'Nashe and Satirical Fiction' in *Prose Fiction in English from the Origins of Print to 1750* ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
Tiffany Stern (7577)

In the 1580s and 90s a man who never called any of his works satires was writing prose invectives: Thomas Nashe (1567-c.1601). Yet 'satire' was to be a term conferred upon his works by admirers who sought to define – and so limit – the nature of the prose he wrote. Samuel Sheppherd wrote of Nashe's 'sweet Satyrick veine'; John Taylor swore by the urn of 'sweete Satyricke *Nash'; and Dekker memorialised* 'ingenious, ingenuous, fluent, facetious, *T. Nash:* from whose aboundant pen, hony flow'd to [his] friends, and mortall Aconite to [his] enemies', seeing Nashe as both 'Luculent Poet' and 'Sharpest Satyre'.[1] But what, to Nashe's friends and enemies, did 'satire' or 'satiric' mean? Why did they also associate Nashe with sweetness and honey? And why did Nashe himself avoid the word 'satire' throughout his writing career? To explore the extent to which Nashe was and was not a writer of satires, as well as where his 'sweetness' resides, it is necessary to examine, first, what early modern writers took the word 'satire' to portend, and then to examine who they thought to be writing it.

As no early modern writer could give a single source for the word 'satire', its definition was unclear from the start, and hence its writers were hard to define. Thus Thomas Drant, in 1566, opened his book of translations from the satires of Horace with a verse in which he explored numerous potential origins and hence meanings of the word 'satire': satire, he explained, was 'a tarte, and carping kinde of verse' like the content of the Horace that he was translating; or 'the mossye rude, / Uncivile god', a satyr; or 'full / Of … arte', from 'satura', literally 'a mixed dish'; unless, of course, it had its roots in the Arabic for 'sword'; or came from 'Saturn' who was said to be 'testie' with vice but 'courteous' to the good.[2] He brings attention to the fact that, as there was no unique definition of 'satire', the word could potentially be ascribed to numerous different English genres of writing.

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[1] Samuel Sheppard, *God and Mammon* (1646), 1; John Taylor, *A Kicksey Winsey, or, a Lerry Come-twang* (1619), C1a; Thomas Dekker, *Newes from Hell brought by the Divells Carrier* (1606), C2b.
[2] Thomas Drant, 'Priscus Grammaticus de Satyra Satyra est carmen acerbum, instrumentum mordax. &c.' from *A Medicinable Morall, that is, the Two Bookes of Horace his Satyres, Englyshed* (1566), aivb.

There came to be, however, a set of people who were to appropriate the term 'satire' to describe what they were doing. This was a set of angry young poets writing in the 1590s, of whom Joseph Hall claimed to be the first: 'I first adventure: follow me who list, / And be the second English Satyrist'.[3] As, only a year later, Francis Meres was able to include Hall on a list of people all producing this new kind of English 'satiric' poetry, Hall was exaggerating his singularity, though not his genre. That new poetic school, according to Meres, took its art form from classical verse precedent – and thus conformed to the very first definition Drant had offered:

> As *Horace, Lucilius, Juvenall, Persius & Lucullus* are the best for Satyre among the Latines: so with us in the same faculty these are chiefe, *Piers Plowman, Lodge, Hall* of Imanuel Colledge in Cambridge; the Authour of *Pigmalions Image, and certaine Satyrs; the Author of Skialetheia.*[4]

According to Meres' understanding of contemporary satire, then, poetry was at the very core of the genre, and imitation or homage to classical precedent was what it was about. All the English poets he names are late Elizabethan (apart from his rooting of early English satire in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, written c. 1360-87, – his way of giving longevity and thus respectability to the form): 'Lodge' is Thomas Lodge, author of *A Fig for Momus* (1595); Hall is Joseph Hall, mentioned above, and author of *Virgidemiarum* (1598); John Marston is the author of *Pigmalions Image* (1598); Everard Guilpin wrote *Skialethia* (1598). He sees 'satire', then, as a 1590s branch of humanism, with somewhat bitter imitation at its core. Other verse writers not named by him were also producing 'satires' in the 1590s and can be loosely added to the group named above: John Donne's five formal '*Satires*' were penned in that decade, between 1593 and 97, though they circulated in manuscript only; Thomas Middleton published his *Microcynicon* in 1598; William Rankins that same year printed *Seven Satyres*, and William Goddard brought out his *Mastif Whelp* in 1599.

Thus the 1590s was the decade of a certain variety of satiric writer: young malcontents who took their ferocity and bitterness from Juvenal, their measure and argument from Horace, and their poetic form from both. All *shared a didactic intent*

[3] Joseph Hall, *Virgidemiarum: Sixe Bookes. First Three Bookes* (1598), B1a.
[4] Francis Meres, 'Poetrie; Poets; and A Comparative Discourse', *Palladis Tamia* (1598), 2O3b.

*that permitted their writing. 'Satyre', wrote Hall, should be 'l*ike the *Porcupine / That* … wounds the blushing cheeke, and fiery eye, / Of him that heares, and readeth guiltily'.[5] To him, reading and hearing – presumably reciting – a satire would be accompanied by immediate guilt in the reader, the flushed face and watery eye confessing that there are deep-seated truths lodged in the invective. *The other 1590s poets joined Hall in portraying their aggressive view of the world with pride, for they too believed the satiric form* was ultimately moralistic and that readers would be bettered through encountering it. So, collectively, 1590s verse satire was seen as, though cruel, holding a position somewhat akin to that of a sermon: it provided a purifying and necessary purge. Satirists therefore assumed collusion with their readers, who, however guilty, would be in broad agreement with their sentiments, and filled with Calvinistic anxiety about the growth of sinfulness in themselves and the city.

As Nashe was not writing in verse, had no obvious didactic intent, alienated his readers as often as he flattered them, and did not mirror the style or subjects of Juvenal or Horace, he was not an English satirist as defined by writers of the 1590s – and so was not included on Meres' list of satirical writers. He did, however, make it into Meres' book, though as a unique, independent, writer. 'As *Eupolis* of Athens used great libertie in taxing the vices of men: so dooth *Thomas Nash*, witnesse the broode of the *Harveys'*.[6] For Meres, then, Nashe's writing was the descendant not of satires but of the plays of the famously bitter and angry Athenian comic playwright *Eupolis* (ca. 446 BC-411 BC). *Like Eupolis, Nashe was* focussed on the business of 'taxing' (censuring) rather than reforming; like Eupolis, he was humorous (while English satire presented a straight-laced bitterness); like Eupolis, he was obscene; and like Eupolis he attacked his enemies by name. Meres' *suggestion here is that though Nashe in mood resembled the other 1590s'* disaffected intellectuals – all infuriated by a culture from which they felt estranged – he was different in intent. Either he was entirely unique, or his aims were simply not clear enough to merit the title 'satire'.

But might Nashe have been a satirist by a different definition of satire; one not fully acknowledged in the 1590s, but still seen to reside within the possibilities offered by the word itself? For if satire could be said to have descended from 'sat

[5] Joseph Hall, *Virgidemiarum: The Three Last Bookes. Of Byting Satyres* (1598), F3b.
[6] Francis Meres, 'Poetrie; Poets; and A Comparative Discourse', *Palladis Tamia* (1598), 2O6a.

irae', 'full of anger', then emotion – rage – made satire what it was, and Nashe had plenty of that.[7] Or if, as many maintained at the time, satire came from the 'satyr' of ancient Greek drama, a monstrous creature with an old man's head and torso and a lustful goat's lower body, Nashe's works could also be seen as satires, for according to this terminology, anything mimicking the satyr's ferocity, grotesqueness, sadism, and ribaldry was a work of satiric intent. It is through these alternative definitions that we actually find Nashe sharing themes with the 1590s poets. For, like the 1590s English satirists, Nashe was angry, vitriolic and cruel. '**Now** grim *Reprofe*, swel in my rough-heu'd rime, / That thou maist vexe the guilty of our time' wrote John Marston in his satire *Pigmalians Image*; 'in this Booke, wholy have I bequeathed my penne and my spyrite to the prosternating and enforrowing the frontiers of sinne' wrote Nashe in a similar vein of his *Christs Teares* (2: 80).[8] Yet he was also unlike the poets whose rage he shared, for Nashe's anger did not always set out to seem – or claim to be – genuine. Rather, according to Nashe himself, his invective was often adopted simply as a method to display his rhetorical extravagance. He taunted the pedantic scholar Richard Harvey, with whose family he had an intense quarrel, by explaining: 'I would not have you thinke that all this … is set downe here is in good earnest … but onely to shewe howe for a neede I could rayle, if I were throughly fyred' (*Pierce Pennilesse*, 1: 199).

Indeed, it was because his anger was semi-phony, or at least fed upon itself rather than upon a topic, that Nashe's vitriol was, again unlike that of the 1590s poets with their fixed and constant themes, available for hire – which might seem the ultimate satirical act, or its reverse. So when in 1588 and 1589 a series of anonymous attacks on episcopacy and the Anglican church were published, known as the 'Marprelate tracts' (Puritanical tracts written under the name 'Martin Marprelate'), Nashe was one of a group acquired by the established church, seemingly for payment, to write counter attacks. He was, however, equally available to write dedications and love-poems for money: 'I prostitute my pen in hope of gaine' he boasted of the 'amorous *Villanellas* and *Quipassas*' he had penned (*Have With You*, 3: 30-1). It was not simply that Nashe wrote to order; it was also that he relished the rhetoric involved

[7] Joseph Hall, 'De Suis Satyris' in *Virgidemiarum* (1598), A7a.
[8] John Marston, *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image And Certaine Satyres* (1598), 50. Thomas Nashe, *The Works* ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958). All subsequent quotations from Nashe come from this edition.

in changing opinions, or writing from opposite stances. After composing a series of pamphlets attacking his enemy Gabriel Harvey, brother to Richard Harvey, he changed his mind: 'Maister Doctor Harvey … I rashly assailed: yet now … of his perfections more confirmedly perswaded, unfainedly I entreate of the whole worlde, from my penne his worths may receive no impeachment' he wrote in 1593; by 1596, however, he returned, with original vigour, to his first opinion, describing 'the reprobate brace of Brothers of the Harveys' as 'witlesse *Gabriell* and ruffling *Richard*; that … have plaid the fantasticall gub-shites and goose-giblets in Print … and left no arte undefamed with their filthie dull-headed practise' (*Christs Teares*, 2: 12; *Have With You*, 3:12).

Nashe also pointedly broke the rules followed by the 1590s poets. He celebrated the fact that his employment of the wanton or grotesque was not, like the work of the 1590s satirists, excused by a didactic purpose: he simply enjoyed sensational subject matter. 'What good poet is, or ever was there, who hath not hadde a lyttle spice of wantonnesse in his dayes?' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 266). He chose to name his victims, though it was an absolute given of 1590s satire that attacks were to be made on personality types rather than specific people – fops, courtiers, soldiers, bawds etc – (even if, as was often suggested, the types were so resonant as to suggest an individual). As Thomas Lodge had put it:

> in them [the satires] (under the names of certaine Romaines) where I reprehend vice, I purposely wrong no man, but observe the lawes of that kinde of poeme.[9]

Nashe, on the contrary, focused his writing on individuals. He obsessively harped upon specific people, making variations, puns, and quips upon their names with bullying insistence. For Gabriel Harvey alone he had over forty burlesque titles, ranging from those that specifically recalled his name – a play upon Gs and Hs – to those only identifiable through the accumulation of similar insults: Gamaliel Hobgoblin, Gilgilis Hobberdehoy, Gregory Habberdine, Gabriel Hangtelow, Gorboduck Huddleduddle, Goblin a Grace Ap Hannikin, Himpenhempen Slampamp, Braggadochio Glorioso, Gafer Jobbernoule, Archibald Rupenrope, Timothy Tiptoes,

[9] Thomas Lodge, *Fig for Momus* (1595), A1b.

Wrinkle de Crinkledum, Cod-pisse Kinko. His writing, indeed, was much nearer to libel than the 'standard' 1590s satirists ever dared to go, and he consciously rooted much of what he was doing not in ancient Roman poetic satires, but in modern Roman 'pasquils' or 'pasquinades': libellous texts written anonymously and hung on a Roman statue who had been colloquially named 'Pasquil' ('Pasquil' was then jokingly said to be author of the attacks that bedecked him – so that 'Pasquil' itself stood for anonymity). Three anti-Martinist tracts thought to be by Nashe, or to include passages by him, are ostensibly by 'Pasquil'; and the anti-Martinist *An Almond for a Parrot* (1590), almost certainly by Nashe, threatens Martin that 'a whole hoast of *Pasquils* are coming upon you … not one idle worde shall escape the edge of their wit' (3: 350). Nashe emerges as a 'Pasquil': a writer of a particular subgenre with personal insult as a goal and authorship open to question.

It took a fire, or the threat of one, to define what Nashe was already doing as 'satire'. One year after Meres published his lists of known 1590s satirists, Archbishop John Whitgift came up with a catalogue of his own – of books to be burned according in his 'Bishops' Ban' of June 1599. Alert to the fact that satire was always critical, Whitgift had become increasingly worried by the form, which appeared to him to be ungovernable and dangerous, its so-called improving invective all too easily politically aimed, and its disaffection and social complaint capable of encouraging general discontent. For the flames he therefore listed all the published satires he knew of, and demanded that 'noe Satyres o[r] Epigramms be printed hereafter'. But additionally he stated that 'all nasshes bookes and D[octor] Harvyes … wheresoever they maye be found' should also be burned.[10] By adding Nashe's and Harvey's works to his list of satires, the archbishop declared that satire could exist in prose form – and retrospectively bestowed the term upon the already-published diatribes between Nashe and Harvey. Thus Nashe was enforcedly put into context with a group of poetic scourges, and was, by extension, heralded as a founding writer of satires in prose.

Hence Nashe's entrance into the world of so-called satire was late and never fully 'owned'; he fitted the genre so badly that, years later, the fact that his satires were in the wrong form, prose, still needed explanation. Nashe, 'though he a Proser were' as Drayton put it, was 'Sharply *Satyricke*', though not in a normal fashion: 'that

[10] Richard A. McCabe, 'Elizabethan Satire and the Bishops' Ban of 1599', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 11 (1981), 188-93.

way, / He went, since that his being, to this day / Few have attempted'.[11] Nashe was really more clearly *satirical* than a satirist, and it was variants of the term 'satire', rather than the word itself, that appealed to him. 'A hundred unfortunate farewells to fantasticall Satirisme', he blustered in *Christs Teares* in 1593 (2: 12), like the Bishop's ban, retrospectively acknowledging a form he had never claimed to be embracing; his '*satyricall* disguise', he wrote in *Anatomie of Absurditie*, enabled him 'to wander abroad unregarded' (1: 5), as though satire is itself was one of a number of covers to mask what he was really doing.

The story of Nashe's prose satire, then, is the story of an anxious and alternative relationship to English 'satire', as well as a relationship to forms that satires might take but that the 1590s 'satirists' ignored: pre-Elizabethan satires; contemporary satires in English and Italian; English prose invectives. This chapter will examine where and how a satirical voice can be found in Thomas Nashe, exploring the way Nashe used his own unique mixture of imitation and originality to create a vivid, vertiginous, angry and satirical prose that was as much about Nashe himself as about any genre. In the process, it will argue, Nashe may or may not have invented prose satire – but he invented a highly idiosyncratic form that elevated railing into an art, reshaping prose writing in the process.

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As Nashe avoided being seen to adopt a single approach in anything he wrote, the question as to what, generically, to call any of his writing remains unsettled. Those who claim that Nashe avoided definition – and that we should do likewise – have a point. They draw attention to the fact that Nashe's works take up and parody every contemporary genre of prose, poetry and drama in turn, including religious pro-establishment propaganda (*Almond for a Parrot*, 1589, and perhaps other anti-Martinist tracts), literary criticism (the preface to Greene's *Menaphon* 1589, the preface to Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, 1591), medieval moralities (*Pierce Penilesse*, 1589), pornographic poems (*Choise of Valentines*, c. 1592), comedies (*Summer's Last Will and Testament*, c. 1592), dream discourses (*The Terrors of the Night*, 1594), picaresque novels (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 1594), chorographies (*Lenten*

[11] Michael Drayton, *The Battaile of Agincourt* (1631), 293.

Stuff, 1599), and flytings (contests made up of an exchange of insults – in this instance, the exchanges with Gabriel Harvey, including *Strange Newes,* 1592, *Christs Teares,* 1593, and *Have With You to Saffron-walden,* 1596). Perhaps collectively these amount to satires, they suggest, except that inside each piece of writing a different series of current styles comes up for burlesque, criticism – and homage. True, that conforms to one of the many other definitions of satire, 'lanx satura', a dish of various fruits, in which 'satire' is a specifically mixed form. By such a definition, William Baldwin's *Beware the Cat* (c. 1561), for instance, which compounded beast fable, dream vision, proverb and jest into its Anti-Catholic narrative, was an early satire and Nashe's writing took on and continued that form. But Baldwin, like Nashe, relished instability itself; for both men generic unfixity is part of their aesthetic – and the attempt to confine them with definitions flouts itself.

Insofar as Nashe was attracted to satire, he was particularly drawn by versions of it that had not been taken up by his peers. He evinced some interest in satire's earlier, pre-1590s English manifestation, for instance, which recent (re)publication had made available once more. This was a version of satire that was more mocking than moral: the three verse epistolary trilogies (generally referred to as 'satires') of Thomas Wyatt (written before 1542, but only printed in Richard Totell's *Miscellany* in 1557); John Skelton's *Colyn Cloute* (a satire on Wolsey and the clergy in general written in about 1519, but republished in 1545, 1554, 1558 and 1568); andLangland's *Piers Plowman* (a satire written in the fourteenth century, but reprinted in 1550 and 1561), seem to have drawn him precisely because they were different from the satires of the 1590s. Though these earlier satires had predicted their Elizabethan successors in maintaining that rough verse and plain language were the form satire should take, they had worked up from the Medieval English habit of ritualised 'complaint', in which the miscarriage of the speaker's hopes are as prominent as his sorrows about the human condition. Their spokesmen were often fictional characters unsavoury enough that, though mocking others, they were, like Skelton's hero 'Colin Clout', or Langland's 'Piers Plowman', themselves guilty of some of the sins they most criticised. It is these poems that Nashe consciously references, structuring his *Pierce Penniless* in Medieval fashion around the seven deadly sins; and naming his anti-hero 'Piers' or 'Pierce' in a conscious reference to Langland's *Piers Plowman* ('Pierce Pennilesse' also, of course, puns on 'purse' and 'per se'). Even when glancing at a

school of literature like 'satire', then, Nashe would avoid letting it take the form his contemporaries had adopted.

Indeed, on the few occasions when Nashe intentionally added to his work a little modern satirical spice he looked not to the writings of England at all, but to Italy. Nashe infused into his writing 'the raptures of [a] fierie and inconfinable *Italian* spirit' as Dekker put it appreciatively.[12] Nashe's outrageous energy, hyperbolic language, lascivious tone and jocular use of the vernacular resembled, in particular, the egocentric prose of Pietro Aretino (1492-1556), a writer of comedies and dialogues, a pornographer, a railer, and a satirist, said to have died of laughing at an obscene story. Aretino was, like Nashe, a prose writer; like Nashe too he claimed to have no lofty intellectual purpose but simply to be steeped in the corruption that typified the late Italian Renaissance – and that he loved to hate. Aretino's works offered decadence, humour, and disdain in ways that thrilled Nashe and inspired him to bring the same to the English vernacular: 'of all stiles I most affect & strive to imitate *Aretines*', he wrote (*Lenten Stuffe*, 3: 152). And, in acknowledging Aretino, Nashe was making his own variety of addition to English humanism: just as the 1590s poets turned to Roman verse satirists and Anglified them; so Nashe turned to Italian prose satire and Anglified it.

Nashe did, however, have many other prose debts, continental and English, which were not satirical, and which added to the variety, and unpredictability, to his style. They again raise questions as to what kind of a writer he is. According to Gabriel Harvey, Nashe's writing smacked of 'the fantastical mould of … Rabelays' (François Rabelais, famous French writer of fantasy, the grotesque, and bawdy jokes and songs) and 'the pittifull historie of Don Lazarello de Thomes' (an anonymous picaresque Spanish novel, ascribed to Diego Hurtado de Mendoza and translated by David Rouland in 1586); for Harvey, this was an insulting way of saying that Nashe was not only unoriginal butalso all-purposely, and dubiously, 'foreign'. Harvey added to this that Nashe was also derivative in his style, claiming that he was reliant on 'Euphuisme and Greenesse' (the embroidered styles of John Lyly, author of *Euphues*, and Robert Greene), and that he had borrowed, too, from 'Tarltons surmounting Rhetorique' (Richard Tarlton was the great theatrical clown of the 1580s).[13] Nashe, always ready to deny categorisation, naturally claimed otherwise: 'Wherein have I

[12] Thomas Dekker, *Newes from Hell brought by the Divells Carrier* (1606), C2a.
[13] Gabriel Harvey, *The Works* ed. Alexander B. Grossart, 3 vols (1884-5), 1: 218.

borrowed from *Greene* or *Tarlton*, that I should thanke them for all I have?' (*Foure Letters*, 1: 318-9). But he did have a style that was a variation upon, a continuation of, and a meeting place for, a variety of contemporary prose styles, staged, as well as printed.

It was indeed, a working knowledge of drama that gave his prose some of its fractured individuality; drama's energy but also its bittiness – the fact that plays are in their nature dialogic, not monologic – seem to have inspired Nashe, who was drawn to a fragmentary style that allowed for contradictory opinions. It is telling not only that Nashe dedicated his *Almond to a Parrot* to Tarlton's successor, the clown William Kempe, and jotted down bits of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* in the margin to Leland's *Principum in Anglia Virorum Encomia* (1589), but also wrote dramas himself, including the lost *Isle of Dogs*, co-authored with Ben Jonson, and perhaps pieces of *Dido Queene of Carthage* (c. 1587-93), said on its titlepage to be by Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Nashe.[14] Nashe also embraced the idea that his prose was essentially theatrical in formula, as when he describes the conclusion of a pamphlet in terms of a play – 'All the conclusive epilogue I wil make is this …' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 328). For him, to connect a written, paper text with the vividness of live theatre was an act of praise: extolling Sidney, he described the book containing *Astrophil and Stella* as though it were a magnificent playhouse – it was a 'Theater of pleasure, … here you shal find a paper stage streud with pearle, an artificial heav'n to overshadow the faire frame, & christal wals to encounter your curious eyes, whiles the tragicommody of love is performed by starlight' (Preface to *Astrophil and Stella*, 3: 329). The best writing, that is to say, aspired to drama and, at its zenith, achieved the state of theatre itself.

Surprisingly, Nashe also gathered stylistic tricks from polemicists at the other extreme: puritan prose writers. From George Gascoigne, author of *The Steele Glas* (1576); Edward Hake, author of *Newes out of Powles Churchyard* (2nd ed. 1579); Stephen Gosson, author of *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579); Philip Stubbs, author of *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583); the Harvey brothers and Martin Marprelate 'himself' he learned a vigorous, accessible, 'low' language that he added to his high rhetorical writing, taking from them a habit of rough buffoonery expressed in robust, savage, colloquialisms. His 'low style' is responsible the title he has sometimes been given of

[14] Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 97.

'journalist' (though news 'corantos' were not to circulate regularly until after his death, and 'journals' were not to come into being for another two hundred years); when he wanted to, he could use the idioms of everyday life to produce a prose that was approachable, factual, and frank, as when he wrote about the steambath houses that were also brothels:

> A thousande partes better were it to have publique Stewes, then to … keepe private Stewes … Waters and receipts have they to enable a man to the acte after hee is spent, dormative potions to procure deadly sleepe, that when the hackney he hath payde for lyes by hym, hee may have no power to deale wyth her, but shee may steale from hym, whiles he is in his deepe memento (*Christs Teares*, 2: 153).

Collectively, then, Nashe's style had as mixed a heritage as his genres. Yet for Nashe, style had a meaning of its own beyond that of its content. Nashe's style deeply expressed Nashe the man: he *was* his style, to such an extent that his own emotions, particularly his tendency towards depression, affected his writing. 'My impotent care-crazed stile cast of his light wings and betooke him to wodden stilts', he wrote at a low moment (*Christs Teares*, 2: 10); bad writing in others, he claimed, pulled him down: to Gabriel Harvey he railed – with a fluency that, as ever, upstages the very point he is making –

> A bots on thee for mee for a lumpish, leaden heeld letter dawber, my stile, with treading in thy clammie steps, is growne … heavie gated … Ere I was chained to thee thus by the necke, I was as light as the poet *Accius*, who was so lowe and so slender that hee was faine to put lead into his shooes for feare the winde should blowe him into another Countrie (*Foure Letters Confuted*, 1: 322).

One reason why Nashe so personally identified with his writing was that he filled it with unique Nashisms. No friend to Nashe, Edmond Malone wrote in the eighteenth century that:

> of all the writers of the age of queen Elizabeth, Nashe is the most licentious in his language; perpetually distorting words from their primitive signification, in a manner often puerile and ridiculous, but more frequently incomprehensible and absurd. His prose works, if they were collected together, would … exhibit a greater farrago of unintelligible jargon, than is to be found in the productions of any author, ancient or modern.[15]

Malone is drawing attention to a feature now thought to be one of Nashe's greatest contributions: the fact that he stretched language, because he thought beyond it, and consequently, and repeatedly, coined new words, using the Latin, Greek, Italian and English he had at his disposal. To extend his range of insults, for instance, he described Gabriel Harvey as '*infractissime* PISTLEPRAGMOS' (*Foure Letters*, 1: 294), a corruption of '*infring-ĕre*', the Latin for 'to break, damage, or make void', 'pistle', colloquial English for penis, and '*πραγματ-*, *πρᾶγμα*', the ancient Greek for 'a deed or act'. Criticised in his time for his 'multitude of … boystrous compound wordes', especially 'the often coyning of Italionate verbes which end all in Ize, as mummianize, tympanize, tirannize', Nashe explained that he was enriching 'our English tongue' which 'of all languages most swarmeth with the single money of monasillables, which are the onely scandall of it' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 183-4). Outrageously, the man who elsewhere extolled the fact that his writing, and that of others, was destined to become lavatory paper (his *Strange Newes* was according to the title page 'the intercepting certaine Letters and a Convoy of Verses, as they were going *Privilie* to victual the Low Countries', *The Unfortunate Traveller* he bequeathed 'as a *privie* token of his good will' towards the readers (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 207)) now claimed to be permanently improving the English tongue. Nor was he in fact wrong. As Jurgen *Schäfer* pointed out of the *Oxford English Dictionary* before it was revised, over fifty words said to have been first used, and so coined, by Shakespeare, were actually first used by Nashe.[16] That means that Nashe added to language in ways that appealed to, or that inspired, Shakespeare; his coinings made a permanent contribution that also brought about other literature.

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[15] Edmond Malone in William Shakespeare, *The Plays* ed. Samuel Johnson and George Steevens, 10 vols (1778), 1: 295.
[16] Jurgen *Schäfer*, *Documentation in the O.E.D. : Shakespeare and Nashe as Test Cases* (Oxford : Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

In a number of other ways too, everything Nashe wrote was about himself. He is regularly a physical presence in his books: he falls sick on a page of *Strange Newes* when 'a hot ague hath me by the back'; (*Foure Letters*, 1: 322); he breaks off in the middle of *Lenten Stuff* to go to the printers, 'Apply it … for I am cald away to correct the faults of the presse, that escaped in my absence from the *Printing*-house' (3:152). He even created a caricature of himself: his weedy beard could be spotted across pamphlets, tying together his heroes with himself irrespective of name. Thus he writes of his 'beardlesse yeeres' in *Pierce Penilesse* (1: 195); and of 'the minoritie of my beard' in *Have With You* (3: 129); while in *Foure Letters* he thanks good he does not have 'furre like a Muscovian … when one cannot drinke but hee must thrust a great spunge into the cup, & so cleanse his coole porridge, as it were through a strayner, ere it comes to his lippes' (2: 292). So Jack Wilton in *The Unfortunate Traveller* has at least a hint of Nashe in himself when he describes the way he is thinly bearded, with a 'sable auglet of excrements in the first rising of the anckle of my chinne' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 227). For Nashe, self was partly what writing was about – so the division between his writing and his personality could be very porous indeed.

Even Nashe's contrariness was an extension of the conscious intrusion of himself into his literature. His need to foster disagreements, change his mind and not follow rules affected life and literature equally – and highlighted the interconnections between the two: repeatedly his friends became enemies, outraged that they or people they cared for had been used or sacrificed for a paragraph, joke or phrase. Thus Archbishop Whitgift, with whom Nashe had briefly lived, and for whom he had written his play *Summer's Last Will*, was the same archbishop who ordered the burning of his books; the countess of Pembroke, sister to Philip Sidney, for whose posthumous *Astrophil and Stella* Nashe had written an extravagant and praise-filled introduction, not only had the book, which was full of errors, impounded – but seems to have ensured that when it was reprinted in better form, Nashe's introduction would no longer be there. Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, to whom Nashe dedicated *The Unfortunate Traveller*, was, it seems, the person who insisted the dedication be removed: certainly the book was reprinted without it. Even Nashe's most repentant and religious tract, *Christs Teares*, outraged its most obvious readership: it annoyed the mayor of London to such an extent that Nashe was gaoled for it; it was republished only after certain passages from it had been cancelled.

The connection between manner of writing and life that Nashe perceived meant that when he tried to wound Gabriel Harvey most deeply, he went for his style. Harvey had a wide vocabulary, he stated, but did not know how to be dazzling with it: 'he hath some good words, but he cannot writhe them and tosse them to and fro nimbly, or so bring them about, that hee maye make one streight thrust at his enemies face' (*Foure Letters*, 1: 282). Nashe countered this with his own heady, unstoppable, verbal exuberance, a mixture of sound, image, and simple excess. His lists, in particular, show only too well his ability to writhe and toss words over content – they win the reader sometimes through aural connections rather than meaning, as when he denotes Richard Harvey 'thou great *babound*, thou *Pigmie* Braggart, thou Pamphleter of nothing but *Peans*' (*Pierce Pennilesse*, 1: 196), bullying with spitting plosives, though the move from baboon to peans and from 'great' to 'pamphleteer' does not work as a series of mental images. Similarly, so alert was Nashe to puns and double meanings that he might sacrifice sense for them. Seemingly bemoaning the age, he writes: 'this is an yron age, or rather no yron age, for swordes and bucklers goe to pawne a pace in Long-Lane: but a tinne age; for tinne and pewter are more esteemed than Latine' (*Pierce Penniless*, 1: 182). Here the final word in the sentence is a pun on the classical tongue, Latin, and a type of brass-like metal, latten, which now makes the sentence a jest about metal at the expense of its social comment. In his best writing, however, sound, image, and list-like profusion joined together. Nashe brilliantly denotes Gabriel Harvey, for instance, 'this mud-born bubble, this bile on the browe of the University, this bladder of pride new-blowne', adding to his plosives a list with a brutal logic: whatever repulsive, empty bauble typifies Harvey, it is in need of bursting (*Foure Letters*, 1: 282).

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A closer look at what Nashe does in his most famous work, often seen as a prototype novel, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, makes clear how Nashe toys with satire only alongside other generic forms, and, by fusing this with his unique style, creates a new variety of fictional writing altogether. For a start, Nashe opens with a title, *The Unfortunate Traveller*, which retrospectively comes to seem untrue, or at least inaccurate. The title suggests that an autobiographical travel narrative will follow: yet

Jack Wilton, the book's hero and narrator, is a fictional character who experiences events that cover an eighty year time span without aging: the book takes on the pre-Elizabethan satirical idea of having a named, sinful, narrator, but situates him within real, dateable history, so drawing attention to the fact that the narrator is chronologically impossible. Moreover, Jack Wilton is not unfortunate: in his tale he witnesses and sometimes rejoices in the misfortunes of others; he ultimately triumphs with a wife and money himself. Nor is this a standard travel narration: variously described by Nashe as a 'chronicle' and a 'historie', *The Unfortunate Traveller* is a hybrid, made up from aspects of jestbooks, picaresque novels, sermons, revenge tragedies, geographies, and romances as well as histories made from travellers' tales – which themselves hovered between 'stories' and history – and, of course, invective.

Nashe brings confusion to the surface from the start. A couple of mock dedications undercut the narrative-to-come. One is '*To the right Honorable Lord Henrie Wriothsley, Earle of South-hampton, and Baron of Tichfeeld*' – this was the dedication later removed; one is to 'the dapper Mounsier Pages of the Court': the result of these dedications contrary in address and tone is to celebrate Nashe's lack of a conventional patron while mocking the genre of dedications. From the opening of the book, then, the tale turns on their heads the conventions to which it supposedly adheres.

As the tale begins, it seems at first clear that Jack Wilton is telling an oral narration and that we, the readers, have also been fictionalised: we are the hearers, sitting and listening to him. Hence he addresses us with 'Everie man of you take your places, and heare *Jack Wilton* tell his owne Tale' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 208); later demands 'list, lordings, to my proceeding' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 210); and later still exclaims 'Oh my Auditors' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 219). Yet as the tale progresses, our own fictional personality is questioned. Suddenly we are not listeners at all, but readers who may or may not be kind or well-born – 'Gentle Readers (looke you be gentle now, since I have cald you so) …' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 217). As a result we do not know who precisely we are, though we learn that we are not necessarily liked: 'what, will you in your indifferent opinions allow me for my travell no more signiorie over the Pages than I had before? yes, whether you will part with so much friendly suppose or no, Ile have it in spite of your hearts' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 227). As Jack Wilton too moves from speaker to writer, musing on the size of the book he is creating ('I must not place a volume in the precincts of a

pamphlet', *Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 227), he is as unfixed as we are: this is a narrative that revels in the fictionality both of the narrator and the reader.

Then again, Jack Wilton, who describes himself as an 'appendix or page' makes clear he floats between an actual and a metaphorical page: page to the king, he is also the active paratext to the book he is inscribed upon – '*A proper fellow Page of yours called Jacke Wilton … hath bequeathed for wast paper here amongst you certaine pages of his misfortunes*' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 207, second italics mine). So Wilton's asides sometimes upstage their speaker, warning us not to trust what we are being told: describing his sorrow for the cider merchant, Wilton relates that he has 'wepte all my urine upwarde. The wheele under our citie bridge carries not so much water over the citie, as my braine hath welled forth gushing streames of sorrow' – ironising the sorrow he claims to feel; relating the tone in which he addresses the Captain, Wilton explains 'I entertaind him with this solemne oration' – letting us know the solemnity too is pretend (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 218). He is his own ironic commentary.

Hence, wrong-footing the reader is one of Nashe's aims. The fact of Wilton, as the one constant in a world where context, narrative voice, readership, and so meaning itself, constantly changes, forces us to rely on a man who is as dislikeable as he is unstable. If we choose to relate to Jack, we are made to admire executions and murders as much as jests; if we do not, we are forced by the very act of reading to collude in morally repugnant happenings, as when the conclusion of the erotically charged rape of Heraclide is, horrifically, given to us to imagine: 'conjecture the rest' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 292). As the descriptions in the book become more grotesque, Jack Wilton comes to seem not simply chronicler but villain: a manipulator of the tale he tells. Morally as well as intellectually, the reader is destablised, perplexed and alienated; Nashe's ambivalences becomes our own. By the time the book ends, abruptly, and contradictorily, it is hard to know what Nashe or Wilton intends and we want. Having renounced any further adventure, Wilton then promises just that, saying that if the book is popular, he will write a sequel: 'All the conclusive epilogue I wil make is this; that if herein I have pleased anie, it shall animat mee to more paines in this kind' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 328). Reading *The Unfortunate Traveller* is to enter a world where our codes and beliefs are challenged as we are forced to collude with and inside a text we can hardly fathom.

It is unsurprising that the book does not go through a normal development in telling its tale. It moves generically from amusing to troubling. Jests give way to mini-tragedies; anecdotes become longer, and their substance more vicious. A jape at the expense of a cider-merchant yields to plague, religious battles, rape, murder and executions. Thus a book that at first seemed humorous turns out to be given to lurid cruelty, all depicted with the same sleight-of-hand rhetorical exuberance.

So anything the book claims to do, it is also not doing; unlike a novel, it is not developing a story so much as threatening it. So though *The Unfortunate Traveller* is, in some sense, a romance – in that, like Sidney's *Arcadia*, it mingles its narrative with poetry – it is also not: the poetry it supplies is parodic. Set out as a series of actual poems by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517–1547), these made-up lyrics ridiculed the very variety of love that Surrey's actual poems were about. So is *The Unfortunate Traveller*, then, a bitter burlesque on the romance form? It is also not that: Surrey is presented with respect as someone excelling in poetry and humanity: 'My Heroicall Master exceeded in … supernaturall kinde of wit; he entertained … admirable, airie, and firie spirites, full of freedome, magnanimitie and bountihood' (*The Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 242). Similarly, it hovers between being a perversion of humanism and an act of humanism: it tears apart some of the values of relying on scholastic logic and 'auctoritas', but only because it assumes they have value in the first place.[17] Thus Nashe repeatedly quotes in Latin, implying a shared humanistic world with his reader, whilst also repeatedly trivialising that Latin, implying he sees it as valueless (except insofar as it is useful for jokes). For instance, Nashe praises the cider-merchant by taking Ovid's 'tendit in ardua virtus' ('virtue aims at what is difficult') and misquoting it as *'Tendit ad sydera virtus'* ('virtue aims at the stars'), which he then 'translates' as 'Thers great vertue belongs … to a cup of sider' (*Unfortunate Traveller*, 2: 210). In this way he wrests a noble sentiment from Ovid, does not ascribe it, misquotes it so that it looses meaning and contextual value, and then 'translates' it as though he does not understand Latin for the sake of an English homonym. The result is a joke at the expense of form *and* content.

So *The Unfortunate Traveller* may be a satire in its games with language, games with genre, or simply in its level of undirectional invective. Or it may not. Whatever satire is there it is in the interstices rather than entirely in form or content. It

[17] Anthony Ossa-Richardson, 'Ovid and the "free play with signs" in Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller'*, 956.

is there in the unstable narrator; and it is there in the ambiguous and changeable style, which is sometimes rhapsodising, sometimes ranting, always fragmentary, and always upstaging itself. Because of this, the 'novel' too is there in miniature, in that many of the devices used in *The Unfortunate Traveller* will later turn up in the genre; it is also not there, because Nashe is not necessarily aiming to 'start' or 'inspire' a literary form old or new. His variety of originality meant that whatever he did he also undid, as writing to rule and adapting a given form comes with an agenda – and all agendas were anathema for someone as contrary as Nashe. Some critics have consequently seen him as empty of content. Routh maintained: 'He might have made his mark as a satirist or epigrammatist … but he was at best a prophet without a message, and hence he remained an ephemeral pamphleteer', and C. S. Lewis concurred: 'if asked what Nashe "says," we should have to reply, Nothing … In his exhilarating whirlwind of words we find not thought nor passion but simply images'.[18]

Yet Nashe's writing gave literature something that could not be found elsewhere: a mixture of insult, invective, and crazily energetic verbal edginess, novelty and freshness. Combining pre-Elizabethan with Italian satire, adding puritanical prose and more than a dash of his unique verbosity and contrariness, Nashe created a fashion of prose writing – and perhaps even a style of prose satire – that was unique, and that was also uniquely non-poetic, though highly rhetorical in its nature; 'There is no kind of peaceable pleasure in poetrie' he maintained (*Foure Letters*, 1: 320). Some called his talent for curious lyricism 'sweet', as the examples at the start of the chapter showed, perhaps picking up on Nashe's own loaded and complex use of the term: he wrote that the 'remedie of contraries' would cure gentlemen 'surfetted … with the sweete sacietie of eloquence', criticising, praising and amending rhetorical sweetness all at once (*Preface to Menaphon*, 3: 314). The point is, though, that Nashe was too original to be a definable type of rhetorician. He had his literary debts, as has been shown, but what he valued most, and what brought about his most original contributions to literature, was 'the veine which I have'. For that, he had no name, merely a description – Nashe's 'veine' was 'of my owne begetting, and cals no man father in England but my selfe' (*Foure Letters*, 1: 319).

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[18] H. V. Routh, '*Review of The Works of Thomas Nashe* ed. Ronald B. McKerrow' in *The Modern Language Review*, 6 (1911), 241-45 (242); C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 416.