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The Italian London of John North: Cultural Contact and Linguistic Encounter in Early Modern England

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This article takes as its subject the remarkable diary kept by a young English gentleman named John North from 1575 to 1579. On his journey home from Italy in 1575–77, North changed the language of his diary from English to Italian. On his return to London, he continued to keep a record of his everyday life in Italian. This article uses North's diary as a starting point from which to reconstruct the social and sensory worlds of a returned traveler and Italianate gentleman. In doing so, it offers a way of bridging the gap between individual experiences and personal networks on the one hand, and the wider processes of cultural encounter and linguistic contact on the other.

INTRODUCTION: THE RETURN OF THE ITALIANATE ENGLISHMAN

ON 3 NOVEMBER 1577, John North was on the last leg of his journey home from Venice. On the road to Calais, preparing to sail to England after two years on the Continent, he noted in his diary that some soldiers had taken him to be an Italian.¹ North had begun keeping his diary while traveling southward through the Low Countries and Germany into Italy in the autumn of 1575. On his arrival at Padua his entries had abruptly stopped, until North took up his pen again when leaving Venice to embark on the journey home. This time, however, he chose not to write in English, but in the Italian he had learned while abroad.² North's remarkable Italian diary did not end when his travels did. After sailing from Calais and leaving the Continent behind, North continued to keep an Italian-language record of his everyday life in England—in London, at

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¹Bodleian Library, MS Add. C. 193 (hereafter BodJN), fol. 75^v.

²For North's arrival at Padua, see BodJN, fol. 16^r; for the switch to Italian, fol. 88^v. On the diary, see Bellorini; Trim.

the court, at his family home in Cambridgeshire—for a further two years after the end of his travels.

Renaissance travelers would be bemused by modern histories of early modern travel. By and large, studies of early modern travel focus on travelers' experiences abroad: where they went, who they met, what they learned. In doing so, these histories miss a crucial point: early modern theorists and travelers were deeply concerned with the idea of return. The pedagogies and practices of early modern travel were geared toward cultivating attributes and a personality that would be well received at home and could lead to employment or other advancement.³ This, in turn, could be the cause of controversy; the returned traveler faced criticism and mockery for attempting to import foreign behaviors or fashions into their home society. Work on the returned traveler tends to consider him as an archetype or a stock character, rather than an individual seeking to translate international experiences into a new persona at home. North's diary is a document of return that offers a rare insight into the practices of fashioning a new, cosmopolitan identity after the personal upheavals of Continental travel.

North returned to an England where the adoption of foreign fashions and behaviors was controversial and where the influence of Italy in particular was under attack. The month before he arrived home, a sermon preached at Paul's Cross complained that "All delight is reposed in Italianate heades, discoursing tonges, & merie conceited companions."⁴ The decade had begun with Roger Ascham's famous attack on the corrupting influence of Italian travel: "I know diverse, that went out of England, men of innocent life, men of excellent learnyng, who returned out of Italie, not onely with worse maners, but also with lesse learnyng: neither so willing to live orderly, nor yet so hable to speake learnedlie, as they were at home, before they went abroad."⁵ These critiques of returned travelers were one expression of wider Elizabethan anxieties about cultural contact and cultural hybridity.⁶ Cultural encounter became audible in the case of contact and mixing between English and other vernacular languages, and travelers like North were seen as agents of pernicious language change as well as importers of foreign fashions and behaviors. Authors like Thomas Wilson took aim at those "farre jorneid gentlemen" who "at their returne home, like as thei love to go in forrein apparell, so thei wil powder their talke w[ith] oversea la[n]guage," so that "He that cometh lately out of France, wil talke Fre[n]che English, & never blushe at the matter. Another choppes in with Angleso Italiano."⁷ The kind of language mixing North practiced in his diary could be

³Warneke. For a helpful overview of early modern educational travel, see Brennan, 9–47.

⁴Walsall, sig. E3^r.

⁵Ascham, fols. 24^v–25^r. See also Wyatt, 159–63.

⁶On concerns about English identity and cultural exchange, see Larkin.

⁷Wilson, fols. 86^r–88^r.

cause for concern among those who worried about the number of words being borrowed into English from Continental vernaculars, seeing it as becoming, in the words of John Florio, “a language confused, bepeesed with many tongues.”⁸

North’s diary details where he went, what he bought, who he met, what he ate and drank and with whom, who he employed, and what he wore, from pantofles to perfume. Read in conjunction with revealing documents from North’s life—an acrimonious legal dispute with the servant who accompanied him to Italy, North’s letter-writing campaign in support of an immigrant fencing teacher fallen on hard times, and the documents of a vendetta leading up to a challenge to fight a duel of honor—the diary offers a rare perspective on the Anglo-Italian encounter: the view from inside.⁹ “Italianate Englishmen”¹⁰ featured heavily in later sixteenth-century English writing, but they are still understood largely from the perspective of the critics who thought of them as “devils incarnate.”¹¹ This article uses the rich documentary record of one gentleman’s life to access the experiences, practices, and relationships that underlay the Anglo-Italian encounter in the later sixteenth century. It offers a way of bridging the gap between individual experiences and personal networks on the one hand, and the wider processes of cultural encounter and linguistic contact on the other. This article shows how one individual fashioned a hybrid identity on English soil through practices of consumption, clothing, sociability, and language, and how those practices related to the great debates and changes of his time.

TEXTS, TASTES, AND SOCIABILITY

North began his diary on 6 September 1575, titling it “A note, of my expenses w[hich] I have spent for my voiage, and in the same.”¹² He bought supplies for the journey and set sail from Dover just over a week later. With his entourage, he traveled to Bruges and Antwerp and then southward on the Rhine through Germany and the Swiss territories, arriving in Padua (after a plague scare near Mantua) on November 7, taking a room for a few days “att the I[n]n of the Son, wher the lodging was good and the fare lykewise” before hiring a chamber in the town.¹³ At this point, the diary goes quiet for nearly two years, until it begins again, starting near the back of the notebook with this entry in Italian:

⁸Florio, 1578, fol. 50^v. On linguistic borrowing in early modern English, see Barber, 53–70; Durkin, 316–20.

⁹The fullest account of Anglo-Italian cultural contact and exchange in this period is Wyatt; see also Lawrence; Rossi, 1989 and 1984.

¹⁰For this term, see Warneke, 105–37.

¹¹Parks; Warneke, 56–60, 107–34; Bartlett.

¹²BodJN, fol. 2^r.

¹³Ibid., fol. 16^r.

“September, on the 24th of which month, at six o’clock in the morning, I left Venice with two Venetian gentlemen, brothers with the names Ottaviano Buon and Filippo Buon, and with another Grego, a merchant of Zante, a Levantine. For the gondola, £3” (figs. 1 and 2).¹⁴ Figures 1 and 2 show that as well as switching languages, North had changed his handwriting, from the secretary hand of his outward journey to a sloping italic.¹⁵ Learning a new hand to go with a new language was not uncommon: in Padua in 1581, Arthur Thockmorton made a note in his diary that “I entered to learne to wryghte to whom I geave a doucate by the mounthe.”¹⁶ Throughout his journey home, North also made Italian-language observations on the places he passed through, following the advice recommended by authors of humanist travel advice texts.¹⁷

The choice to switch from English to Italian in his diary was a remarkable one for John North, although he was not the only traveler of his time to do this: famously, Michel de Montaigne kept a record of his voyage through Italy in Italian in 1580–81. Switching from French to Italian, Montaigne wrote, “Let us try to speak this other language a little, especially since I am in this region where I seem to hear the most perfect Tuscan speech, particularly among those natives who have not corrupted and altered it with that of their neighbours.”¹⁸ For Montaigne, keeping an Italian-language journal was not aimed at producing a polished final text; it was a process of essaying, or attempting—he uses the verb *assaggiare*, which Florio translates as “to assay, to taste, to try.”¹⁹ This approach differentiates North and Montaigne from travelers like William Cecil (Viscount Cranborne), who kept a French-language record of his travels in France between 1609 and 1612. Cranborne made careful humanistic observations in French on the places he passed through and sent his journal home to his father, Robert Cecil, who was eager to judge and comment on his son’s progress in language and knowledge.²⁰

No other figure, though, seems to have done as North did, maintaining a foreign-language diary for a significant period of time beyond their return. When he crossed back into France, Montaigne switched back to French, writing, “Here we speak French; so I quit this foreign language, which I use easily but with very little sureness, not having had the time to learn it at all well, since I was

¹⁴Ibid., fol. 88^v: “Settembre, alli 24. del’qual’ mese, a 6 hore della mattina, io mi partiva da Venetia con due gentiluomini Venetiani fratelli chi s’hanno il nome Ottaviano Buon, & Filippo Buon, & con un altro Grego mercatante di Zante, Levantino. P[er] la gondila—3£.”

¹⁵Bellorini sees North’s adoption of a new hand as a sign of his assimilation into a new culture and “a new and ‘modern’ world”: Bellorini, 24.

¹⁶Canterbury Cathedral Archives (hereafter CCA), U85/38/14/1, fol. 66^v.

¹⁷On humanist travel advice, see Stagl, esp. 47–93; Rubiès, 139–90.

¹⁸Rigolot, 229 (Rigolot’s translation).

¹⁹Ibid. Florio, 1611, s.v. “Assaggiare.”

²⁰Owen, 104–13; see also Chaney and Wilks.

Montagnona. 6. / 3. 1/2. 16
 for our supper 2 — 6. riall
 for my horse mount. — 3. riall
 vnto the Smith for ruyng my
 horse face, w^{ch} was prytto. 7. riall
 Este. 7. / 10. Ital. mil
 payed for my wayen, fro Li-
 gnana, vnto this towne — 11. riall.
 fro this towne w^{ch} wente
 by barto, vnto Padua.
 v. Padua. 10. / 7. /
 wee ran potter fro Este
 att 4. of the clocke
 wee were lodg^d att the
 fr^o of the son, w^{ch} for the
 lady mye was yead and the
 fawd by the wife, but wee
 w^{ch} mayned these att y^e r^ou^t
 thas y^eo.
 for my dinner, 2. suppers,
 w^{ch} horse mount. — 3. riall
 I tawd att att this Inn
 all the 8. day, and dined
 soere all the 9. of the
 dinner goinge but my
 gambor w^{ch} I missed.

Figure 1. Diary of John North. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS Add. C. 193, fol. 16^r.

Anno 1577
 Settembre, alli 24.
 del qual mese, a 16 ho-
 re della mattina, io mi
 partina da Venetia
 con due gentilhuomi-
 ni Venetiani fratelli
 chi s'hanno il nome Ot-
 taviano Buon, e Phi-
 lippo Buon, e con un
 altro Grego mercatan-
 te di Lante, Lenan-
 tiano. 1^a la gondola — 3^l
 mercoledì di 24. Settem. 1577
 Disinai a messre che mi
 costava con li cavalli
 — 1 scudo, 4^l.
 Al mio partire da messre
 donau a sr Gieron sup-
 cote — 2 scudi più
 e lasciai a lui per com-
 prarmi una libra d'oglio
 di scorpiori — 1 scudo $\frac{1}{2}$
 Da messre cerre andammo
 a Castel franco al letto
 miglia 20 da messre
 pagando lui per cena, e
 li cavalli — 1 scudo.
 L'osteria fu la spaja, assai
 honorata.

Figure 2. Diary of John North. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS Add. C. 193, fol. 88^v.

always in the company of Frenchmen.”²¹ North was different. His diary was more than simply a place to practice a foreign language or a document created to justify the time (and money) laid out on his travels. Nor did the diary continue as a vehicle for practicing or performing humanist prose composition once he had returned to England. Instead, it became a space in which he could construct a multilingual and cosmopolitan self. North translated the names of places—so that Magdalene College, Cambridge, became “Il collegio di Santa Maddalena in Cantabrigia”—and of people, so that his servant is called “Odoardo Cotes” and his lute teacher, one Johnson, is referred to throughout as “Gionsono.”²² In his diary, on his return, North spent nearly two years noting quotidian events and expenses, practicing an everyday process of self-translation.

Leaving Italy meant leaving an environment where speaking and hearing Italian was a part of North’s everyday life, but the diary allowed him to continue leading one part of his life in the language. It mostly listed expenses and events rather than entering into much discursive detail, making it difficult to assess North’s exact skill level, though his idiosyncratic but competent Italian was certainly more than what Smith derided as “Angleso Italiano.” North was already well advanced in Italian by the time he returned from travel. He had benefited while in Italy from the stewardship and instruction of Giacomo Castelvetro, the peripatetic humanist, writer, editor, and teacher who died in England in 1616.²³ Castelvetro is only mentioned once by name in the diary, as “S[ignor] Jacomo,” when North recorded hiring a horse for him for the trip from Brescia to Mantua.²⁴ Whether North continued to consult Castelvetro as a tutor after his return is unclear from the diary, though in a handwritten dedication by Castelvetro of a book to North’s father, he says that he is writing the message (in Italian) “in the house of the lord your son my patron.”²⁵

As well as writing in the language, North also had Italian books shipped home from Venice and remained in contact with acquaintances in the city.²⁶ North exchanged letters and received books from “S[ignor] Gieron: Sapcote”—Jerome Sapcote, a recusant’s son, former Oxford student, and author of Latin legal texts, living in Padua and Venice in the 1570s and 1580s.²⁷ It is not clear from the diary

²¹Rigolot, 230 (Rigolot’s translation).

²²For instance, see BodJN, 36^f, 29^v.

²³On Castelvetro, see Butler; Rosenberg, 1943; Rossi, 1984, 78–82; Ottolenghi.

²⁴BodJN, fol. 11^f.

²⁵“In casa del Signor suo figliuolo mio padrone”: Rosenberg, 1943, 132–33; see also 147. The inscription is found in the Columbia University Butler Library copy of Juan Gonzáles de Mendoza, *L’historia del gran regno della China*, 1587, shelfmark B899.63 G581; the North–Castelvetro relationship was still alive a decade after the pair had traveled in Italy together. I am grateful to Jane R. Siegel for providing me with an image of this inscription.

²⁶BodJN, fol. 29^v.

²⁷*Ibid.*, fols. 62^f, 64^v, 84^v, 88^v; Woolfson, 71, 122–23, 268–69.

whether his relationship with the brothers Ottaviano and Filippo Bon (with whom he departed from Venice) continued, though it is tempting to think that it might have: North and Ottaviano might have first encountered each other in Padua in 1576/77, and the Venetian circle included men like Paolo Sarpi and Giordano Bruno who would be important to the Anglo-Italian cultural encounter.²⁸

Among North's multilingual purchases on his return to London were "a book of four languages," Vives's dialogues in French, and a French translation of Italian "tragical histories" (probably those of Matteo Bandello), all bought in London.²⁹ North picked up a copy of John Florio's *Firste Fruites* (an English-Italian language guide) a bare month after Florio signed the prefatory letter.³⁰ He also took up (or continued) the study of French, buying books in person from the Protestant emigré teachers Claudius Hollyband and Jacques Bellot. From Bellot, North probably bought his *French grammar*, published in 1578, which advertised itself as "an introduction orderly and methodically, by ready rules, playne preceptes and evident examples, teachinge the Frenche tongue."³¹ In November 1578, North began taking French lessons with Hollyband, whose school was in St. Paul's Churchyard, at the price of fourteen shillings a month.³²

North's multilingual diary points toward other, more social practices of language-learning in early modern London. Foreign-language teachers were clear on one point: a language could not be satisfactorily learned in isolation or solely from the pages of a book.³³ Early modern linguistic pedagogy demanded

²⁸Pasdera.

²⁹BodJN, fol. 50^r: "un libro di 4. lingue" ("a book of 4. languages"); and fol. 49^v: "Ancor les dialogues de vives" ("the dialogues of Vives again"), "un libro francese detto Histoires Tragiques" ("a French book called Histoires Tragiques").

³⁰Florio signed the book's dedication to Robert Dudley on 10 August 1578: Florio, 1578, *ii.^r, "Al Ill^{mo}. et Ecc^{mo}. S^r. il S^r. Roberto Dudleo." On 14 September 1578, North wrote "In florio & un'altro libro ij^s viij^d": BodJN, fol. 41^r. See also Bellorini, 30.

³¹The full printed title of this work is *The French grammar: or an introduction orderly and methodically, by ready rules, playne preceptes and evident examples, teachinge the Frenche tongue, made, and very commodiously set forth for their sakes that desire to attayne the perfecte knowledg of the same language.*

³²BodJN, fols. 26^r, 47^r. On Hollyband's school, see Berc. North seems to have read at least some French around this time and would likely have used it while serving in the Netherlands: a French-language petition by North to the States General survives (asking for relief from his debts), though its command of legal language and French hand suggest it was probably written by a notary or other professional scribe. North has signed it flamboyantly as "Jehan Northe": British Library (hereafter BL), Additional MS 32502, fol. 5^{r-v}.

³³I differ from Jason Lawrence in seeing orality and pronunciation as being fundamental to the study of Italian in early modern England: see Lawrence, 5, 21–29. By contrast, Wyatt, 168, argues with relation to Florio that his "pedagogical approach . . . values speaking above grammatical precision."

an engagement with the target language as it was spoken and heard. The anonymous compiler of *A plaine pathway to the French tongue* (1575) urged the student to combine their reading of the rules of pronunciation with “a little labour and leasure bestowed in the company and hearing of some Frenche man, without which no booke can throughlie instruct him.”³⁴ The French teacher de la Mothe, author of the popular *French Alphabet* (first published in 1592), urged students based in a place “where the Frenchmen have a Church for themselves, as they have in London” to use this to their advantage: “get you a French Bible, or a new Testament, and every day go both to their Lecture and Sermons. The one will confirme and strengthen your pronunciation, and the other cause you to understand when one doth speake.”³⁵

People followed this advice. In the late 1580s, Robert Cecil practiced his Italian with a physician named Paolo Lentolo until his studies were interrupted by the growing Armada threat.³⁶ Lentolo, or Lentulo, was the son of the Protestant Italian grammarian Scipione Lentulo, and was described by Henry Wotton as “a man well travelled and languaged.”³⁷ The returned traveler and Italophile Edward Zouche wrote to an Italian contact that “I find it good to have my Italian exercised wherof I begin to grow barre[n] . . . my owne want[es] ba[n]ishing me from the sweet company of strangers wherin I have had so much delight.”³⁸ As for attendance at foreign-language churches, this was what Roger Ascham took aim at in his influential attack on Italianate Englishmen in 1570, when he criticized those who attended the Italian church in Mercers’ Hall “to heare the Italian tonge naturally spoken, not to heare Gods doctrine trewly preached.”³⁹ It was a commonplace of early modern language teaching that the student should seek out these multilingual people and places and exploit them to their pedagogical advantage.

This was the multilingual world of speaking, hearing, and learning to which John North returned. It was a polyglot existence for which he had been prepared: he had been raised in a family of linguists and travelers. His father Roger, Lord North, undertook multiple embassies on behalf of Elizabeth I; his skill in Italian was commended during his time at the French court in 1574.⁴⁰ Roger’s

³⁴*A plaine pathway*, sig. A2^r.

³⁵De la Mothe, “An Epistle to the Reader.”

³⁶See Lentolo to Cecil, in Giuseppi, 299 (item 594). Recalling their earlier relationship, Lentolo wrote in Italian.

³⁷Pearsall Smith, 1:300. Scipione Lentulo was known in English through the translation of his Latin-language grammar of Italian made by Henry Grantham in 1575.

³⁸BL, Egerton MS 2812, fols. 27^v–28^r.

³⁹Ascham, fol. 28^v. The records of the Italian church show that it was a multilingual community, including English and Dutch speakers but worshipping and performing administration in Italian. See Boersma and Jelsma; Villani.

⁴⁰Craig.

brother—and John’s uncle, who appears frequently in the diary—was Thomas North, best known today as the English translator of Plutarch’s *Lives*. The Plutarch translation was from French, but Thomas North also produced a translation of Antonio Guevara’s *Libro Llamado Relox de Principes* (translated as *The diall of princes*) and a translation from Italian titled *The morall philosophie of Doni*, published in 1570.⁴¹ Further afield, John’s brother Henry accompanied Humphrey Gilbert on at least one of his voyages, and served as a soldier in Ireland and Poland.⁴² And when John finally married in 1581, his bride was Dorothy Dale—daughter of Valentine Dale, a lawyer and diplomat well known for his skill in classical and vernacular languages.⁴³

North and his family moved in the orbit of one of Elizabethan London’s most influential Italianate tastemakers: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Roger North was a close confidant of Leicester’s—close enough to be blamed by the author of the scurrilous tract known as *Leicester’s Commonwealth* for having turned the earl into a Puritan.⁴⁴ Leicester’s household was a hub of Anglo-Italian cultural contact. The earl was an importer of Continental clothing, materials, and fashions. He styled himself as a protector of and patron to Italians in England; Giordano Bruno described him alongside Walsingham and Sidney as “so praised from the hearts of generous Italian souls, who were received especially by him with particular favor (accompanying that of his Lady), and were always befriended [by him].”⁴⁵ Leicester appears on multiple occasions in John North’s diary (and in Roger North’s household accounts), though John always seems to be on the fringes of his company rather than at its heart, paying money to his servants and cooks and watching his players perform.⁴⁶ That Leicester was comfortable in Italian is suggested by his correspondents’ use of the

⁴¹North, 1557, 1568, and 1570. The *Morall philosophie* was an English translation of *La moral filosofia del Doni, tratta da gli antichi scrittori*, an Italian translation by Anton Francesco Doni. Guevara was also an influence on John Florio and John Eliot in their language-learning texts: see Yates, 36–41; Eliot, 31. On Thomas North’s life, see Lockwood; Davis.

⁴²BodJN, fols. 48^r, 68^r; see *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1558–1603*, ed. P. W. Hasler, s.v. “North, Henry (1556–1620), of Wickhambrook and Mildenhall, Suff’”: <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/north-henry-1556-1620>.

⁴³Marriage of John North and “Dorothie Mrs Dale” at St. Gregory by St. Paul, 13 November 1581: Trim. See also Hicks.

⁴⁴*The copie of a leter*, 15.

⁴⁵Quoted in Goldring, 17. See also Bruno, 83–84.

⁴⁶Compare John North’s gift of three shillings to “Guglielmo Cuoco del S[ignor] conte di Lester” in BodJN, fol. 55^v, with the ten shillings given by Roger, Lord North, “to my .L. of lesters cooke” in BL, Stowe MS 774, 1:fol. 71^v. For Leicester’s players, see BodJN, fol. 45^r. On Leicester’s household and staff, see Adams.

language in letters to him.⁴⁷ It was an aptitude that bound Leicester and the Norths together: Thomas North chose the earl as the dedicatee of his translation of *Doni* from the Italian partly on the grounds that “your Lordship understandeth the Italian tongue very well, and can perfetly speake it.”⁴⁸

The figures named in North’s diary show that he was part of an international and Italianate network linked in various ways to Leicester.⁴⁹ One Leicester link was the Genoese financier Benedict Spinola, whom the earl described as “my dear friend and the best Italian I know in England.”⁵⁰ North borrowed money from Spinola and relied on the Spinola family network to ship his belongings home from Venice via Antwerp.⁵¹ While in Italy, North had received money from a man whom his servant named as “one Seign[or] Pasquell Spindelo a venetian marchaunte.”⁵² This “Spindelo” was Pasquale Spinola, the brother of Benedict who had moved back and forth between London and Venice; in 1575 he helped finance the Earl of Oxford’s Italian travels.⁵³ It seems likely that at least some of the wines and luxury textiles that appear so often in North’s expenses had also passed through the Spinola family network. During his occasional bouts of illness, North recorded paying money to physicians, including Fabiano Nifo, grandson of the Italian humanist Agostino Nifo, who was later granted an Oxford degree on Leicester’s recommendation.⁵⁴ He also recorded visits from “il s[ignor] Dott[ore] Lopus”: this was Roderigo Lopez, the Portuguese doctor who was physician first to Leicester and next to the queen, and would ultimately be executed for his supposed role in a plot against her life.⁵⁵ These visits were both professional and social: North paid Nifo and Lopez for medical services, but also entertained them at dinner. Italian-language dinners were not unknown in early modern London: the Venetian envoys entertained by William Cecil and the

⁴⁷See, for instance, BL, Cotton MS Galba C/V, fol. 37^{r-v}. See also Goldring, 41.

⁴⁸North, 1570, sig. A3^v. On Leicester’s literary patronage, see Rosenberg, 1956.

⁴⁹The history of the Italian community in London has yet to be fully documented. See Wyatt, 146–54; Pettegree, 8–14, 19, 143; Schoeck; Rossi, 1984. On stranger communities in London more generally, see Archer, 131–40; Luu, 459; Rappaport, 42–47, 104–05.

⁵⁰Bennell.

⁵¹BodJN, fols. 35^r, 64^v.

⁵²NA, C 2/Eliz/N3/59, “Hugh Lochard’s first rejoinder, 5 June 1595.”

⁵³Bennell; Kuin, 1:618. In the diary, North recorded (in a weak attempt at code) writing to a “S[ignor] P*sq**I Sp*n*I*”: BodJN, fol. 84^v. For the servant’s story, see the National Archives (hereafter NA), C 2/Eliz/N3/59. On Italian merchants in London, see Wyatt, 140–46.

⁵⁴Palumbo. A letter from Simone Simoni to Theodore de Bèze, 22 September 1567, condemns the reputation and morals of “Niffo,” saying that those who had been his friends in Orléans now considered him “a terrible pedant, an awful ignorant, most arrogant and most proud” (my translation): Aubert, 8:183. On Nifo in London and his relationship with the London Italian community, see Firpo; Ungerer, 1:84n2.

⁵⁵Green; Samuel.

Privy Council in 1575 were impressed by “almost all of them speaking our Italian tongue, or at least all understanding it.”⁵⁶ While one can only guess at the language or languages spoken and heard at North’s dinners, it is clear that both the company and the conversation were cosmopolitan.

The diary’s records of communal dining offer a way into thinking about the kinds of taste and sociability that brought together Italianate communities in early modern London. On 21 February 1577/78, North hosted “the lord earl of Bath . . . with the firstborn son of the knight S[ignor] Parrat & another gentleman his friend.”⁵⁷ The “Conte di Bathe” is presumably the Third Earl of Bath, William Bourchier (1557–1623). Bourchier was a recent graduate from Cambridge and had just been married secretly the previous December—a union his mother worked to undo, with the help of none other than the Earl of Leicester. He is described in the *Dictionary of National Biography* as “a rather enigmatic figure,” though perhaps he and North were brought together by familial links to Leicester, or by their shared interest in music and books.⁵⁸ The identity of the younger Parrat is unclear; this could be the “Sir Thomas Parrot” (or his son) found alongside Roger North in Theodor de Bry’s engravings of Philip Sidney’s funeral procession.⁵⁹ Joining the dinner guests were North’s translator-uncle Thomas and his wife and daughter. Certain figures are harder to pin down. North mentions “la vicina s[ignora] Greca” (“the Greek lady, my neighbor”) and “Buttlera, with her husband and the lady Mills.”⁶⁰ The final two guests were “il S[ignor] Rocco Italiano, & S[ignor] Richardo Knolles.”⁶¹ Rocco is Rocco Bonetti, the Italian intelligence agent and fencer. A likely identification of “Richardo Knolles” is Richard Knollys, courtier, later a member of Parliament, and a student at the inns of court, like John North, in the early 1570s. North made a note in his diary of the marriage of his sister, “Elisabetha Knols,” to Sir Thomas Leighton; another sister, Lettice, would be banished from court for marrying Robert Dudley.⁶²

Courtiers, gentlemen and gentlewomen, a translator, a potential Greek, and an Italian: North entertained his cosmopolitan guests with a rich banquet of

⁵⁶Brown and Bentinck, 7:524–27.

⁵⁷BodJN, fol. 29^r: “il s[ignor] Conte di Bathe . . . co’l figlio lo primogenito del’Cavalliero il s[ignor] Parrat & un’altro gentilh: amico suo.”

⁵⁸Cooper.

⁵⁹Lant and de Bry: Parrot appears in image 12, on foot next to Francis Drake, while Roger North is on horseback in image 23, in the company of (among others) the Earl of Leicester and Baron Willoughby (Peregrine Bertie).

⁶⁰BodJN, fol. 29^r: “La vicina s[ignora] Greca, & Buttlera, co’l suo marito & la gentildonna Mills.” On Greeks in London, see Harris and Porfyriou, 78–86.

⁶¹BodJN, fol. 29^r.

⁶²Ibid., fol. 59^v.

luxury foods, which he listed along with the amounts he had paid for them. The list includes “various confections of sugar, apples, oranges, lemons, figs, almonds, and sugar,” and a variety of drinks.⁶³ As well as three shillings’ worth of meat, North laid on a veritable seafood platter, including salmon, plaice or sole, eels, and what he calls “thornbacce,” which looks like an attempt to Italianize “thornback,” a kind of ray.⁶⁴ There was oil that he described as “sottile,” and vinegar, as well as cinnamon and pepper. For another dinner he held for his “amici,” North bought oil, vinegar, olives, capers, salted lemons, grapefruits, oysters, and white and red wine (the latter of which he called “vino negro”). For the sweet toothed, he laid on four pounds of sugar, raisins, sweets, cinnamon, and ginger—there was pepper, too. The meal was rounded off with a whole cheese.⁶⁵ Elsewhere, one can find North buying “moscatello” (a sweet wine, translated by Florio as “the wine Muskadine”) and candied roses (“rose inzuccherate”).⁶⁶ Reading cultural meanings into a list of foods can be tricky, but there is much here—the grapefruits, the capers, the salted lemons—that is redolent of Mediterranean tastes.⁶⁷

North’s Continental tastes may have made an impression on his father: the same week John returned from Italy, Lord North joined him in London and recorded in his own household accounts three shillings and ninepence spent on two pints of olives, and eight shillings on four pounds of capers.⁶⁸ This was the first time since the elder North’s surviving accounts began (in January 1575/76) that either of these foodstuffs was mentioned in his recorded purchases. It was not the last. Lord North recorded spending money on Mediterranean foods on other occasions, not least when in London for his son’s wedding, when he spent eighteen pence on, yet again, olives and capers.⁶⁹ Capers were an “exotic” food common in household accounts from the 1620s onward: North (and his father) were ahead of the trend.⁷⁰ North’s food, the environment in which he served it, and the company to whom he served it—to the accompaniment, on at least one

⁶³Ibid., fol. 28^v: “confettoni varie di zuccaro, pomi, narranci, citroni, fichi mandole, & zuccaro.”

⁶⁴Ibid., fol. 54^v: “salmone, passeri, anguille, & thornbacce.” Items like salmon were costly and prestigious: see Lloyd, 94–98. On dining in Renaissance Italy, see Grieco, 244–53.

⁶⁵BodJN, fol. 54^v. On expensive spices, sugar, olives, and exotic fruits (fresh and preserved), see Lloyd, 119–28. The sheer variety of food laid on by North recalls the sixteenth-century Italian trend toward festive meals containing more courses and salads, including fish and shellfish and dressed with vinegar and oil: Grieco, 249–51.

⁶⁶BodJN, fols. 30^r, 49^r, 60^v. Comfits and candies became increasingly popular during the period: Lloyd, 134, argues that the Earl of Leicester was a trendsetter in this regard.

⁶⁷For an overview of later sixteenth-century English tastes in food, see Thirsk, 27–56. On elite diets generally, see Lloyd, 75–140.

⁶⁸BL, Stowe MS 774, 1: fols. 53^r–53^v.

⁶⁹Ibid., fols. 162^v–164^r.

⁷⁰Lloyd, 110.

occasion, of paid musicians—allowed him to perform Italianate taste and sociability in early modern London.⁷¹

VOICES, WORDS, AND BODIES: MUSIC AND DANCING IN LONDON

Communal music making was an important aspect of Italian and Italianate sociability. It required linguistic, bodily, and social skills, as well as offering an opportunity to exercise and display taste. Thomas Whythorne, the English musician and composer, wrote in his manuscript autobiography (ca. 1576) that many of “the nobility and the worshipful” in England followed the advice of books like Castiglione’s *Courtier* in learning music.⁷² During his travels in Italy, Whythorne had noted that the Italian elites he encountered valued an understanding of music and the ability “to play or sound on some musical instrument; or else to sing pricksong, in such sort as they were able to sing a part when they were in company of such who were willing to sing songs of two, three, four parts &c.” In the houses of Italian elites could be found “not only instruments of music but also all sorts of music in print,” so that those who could sing would be provided with materials to make music together.⁷³ John North used his diary to record his purchases of “libri da cantare” (“singing books”), books of dances and pieces for the lute, and musical instruments, suggesting an interest in this kind of communal music making.⁷⁴ The study of singing could be a part of travel, as it was for Arthur Throckmorton, who recorded money paid in Florence “to M^r vinsenso gallilea for teaching me to singe . . . and for a singyng booke.”⁷⁵ Travelers could carry home a new voice, as well as a new language, and the music they learned was a social skill that could be employed on their return.

North’s diary records money spent on musicians and music in a variety of contexts—in private homes, at a dinner he hosted, and in taverns at home and abroad.⁷⁶ As described in Nicholas Yonge’s preface to *Musica Transalpina*

⁷¹BodJN, fol. 29^f.

⁷²Whythorne, 205.

⁷³Ibid., 206. On the relationship between texts and communal music making in early modern Europe, see Wistreich; for the specifically Italian contexts that North may have been emulating, see Dennis.

⁷⁴BodJN, fol. 38^v.

⁷⁵CCA, fol. 69^f. The Vincenzo Galileo mentioned here was Galileo Galilei’s father—an important Italian musician and member of the Florentine Camerata, where he was a part of influential discussions on musical theory and practice.

⁷⁶BodJN, fols. 63^f (music at the house of the Countess of Worcester), 29^f (music at a dinner hosted by North), 67^v (music at the Half-Moon tavern in Cambridge), 84^v (music at an inn in Augsburg).

(1588), a collection of Italian madrigals translated into English, communal singing in early modern London brought Italians and English speakers together in a multilingual musical environment. Yonge wrote that

since I first began to keepe house in this Citie, it hath been no small comfort unto mee, that a great number of Gentlemen and Merchants of good accompt (as well of this realme as of forreine nations) have taken in good part such entertainment of pleasure, as my poore abilitie was able to afford them, both by the exercise of Musicke daily used in my house, and by furnishing them with Bookes of that kinde yeerly sent me out of Italy and other places, which beeing for the most part Italian Songs, are for sweetnes of Aire, verie well liked of all, but most in account with them that understand that language. As for the rest, they doe either not sing them at all, or at the least with litle delight.⁷⁷

In this account, Yonge's home was a private space in which Italians, Italian speakers, and others met at an event whose centerpiece was the performance of music in Italian. Singing in Italian was a fashionable activity that could provide the motivation for those that could not speak Italian to learn the language, if they were impressed by the music or shamed by their ignorance in polyglot company. Communal singing could also be a kind of language practice, since singers needed to conform to the same correct pronunciation. Hearing and imitating native Italians would allow an English singer to improve their pronunciation, while the wordpainting that was a feature of the Italian madrigal linked the meaning of lyrics to their musical expression, encouraging a kind of translation of the piece's text into its performance.⁷⁸

Similarly central to elite sociability in early modern London was the practice of dancing. It was a sociable activity and an important aspect of the gentlemanly curriculum followed by young men at the inns of court and in London.⁷⁹ It was also an activity in which Italian and French cultural forms were brought into England and mingled with native practices.⁸⁰ North attended dancing schools—including one at Holborn—and engaged other teachers, including one Rouland, a Sherman, and an earl's servant whom he called "Odoardo."⁸¹ Rouland, whom

⁷⁷Yonge, sig. A2^r.

⁷⁸For music and song in early modern pedagogies, see van Orden, 117–227. For word painting and the Italian and English madrigal, see Atlas, 431–39, 681; Fallows 125.

⁷⁹Ward; Rhatigan, 90–91; Prest, 153–58.

⁸⁰Ravelhofer, 104–08. North's diary also suggests that he participated in a wedding entertainment that involved wearing a mask: in December 1579 he writes, "Io mi mascherava sta sera & ne pagava—xx^s" ("I masked myself this evening and paid 20 shillings for it"): BodJN, fol. 74^r.

⁸¹BodJN, fols. 54^r, 28^r, 61^r, 62^v.

North paid on multiple occasions, was also engaged by North to produce some handwritten “measures.”⁸² Shortly after his return home, he recorded paying seven shillings for “certain country dances, and galliards.”⁸³ At a dinner hosted by North on 21 March 1578/79—he had laid in new oranges for the occasion—were his uncle, Thomas North; the Italian physician Fabiano Nifo; two men whom North calls “Lodowico” and “Ambrosio”; another named “Gionsono”; and one “s[ignor] Cardel.”⁸⁴ A few days later, “Cardel” began teaching North to dance. It seems very likely that this man is Thomas Cardell, lutenist and dancing master at Elizabeth’s court. Cardell was appointed to Elizabeth’s service in 1574, replacing an Italian dancing master named Jaspar Gaffoyne.⁸⁵ The guest named “Gionsono” is an Italianized “Johnson.” He was North’s teacher on the lute from February 1577/78 onward and the recipient of frequent payments for instruction or for maintenance and repair of North’s lutes.⁸⁶ Gionsono’s appearance in the company of a courtier like North and a court dancer and musician like Cardell makes it likely that he is John Johnson, who was appointed as a royal lutenist around the same time as Cardell.⁸⁷ Johnson is described by Matthew Spring as “the first native English lutenist composer of real merit” and the originator of an English style of composition for the lute based on Italian grounds.⁸⁸

North owned and maintained multiple lutes, one of which he bought from his uncle for forty shillings.⁸⁹ He spent money on a lute book and books of lined

⁸²Ibid., fol. 28^v: “donava a Rouland per le misure scritte mi a penna—3^s” (“gave to Rouland for the measures written in pen for me—3 shillings”). On manuscript “measures” in early modern England, see Ward.

⁸³BodJN, fol. 28^v. On “country dancing” and the relationships between dance and society, see Marsh, 328–90.

⁸⁴BodJN, fol. 56^r. I focus here on “Gionsono” and “Cardel,” but there are potential identifications for the other two diners. “Lodowico” (with whom North dined again the following week) could be Lodovico Bassano (d. 1593), a recorder player at the court from 1568 onward and a member of the Bassano clan of musicians. He may have been a composer for the lute. “Ambrosio” could be Ambrose Lupo, originally from Milan, a string player who had first come to England in 1540 and was a relatively well-off Londoner and member of the Italian church, dying in 1591. See Ashbee and Lasocki, 1:120–21, 2:745–47.

⁸⁵For Cardell’s career, see Ashbee and Lasocki, 1:230–31; Spring, 102. Like John Florio, Cardell later became a Groom of the Privy Chamber to Queen Anne.

⁸⁶BodJN, fols. 29^v, 38^v, 64^v. Gionsono may also be the “Johnson” paid for a month for an unspecified activity on fol. 51^r, and the man whose daughter’s baptism North attends on fol. 64^r, presenting the mother with a silver spoon costing seven shillings. The combination of roles as musician and instrument repairer was not unusual in Elizabethan England: see Lasocki.

⁸⁷For Johnson, see Ashbee and Lasocki, 2:629; Spring, 47, 77, 97–98, 103. Spring suggests that Johnson’s preferment at court may have been due to Leicester’s influence: *ibid.*, 107.

⁸⁸Spring, 47, 77. On lute teachers in early modern London (including Johnson), see Gale.
⁸⁹BodJN, fol. 30^v.

staves in which he could copy or compose music under Johnson's instruction.⁹⁰ A fashionable instrument with Italianate connotations, the lute was a status symbol, a beautiful object to be displayed, and an instrument of sociability and communal music making. Readers of Claudius Hollyband's *Italian Schoolemaister* (1597) learned to say "*O compagni, voglio che cantiamo una canzone, e io pigliarò il liuto*. O fellowes, I wish that wee shoulde sing a song, and I will take the lute."⁹¹ In Italy only a few years later, Arthur Throckmorton would engage a reader in Italian and two men to teach him the lute, as well as writing to have his "lutyng booke" sent to him.⁹² Learning to play the lute, like practicing a new hand or an Italian dance step, involved the retraining of the body.⁹³ John North—a lute player and dancer who recorded his expenses in a neat italic—had engaged in the kind of bodily translation so abhorred by the critics of Italianate gentlemen. Thomas Nashe attacked the returned traveler whose experience abroad "makes him to kiss his hand like an ape, cringe his neck like a starveling, and play at heypass, repass come aloft, when he salutes a man."⁹⁴ Similarly, Gabriel Harvey mocked the Italianate gentleman for "His cringing side necke, Eyes glauncing, Fisnamie smirking / With forefinger kisse, and brave embrace to the footewarde."⁹⁵ Through music making and the study of singing and playing, the voices and the bodies of Italians and English Italianates became trained agents of cultural contact.

CONTINENTAL CLOTHING

In his *Firste Fruites*—bought by John North in 1578—John Florio wrote, "Now let us see, if al the colours you have, are able, of naturall Englishmen, to dye us into artificial Italians."⁹⁶ His use of a metaphor drawn from the (immigrant-heavy) cloth trade is telling.⁹⁷ In early modern London, clothing and accessories

⁹⁰Ibid., fols. 27^r, 51^r. On teaching practice, see Spring, 112. The lute book bought by North may have been the 1568 *A briefe and easye instruction to learne the tablature to conducte and dispose thy hande unto the Lute* (the English translation of Adrien le Roy's 1565 *Breve et facile instruction pour apprendre la tablature, a bien accorder, conduire et disposer la main sur le cistre*).

⁹¹Hollyband, 1597, sigs. E1^v–E2^r. Cf. Hollyband, 1582, 54^v–57^v.

⁹²CCA, fol. 64^r: "I write to Thomas Loy: for my lutyng booke 6^s: Bergamasco came to teache me on the lute to whom I gave 8^l: by the monthe A reader came to teache me Itallian to whom I gave 7^l: by the mounthe."

⁹³Kenny.

⁹⁴Nashe, 345. For a useful discussion about foreignness and bodily comportment, see Larkin, 67–78.

⁹⁵Spenser and Harvey, 36.

⁹⁶Florio, 1578, fol. 106^r.

⁹⁷On immigrants' impact on English cloth and clothing, see Schneider; Jones and Stallybrass, 25, 76.

offered a visible and public way of proclaiming cosmopolitan identities: it was no coincidence that “reclotting” was a master metaphor of early modern translation.⁹⁸ North was conscious of the origins of the materials and styles of some of his clothing: he recorded buying “a pair of boots of Spanish leather” (“un paro di stivali di cuoi’ di spagna”), some “Flanders silk to make myself a doublet” (“tela di fiandra a farmi un giubbone”), and “a pair of leather pantofles in the French style” (“un paio di pantofoli di cuoio alla francese”).⁹⁹ North details the items of clothing he purchased, their care, and the materials he bought, sometimes giving details of the outfits into which they would be incorporated. On occasion, he gave the names of vendors or the place where an item was bought.¹⁰⁰ In his *Delicate diet, for daintiemouthde droonkardes* (1576), George Gascoigne had burlesqued the English adoption and adaptation of foreign fashions, bemoaning the English ability “by lytle and lytle to excede and passe them al, in all that which (at first sight) we accoumpted both vyle and vyllanous,” so that “of a Spanish Codpeece, we make an English footeball: of an Itallyan wast, an English Petycoate: of a French ruffe, an English Chytterling,” and so forth.¹⁰¹ In his Italian-language notes on materials to be fashioned and worn in England, North was experiencing firsthand the process by which foreign fashions were translated and domesticated by English consumers. In the later sixteenth century, the buying and wearing of foreign fashions were activities that became linked to wider questions of economics, cultural politics, and English identity. North’s clothing—like the identity he cultivated in the diary—was consciously international and consciously controversial.

In his diary, North showed the extent of his sartorial vocabulary. In April 1578, he wrote that he had paid the significant sum of four pounds to one Banks for “due calze (overò bragoni)” — “two pairs of hose,” he writes at first, before correcting himself in parentheses to say rather “great breeches, or slops” (to use Florio’s translation).¹⁰² North moves from a general term to a more specific one, showing a concern with accuracy of description. It’s a telling moment: a reminder that a command of vocabulary was a foundation of distinction and taste. North’s writing in the diary displays a detailed knowledge of the Italian

⁹⁸Coldiron, 2010, 111–13; Wyatt, 159. On the overlap between discourses on language and on clothing, see Larkin, 26–28, 63–64. On clothing and the fashioning and expression of identity, see Rublack, 2010. For English contexts, see Jones and Stallybrass; Hentschell, 2002 and 2004; Shulman; Larkin, 79–122.

⁹⁹BodJN, fols. 35^v, 49^v, 72^v. On the cultural meanings of leather in early modern Europe, see Rublack, 2013.

¹⁰⁰For example, North notes that he “paid to Madam Browne in Fleet Street for 2 shirts, & 2 collars of ruffs wrought—£2 16s” (“Et pagava a Mad^a: Browne in fleetestreete di 2. camiscie, & 2 collari di ninphe lavorate—ij£ xvj^{ss}”): BodJN, fol. 71^v.

¹⁰¹Gascoigne, sig. C3^v.

¹⁰²BodJN, fol. 32^f.

terminology of textiles and fashion. He made Italian notes on his purchase of “perfect satin in two colors” (“*raso perfetto di due colori*”) with which to make himself a doublet, and recorded a two-day shopping spree during which he bought handkerchieves, silver buttons, a velvet hat, a pair of pumps, and red silk points.¹⁰³ North’s clothing was fashionable and extravagant. He spent considerably on silver and gold lace (“*passamano d’argento*” and “*passamano d’oro*”)—showy and expensive material targeted by sumptuary laws.¹⁰⁴ North bought multiple “*nimphe*,” the plural of “*nimfa*,” which Florio translates as “a thick ruffe-band, as women or effeminate fellowes weare about their necks” (a reminder that critics of Italianate gentlemen commonly attacked them for their supposed effeminacy).¹⁰⁵ Neither “*nimpha*” nor “*passamano*” appears in William Thomas’s Italian-English dictionary (first published in 1550); nor are they mentioned in Florio’s *Firste Fruites*, the most complete English-Italian manual available when North was writing.¹⁰⁶ One can assume that at least some of North’s fashion-related vocabulary came from the very oral world of valuing, bargaining, buying, and selling that he encountered abroad and at home, where foreign merchants and foreign labor were essential to the creation of fashionable items. From embroidery to alteration, he displayed an understanding of the vocabulary that described how his clothes were made and what they were made from.¹⁰⁷

This ability to name and discuss foreign fashions was essential to understanding their value. This is why the vocabularies and dialogues of language manuals like those bought by North devoted such attention to lists of materials and items of clothing. Carefully constructed, they could inculcate discernment in attentive readers. Printed vocabularies organized commodities, materials, and styles in hierarchies and taught the vocabulary of distinction: the language used by an insider with knowledge of the trade. At the same time, printed dialogues taught object lessons in the social life of clothes and textiles. The reader of Florio’s *Firste Fruites* learned far more than the names of materials and garments listed in the brief vocabulary.¹⁰⁸ Taken as a whole, the text is

¹⁰³Ibid., fols. 31^v, 62^r.

¹⁰⁴Fynes Moryson claimed Italian origins for European lacemaking techniques, and an English act of 1545 gave permission to the Florentine Cavalanti merchant family to import “all manner sorts of Fringys and Passamentys wrought with Gold and Silver or otherwise”: Levey, 9. On the growing popularity of ruffs in England during the 1570s, see *ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁵See, for instance, BodJN, fol. 71^v. Garments like these could often be supplied by the labor of foreign women living in London: Korda.

¹⁰⁶Hollyband, 1593, s.v. “*Passemens*,” translates “*Passemens*, come robbes couvertes de passemens” as “all kind of pasement lace,” the term “*pasement*” suggesting that *passamano*, the Catalan *passmano*, or the French *passement* had been borrowed into English. See Levey, 5–6.

¹⁰⁷See “*acconciatura*” on BodJN, fol. 27^v (and elsewhere), and “*ricamatura*” on fol. 63^v.

¹⁰⁸For cloth terms in the vocabulary, see Florio, 1578, fol. 102^{r-v}.

saturated with discussions of cloth and clothing, and of how they are bought and sold, compared, and circulated. In the third dialogue, two characters give up on chasing women through London in order to “go and walk in Cheape to buy something”: one seeks “a hat, a payre of white Stockens” (“un capello, un paro di calzette bianche”), while the other wants “a payre of Pantofles and Pumpes” (“un paro di Pantofole e Scarpine”). They discuss prices, they sniff perfumed gloves, and they compare the color of their garters and stockings.¹⁰⁹ The fifth dialogue, teaching “Familiar speache with man or woman,” swerves from a profession of love to a request “to make me a couple of white shertes” and “two faire handkerchiefes, wrought with Crimosen silke”: the characters discuss the quality of cloth and its price on the market.¹¹⁰ Later, a character on his way to the Exchange lists some of the fashionable items one might find there: “I wil buy a Hat, a Cappe, a Girdle, a Doblet of Tafeta, Velvet, Grograyne, Satten, Makadowe, Chambelot, white, redde, greene, yallowe, blewe, russet, and blacke.”¹¹¹ Most of the items here listed by Florio also appear among North’s expenses. Florio’s “familiar speeches” contained embedded instruction in the kind of competence witnessed in North’s diary: an understanding of the value-laden language used to discuss and debate these commodities in early modern England and Italy and of the roles played by cloth and clothing in the everyday social life of fashionable London.

Few items of early modern clothing served social purposes as explicitly as did gloves. Gloves existed not just to be worn or carried, but also to be circulated. In Northern Europe in the later sixteenth century, gloves became increasingly popular as gifts, as tokens of esteem or affection, and as emotional and romantic objects to be passed from hand to hand.¹¹² From the late 1560s onward, fashionable London was gripped by a trend for perfumed leather gloves. The trend for scented gloves was generally attributed to the influence of Italianate courtiers like the Earl of Oxford, who gave a pair to the queen in 1566.¹¹³ Holly Dugan has argued convincingly for the complex and international nature of both the production and the cultural meaning of these objects in early modern England.¹¹⁴ North recorded multiple purchases of pairs of gloves, some presumably for himself and others to be sent to his father or to be given away,

¹⁰⁹Ibid., fol. 2^v; see also 3^r.

¹¹⁰Ibid., fol. 5^{r-v}.

¹¹¹Ibid., fol. 10^r: “*Io voglio comprare un Capello, una Baretta, una Cintura, un Giupone di Tafettato, Velluto, Grossograno, Raso, Moscagliado, Ciambelotto bianco, rosso, verde, giallo, turkino, bigio, e negro.*”

¹¹²Welch.

¹¹³Oxford was among the most extravagantly Italianate gentlemen in Elizabethan London. His trip to Italy began in the same year as John North’s, 1575. See Nelson.

¹¹⁴Dugan, 131–32.

on one occasion at Bartholomew Fair.¹¹⁵ One entry lists “piu guanti a dar via, per buone mani” (“more gloves to give away”): Florio explains “buone mani,” or “Bonamáno,” as “a new yeares gift, a reward. drinking money, a good hansell.”¹¹⁶ Gloves like these could be used to steer social, economic, and political relationships. North’s gloves, like his person, were scented. On Valentine’s Day in 1577/78, North paid nine shillings for a flask of rosewater, a pair of scented gloves, “pomata odorifera” (a scented lip salve) and “Naples soap.”¹¹⁷ The first time North mentions buying a pair of gloves in the diary, he also bought “acqua mischiata,” probably a kind of scented water; elsewhere he bought “acqua rosata” (rosewater had been a popular scent since the Henrician period), and “acqua composita” in a pewter flask to be sent to his father.¹¹⁸ He spent fourteen shillings on “granetti di mosco”; this “musk” or ambergris was a luxury substance commonly used for the perfuming of gloves.¹¹⁹ It was not only North’s gloves that were scented: in December 1578, he bought three-and-a-half yards of perfumed fustian.¹²⁰

The Italianate gentleman had a multisensory impact. Perfume and perfumed garments were identified with the affected courtier: Philbert de Vienne’s satire, *The philosopher of the court* (translated into English by George North in 1575), lampooned “Counterfaite Courtiers” who were identifiable by the “perfumed gloves under their girdels,” but also by their speech and their polyglot pretensions; they could be heard “speaking lispingly, & answering singingly,” ornamenting their discourse with “a word or two of Fre[n]che, Italian, or Spanish, which they carry in their budgettes.”¹²¹ In 1598, John Marston would attack the “perfum’d Castilio,” a courtly follower of Castiglione recognizable by his scent. In the same year, Edward Guilpin wrote, “Come to the Court, and Balthazar [i.e., Castiglione] affords / Fountains of holy and rose-water words,” highlighting the overlapping

¹¹⁵BodJN, fols. 29^v, 51^v, 52^f.

¹¹⁶Ibid., fol. 41^f. Florio, 1611, s.v. “Bonamáno.”

¹¹⁷BodJN, fol. 28^f: “sapon’ di Napoli.” “Pomata odorifera” could potentially be another kind of ointment or unguent for skin or hair, but Florio, 1611, s.v. “Pomáta,” translates “Pomáta” as “pomado or Lip-salve.”

¹¹⁸BodJN, fols. 34^f, 33^f, 55^f. On scented waters, see Lloyd, 136–37; on rosewater, see Dugan, 42–69.

¹¹⁹BodJN, fol. 31^f; Dugan, 126–53.

¹²⁰BodJN, fol. 51^f. This purchase set North back 26 shillings. Larkin notes that a 1610 joke relied on the audience knowing that “much . . . grey-brown fustian came from Genoa and Milan”: Larkin, 64.

¹²¹De Vienne, 16. In this context, a “budget” refers to a purse, wallet, or pouch, usually made of leather. On de Vienne’s satire, see Snyder, 81; Burke, 112–13. Evelyn Welch also notes that Florio, 1611, gives “Profumatello” as “a wanton perfumed or effeminate fellow”: Welch, 26.

sensory impact of scent and language.¹²² The Italianate gentleman was a man changed not just inwardly, but in his words, his carriage, and even his odor: an encounter with this culturally hybrid figure was a multisensory one, incorporating sight, sound, and smell.

North's taste for scent and scented fabrics or items of clothing was no doubt informed by contemporary fashions. In the early modern city, however, pungent smells were potent in other ways. North's return overlapped with the return of the plague to London: in 1578 it killed an estimated 3,568.¹²³ It was believed that strong odors carried or worn on one's person could have a prophylactic effect against the plague. William Bullein informed his readers that "Gloves sweetely perfumed with Muske, Sivet, Amber Grece, and Oyle de Ben, be very wholesome for Cytizens, that dwell in close, corrupted foule ayre."¹²⁴ Intriguingly, the missing period in North's diary—from his arrival in Padua in late 1575 to his departure for home in September 1577—coincides with one of the worst outbreaks of plague in sixteenth-century Venice. Between 1575 and 1577, the plague killed roughly a quarter of the city's population.¹²⁵ The only evidence for North's activities during this period comes from the documents of an acrimonious lawsuit undertaken two decades later, which resulted in a series of vitriolic denunciations by North of his servant on the journey, Hugh Lochard, and vice versa. Lochard attested that North had been lodged outside Venice at the height of the plague, but that he had sent his servant into the city to acquire money from a Venetian merchant on three occasions: the first when "the fame & reporte was co[m]men, [that] ther died every daye fyve hundred p[er]sons"; the second time when 700 people were said to die daily; and the third when mortality rates were rumored to be 900 daily, and where Lochard "sawe the deade bodyes carried uppon heapes in barges."¹²⁶ Lodging and traveling in the Veneto at a time of intense disease would have brought North into contact with the "battery of aromatic counter-measures" available to combat the plague, from cheap herbs to "elaborate compound remedies . . . based on exotic and costly ingredients."¹²⁷ To read North's purchases of scents and scented materials solely in the context of fashion is to miss a potentially important meaning for them. Journeying from Venice to London, he traveled out of one plague year and into another: if he smelled of Italy, it may have been with scents that spoke of the fear of disease as well as fashion.

¹²²Both quoted in Larkin, 59–60.

¹²³Slack, 151.

¹²⁴Bullein, fol. 56^r. See also Jenner.

¹²⁵Wheeler.

¹²⁶NA, C 2/Eliz/N3/59.

¹²⁷Wheeler, 35.

North's clothing choices placed him at the heart of contemporary debates about fabric, commonwealth, and national identity. Garments like the fourteen-shilling velvet hat he purchased in June 1579 spoke loudly of Continental tastes.¹²⁸ While velvet was a material with origins in the Ottoman Empire, it was common knowledge in early modern Europe that the best velvet came from the cities of Northern Italy.¹²⁹ A critique of velvet as the archetypal foreign fabric was at the heart of the period's best-known sartorial satire. Robert Greene's 1592 *Quip for an upstart courtier* mocked pretentious courtiers and praised plain Englishmen through the medium of a dream dialogue between two pairs of breeches—one of cloth and one of velvet. Greene's broadside responded not only to the perceived importation of foreign customs and manners into England by young gentlemen mocked by Greene as "Italianate Cantes, humorous Cavaliers, youthfull Gentlemen, and Inamorati gagliardi," but also to the slump in the English cloth trade and the perceived usurpation of good English cloth in the market by Continental stuffs.¹³⁰ Greene's monstrous Velvet-breeches is a grotesque hodgepodge of foreign fabrics: "It was a very passing costly paire of Velvet-breeches, whose panes being made of the cheefest Neapolitane stuffe, was drawne out with the best Spanish satine, and marvellous curiously over wipt with gold twist, intersemed with knots of pearle, the Netherstocke was of the purest Granado silck, no cost was spared to sett out these costly breeches."¹³¹ In the verse text that inspired Greene's prose satire, the Velvet-breeches character explicitly announces that "I was borne in Italy" and flaunts the expense and prestige of his material against the poorer English equivalents.¹³² Velvet-breeches is an avatar of foreignness, luxury, and pretension. The hodgepodge nature of his extravagant clothing is echoed in North's purchase of Spanish taffeta with which to make a French "capotto," which John Florio translates as "a short dutch cloke, a short Spanish cap. Also a hood or cowle."¹³³ North's clothing proclaimed his international tastes: a multisensory expression of the hybrid identity he worked out in the pages of the diary and in the streets and spaces of early modern London.

¹²⁸BodJN, fol. 62^r.

¹²⁹On velvet in early modern Europe, see Monnas, 7–52.

¹³⁰Hentschell, 2002, 559–65.

¹³¹Greene, sig. B^r.

¹³²F.T., sig. [A7]^v. His opponent replies (sig. [A8]^r), bemoaning the foreigner's migration to England: "And where thou sayest thou art of Italy, / Borne and bred in that noble region: / Why livst thou not at home in thy country, / Woe worth him brought thee fyrst to Albion."

¹³³Florio, 1611, s.v. "Cappotto"; BodJN, fol. 27^v: "Hoggi comprava taffita di ispagna per farmi un capotto franscese."

FENCING AND COMMUNITY IN ITALIAN LONDON

John North and Velvet-breeches shared more than a taste for costly foreign materials: both were keen fencers. Robert Greene first shows Velvet-breeches “pacing downe the hill stepping so proudly with such a geometricall grace, as it semed an artificall bragart had resolved to measure the world with his paces,” and bedecked with “a Rapyer and Dagger gilt, point pendante, as quaintly as if some curious Florentine had trickte them up to square it up and downe the streetes before his Mistresse.” Dressed “as though they had there appointed to act some desperat combat,” Velvet-breeches is the image of the Italian fencer.¹³⁴ His physical bearing also marks him out as Italianate: the “geometricall grace” of his step references the “geometrical” approaches common in sixteenth-century Italian treatises on fencing like that of Camillo Agrippa.¹³⁵ His rapier and dagger stand in contrast to Cloth-breeches’ “good sower bat with a pike in the end.”¹³⁶ The critics of Italian fencing and its impact on dueling in England complained that it was both more deadly in the context of urban combat and utterly useless on the battlefield. The fencer armed with rapier and dagger was simultaneously the cause of senseless death at home and weakness abroad.¹³⁷

Clothing, armor, and weaponry were not distinct categories for the Renaissance gentleman—each followed fashions and complemented the other. North’s purchases of fencing equipment marked him out as a man of Italianate tastes.¹³⁸ On 8 April 1578, he spent eight shillings on new scabbards for his sword and dagger: both were made of velvet.¹³⁹ This was followed just over a week later by a girdle and hangers, also of velvet, at a cost of six shillings (figs. 3 and 4 show near-contemporary examples of similar equipment).¹⁴⁰ In June, North had a coat repaired or remade with velvet, and in July he bought a new set of girdle and hangers in the same material, followed by yet another velvet pair in November.¹⁴¹ In December, he spent thirty-four shillings on a velvet hat with a gilt hatband and a feathered plume.¹⁴² It is tempting to think of the velvet and gold of the hat perfectly offsetting a velvet scabbard and a gilded hilt like those North displayed on some of his swords: such an ensemble would also helpfully match the four pairs of velvet pantofles he purchased later that month.¹⁴³

¹³⁴Greene, sig. B^r.

¹³⁵Mondschein; see also Anglo, 154–55.

¹³⁶Greene, sig. B^r.

¹³⁷Peltonen.

¹³⁸Patterson.

¹³⁹BodJN, fol. 32^r.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., fol. 32^v.

¹⁴¹Ibid., fols. 35^r, 38^v, 46^v.

¹⁴²Ibid., fol. 50^f.

¹⁴³Ibid., fol. 51^r.



Figure 3. Damascened and blued dagger with velvet scabbard. Italy, ca. 1550. Wallace Collection, A817. © The Wallace Collection.

North was similarly discerning in choosing, decorating, and maintaining the weapons that went with these garments. Before departing for the Continent, he paid six shillings for a gauntlet and five shillings “for russetinge my rapier and my dagger with the girdel and hangers.”¹⁴⁴ At Antwerp, he bought “ij paire of knifes, w[ith] velvet shethes, and silver hafts.”¹⁴⁵ His tastes in fencing equipment tended toward the lavish and the

¹⁴⁴Ibid., fol. 2^v.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., fol. 5^v.



Figure 4. Sword belt (leather, velvet, bronze, gold). Germany, ca. 1600. Wallace Collection, A1067. © The Wallace Collection.

decorative. On 18 November 1578, at the beginning of a three-week spending spree, North spent nineteen shillings on the gilding of a sword and on a new scabbard.¹⁴⁶ This gilding—North calls it “indoratura”¹⁴⁷—could indicate one of three common sixteenth-century techniques: either damascening, in which a precious metal was inlaid into iron or steel; the cheaper and more fragile false damascening, whereby gold or silver wire was worked into grooves etched into a metal surface with a sharp tool; or fire gilding, which involved using a heated mixture of gold and mercury to bond a gold coating to iron or steel.¹⁴⁸ Four days later, North spent a further twelve shillings on the gilding or regilding of another sword and dagger set.¹⁴⁹ The ornamentation of these weapons with precious metals suggests that they were largely for display. It was normally only the hilt of a sword that was ornamented in this way: while unsheathing the blade in public could be a dangerous and potentially explosive act, the hilt—like the scabbard and furniture—was constantly on show.¹⁵⁰

For a man of North’s background, expensive clothing and weaponry could be a social necessity, an expression of status. In his *Anatomie of abuses*, Philip Stubbes attacked the common carrying of “swords, daggers, and rapiers guilte, and reguilte, burnished, and costly ingraven,” such that lower-status people could not be distinguished by sight from their betters. He proclaimed his incomprehension in the face of ornamented swords and their “scaberds and sheathes of Velvet or the

¹⁴⁶Ibid., fol. 46^v.

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸Capwell, 63.

¹⁴⁹BodJN, fol. 46^v.

¹⁵⁰Patterson, 63.

like, for leather,” further complaining that “wherefore [swords] be so clogged with gold and silver I know not, nor yet whereto this excesse serveth I see not.” Stubbes saw this as one expression of a wider problem with inappropriate apparel, attacking the lower orders for wearing “Silks, Velvets, Satens, Damasks, Taffeties, Gold, Silver, and what not.”¹⁵¹ Keeping up appearances could cause financial difficulty: in 1583, Arthur Throckmorton complained bitterly of the cost of buying clothes and silvering his rapier in preparation for attending the court.¹⁵² North might have empathized after spending forty-three shillings on a gilded sword and dagger with a girdle and a pair of hangers on one day in May 1579.¹⁵³

North’s swords and fencing equipment served a variety of different uses. Beautifully gilded or silvered hilts could catch the eye at court, but were impractical for fighting with. On 28 November 1578, North spent eight shillings and eightpence on new hilts for a sword, and twelvecence on a cotton sword-hilt cover.¹⁵⁴ Expensive accessories needed care and protection. That they were not suitable for the rough and tumble of combat is suggested by North’s purchase on December 1 of “elzi di ferro a giuocare”—iron hilts for use in swordplay.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, false-damascened hilts were particularly vulnerable to damage, since the metal designs inlaid into them could be dislodged by a sharp knock.¹⁵⁶ North distinguished between more ornamental hilts—those he had gilded or silvered—and those that were meant to be used in practice at the fencing school.¹⁵⁷ Play and display required different materials.

North practiced swordplay at London’s fencing schools. Among the first things he did on his return from Italy was to spend fifteen shillings on a new sword and another shilling at a fencing school.¹⁵⁸ He first encountered the servant who accompanied him to Italy when the man was working as an usher at a fencing school and “[gaining] by his fence playe what he colde”; North would later accuse the servant of “alluringe and intisinge [North] to ffence scholes, daunsinge & ryotouse banquetinge att Tavernes” when he was still an impressionable young man.¹⁵⁹ In early February 1578, North noted that “I began fencing this morning, and gave to the master 16s. 8d.”¹⁶⁰ He noted

¹⁵¹Stubbes, sig. E7^r (“To The Reader”).

¹⁵²Patterson, 60.

¹⁵³BodJN, fol. 61^r.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., fol. 47^v.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., fol. 48^r.

¹⁵⁶Capwell, 66.

¹⁵⁷On different kinds of armor, see Patterson, 16–17.

¹⁵⁸BodJN, fol. 27^r.

¹⁵⁹NA, C 2/Eliz/N3/59.

¹⁶⁰BodJN, fol. 27^v: “cominciava sta matina la scrimia [sic], & ne diedi al’ mastro—16^s viij^d.”

multiple other payments at fencing schools and to fencers, including four shillings to “the vice-master of the fencing school” and a further three shillings to a fencer whom he called “Gulielmo.”¹⁶¹

These fencing schools—like the dancing school where North recorded entertaining people to breakfast—were spaces of elite sociability and Anglo-Italian encounter.¹⁶² George Silver, the English master of defense whose *Paradoxes of defence* (1599) was a vitriolic attack on Italian fencing masters and Italianate fencers, described the school owned by one of his rivals, the Italian Rocco Bonetti. He wrote that Rocco was known for teaching the noblemen and gentlemen of the court in “a faire house in Warwicke lane, which he called his Colledge, for he thought it great disgrace for him to keepe a Fence-schoole.” Rocco was proud of his high-status students and found a way of allowing them to display their wealth and status while contributing to his college’s reputation: “He caused to be fairely drawne and set round about his Schoole all the Noblemens and Gentlemens armes that were his Schollers, and hanging right under their armes their Rapiers, daggers, gloves of male and gantlets.”¹⁶³

Rocco also provided everything necessary for his school to be a social hub for young men of high status. Silver wrote that the school also contained “a large square table, with a greene carpet, done round with a verie brode rich fringe of gold, alwaies standing upon it a verie faire Standish covered with Crimson Velvet, with inke, pens, pin-dust, and sealing waxe, and quiers of verie excellent fine paper gilded, readie for the Noblemen & Gentlemen (upon occasion) to write their letters, being then desirous to follow their fight, to send their men to dispatch their businesse.”¹⁶⁴ Rocco’s school was designed as a space in which social status was displayed and performed: even if a fencer like John North had to switch to plainer iron hilts for fencing practice, his beautifully ornamented fencing equipment could still be on display to those other gentlemen who made Rocco’s school their social hub, composing letters at his writing-table or observing his teaching from the benches and stools he provided for that purpose. Rocco’s schoolroom was designed as a club for elite men, where play and display were mixed with a hefty dose of Italianate style. Silver’s portrait of Rocco’s school shows how cultural contact, sociability, and material culture overlapped in the practice of fencing in early modern London.

Rocco Bonetti appears once in North’s diary, as “il S[ignor] Rocco Italiano.”¹⁶⁵ The two may have come into contact simply through fencing,

¹⁶¹Ibid., fols. 32^r, 48^v: “Al’vicemastro della schola di scrima—4.^s,” “Donava ad Gulielmo scrimatore—iiij.^s.” On fencing schools, see Anglin.

¹⁶²BodJN, fol. 66^v.

¹⁶³Silver, 64.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 65.

¹⁶⁵BodJN, fol. 29^r.

though Bonetti was also linked to Leicester's Continental networks, having supplied political information both to the earl and to Francis Walsingham in Italian-language letters while abroad earlier in the 1570s.¹⁶⁶ While the diary offers little information about the relationship between North and Bonetti, a cache of letters from the mid-1580s sheds more light. In 1585/86, North headed up a group of gentlemen in a letter-writing campaign that attempted to defend Rocco against the depredations of his landlord in the Blackfriars, Sir William More. His fellow letter-writers included Peregrine Bertie (Baron Willoughby) and none other than Walter Raleigh, who wrote that "I have a very good opinion of the poore gentilma[n] [Rocco], whose honeste behaviour and singular good qualities des[er]veth greate comendac[ion]."¹⁶⁷ For his part, North described Bonetti as "a stranger, whom I doe affect," and hosted one of the meetings between representatives of Rocco and More at his own lodgings near St. Paul's.¹⁶⁸ The closeness of North's relationship with Rocco is suggested by the number of his letters surviving in this case (four, compared to one each from Willoughby and Raleigh) and their comparative length and emotional expression. Praying More to show charity to "a poore stranger, in a forreyne contrie, and voyde of all freindes," North promised not only his own thanks but those of "a number of honorable gentlemen, whiche wyshe him [Rocco] well."¹⁶⁹ These letters read like a segment of Italianate London coming to the aid of one of their own: for a moment, they bring to light some of the personal relationships that underlay an important and controversial cultural import into elite English society, and are a reminder that cultural contact and cultural exchange were never impersonal processes.

North's closeness to the most visible representative of Italian fencing styles in 1570s London placed him at the epicenter of a key Anglo-Italian conflict. In 1578, Rocco Bonetti had complained to the Privy Council that he was "daylie

¹⁶⁶See, for instance, BL, Cotton MS Galba C/V, fol. 37; NA, SP 46/125, fol. 130.

¹⁶⁷Surrey History Centre (hereafter SHC), Z/407/1, item Lb.37 [this item is now at the Folger Library with the call number L.b.37]. Raleigh was also a dedicatee of work by Giacomo Castelvetro, and described by the Italian as "[il] M[olto] Ill[ustre] S[ignor] Gualtieri Relich mi padrone" in a note made in Castelvetro's journal and *album amicorum* in 1612: BL, Harleian MS 3344, fol. 130^r. It is difficult to ascertain the nature of North's relationship with Willoughby—North's father was pictured alongside him in the de Bry engravings of Sidney's funeral, and Hugh Lochard's testimony against North claimed that there had been a reputed "quarrell betwyxte [North] & [the] now Lorde willoughby" in around 1574: NA, C 2/Eliz/N3/59.

¹⁶⁸SHC, LM/COR/3/388. As well as the Raleigh letter cited above, the other letters written to William More relating to Rocco Bonetti are SHC, LM/COR/3/372, LM/COR/3/382, LM/COR/3/383, LM/COR/3/384, LM/COR/3/385, LM/COR/3/386, and LM/COR/3/387.

¹⁶⁹SHC, LM/COR/3/387 and LM/COR/3/383.

ved by the common fencers of that Cittie because he professeth the use of weapons." These rival fencers, Rocco claimed, had "offered him violence": in response, the council wrote to the mayor and aldermen of London to request that these belligerent city swordsmen be examined, punished, and bound over to show good behavior toward Bonetti, so that "without impediment he maie teache the use of weappons within his howse to suche gentlemen as shall like to resort unto hym."¹⁷⁰ The popularity of Italian fencing masters like Rocco Bonetti and (later) Vincentio Saviolo was resented by their English counterparts, the masters of defense.¹⁷¹ In his *Paradoxes*, the English fencer George Silver claimed to speak for a disgruntled and xenophobic community of English masters of the martial arts, united against the new fashion for "Italianated, weake, fantasticall, and most divellish and imperfect fights."¹⁷² An oath sworn by new masters of defense saw them promise "not to challenge anny maister Within this realme of Englande beinge an Englishe man"; elsewhere, they swore to aid their provost "agaynst all strayingners and soch as take upp on them to teach without authoritie wilfully."¹⁷³

But in spite of the well-documented rivalry between Italian and English fencers in early modern London, John North seems to have been acquainted with people on both sides. He does not refer to the name or origin of many of the fencers he encountered or employed, but in March 1578 he recalled paying money to "Greene scrimator & al'suo luogotenento" ("Greene fencer and his lieutenant").¹⁷⁴ It seems likely that this fencer named Greene, accompanied by his "lieutenant," was one of the four men named Greene or Grene who were members of the Company of the Masters of Defence of London around this time.¹⁷⁵ North displayed an interest in the world of the English masters of defense too, attending one of the popular fencing challenges held under the company's auspices at the Bull tavern—"all'insegna del'toro" ("at the sign of the bull")—in Bishopsgate. There, he treated five unnamed gentlemen to dinner after observing a fight involving a master of defense called Goodwin.¹⁷⁶ This Goodwin may be the same Goodwin named as a master of defense and a servant of Roger, Lord North, in a 1579 letter from the aldermen and mayor of

¹⁷⁰Dasent, 10:261–62.

¹⁷¹Vincentio Saviolo was a fencing teacher and the author of *Vincentio Saviolo his practise. In two Bookes. The first intreating of the use of the Rapier and Dagger. The second, of Honor and honorable Quarrels* (London, 1595).

¹⁷²Silver, 1.

¹⁷³Quoted in Berry, 34.

¹⁷⁴BodJN, fol. 55^r. Florio, 1611, s.vv. "Scrimatóre," "Scrimaruólo," gives "Scrimatóre" or "Scrimaruólo" as "a Fencer, a Master of Fence."

¹⁷⁵See the list of prizes played by members of the company drawn by John D. Murray from BL, Sloane MS 2350, online at http://iceweasel.org/lmod_list.html.

¹⁷⁶BodJN, fol. 60^v.

Cambridge to the lord treasurer. The letter describes Goodwin as being “no co [m]mon fencer but one of the co[m]en counsell of o[ur] town”; both he and his adversary are described as “noble men.”¹⁷⁷ He (or perhaps a relative) may also be the man named in the minutes of a meeting of the Privy Council in December 1592 as “one [blank] Goodwin a ffencer” and servant to the Earl of Bath.¹⁷⁸ That same earl, William Bouchier, had been a guest—along with Rocco Bonetti—along with Rocco Bonetti—along with the dinner party thrown by North in February 1578.¹⁷⁹ North’s diary suggests that even the most Italianate of gentlemen could move between the rival communities of Italian and English fencers in early modern London.

POINTS OF CONTACT: LANGUAGE AND VIOLENCE

The booming popularity of Italian fencing in late sixteenth-century England meant more than the importation of materials and masters. An often overlooked aspect of George Silver’s *Paradoxes of defence* is the way in which Silver uses stories of brawls and humiliations as a means of bringing wider Anglo-Italian cultural conflicts into the frame. One of Silver’s anecdotes concerns Vincentio Saviolo, a fencing master and the author of *Vincentio Saviolo his practise*, published by John Wolfe in 1595. Saviolo, a well-built Paduan, was described admiringly by John Florio as “More valiant than a sword it selfe.” He taught fencing with rapier, dagger, and cloak—“The true and right gentleman-like weapons”—and was “a good dancer [who] danceth verie well, both galiards, and pavins, hee vaultes most nimblie, and capers verie loftilie.”¹⁸⁰ Silver, however, gleefully mocked Saviolo with a tale of the Italian’s humiliation at the hands of an English master of defense. In Silver’s telling, after Saviolo refused the challenge of the English master to fight him, the Englishman called him a coward and soaked him with (good, English) beer. The next day, Saviolo encountered his tormentor in the street, and—says Silver, mocking his broken English—complained, “you remember how misused a me yesterday, you were to blame, me be an excellent man, me teach you how to thrust two further then anie Englishman.”¹⁸¹

Resting on a burlesque imitation of an Italian accent, Silver’s punchline reveals Elizabethan England’s overlapping anxieties about cultural encounter and language contact. Debates over foreign fencing styles were commonly framed in terms of linguistic contact and the introduction of foreign terminology as well as foreign techniques into the English language. Florio praised Saviolo, saying that “Hee will hit any man, bee it with a thrust or stoccada, with an imbrocada or a charging

¹⁷⁷BL, Lansdowne MS 29/46, fol. 108^r.

¹⁷⁸NA, PC 2/20, fols. 144^v.

¹⁷⁹BodJN, fol. 29^r.

¹⁸⁰Florio, 1591, 116–19.

¹⁸¹Silver, 70.

blowe.”¹⁸² Florio’s inclusion of the borrowed terms alongside their English translations in the English portion of his dialogue suggests their gradual adoption into the English fencing vernacular. Similarly, George Silver’s climactic outburst of invective relied on foreign terminology—and italic type—to cast his opponents as alien and monstrous: “Now, ô you Italian teachers of Defence, where are your *Stocatas, Imbrocatas, Mandritas, Puntas, & Puynta reversas, Stramisons, Passatas, Carricados, Amazzas, & Incartatas* & playing with your bodies. . . . What is become of all these juggling gambalds, Apish devises, with all the rest of your squint-eyed trickes?”¹⁸³

In this passage, as in his mockery of Vincentio, Silver presents the conflict between English and Italian fencers as physical, cultural, and linguistic. The same technique is at work in Mercutio’s mockery of Tybalt as affected and foreign in *Romeo and Juliet*: “Oh he is the couragious captaine of complements, Catso, he fightes as you sing pricke-song, keepest time dystance and propotion, rests me his minum rest one two and the thirde in your bosome, the very butcher of a silken button, a Duellist a Duellist, a gentleman of the very first house of the first and second cause, ah the immortall Passado, the Punto reverso, the Hay.”¹⁸⁴ Mercutio’s insulting portrait of Tybalt manages to encompass communal song, Italianate fencing style, elaborate clothing, and language mixing: all features of the persona constructed by John North in his diary and the life it chronicled. This complex insult is bound together with “Catso” (an anglicized *cazzo*)—an Italian term of abuse.¹⁸⁵ Tybalt stands for “such limping antique affecting fantasticoes these new tuners of accents”: Italianate men whose affected characters manifested themselves in their bearing, their fighting, and their speech.¹⁸⁶

Silver and Shakespeare both tied imported forms of urban combat to contemporary concerns about language change. The borrowing of foreign words was cause for anxiety at a time of unprecedented linguistic change in English.¹⁸⁷ In the London of John North and Rocco Bonetti, the link between

¹⁸²Florio, 1591, 119. On the borrowing of fencing terms into English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see McConchie.

¹⁸³Silver, 55. On typographical representations of other languages, see Armstrong; Coldiron, 2015.

¹⁸⁴Shakespeare, sig. E^r–E^v. The “Punto reverso” is the “punta riversa,” which the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) gives as a term of Italian origin meaning “a thrust made with the point of the sword and typically delivered from the executant’s left side with the palm up.” The *OED* argues that “Hay” comes from the Italian “hai,” meaning “thou hast [it],” and can refer to a home thrust or an exclamation on hitting an opponent.

¹⁸⁵Florio, 1611, gives “Cázzo” as “a mans privie member,” and links it to “Cazzíca,” “an Interjection of admiration, what! gods me! god forbid, tush.”

¹⁸⁶Shakespeare, sig. E^v.

¹⁸⁷Durkin, 316–20.

foreign vocabulary and physical violence could be very real indeed. A weaver named Valentine Wood deposed that he had been near Aldgate in London in the middle of August 1585, in the company of Marcantonio Bassano—one of the queen’s musicians—and “two Straungers of the Glassehowse and glassemakers.”¹⁸⁸ Marcantonio, recalled Wood, “dyd speake some worde[s] in Italyan to the Straungers then in his companye but what he sayd this depon[ent] cannot depose for that he understandeth not the Italyan Tongue.” This snippet of conversation was overheard, however, by “some soldyers that weare then passinge by that waye.” They approached Marcantonio, asking him what he had said. He replied “whye nothing but god blesse yow, or god save yow.”¹⁸⁹ The soldiers did not believe him: another deponent claimed that a passerby had told them “that the sayd Basanye sayd that the souldyers weare A sorte of Englysshe Tykes, and though they leapt lustylye theare they wold be glad to eate the Spaniarde[s] Dunge before they returned or suche lyke worde[s] in effect.”¹⁹⁰ In Wood’s telling, the soldiers accused Bassano of having called them rogues, and having said that “he hoped to see theyre blood under his feete.” Both witnesses agreed on what followed: the soldier attacked Marcantonio, who said something in response, whereupon the group of soldiers drew their swords and he fled to a nearby house, narrowly escaping being killed—“Or els in this depon[entes] judgem[ent] he had byn slayne. for that the Souldyers thought him to be a Spanyarde.”¹⁹¹ In John North’s London, the sound of foreign speech could be cause for violence.

Where was John North in this world of cultural exchange and physical force? The quarrelsome and irresponsible side of North’s personality emerges clearly from the documentary record of his time serving as a soldier in the Low Countries. North’s military career saw him falling out with many of those around him. In a letter to the Earl of Leicester in 1582, the intelligence agent William Herle wrote that there were rumors circulating concerning North’s attendance at Mass in Antwerp, and that Herle had “warned hym [North] pryvately in good fryndship, that he was subject to sclanders, asswell for presentyng him self att masse tyme, among the frenche, as for the note of som companye he kept”—a warning that, Herle wrote, had fallen on deaf ears. Rumors of North’s apostasy may have been exaggerated (this is the only accusation of this kind that I have been able to find), though the accusation of Catholic sympathies was a common slander leveled at Italianates in early modern

¹⁸⁸The glasshouse run by Jacob Verzelini, home of the fashionable Venetian *crystallo* glass in England, was staffed by a mixture of Italians from Murano and Englishmen: Truman, 7–8; McConnell; Willmott.

¹⁸⁹NA, SP 12/181, fol. 174^r.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., fol. 174^v.

¹⁹¹Ibid., fol. 174^f.

England.¹⁹² North's crimes did not stop with his attendance (bareheaded) at Mass: Herle wrote that North had invited one of the Earl of Sussex's men, one Thomas Webbe, to supper, where a quarrel had broken out over the old animosity between the earls of Sussex and Leicester. In the heat of the moment, "northe stabbed webbe att the Boord xiiij ynches depe under the on pappe, & xij ynches under the other, the knife comyng with a marvaylows escape to the bellyward & nott ynwards."¹⁹³ One of North's lovingly chosen daggers had been put to purpose.

Webbe escaped with his life, but this marked the beginning of a vendetta between the pair. On 1 December 1587, North wrote to the Earl of Leicester in protest at his having been arrested and locked up in the "publicke prison" at Dordrecht. He described the chain of events that had led to his imprisonment: first, Webbe had uttered slanderous words about both Leicester and the Lord North, which "soodenly in nature further movinge my bloude & provokinge coller, caused me w[ith] a blowe or two to forgett my selfe." North wrote that Webbe had sought his revenge by attacking him in Antwerp: "most cowardly & vilanouslie hee sought to revenge agaynst me w[ith] a cogell in offer, rydinge in the streetes of Anwarpe, albeyt for [that] I was mounted hee cowld not worke his will: besydes my horsekeeper givinge me my rapier, was beastly wounded on his hed behynde, by a lurkinge Copesmate of his, who, notwithstandinge encounteringe him w[ith] my weapon turned his backe forthwith & fledde from mee, leavinge mee his cloake att that present for a pawne, [the which] I tooke & gave to my man, who yet weareth yt to his shame in Soffolke." North wrote that in the aftermath of this encounter, Webbe had taken to spreading "most injuriouslie forged, false & sclauderouse reportes . . . as nothinge cowld bee more devysed to my greater disgrace."¹⁹⁴

Four days after North wrote to Leicester, his father wrote to the earl in mitigation of the crime committed by "my ungratious son, Jhon North, whoe as I here hath lately taken an extraordinary, and slanderus revenge of one Webb (for w[hich] I ame hartely sorry)." Roger North enclosed with his letter a copy of an old letter by Webbe, challenging John North to a duel.¹⁹⁵ In his challenge (written in or around 1582), Webbe accused North of "Cowardlines" and "Boyeishe behavior[r]." Having awaited North's challenge for two days, wrote

¹⁹²See, for instance, *A true and plaine declaration*, 52; Rainolds, 668.

¹⁹³BL, Cotton MS Titus B VII, fols. 44^r–45^v. I am gratefully reliant here on the transcription made by Robyn Adams for the "Letters of William Herle Project" (2006) at the AHRC Centre for Editing Lives and Letters: <http://www.livesandletters.ac.uk/herle/letters/064.html>.

¹⁹⁴BL, Cotton MS Titus B VII, fols. 79^f–80^v.

¹⁹⁵BL, Harleian MS 6994, fol. 104^r.

Webbe, he had become exasperated and offered his own, having “[found] but wordes in thy chamber and Italionated devises in thy practizes.”¹⁹⁶ When they fought in the streets in Antwerp, North would reach for that most Italianate of weapons—his rapier. Above all, it is remarkable to find that in North’s dispute with Webbe, his challenger specifically chose to label him with the term “Italianate.”¹⁹⁷ Five years after he stood on the French coastline and wrote proudly that he had been mistaken for an Italian, North’s hybrid identity—carefully constructed and maintained—was still evident, still controversial.

CONCLUSION: AN ENGLISHMAN IN TRANSLATION

In 1591, John Florio—the bilingual son of an immigrant—opened his *Second Frutes* with a defiant statement of his Anglo-Italian identity: “As for me, for it is I, and I am an Englishman in Italiane; I know they have a knife at command to cut my throte, *Un Inglese Italianato, è un Diavolo incarnato.*”¹⁹⁸ At a time when less than clear-cut identities were cause for suspicion in England, John North embodied all that was worrying about the “Englishman Italianate.” Clothed in fine foreign materials, smelling of exotic perfumes, carrying ornamented weapons, keeping company with Italians and Italianates, rumored to be unreliable in his faith, and given to horrific violence in defense of his honor: it is difficult to imagine someone who better fits the caricature of the “devil incarnate.” North walked the boundaries between English and Italian, between native and foreign, and the ambiguities that troubled his contemporaries could be read in his person and in his writing. North’s diary is a unique survival: kept for two years in Italian, it is a record of the processes, the practices, and the relationships that animated cultural encounter. It represents a sustained project of self-translation by an Englishman returned from Continental travel.

North’s diary is remarkable, but the kind of language mixing that it models was not. Early modern English court culture was multilingual: even where people were not fluent in other languages, it was not uncommon, as Thomas Wilson pointed out, for people to powder their talk with “oversea language.” In the *Firste Frutes*, a character standing for John Florio spoke of those gentlemen “that begyn to learne to spake Italian, French and Spanish, and when they have learned two woords of Spanish, three woords of French, and foure woords of Italian, they thinke they have yenough, they wyll study no more.”¹⁹⁹ In his copy of John Florio’s *Firste Frutes*, Gabriel Harvey bemoaned the difficulty he found

¹⁹⁶BL, Lansdowne MS 99/109.

¹⁹⁷The duel seems never to have taken place. North died in 1597, after a fever.

¹⁹⁸Florio, 1591, sig. A5^{r-v}.

¹⁹⁹Florio, 1578, fol. 51^{r-v}. On critiques of the language of returned travelers and courtiers, see Larkin, 33–78.

in learning Italian: “How the Earl of Leicester, Master Hatton, Sir Philip Sidney, and many of our outstanding courtiers, speak the Italian tongue most fluently. . . . Florio, how often have you instantaneously created blossoming Italians?”²⁰⁰ In his marginalia, Harvey bemoaned not having “the mouth, and tongue” of an Italian—the idealized skill in Italian was sociable and oral, a skill to be spoken and heard. For men like North and Harvey, language contact and language mixing were not abstract literary questions; they were part of everyday oral and aural experience.

Beyond the court, language contact and language mixing made their impression on everyday life. This is why, in this period, language change was traditionally described using metaphors drawn from everyday social and economic life. John Cheke worried that the English adoption of foreign terms—“ever borowing and never payeng”—would result in a kind of linguistic bankruptcy, while a character in a John Florio dialogue feared that if borrowed words were reclaimed by their original languages, “there woulde but a fewe remaine for English men, and yet every day they adde.”²⁰¹ For William Camden, English had been enriched “partly by enfranchising and endenizing strange words, partly by refining and mollifying olde words, partly by implanting new wordes with artificiall composition.”²⁰² Translated authors were described as wearing “new Englishe apparell” or as having been transported bodily into England.²⁰³ Money, travel, immigration, clothing: the metaphors of language contact and language change used in early modern England reflected the overlapping anxieties about cultural encounter, the movement of people and goods, and the language of the nation. North’s diary illuminates the ways in which individuals practiced and perceived the negotiation of identities, individual and communal, and the roles of actions, words, and goods in these negotiations.

John North was an Englishman in translation. His diary shows how a returned traveler could reassimilate into life at home, and the oral, sociable, and commercial practices that underlay the process of self-translation. On his return from Italy, North’s new experiences and knowledge manifested themselves in a multisensory display of cultural hybridity. His diary sheds new light on the practices of return that were so important to early modern travelers but so rarely considered in detail by historians of travel, and on the

²⁰⁰Lawrence, 28.

²⁰¹Hoby, sig. [Zz5]^r; Florio, 1578, fol. 50^v.

²⁰²Camden, 21.

²⁰³Whitehorne, [A4]^r (“The Epistle Dedicatorie”): Whitehorne also describes Machiavelli as one of the many “straungers, whiche from forrein countries, have heretofore in this your Majesties realme arrived.” On metaphors of translation in early modern English writing, see Coldiron, 2010.

everyday realities of cultural encounter. Scholars are used to thinking about the literary culture of early modern England as being polyglot and international. But neither linguistic contact nor cultural exchange happened first, or even primarily, on the page. North's diary—with its cosmopolitan dinners, its Italianate shopping sprees, and its enthusiasm for Continental pastimes, all noted down in Italian—points beyond the printed and written word to the noisy, sociable, multilingual worlds of early modern London. Elizabethans reached for everyday metaphors when they wrote about language contact and translation for the simple reason that, to them, these were everyday phenomena. An exploration of John North's Italian London offers a bridge between the great questions of cultural encounter and the everyday lived realities—social, oral, sensory—of early modern cultural and linguistic change.

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