction to the facsimile of Guildhall MS 3133 by A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley,
The first appearance of verse in this work appears in the prologue to the first volume, when Fabyan employs poetry to launch his ambitious undertaking. Surpassing the scope of the chronological table of contents for the first volume (which extends from Brutus to William the Conqueror), the prologue versifies the span of the entire book’s contents; i.e., the two volumes of the work will proceed from Brutus all the way through Henry VII. Drawing from “olde Auctours . . . in latyn and Frenche” who with “theyr dytes swoot . . . haue so compendiously/Sette the ole Storyes in ordre” (Ellis, 6), this collection relates “the reygne of euery kynge,” including “howe long the Brytons ruled,” and “howe by Saxons they lastly were put oute,/Than of Danes,” and then “how the Normannes, by Wylyam Conquerour,Entryde this lande, and helde the Sygnory” (Ellis, 4). The poet foregrounds this project’s sustained interest in London governance as well: “London, that auncyent Cyte, euer parseueryd in virtuous noblesse” in spite of large-scale waves of invasions (Ellis, 4). In these prefatory verses, the first-person narrator presents the organizational principles of the two volumes as deliberate choices.

In its careful arrangement of source materials, this project employs a noteworthy methodology: it intertwines the histories of England and France, culling from disparate sources to produce an organic whole: “in this boke, may you here and se/Of both landes the Cronycles entyere,/With other matyrs which Regystred be” (Ellis, 5). Fabyan proclaims a fitting title for his work of synthesis: “this boke . . . [t]herefore this name . . . shall now purchase/Concordaunce of Storyes, by me prouyded” (Ellis, 5). Although the verses in the Concordance differ (in form and style) from the textual apparatus, their content is mutually enforcing. Both the tables and the prefatory verses outline the scope of the project, highlight its conceptual framework, and present the “boke” as a synthetic whole.

Although this chronicle of rulers moves along a linear trajectory, a significant amount of “channel surfing” characterizes the chapters, particularly after part 5 of volume 1. In what might be considered a geopolitical equivalent of linguistic code-switching, Fabyan oscillates between chapter sequences bearing the heading Anglia [England] and Francia [France], and at the start of individual chapters, Fabyan often reminds readers of the simultaneity of English and French histories.12 The first chapter on Charles

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12. The Francia/Anglia headings appear in the earliest printed editions of the text (Pynson 1516, Rastell 1533), and these rubrics are likewise preserved as marginal glosses in the edition by Ellis (1811).
IX of France, for instance, states that he “began hys reygne ouer the realme of Fraunce” in 1484, in the “seconde yere of [Richard III] of Engelande” (Ellis, 673); and the chapter on Henry VII of England states that he “began hys dominyon ouer the realme of Englande” in 1485, the “seconde yere of [Charles VIII] then kynge of France” (Ellis, 678). In other words, Fabyan’s chronological history requires cross-referencing and backtracking, imagining a reader who traces events in England and France concurrently. On this note, the prefatory verses encourage discontinuous reading, inviting traversals across Anglia and Francia: “Into .vii. partes I haue this booke deuyded,/So that the Reader may chose where he wyll” (Ellis, 5).

Since Fabyan’s manipulation of historical sources has been much examined by other scholars, this discussion turns to an under-appreciated aspect of his magnum opus: its literary aspirations. Fabyan presents his project as a collection of historical narratives (“storyes”), but the enterprise simultaneously serves, often self-consciously, as a poetic anthology. As much as the Concordance comprises a synthetic historical chronicle, the “boke” experiments with diverse internal strategies for verse translation. As chapters progress, Fabyan develops a literary persona that positions the compiler not only as a historian but also as a poet, a writer who is keenly aware of the challenges inherent in verse translation and compositional practice. Exploiting myriad discourses for theorizing poetry making, Fabyan expresses deep appreciation for aesthetic and stylistic matters, including meter and literary form.

The first instance of verses within the chronicle proper occur in the first volume’s second chapter, which derives from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae. Brutus, legendary founder of Britain, flees Troy, arrives on the coast of Africa, and prays to Diana for guidance. The goddess then appears to him in his sleep:

Brute fyll in a slepe; in tyme of whiche slepe apperyd to hym the sayd Goddesse and sayd to hym in maner and forme as foloweth.

Brute sub ocasu solis trans gallica Regna
Insula in oceano est vndique clausa Mari:
Insula in oceano est habitata gigantibus olim,

Nunc deserta quidem, gentibus apta tuis.
Hic de prole tua reges nascentur, & ipsis
Totius terre subditus orbis erit.
Hanc pete namque; tibi sedes erit et illa perhennis.
Hic fiet natis altera Troia tuis.14

The which versis maye be Englysshed as hereafter foloweth.

Brute farre by West, ouer the lande of Fraunce,
An ile in ocean there is, all closed with the see;
An Ile [with] Geaunts whylom inhabyt by chaunce,
Nowe beynge deserte as apte for thy people & the.
In this of thy body kynges borne shall be,
And of this Ile thou shalt be lorde and kyngye.
Serche this, for here a perpetuell See [i.e., “seat”] to the,
And here to thy childer a new Troy shal spryngge. (Ellis, 9–10)

In an abrupt break in the chronicle’s prose, the narrator code-switches from English to Latin by means of a verse citation. Fabian adheres to the “maner and forme” of the Latin verses that he transcribes, in the original language, from his source text; such respect for the original form of poetry from Latin or French sources is a feature that persists throughout the other chapters.

In this moment in the text, Fabian finds an appropriate vernacular register to convey the “maner and forme” of an eight-line Latin utterance: a modified French-derived rhyme royale stanza (ababbcbc). As appropriate as this form is, the English verses do not correspond “line for line” with the Latin. For instance, the English converts the figurative phrase sub ocasu solis [under the setting of the sun] to a simple cardinal direction, “farre by West.” Despite metrical differences between the Latin and the English, the equivalent line numbers across both versions visually registers Fabian’s respect for the formal aspects (“maner and forme”) of the original. Moreover, this “Englysshed” reiteration of Diana’s utterance re-creates at least some of the Latin’s rhetorical effects.15

14. Brutus, there lies toward the setting sun (in the West), beyond the realm of Gaul, an island surrounded by the waters of the ocean; an island in the ocean once inhabited by giants, but it is now deserted, ready for your people. From your offspring kings will be born, so seek out this place; it will be a proper seat for you and your people. In this place there shall be created for your children another Troy.

15. The anaphora of two lines beginning “Insula in oceano est” (Latin lines 2–3) has an echo in “An Ile . . . An Ile . . . And of this Ile . . . ” (English lines 2, 3, and 6).
These roughly equivalent English and Latin verses foreground the linguistic challenges inherent in verse translation, and this episode additionally evokes another valence of the Latin etymology of *translatio*: movement across space. Diana’s words to Brutus famously predict the foundation of an *altera Troia* or “a new Troy” in the West that will resemble—but cannot replicate—the original in Asia. Indeed, the final words of Fabyan’s next chapter showcase the connection between his own act of poetic translation and the toponymic “crossing over” that occurs in his source narrative: “when Brute had deuyded this Ille of Brytayne . . . after most concordaunce of wryters, he dyed; and was enteryd or buryed at Troynouant or London” (Ellis, 11). The “concordaunce of wryters”—that is, the collective authority of past historians—establishes a movement from Troy to his final internment at “Troynouant or London.” Fabyan’s invocation of a “concordaunce of wryters”—and his choice to name his city with two concurrent toponyms, the native English place-name and a French one—prepares his audience for the many acts of language crossing that will transpire in the rest of his own *Concordance*.

The narrative context of this foundational chapter nicely anticipates subsequent acts of code-switching in Fabyan’s work. Elsewhere in the *Concordance*, poems punctuate the transport or internment of bodies. The explication of *translatio* takes multiple forms in the Brutus section, including an emphasis on somatic motion and crossing over from this life into the next (Diana says to Brutus that “kynges [shall be] borne . . . of thy body” and “Brute . . . was interyd or buryed at Troynouant or London”), and the intertwined resonance of linguistic and somatic *translatio* infuses subsequent chapters. Throughout the *Concordance*, many chapters that mark the end of a king’s reign provide commemorative verses: most often, an epitaph or other memorial inscription (“superscrypcyon”) upon a tomb or commemorative object. For example, Richard I of England is buried at “Fount Ebrade [Fontevraud Abbey in France] with this epytaphy vpon his tombe,” which Fabyan transmits as ten lines of elegiac verse; he then specifies that the “whiche verses are thus moche to meane in sentence,” with an English approximation of the Latin in the form of two *balade* stanzas (Ellis, 281). In some cases, the description of the tomb itself is highly elaborate. Louis VIII of France, for instance, is interred in Saint-Denis within a “sepulture [adourned] in the moost rychest maner with golde, syluer, & precious gemmys; vpon whose toumbe was grauen theyse .ii. [Latin] verses folowynge,” and here too Fabyan provides a corresponding English verse in *balade* form (Ellis, 272).

In these chapters with commemorative verses, Fabyan’s strategies of
translation are flexible, shifting idiosyncratically from chapter to chapter. Most often such Latin verses (many, but not all, in elegiac meter) find a vernacular equivalent in English balade (rhyme royale) stanzas, which was evidently Fabyan’s preferred mode for conveying the “maner and forme” of elevated Latin verses. At times, more ad hoc verse improvisation occurs, with Latin and English verses varying in length, meter, or form. In verses for Edward I of England, for instance, every two Latin couplets (in a 24-line verse) comprise a single balade stanza in the corresponding English sequence. Throughout the Concordance, the narrator’s terms for translingual mediation are noticeably flexible as well. Fabyan never claims his English verses as final, authoritative “translations” of Latin (or French) source texts; rather, he insists that the non-English verses he transcribes are provisionally or inexactely “expounded,” “Englysshed,” or “vnderstood” in the “maner and forme” in which the text presents them. In other words, Fabyan takes pains to present two languages concurrently, allowing the original and provisionally “Englysshed” verses to coexist and occupy the same space.

When Fabyan’s narrator interjects first-person commentary on his poetic style, he expressly encourages the reader to think across two languages concurrently. In addition to his stated respect for the “maner and forme” (variously connoting style, tone, or formal integrity) of non-English verses, Fabyan acknowledges the aesthetic quality of his poetic translations and suggests their very stylistic qualities might inspire a deeper reading across languages. At the end of the Edward I verses, for example, he renders rhyming Latin couplets as English stanzas “[set] out in baladde royall” with the explicit goal that the “reder myght haue the more desyre to ouer rede theym” (Ellis, 405–7). Here, the “Englysshed” iteration of a poem in rhyme royale stanzas does not supplant but converses with the Latin, and Fabyan invites the reader to view the English and non-English renditions afresh.


18. This principle holds true when English coexists with languages other than Latin. In volume 2, part 7, Scots perform songs in “derysyon” of the English (years 1296–1297, 1313–1314, and 1372–1373); Welsh and English “metricyans” trade verses in Latin (year 1282–1283); Flemish city dwellers unfurl a banner bearing verses taunting the French (year 1376–1377); French verses at a banquet include “soteltyes” inscribed on food (year 1419–1420); Latin masses are performed in honor of Henry V (year 1421–1422); and actors in a procession welcoming Henry VI to London recite verses (year 1431–1432).
How does Fabyan theorize his translingual poetic practice? His thinking about poetic craft emerges most visibly in the form of first-person transitional passages like prologues and envoys. In instances where he is not deriving material directly from non-English sources, Fabyan positions himself as an agent of poetic transformation. His surprisingly innovative metaphors conceive poetry as a craft or trade as well as a perpetually shifting, transformative art.

The verses in the preface to the entire Concordance set the stage for this process of poetic cultivation. The prologue opens with Creation—reckoning “the accomptynge of the years of the world, from the Creacion of Adam” (Ellis, 1)—but soon shifts into verse:

When I advertise in my remembrance,
The manyfolde storyes, in ordre duely sette,
Of kyngs & prynces that whylum had governaunce,
Of Rome and Italye, and other further fette
As of Iewes and Grekes, the which haue no[t] lette,
But that men maye se in order ceryously,
Howe long they reygned, and how successyuel.

Of Fraunce and other I might lyke wyse report
To theyr great honour, as of them doth appere,
But to Englande, if I shall resorte,
Rygth mysty storyes, doughtfull and vnclere,
Of names of tymes, and of the duraunt yere
That kynges or prynces ruled that famous yle,
Almoste vncertayne howe I shulde gyde my style.

And for of cunyninge I am full destytute,
To bring to frame so great a mysterye:
I nyll presume, without other refute,
To ioyne suche a werke or it to rectyfye,
To me it semyth so ferre sette a wrye
In tyme of years, to other discordaunt,
That to my dull wytte it is nat atteynaunt. (Ellis, 2)

These lines deserve careful unpacking. First of all, the stanzas establish a distinct literary persona for Fabyan, presenting him as a diligent compiler who arranges source materials (“manyfolde storyes, in ordre duely sette”), yet all the while claiming uncertainty with his poetic skill (“vncertayne
howe I shulde gyde my style”). That is, the first-person poetic persona claims he is still working out the manner in which he will compose this text-in-progress. The phrase “gyde my style” refers to the physical act of writing, e.g., “direct my pen” (stylus, or writing instrument); but more figuratively, the poet wonders what style, or linguistic register, is most appropriate for him to adopt.

In addition to foregrounding the physical act of writing, Fabyan’s stanzas exploit evocative metaphors for poetic creation, including verbs derived from trade professions: architecture, including carpentry or stone-masonry (“bring to frame so great a mysterye”); textile crafts, which entail measuring and joining materials (“ioyne suche a werke or it to rectyfye”); and metaphors for polishing raw stone (i.e., his “dull wytte” struggles to clarify “mysty storuyes, doughtfull and vnclere”). Moreover, Fabyan invokes multiple sensory metaphors for his composition process. The poet-historian must take “mysty storuyes . . . vnclere” and clarify (polish) them, and other times he must, like a musical composer, harmonize disparate historical accounts whose details (years and dates) appear “discordaunt.” Most strikingly, Fabyan tackles some of the difficulties inherent in the historian’s project by adjusting received models of temporality itself. He invokes the linear telos of *translatio imperii* in which power is transferred from one civilization to another (“Howe long they reygned, and how successyuely”), but he also foregrounds cultural continuity: Greek and Jewish cultures have not “lette” (i.e., they endure in the present). Through complex conceits drawn from craft discourses, this draper turned poet-historian ponders his fashioning of a transnational, synthetic account of history.

In the next few stanzas Fabyan further develops intertwined metaphorical conceits to cast poetry-making as a generative process:

And I lyke the Prentyse that hewyth the rowght stone,
And bryngeth it to square, with harde strokes and many,
That the mayster after may it ouer gone,
And print therein his figures and his story;
And so to werke it after his proporcynary,
That it may appere to all that shall it se,
A thing ryght parfyte and well in eche degree.

And haue I nowe sette out this rude werke,
As rough as the stone nat comen to the square,
That the lerned and the studied clerke
May ouer polysshe and clene do it pare;
Flowrysshe it with Eloquence, wherof it is bare,
And frame it in ordre that yet is out of ioynt,
That it with olde Auctours may gree in euery poyn. (Ellis, 3)

In these stanzas, Fabyan brilliantly reshapes fifteenth-century English discourses of literary “dullness.” Earlier, the poet applies his “dull wytte” to polish “mysty storyes . . . vnclere,” and here Fabyan further reanimates craft parlance. Not only does his project comprise an artful shaping of raw source material, but his own work can be subject to refinement just as artisans polish, clean, and measure (“frame . . . in ordre” what is “out of ioynt”) in order to create a “thing ryght parfyte and well in eche degree.” Most strikingly, Fabyan positions himself as a laboring “Prentyse” who subjects his output to correction or improvement by a master.

Just as Fabyan exhibits interests in how humans shape inert raw materials, other passages in the prefatory verses suggest more vital, organic processes. This work is written in “honor of this Fertyle Ile” and the poet asks future readers to spread the flowers of what it transmits (“Flowrysshe it with Eloquence”); moreover, Fabyan grafts together two related plants, conjoining the “storyes of Englande and Fraunce so dere,/That to the reder it may well be sayne,/What kings togyder ruled these lands twayne” (Ellis, 3). In Fabyan’s poetry, artisanal craft discourses foregrounding human labor coexist with implicitly organic metaphors to convey a synthetic compositional practice.

One of Fabyan’s most self-consciously literary moments occurs at the beginning of part 7, which explores the consequences of the Norman Conquest:

Nowe shaketh my hande, my pen waxeth dulle,
For weryd and tyred; seynge this werke so longe:
The auctours so rawe, and so ferre to culle;
Dymme and derke, and straunge to vnderstonde:
And ferre out of tune, to make trewe songe.
The storyes and years to make accordaunt,
That it to the reder might shewe true and pleasaunt. (Ellis, 239)

20. On the rich resonance of craft discourses in medieval literary texts, see Lisa H. Cooper, Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late-Medieval England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); for fifteenth-century examples of this motif, see the discussion of Lydgate’s craft discourses on 165 and 171.
This *balade* makes explicit the physical labors of the poet-craftsman (or translator-compiler), and its invocation of a “werke so longe” and sources “so ferre to culle” recalls a longstanding *ars longa, vita brevis* motif. Fabian casts poetic composition as well as his method of historical and literary compilation as a craft. He foregrounds the physical labor involved in writing out the manuscript as well its attendant intellectual labors: assembling, calculating, and “mak[ing] accordant” the dates and regnal years.

As I have demonstrated, Fabian’s poetry is thick with a number of different craft discourses, and his work consequently exhibits a pervasive poetic synaesthesia: a rich simultaneity of sensory modes of perception (vision, sound, and touch). For instance, Fabian evokes “dullness” in senses that are once visual (“mysty [and] vnclere,” “dymme and derke”) and tactile (“rowght stone,” “harde strokes”). Likewise, Fabian’s notion of synthesizing “discourdaunt” sources into a form that is “accordaunt” and “plesaunt” suggests visual cohesiveness as well as musical harmony; indeed, the rhyme pattern here conveys a pleasing sonic concordance. By densely packing his verse with transmuted sensory modalities, Fabian mobilizes the powerful aesthetic effects that poetic “style” can have upon his reading or listening audience.

Insofar as poetic craft is concerned, Fabian’s rhyme does exhibit some imperfections. This particular stanza *almost* corresponds to an idiosyncratic *abacbcc* rhyme pattern—but only if we perceive the native English word “vnderstonde” as somehow rhyming with French-derived words “accordaunt” and “plesaunt.” Moreover, the sound of the verses effects an imperfect concord between English and French, suggesting the intertwining of histories that underlies Fabian’s project. Later editors have been troubled by the rhymes in this stanza. Like a master correcting an apprentice’s imperfect work, one 1559 editor perfects Fabian’s writing, amending the word “vnderstonde” to “vndersonge” to make the rhyme conform to a regular pattern. In this case, one must read the original “vnderstonde” as rhyming with the word “songe”—and if this is so, then the poet has created a rhyme pair that sounds discordant, deliberately “out of tune.” Through his poetic synaesthesia, Fabian aligns concurrent modes of perception and linguistic simultaneity. This very notion of “concord” obliges the reader to think in English and in French at the same time.

As strange as it may seem, the merchant-compiler’s interests in artistic and literary creation inform another code-switching text that we can ascribe to Fabian: his final will and testament. Fabian’s will directs executors in the dispersal of his household goods (as one would expect), but the text also exhibits an extraordinary feature: a series of prolix tomb descrip-
tions with accompanying verses in Latin and in English. The original copy of the will does not survive, but the Registry of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury transcribed the will that went into probate in 1513 (Kew, National Archives, E PROB 11/17, fols. 90v–93r). It opens with a conventional bilingual invocation:

In Dei nomine. Amen. Undecimo die mensis Iulii, anno dominice incarnationis millesimo quingentesimo undecimo / ac anno ilustrissimi principis, ac regis nostri Anglie Henrici octavi, tertio.\(^{21}\) I ROBERT FABYAN, Citizen & draper of London thanke and lawde be thereof giuen to God and to his blessed moder our Lady seynt Mary hole of body and mynde ordeyne and make this my present Will and Testament / in maner and forme as folowith. . . . (fol. 90v, qtd. Ellis, iii)

This Latin/English opening is formulaic and consistent with surviving wills of contemporary London citizens, which include prayers for one’s soul and relatives, with specific instructions for future acts of commemoration.\(^{22}\) A catalogue of possessions and monetary amounts bequeathed to friends and relations follows as well.\(^{23}\) Where Fabian’s will stands out from contemporary wills is the elaborate specificity in the tomb commemoration it envisions. Fabian not only transmits tomb inscriptions in Latin and English but also describes a complex accompanying iconographical program:

And also I will that if I decease within the Citie of London / that w[ith] in three years following myn executors doo make in the walle nere unto my grave a little tumbe of freestone / vpon the which I will be spent liij s. iii d. att the most / And in the face of this tumbe I will be made in / two platis of laton / ij. figures of a man and of a woman, w[ith] x. men children and. vi. women children / and over or above the said figurys I will be made a figure of the fader of heaven enclosed in a sonne / And from the man figure I will be made a rolle toward the said figure of the fader / and in hit to be graven. O Pater in celis / And from the figure of the woman another lyke rolle / wherein to be graven. Nos mecum pascere velis / and

21. In the name of God, Amen. On the eleventh day of July, in the Year of Our Lord 1511 and the third year of our illustrious prince and King of England Henry VIII.

22. Fabian describes in excruciating detail the masses to be performed on his behalf, as well as the timing and the trajectory of his own funeral procession and other commemorative acts throughout city (Ellis, vi).

23. Many of these include household goods and precious items, like jewelry, bequeathed to his children and other relatives (Ellis, vii).
at the feete of the said figures I will be graven these ix verses following /
Preterit ista dies / oritur origo secundi / An labor an requies / sic transit
 gloria mundi. (fol. 92v, qtd. Ellis, x)

Much of this iconography is consistent with surviving memorial brasses of
members of the merchant classes and citizens of his social rank; these can
depict a husband and wife along with children (including deceased ones),
often segregated by gender, accompanied by pious inscriptions above or
below in Latin (or, in other cases, French). Immediately after this descrip-
tion, an English stanza expounds upon the Latin couplet:

Lyke as the day / his course doeth consume
And the new morrow / spryngith again as fast
So man and woman / by natures costume
This life doo passe / and last in earth ar cast
I ioye and sorrow / which here their time dide wast
Never in oon state / but in [course] transitory
Soo full off chaunge / is of this worulde the glory. (fol. 92v, qtd. Ellis, x)

Attesting to Fabyan’s interest in poetic synaesthesia, this document’s ver-
bal imagery is manifold. This description conveys the image and dimen-
sions of a brass artifact along with its iconography and Latin banderole
inscriptions. Moreover, the commemorative Latin couplet is followed by
a corresponding English balade stanza, and both of these verses emphasize
the consumption (waste, spending) of time and transformation of animate,
organic matter.

Interestingly, Fabyan’s will offers a series of contingency plans, envi-
sioning the commemorative and decorative program for an alternate site
should his preferred London resting place be unavailable. Atop this struc-

24. Fabyan’s tomb does not survive. For a canopied tomb with iconography and Latin
scrolls similar to the kind described in Fabyan’s will, see the monumental brass of John
Croke, citizen and skinner of London (d. 1477) and his wife and children; Survey of Lon-
don, Vol. XV: The Parish of All Hallows Barking, Part II, gen. eds. G. H. Gater and Walter
H. Godfrey (London: Country Life Ltd., for the London City Council, 1934), 71–72, with
plates 81, 84, and 85. For an excellent overview of secular memorial brasses, see Nigel Saul,
“Bold as Brass: Secular Display in English Medieval Brasses,” in Heraldry, Pageantry and So-
cial Display in Medieval England, eds. Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (Woodbridge: Boydell,
2002), 169–94. See also the discussion of John Gower’s multilingual tomb and related verses
in chapter 3.

25. “And if I be buried in the churche of Theydon Garnon forsaid, than I will that
w[ith]in a yere folowing myn executors doo purvey a stone of marbill to laye upon my grave,
about the borders thereof I will be fastyned a plate of laton, and w[ith]in that plate graven
ture, Fabyan outlines a program of arms and other devices: “.iii. skochens of armies folowing, that is to say, at the hede the armes of the citie of London, & the Drapers armes, and at the fett myn owne armes, and my merchaunt mark” (qtd. Ellis, x). This detailed verbal depiction is again consistent with features of surviving merchant memorials in London and elsewhere, but the multiplicity of symbolic systems here is intriguing. Other merchants include only the most prestigious heraldic form available to them (e.g., family arms, especially if they married into armigerous families), but Fabyan activates multiple social networks simultaneously. He includes the arms of the City of London (of which he is a citizen), but also signals his guild membership (Drapers), displays his familial arms (indicating his lineage), and claims his own professional identity (merchant mark). Latin and English verses coexist in Fabyan’s imagination, and the symbolism emerging in these verbal descriptions is manifold. Only rarely are so many forms of signification (civic and familial arms and merchant marks) deployed on merchant-class tombs. Even in an apparently quotidian and pragmatic document, Fabyan exploits his creative capacity to synthesize language, verses, and imagery. He exploits an intimate relationship between poetry and allied arts (e.g., song and music, sculpture or carving) and he expresses a deep appreciation for artisanal craft through forms of social display.

The stylistic features in these passages of Fabyan's will vividly recall episodes in the *Concordance*. Fabyan describes the tomb of French king

thies words folowing: ‘Hic jacet Robertus Fabyan, durum ciuis et parnnarius London, ac vice-
comes et aldermanis.’ . . . And in the upper part of that grave stone I will be sett a plate and thereyn graven a figur of our lady with her child sittyng in a sterr, and under that. ij. figurys w[ith] the children before specified; and either of the said ij. figures holding a rolle, whereyn upon the mannys part I will be graven ‘Stella Maria maris.’ And upon the womannys rolle ‘Succurre pijssima nobis’” (qtd. Ellis, x).


27. Another example of such manifold self-display is the memorial brass of John Benett of Norton Bravant in Wiltshire (d. 1461); this includes three shields, one bearing a crossed pair of shears, one bearing a coat of arms, and the other bearing his merchant mark. See a detail of this image in F. A. Girling, *English Merchants’ Marks: A Field Survey of Marks made by Merchants and Tradesmen in England between 1400 and 1700* (London: Lion and Unicorn Press, 1962), 32.
Louis VIII as a “sepulture [adourned] in the most rychest maner with golde, syluer, & precious gemmys; vpon whose toumbe was grauen theyse .ii. [Latin] verses folowyng,” followed by a corresponding English verse in *balade* form (Ellis, 272). In his own will, a single Latin rhyming couplet is expounded by a corresponding English *balade* stanza. Fabyan’s will constitutes a narrative form of self-commemoration that resembles the end of so many of his own *Concordance* chapters. Moreover, the statement that his testament will proceed “in maner and forme as folowith” (fol. 90v) recalls a phrase often repeated near the end of *Concordance* chapters when the narrator offers an English version of a Latin verse.

Fabyan’s interests in concurrent modes of communication and multiple symbolic codes shape how he imagines the construction of his own tomb, which employs rich Latin and English inscriptions as well as mutually informing semiotic systems: London arms, guild iconography, his arms, and merchant mark. This concurrent use of multiple symbolic codes resonates most strongly with his linguistic capacities. We have seen, throughout the *Concordance*, Fabyan’s capacity for linguistic code-switching and sustaining more than one mode of communication simultaneously. The citizen-draper’s will exhibits similar interests in code-switching, verse form, and artisanal craft that resonate with his own first-person poetry and historical compilation.

In these collected textual materials associated with Fabyan, we gain a deep appreciation for how one London citizen-draper and merchant-compiler experiments with simultaneous modes of artistic and literary expression. In his *Concordance of Storyes*, Fabyan transmutes a fifteenth-century discourse of the drab or “dull” poet or chronicler, emerging as vibrant and masterful in his own translingual craft. He interweaves, polishes, adorns, and adapts poetic form organically to suit the subject matter at hand.

Some of my assessments of Fabyan’s literary craftsmanship could grant him a little too much credit. More than one editor has supported the view that his verses are “not of a superior cast.”28 Indeed, Fabyan’s uneven poetic output exhibits imperfect rhyme and meter, clumsy syntax, and inelegant neologisms which could be seen as symptoms of an unpolished “roughness.” This discussion demonstrates that Fabyan’s poetry is actually much more sophisticated than his face-value claims to “dullness” would allow. Fabyan might also prompt us to think a bit more carefully about the value of “rough translation” in premodern English poetics more generally. In the overt provisionality of Fabyan’s English verse translations, and his call to

28. Ellis, xiii.
future readers to “frame it in ordre that yet is out of ioynt” (Ellis, 3), the poet anticipates a form of “subaltern disjointedness” that Dipesh Chakrabarty discerns in postcolonial “rough translations.” In these imperfect, uneven, and deliberately provisional verse translations, Fabyan allows the rough edges of his Concordance to show, foregrounding an aesthetics of unpolished writing. Fabyan invests in the order and sequence of his materials, but is not so much concerned about its apparent “messiness” per se. The compiler does not want to smooth over the rough spots in his work but (to offer a cloth-making metaphor) to allow the stitches and junctures to remain apparent. Fabyan’s Concordance thus showcases the process and craft of the translator-compiler, asking the reader to sustain concurrent modes of thinking.

Regardless of how we seek to value Fabyan’s compositions aesthetically, we can nonetheless appreciate his long-abiding interest in using poetry as a tool for theorizing translation. Conceiving translilingual writing as a dynamic, never-complete process, Fabyan presents each of his verse translations not as a fully “perfected” composition but rather a performative act that bears repetition: each rendition is deliberately provisional, inexact, and open to future modification or alternate iterations. Fabyan admits he faces numerous challenges as he confronts his Latin and French sources, characterizing his “auctours” as “so rawe, and so ferre to culle;/Dymme and derke, and straunge to vnderstonde:/And ferre out of tune” (Ellis, 229). But as Lawrence Venuti has observed, every translator faces a choice in determining how far to “domesticate” foreign source material. Fabyan always includes his non-English verses in their original “straunge [and] ferre” forms, in conjunction with their English counterparts. Compilation ultimately grants Fabyan a platform for theorizing the complex and dynamic processes of translation and translilingual writing. The compiler makes efforts to preserve the “straunge” quality or alterity of his disparate textual sources, even as he sets them alongside the provisionally “expownded” or “Englysshed” verses he creates. The code-switching Fabyan allows English and non-English texts to coexist within the physical space of his pages, inviting his readers to sustain concurrent modes of thought.


30. To adopt yet another metaphor, he can work to harmonize his sources yet still allow some of their “discordant” qualities to remain.

31. Any translator, literary or nonliterary, faces the “choice of whether to domesticate or foreignize a foreign text” (41). Lawrence Venuti, The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation (New York: Routledge, 1994). Fabyan, of course, renders himself quite visible as translator—through first-person commentary in prose as well as his prefatory verses.
Richard Hill (Grocer): Narrative Reckoning

As discussed in the previous section, Fabyan’s collection of lists, historical narratives, and verses across languages and forms comes together as a harmonious “concordance,” a synthetic composition that provides an intertwined history of England and France along with an attention to local London matters. Fabyan’s poetry reveals that he conceives of compilation as a craft or generative activity, and his own will attests to his abiding interests in concurrent forms of signification and versification. Around the time Fabyan completed his Concordance (c. 1503), Richard Hill, a London citizen and grocer, began to assemble his own mixed collection within a private manuscript (c. 1503–1536). As I shall demonstrate in this section, Hill records in his business register items that he calls diverse “reconyngs,” including lists of wards, taxes, goods, weights, and measures, but he also provides brief narrative entries that calculate and record the passage of time, and other texts in prose and verse (or, as he calls them, “tales”). By combining these materials, Hill finds ways to self-consciously enter himself into narrative—although he uses techniques that diverge from those of his contemporary Fabyan.

Hill’s collection would initially appear unrelated to Fabyan’s, both in its form and its contents. Hill’s collection survives only in a single manuscript (Oxford, Balliol College MS 354), and it is often characterized as a personal “commonplace book.”32 Unlike Fabyan’s collection, which was prepared with an eye to its audience and a reader-friendly textual apparatus, Hill’s collection did not seem to be prepared with a large audience in mind. First-person inscriptions throughout the text suggest that the entire manuscript was written out in Hill’s hand. He identifies himself as a London merchant and grocer through first-person inscriptions: e.g., “I Richard Hill was made fre among the merchants aventurers of Ynglond in Barow [i.e., in Flanders] anno 1508” (fol. 107r), and “I was sworn at grocers hall [in London] in anno 1511” (fol. 107r). As one might expect, contents throughout the collection reflect quintessentially mercantile preoccupations and the polyglot aspects of urban life. Hill includes, for instance, a French/English conversation manual with vocabulary for conducting overseas trade (fol. 141r) and a courtesy manual in parallel English and French translation.

32. Hill’s collection has been discussed in numerous ways: as commonplace book, see Parker (above); as pedagogical anthology, see Janine Rogers, “Courtesy Books, Comedy, and the Merchant Masculinity of Oxford Balliol College MS 354,” Medieval Forum 1 (2002). For relevant bibliography, see Boffey, “London Books,” 420. On the possible identification of this Richard Hill, see Parker, 49–50.
(fol. 142v). In addition, he includes a table of weights, wine prices, and Bordeaux coinage (fol. 182r) and “the reconyng of wollis in Ynglond” (fol. 183r), a reckoning table for Calais customs (fol. 183v), a perpetual calendrical chart (fol. 192v), pen drawings of merchant marks (fol. 185v), a business letter with English and French phrases (fol. 143v), and secular and devotional verses exhibiting diverse combinations of English, French, and Latin.  

Like Fabyan, Hill exploits paratext to lend some coherence to his collection. In a table of contents (fols. 3r–4v), Hill characterizes his “boke” as inherently diverse: “The table of the contents within this bok whiche is a boke of dyuers tales & baletts & dyuers reconyngs, &c.” (fol. 3r). Hill announces that his compilation includes narratives and “baletts” (in this case, not “ballades” per se, but more generally verses or songs), as well as practical “reconyngs” (numerical accounts, lists, tables, and related texts). Dispersed among such “reconyngs” are narratives (“dyuers tales”) seemingly devoid of context. For instance, Hill includes verse narratives extracted from Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, but each tale is removed from the poem’s original frame narrative establishing the ethical import or allegorical significance of each story.

So how do we, as modern readers, reckon with Hill’s disparate materials? Unlike Fabyan’s deliberately ordered collection, Hill’s *ad hoc* contents largely resist any linear, chronological reading. Complicating the haphazard quality of the collection is its range of literary texts, which likewise resist categorization: they are not grouped according to genre or any apparent temporal logic. Hill’s quintessentially “medieval” contents—like selections from Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, Marian devotional lyrics, and Lydgate poems—coexist alongside texts that might otherwise strike us as “early modern,” such as prose texts culled from print sources. The miscellany thus has the effect of juxtaposing texts we would retroactively perceive as “belonging” to different periods. Its overtly historical material bridges Lancastrian and post-Reformation London in a chronological fashion, but, unlike Fabyan, Hill makes no attempt to lend a grand order or sequence to the “boke” as a whole.

33. Mixed-language verses include an English-Latin treatise on wine (fol. 101r), Latin-English poem with refrain “Terribilis mors conturbat me” (fol. 229r), English-Latin lyric “Of all creatures women be best/Cuius contrarium verum est” (fol. 250r), French-English lyric “Bon jowre bon jowre a vous/I am cum vnto this hous” (fol. 251v).

34. Gowerian tales include the stories of Apollonius of Tyre (fol. 55r), Philip of Macedon and his two sons (fol. 79r), Adryan and Bardus (fol. 81v), Pirithous (fol. 83v), Lazarus (fol. 84v), Constantine the Great (fol. 86v), Alexander and Diogenes (fol. 91v), Pyramus and Thisbe (fol. 93v), and Midas (fol. 94r).
It is perhaps most productive to approach Hill’s “boke” as a polychronic assemblage, or a collection that code-switches across different moments in time.\textsuperscript{35} Many temporalities coexist throughout Hill’s collection and its “dyvers tales [and] reconyngs” collectively hold in suspension concurrent modes of conceiving the present and the past. Near the beginning of the collection, we have an example of what Adam Smyth in his work on early modern almanacs and account registers entries characterizes as “life-writing.” Hill provides, through a series of inscriptions over time, an apparently improvised chronology of major events in his life.\textsuperscript{36} This life account follows contemporary bookkeeping practices, listing the births of each of Hill’s children, often with financial transactions accompanying each event. It begins:

The birth of children of me / Richard hill that was born on hillend / in Langley in the / pariseh of huchyn in the shire of hartoft. . . . Memo- randum that John hill my first child was borne / the 17 day of novembre anno 1518 at hillend afforesayd on the day of seynt / hewe. . . . (fol. 17r)

Later on this folio, Hill records an entry regarding his third child:

William hill my third child was / born in briggestrete In the parish of seint margrettis . . . godfaders / William whalpot fshemonger & he gave 20 d. / nycholas cosyn merchaunt taylor he gave 20 d. / Margret preston my systeer & she gave 1 docat 4 s. 6 d. . . . (fol. 17r)

Such narrative entries comprise “reconyngs” in multiple senses of the word: not only do Hill’s records render narrative accounts of major events (in this case, children’s births), but he also painstakingly takes note of the time, date, and economic transactions associated with each one.

This section of the “boke” simultaneously functions as a recursive register of deaths. Hill enters each child into the account, but he also makes sure to go back, at a later point in time, to cross out the names of children when deaths occur. When his sixth child Symond dies, the nonlinearity of Hill’s writing practice is registered by a change in the appearance of his


hand (in darker ink, with narrower letters, and written at a slightly different angle). He also code-switches from English into Latin: “mortuus et sepultus [est] in parochia sancta marie at the hill juxta bilyngisgate in London” [he died and was buried in the parish of St. Mary at the Hill next to Billingsgate in London] (fol. 17r). (See Figure 3.) The unexpected shift into Latin can be read as an *ad hoc* commemorative act. Crossing out the narrative entry bearing the child’s name marks the death and comprises, in a sense, an erasure of the entry; nonetheless, the Latin inscription written below the original entry renders the record for the now-departed child all the more conspicuous upon the page.  

Put another way, linguistic code-switching in Hill’s register of births and deaths marks acts of writing across different points in time. This bilingual mode of writing both exploits and transmutes conventional merchant bookkeeping practices, as Hill records gains and losses (as it were) while also generating the skeletal outline of an autobiographical narrative across time. The material form of this manuscript collection supports this reading of transformative bookkeeping quite nicely. The pages of this book are narrow and slender in shape, each resembling the size of what would ordinarily be a single column of text; this column format would indeed be appropriate for bookkeeping. In this respect, Hill’s manuscript has been identified as a repurposed “holster book,” a prepurchased bound book with empty pages whose size and portability made it ideally suited for a business ledger.

Other code-switching moments in Hill’s book do not so much engage in bookkeeping practices, but nonetheless register as conspicuous movements across time. One present-tense devotional poem instructs the reader on the worshiper’s proper responses when hearing the Mass, and it switches between English and Latin for practical ends. It uses English to describe actions performed by the priest, but adopts Latin to transmit the words to be uttered by the worshiper. It concludes in this manner:

Now I cownsaill thee man do after my rede,  
What the priste goth to messe yf you may com,  
& but sekeness lett thee site bare with thyn hede,  
& knok on thi brest & say *cor mundum*

37. The color, angle, and shape of the letters (which all differ from the English entry transcribed above) seem to imply that the Latin lines must have been added at a later date, after the fact.

38. Parker, 38. For more on “holster book” collections, see Boffey and Thompson, 298, footnote 182.
Figure 3. Miscellany of Richard Hill (bottom half of one folio). In this section, Hill records the births and deaths of his children (births in English, deaths in Latin). Oxford, Balliol College MS 354, fol. 17r.
Crea in me Deus & spiritum
Her it forth to the end with meke entent
Wher God in fowrm of bred his body doth present. (fol. 205v)

This poem on transubstantiation ends with the following: “Explicit, quod Hill” (fol. 205v). The internal movements across English and Latin in this poem can be easily explained, and Hill's Latin “Explicit” [it ends] at the end of the poem is a conventional scribal tag. In the context of this discussion, Hill’s act of writing “Explicit” imbues the poem with a layered temporality. This word—along with the past-tense English verb “quod”—suggests the possibility that Hill has actually followed the poem’s instructions, and that he has finished speaking the Latin responses it endorses.

As a conclusion to a didactic verse on the Mass, this scribal tag retroactively characterizes Hill’s completed act of writing out the text as if it were a speech act or performance. Insofar as this poem gives instructions to the worshiper during Mass, Hill would have repeated its recorded responses with the ever-returning “present” that arrives when bread becomes the body of Christ (“in fowrm of bred his body doth present”). Moreover, the poem’s English narration of the priest’s actions assumes the reader’s capacity to recognize that the priest would actually be uttering words in Latin—“Hoc est corpus meum” [This is my body]—at the very moment in the Mass when bread becomes Christ’s body. Latin/English code-switching in Hill’s compilation can be explained in terms of pragmatic functions, but such moments—which require the reader to mobilize knowledge of more than one language concurrently—invite complex meditations on temporality and devotional practice.

In gathering together first-person narrative entries and devotional poems, this combined register/miscellany accrues manifold functions, and the “boke” as a whole attests to the grocer’s considerable linguistic facility. Hill shows competence in deploying Latin as he composes autobiographical entries and copies out verses, and other items in his “boke” (beyond the scope of this discussion) suggest interests in French as well: e.g., vocabulary lists, courtesy manuals, and letters. In the examples I have discussed, Hill’s acts of translingual writing can be read as transtemporal. A register of births and deaths uses Latin and English to mark different types of

39. The “quod” explicit is a common practice among fifteenth- and sixteenth-century copyists; see for instance “quod Rate” throughout Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 61. See Boffey and Thompson, 298. See also George Shuffleton, ed., Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 2008); this edition is also online: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/sgas.htm>.
events (births and deaths) and also signals disparate moments of writing. A mixed-language poem on the Mass invites the reader to reflect on the ways that reading, writing, and devotional practices can enfold the past and the ever-returning present. Hill’s “boke” reveals a desire to engage with the past while also reckoning with a shifting present, and sustained acts of linguistic code-switching—textualized motion across tongues—inform Hill’s modes of life-writing.

**John Colyns (Mercer): Materiality and Marking**

Richard Hill is not the only London citizen to compile a collection of texts in the form of a mixed-language “boke.” His contemporary, mercer and bookseller John Colyns, gathered his own materials into a book during an overlapping time frame (c. 1517–1539). As in the case of Hill’s “boke,” Colyns’ manuscript survives in only one copy (London, British Library, Harley MS 2252), and it too features the compiler’s own handwriting. Colyns’ choice of materials is in many ways analogous to Hill’s: both merchants include chronicles, treatises, lyrics, and practical manuals, among other items. Colyns, like Fabyan, provides his own chronicle of London, but Colyns pares his down to the barest essentials: he only lists the “Namys of the mayres of London” from the “Rayne of Kyng Richard the Second” to 1539, with just the briefest of historical notes.40

Although the similarities between Colyns and Hill are numerous, their collections capture slightly different linguistic aspects of London’s merchant milieu. Hill’s collection attests quite openly to the polyglot texture of mercantile life through English/French phrasebooks, bilingual poems, texts in parallel translation, and English/Latin narrative entries, but Colyns’ collection is oriented more toward texts in English, with less Latin, and surprisingly little French. In many respects, the range of English-language items included in Colyns’ collection most strongly suggests his wider cultural horizons and professional endeavors.41 In addition to con-

40. John Colyns dated the book in 1517 but was clearly updating it well into 1530s, adding topical material regarding Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, and conflicts between England and Scotland. The final entry is for 1539, and Colyns apparently died between then and early 1541, when his will went into probate (Meale, “Compiler at Work,” 96). The chronicle begins on fol. 3v, but after the year 1486 (fol. 6v), the arrangement of text shifts, suggesting he was no longer following an exemplar for the years entered at this point onward (Meale, “Compiler at Work,” 93–94).

41. In comparison to Hill, Colyns draws from a “comparatively wider range of material”
taining an important surviving copy of *Ipomydon* and the only extant copy of the Stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, his book preserves one of the earliest copies of John Skelton’s *Speke Parrot* (c. 1521), a dizzyingly polyglot poem that includes Latin paratext and some glosses that are preserved only in Colyns’ manuscript. In the pages containing *Speke Parrot* as well as *Collyn Cloute* (c. 1522), the compiler Colyns actively engages with the linguistic richness of these poems.

Carol Meale has uncovered much of Colyns’ activities as a bookseller and an avid collector of books through the mercer’s trade, even positing that his copy text of *Ipomydon* served as the exemplar for the edition printed by Wynken de Worde (an anglicization of Jan van Wynkyn, who was born in Woerth in the Alsace region of present-day France). Admitted into the Company of Mercers in 1492, Colyns was evidently quite a professional multitasker, and his pursuits had shifted so much toward bookselling that one record in the *Acts of the Court of the Mercers Company* (dated 1520) claimed “John Colleysn . . . occupieth no feat of Secrettes of the mercery but in Sellyng of Prynted bokes and other small tryfylles.”

This collection under discussion was apparently assembled “around a core of two commercially-produced booklets” with Colyns filling blank pages over time. It would appear that this compilation served more than a private preoccupation: it was quite possibly a repository for future commercial undertakings. An avid consumer of source materials, Colyns found numerous opportunities to showcase his own creativity within the material text: drawing in his own merchant mark in several places, adding ownership inscriptions, decorating letters in lists and verse texts, and (as will be discussed below) experimenting with letter-forms while transcribing a Skelton poem.

Indeed, there are clear signs that Colyns sustained a number of interests in book production as well as bookselling. For instance, among the contents of his “boke” are treatises on “lymming” or bookmaking (fols. 142r–146v). Colyns’ merchant mark comprises a decorative motif throughout the text as well, quite literally marking the “boke” as his possession and a valued commodity, or—in the traditions of masons’ marks and printers’
marks—claiming the physical object of the book as Colyns’ artistic creation. Colyns includes ownership inscriptions at the top of fol. 1 and the bottom of fol. 116r, which also bears his hand-drawn merchant mark. His mark also appears alone on the top right corner of fol. 2r, but Colyns’ most elaborate trace of ownership combines text and symbol. At the end of a quire containing the Stanzaic Morte Darthur, an inscription is written out his own hand with large script, decorative flourishes, and red ornamentation: “Thys Boke belongythe to John Colyns mercer of london dwellyng in the parysshe of our lady of wolchyrche hawe Anexid the Stockes in þe pulltre yn Anno domini 1517” (fol. 133r).

Material circumstances allow Colyns to arrange text differently than Hill does in his “Boke.” Colyns, first of all, employs large folios rather than a “holster book,” so he can exhibit more creativity and experimentation in his use of writing space, and we shall see that Colyns readily manipulates both the content and visual layout of the texts he transmits. From a linguistic standpoint, I find one poem in this collection most compelling: John Skelton’s Speke Parrot (c. 1521), which is copied out in Colyns’ hand on fols. 133v*–140r. Skelton’s poem is highly allusive and its polyvo
cality offers significant challenges to its readers, but the work is largely understood to comprise a satire of Cardinal Wolsey and members of court, among other matters. David Reed Parker notes that the poem is “viciously macaronic, incorporating Latin, Greek, French, Dutch, and even Welsh in snippets of various lengths”; but given “Skelton’s often obscure references,” Parker doubts that Colyns would have “had a full grasp of the baffling text” and its dense, learned allusions; he even maintains that the poem’s anti-Wolsey sentiment is what Colyns would most likely “understand and relish” in the text. In her study of Skelton and his literary reception, Jane Griffiths offers a similar assessment of Colyns’ linguistic capacities,

46. “Iohn Colyns boke ys thys late of London mercer and dwellyng in Wolchyrche Parysshe” (fol. 1v).
47. I silently expand abbreviations in my transcriptions.
48. Two subsequent pages in the manuscript erroneously bear the number 133. The asterisk indicates the second page bearing the number 133.
50. Parker, 113.
observing that “the garbled way in which he copied the Latin” suggests his “knowledge of the language was poor.”

I would like to entertain an alternate approach to Colyns’ “garbled” writing here, suggesting the compiler actively transforms his source text to emerge as the poem’s “final authority” (as Griffiths has asserted in a different context). Skelton’s poem opens with a speaker, Parrot, who claims to know every language—and rather than a mere literary persona for Skelton to voice his satirical commentary, Parrot the fictive speaker is perhaps “alchemical in origin . . . a poetic version of the *lapis philosophorum* which transforms all it touches [and is] both the case and effect of a transformation.” In his own transformation and mutation of the tongues within this poem, Colyns enacts some of the very processes that the poem itself satirizes.

In transcribing *Speke Parrot*, Colyns manipulates Skelton’s text in crafty ways. When codicological considerations are taken into account, the deliberate efforts Colyns takes in writing out this poem become especially clear. As Meale establishes, the pages containing *Speke Parrot* mark a strong visual contrast with crowded pages elsewhere in the collection. Most “notable for the spaciousness of its lay-out,” the section containing this poem likely represents the “earliest stages of [Colyns’] work, and “Colyns evidently took some trouble over the presentation of this poem [including] different types of verse-form distinctively set out” and even “an elementary form of rubrication.” That is, the opening pages of *Speke Parrot* exhibit distinct ornamental flourishes within the loops of individual letter-forms, especially in the first line or initial letter of each stanza. (See Figure 4.) Glosses on the first page of the poem, for instance, are distinguished from the main text by the relative size of the text and its placement inside a marginal rectangular shape. At least in the initial pages of *Speke Parrot*, Colyns takes pains to render the page an aesthetically pleasing artifact.

In his edition of *Speke Parrot* which collates early print witnesses with Latin marginal glosses and other apparatus derived from Colyns’ copy, one editor has proclaimed that the “Latin portions of the manuscript are generally of ludicrous incorrectness, the transcriber evidently not having under-

Figure 4. A page from John Skelton's *Speke Parrot*, with Latin glosses and John Colyns' decorative flourishes. London, British Library, Harley MS 2252, fol. 134r.
stood that language.” It is true that the text begins with a Latin epigram that is difficult to translate: “Crescet in immensum me vivo pagina prae-sens;/Hinc mea dictetur Skeltonidis aurea fama” [This present page will grow greatly while I am alive; thence the golden reputation of Skelton be proclaimed]. The speaker announces his name: “My name is Parrot, a byrd of paradise, / By nature deuysed of a wonderous kynde” (1–2), and the poem reveals Parrot’s fluency in different languages: “Hagh, ha, ha, Parrot, ye can laugh pretyly! [. . . ] Parrot can mute and cry / In Lattyn, in Ebrue and in Caldeye / In Greke tong Parrot can bothe speke and say” (24–28). It is the next full stanza that comprises one of the manuscript’s most intricate passages:

Dowche Frenshce of Paris Parot can lerne,  
Pronownsynge my purpose after my properte  
With Parlez byen Parott ow parles ryen  
With Dowche, with Spanysche, my tonge can agree  
In Englysshe to God Parrott can shewe propyrlye  
Cryste saue Kyng Herry the viij th our royall kyng,  
The red rose in honour to flowrysshe and sprynge!  

This passage describes the linguistic skills of the Parrot speaker, who is familiar with Parisian French, Spanish (i.e., Castilian), English, and “Dowche” (i.e., German or Flemish), and Latin glosses next to this stanza aptly summarize the contents: “Docibilem se pandit in omni idiomate” [He reveals that he can be taught (i.e., is capable of instruction in) all languages] (31–33). A hybrid Latin–Greek gloss accompanies the end of this stanza: “Policronitudo Basileos” [on the beauty of the King] (36–37).  

This stanza offers multiple challenges to the reader, beginning with the curious French orthography in the command “Parlez byen Parott ow parles ryen” [Speak well, Parrot, or say nothing] (33). Alexander Dyce identifies such passages as “ludicrous” errors on the part of Colyns. The editor corrects “Dowche Frensche” (31) to read “Dowse French of Parryse” [sweet
French of Paris], and later in the next stanza Dyce observes that the phrase “saves habler Castiliano” [Do you speak Castilian Spanish?] (40) should properly read “sauies hablar.” Nonetheless, Dyce opts not to correct this latter manuscript reading, viewing the transcription as a deliberate transformation of Spanish on the part of the poet Skelton; i.e., the spelling is not interpreted as an error on the part of the copyist Colyns.\(^{59}\)

If Colyns is committing a scribal error in this stanza, then he might be guilty of an eye slippage: the seemingly nonsensical “Dowche Frenshe” (31) anticipates the appearance of the word “Dowche” in a similar location a few lines down (34). But Colyns’ own “ludicrous” spellings (of French and of Latin) could be approached in a more generous manner. Colyns’ “ludicrous” orthography could, quite literally, be a playful move. If one imagines the original source-text reading “douce French” [sweet French] and Colyns converts this to a hybridized phrase “Dowche French,” then Colyns’ unique copy could actually be seen as enhancing the linguistic texture of this passage.

The fluid play between languages in Colyns’ transcriptions, in other words, takes Skelton’s poetic art to another level, activating further possibilities for interpretation. A phrase like “douce French of Paris” evokes both Francophone and Anglophone literary conventions that maintain the “sweetness” or refinement of Parisian French compared to other languages, or even other varieties of French. Skelton alludes to Chaucer’s Prioress, for instance, who speaks a local (and presumably anglicized) “Frenssh [a]fter the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,” since the “Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.”\(^ {60}\) Closer to Colyns’ time, French instruction manuals like the Manière de Langage praise the sweetness of Parisian French in comparison to other tongues.\(^ {61}\) The phrase “shew properlye” (32) is unique to Colyns’ copy of this poem, and this adjective “properlye” nicely recalls the heavy alliteration a few lines above (“Pronownsynge my purpose after my properte”). In this case, English consonant clusters mark a distinct contrast with the sweet, mellifluous sounds of Parisian French.

Rather than dismissing Colyns’ unique transcriptions as errors or eye-
skips, we can entertain such textual moments as artful emendations to the text. For instance, we could discern an additional translingual pun on “Dowche” (i.e., Germanic language); that is, the poet suggests that the speaker uses a very Germanicized or Flemish variety of French. This reading of “Dowche” is perhaps obscure, but it would make some sense given the speaker’s claim that his own tongue agrees equally well with Castilian Spanish as it does with “Dowche” (i.e., German or Flemish).

The linguistic variety of this poem is indeed pervasive and a full discussion lies beyond this chapter’s scope. But there is such fluidity of languages in Skelton’s poem that, at one point, Latin glosses intermingle with the main text. Colyns’ marginal glosses and tags amplify the text’s polyglossia, creating a dynamic commingling of voices. Some of this linguistic play occurs in rubrics that conclude each section. At the end of the “Laucture de Parott,” Colyns provides this tag: “Dixit [he said], quod parrot, the royall popagay” (fol. 138r). The previous folio, which featuring several speakers, concludes with this French statement: “Maledite soyte bouche malheurewse” [cursed be the wicked mouth] (fol. 137v). The final rubrics of the poem layer the speaking voices even more: “Dixit, quod Parrot” and, afterwards, two lines of Latin, ending “quod Skelton Lawryat” (fol. 140r). Colyns’ copy conveys an abiding interest in polyvocality and the layering of speech acts. Even if (as others have observed) Colyns omits the section about the Grammarians’ War, his customization of this poem registers one of its major themes: its call for collaboration with a reader who actively engages with the text.

The poem’s final stanzas further register Colyns’ profound engagement with Skelton’s text, but this time through a distinct change in visual (graphic) form. The final page of the poem begins as follows:

62. Other non-English passages include the snippets of Flemish, “Hovst the, byuer god van hemrik, ic seg [be quiet, dear God in heaven, I say]/In Popering grew peres, whan Parrot was an ec” (71–72); the German-language royal motto of Henry VIII, “Ic dien [I serve] serueth for the erstrych fether,/Ic dien is the language of the land of Beme” (80–81); an English pun on a purportedly Punic word, “In Affryc tongue byrsa is a thonge of lether” (82); and Parrot cites a Welsh proverb: “Euery man after his maner of wayes,/Pawbe un aruer [each one his manner] so the Welche man sayes” (93–94). Indeed, “Thus dyuers of language by lernyng I grow” (205). See also Brownlow, 17–22.

63. See for instance the Latin/Greek doublet (Dyce, 13, footnotes 8 and 11).

64. Colyns’ manuscript transmits a fitting Latin epigraph at the beginning of Skelton’s text: “Lectoribus auctor recipit opusculy huius auxesim” [By his readers an author receives an amplification of his short poem] (trans. Scattergood, 454). “Of all Skelton’s works, Speke Parrot (1521) most urgently proposes a poetics of collaboration with the reader” (Griffiths, Liberty to Speak, 79).
So many many morall maters, and so lytell vsyd
So myche newe makyng / & so madd tyme spente
So mych translacion in to Englyshe confused
So myche nobyll prechyng / & so lytell amendment
So myche consultacion / almoste to none entente
So muche provision & so lytell wytte at nede
Syns Dewcalyons flodde there can no clerkes rede. (fol. 139r)

These anaphora-laden stanzas fill the entire folio, front and back (fol. 139r–v). Here, Colyns’ scribal response to the “flood” of Skeltonic anaphora is to enact his own graphic experimentation. That is, Colyns plays with the forms of letters just as much as Skelton plays with language. On this folio, Colyns’ use of “S” letter-forms far exceeds the diversity of such letter-forms elsewhere in the manuscript. On the front of the page, Colyns produces forms of the letter “S” that resemble the dollar sign $ (several varieties, top of fol. 139r), a numeral 5 (third stanza, fol. 139r), an elongated “S” with hook and descender (fourth stanza, fol. 139r), and the numeral 6 (fifth stanza, fol. 139r). (See Figure 5.) On the back of this page, he employs a rubricated swan-shaped “S” (first stanza, fol. 139v) and a double closed loop “S” resembling a “B” or sideways heart (third stanza, fol. 139v).65 Elsewhere in the manuscript, Colyns segregates different “S” shapes across units of text (e.g., confines a single S-form to a single stanza or poem) but Colyns’ transcript of Skelton’s Speke Parrot features the conspicuous coexistence of multiple letter-forms, even within a single stanza.66

For Colyns, compilation comprises a complex form of textual consumption. Not only does it encompass the act of collecting and amassing texts, but it also requires that one work through the material, transform it, mark it, and quite literally make it one’s own. Colyns takes up Skelton’s call for “myche newe makyng” (443), and his handwritten changes to the text—emending non-English spellings to create translingual puns and experimenting with letter shapes—transform the text in unpredictable ways. In signaling his aesthetic response to a text or source material, Colyns not


66. The handwriting here can be fruitfully compared to the list of churches, cloisters, and hospitals in London where the initial “S.” in “St.” varies by each ward (e.g., fol. 10r). Colyns writes out fol. 10r through the first 13 lines of fol. 11v, and his collaborator “Schreiber D” writes the final 15 lines of fol. 11v (Frost, 170).
Figure 5. John Colyns’ experiments with diverse letter-forms (varieties of the initial S) near the ending of Speke Parrot. London, British Library, Harley MS 2252, fol. 139r.
only employs graphic flourishes to claim ownership over the text but also customizes it. Given this mercer’s interests in the processes of bookmaking, we might discern an attempt to craft this material text into an aesthetically pleasing artifact in its own right.

Translingual Writing and the Manifold Book

This discussion has traced the wide-ranging interests of a few London merchants while also demonstrating their diverse linguistic capacities. The project of textual compilation across tongues takes each merchant in a different direction: Robert Fabyan’s *Concordance* interweaves French and English sources and inspires first-person reflections on poetic composition and translation; Richard Hill’s “holster book” is a translingual venue for life-writing; John Colyns’ assemblage of booklets records his aesthetic responses to the mixed-language poetry he reads and transmits. For these merchant-compilers, linguistic code-switching is a complex literate practice that energizes many types of writing: life accounts, mixed-language lyrics, verses imbedded in prose narratives (with shifts in register or form to suit the content at hand), parallel translation, translingual punning, and other acts of verbal transformation.

The manifold possibilities of translingual writing are theorized most deliberately in Fabyan’s *Concordance*. Fabyan’s undertaking seeks not to delineate discrete national or linguistic histories but rather to illustrate a perpetual cross-fertilization of peoples and cultures. Intertwining “storyes of Englelde . . . this Fertyle Ille” with “Fraunce so dere,” his composition stresses the concurrent histories of “these landes twayne,” and Fabyan’s close engagement with the formal aspects of his poetic materials across tongues enacts transnational literary criticism *avant la lettre*. Rather than drawing upon any “objective” scholastic theory of authorship (e.g., *translatio* or even *compilatio*), Fabyan intersperses historical matter with editorial verses, perpetually redefining his generative process through craft metaphors: hewing raw material (“hew[yng] rowgth stone . . . with harde strokes”), polishing dull surfaces (“mysty storyes . . . vnclere”), and composing music (harmonizing “discordaunt” French and English narratives). Cross-linguistic textual engagement produces an ever-shifting articulation of Fabyan’s craft.

All these merchant-compilers offer more than intriguing insights into late-medieval or early modern code-switching practices or even the general phenomena of translingual writing. These collections, in my view,
have profound implications for “the history of the book” and its future trajectories. The “book” is, as William Kuskin reminds us, a “symbolic object,” and the meanings we attribute to any given book (literary, social, cultural) have as much to do with “what it says” as “what it is.”

Each of these merchant-compilers conceives of his own book in multiple, concurrent ways: as a material object (i.e., a physical text housing smaller constituent texts), as well as a vehicle for more “imaginative production.” Indeed, we can differentiate between the ways these compilers use the term “book” in reference to their own imaginative endeavors. In Fabayn’s verses, “this boke [named] Concordaunce of Storyes” (Ellis, 5) comprises a deliberately organized collection of historical narratives as well as a space for poetic composition, and Fabyan pervasively aligns its creation with forms of artisanal craft. For Hill, a “boke of dyuers tales & baletts & dyuers reconyngs” (fol. 3r) serves a dual function in its material form, enabling Hill to record different types of “reconyngs,” economic, literary, and spiritual. For Colyns, “Thys Boke” (fol. 113r) is marked as an aesthetic object imbued with cultural prestige. It is a prized item that a merchant can customize and claim as his own: not only by affixing his ownership mark, but also by copying and transforming poetry, embellishing it with decorative letter-forms.

This comparative analysis reveals each merchant-compiler’s manifold understanding of the “book” as a symbolic “object” as well as a signifying (sign-producing) agent. If we attend to the broader “life cycle” of any given book (or, we might add, any account register, or collection, book-in-progress), we can more effectively acknowledge any book’s function within a dynamic “communications circuit” that encompasses humans as co-participants in a creative process along with texts. Fabyan, Hill, and Colyns compel us to expand the “sociology of texts” to include both human and nonhuman agents: to move towards a reciprocity or symbiosis between text(s) and their so-called creator(s). Examining these multilingual books not only lends insight into the material writing practices of individual merchants or even their creativity as compilers; these books suggest a rich, reciprocal process of transformation, a mutual “creative regeneration” transpiring between humans and textual agents.

67. Kuskin, 1 and 2.
68. Ibid., 2.
71. Alexandra Gillespie, Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and
In approaching these merchant collections as textual contact zones, I have emphasized how each book creates an idiosyncratic material space where languages can coexist and transform one another. Fabian offers poetic texts in parallel translation, allowing two languages to occupy the same space and inviting his readers to sustain a concurrent view of the renditions: not prioritizing one form over the other, but entertaining how different forms of a poem might speak to one another. Hill constitutes narrative through his acts of English/Latin code-switching, inviting the reader to see language traversals as marking movements across time. Colyns engages with his sources by enacting interlinguistic puns as well as forms of nonlinguistic graphic play. Ultimately, the translingual character of these collections is not just an incidental aspect of their contents but actively constitutes their manifold functions. In shaping these books into dynamic textual contact zones, these merchant-compilers ask us to entertain our own modes of thinking concurrently across different languages, but also across distant places, and across discrete moments in time.