

conclusion, *Strange Newes* was written over a period of about six weeks in November-December 1592 and, being printed piecemeal, it could be on the bookstalls almost as soon as the writing was finished. The swift appearance of subsequent issues shows its popularity. Since Nashe's reference to the 'house of credit' in which he 'converses' appears in the penultimate sheet (L) of the pamphlet, we can infer that Nashe was still enjoying Whitgift's patronage, probably at Croydon, as late as December.²⁵

From the very first page of *Strange Newes* Nashe identifies his position, draws up the battle-lines against Harvey. Dedicating the pamphlet to William Beeston, he praises him as a 'famous persecutor of Priscian', sworn to 'love poetry, hate pedantisme', admirable for his 'wonted Chaucerisme', his 'pure sanguine complexion', his 'pleasant wittie humour', his fondness for 'new Wine' as opposed to 'small Beere'.²⁶ To borrow this air of boozy good-fellowship, of poetry as an ingredient in *joie de vivre*, is all Nashe asks of his 'pottle-pot Patron' – 'I coniure thee to draw out thy purse, and give me nothing for the dedication of my Pamphlet: thou art a good fellow I know, and had rather spend yeasts than monie'. In similar vein Nashe invokes the balladeers of the day. Noting that Harvey had called the dead 'balletmaker' William Elderton a 'drunken rimester', he cries:

Hough Thomas Delone, Phillip Stubs, Robert Armin, &c. Your father Elderton is abus'd. Revenge, revenge on course paper and want of matter, that hath most sacriligiouly contaminated the divine spirit & quintessence of a penny a quart. Helter skelter, feare no colours, course him, trounce him, one cup of perfect bonaventure licour will inspire you with more wit and Schollership than hee hath thrust into his whole packet of Letters.

He also suggests that Will Kemp should perform some 'merriment' on the theme of the 'clownish' Harveys.²⁷ It is part of Nashe's anti-Harvey tactic to go resolutely downmarket, to counter the worthy-wealthy base of the *Four Letters* – Bird, Demetrius, Spenser – with this motley army of tipplers, clowns and rimesters. Nashe hits below the belt, a guttersnipe antagonist who cares nothing for the rules of the polemical game. Where Harvey had remonstrated and patronized, Nashe ridicules and abuses:

Why, thou arrant butter whore, thou cotqueane & scratpof scoldes, wilt thou never leave afflicting a dead Carcasse? . . .

This bile on the browe of the Universitie, this bladder of pride new-blowne . . . this indigested Chaos of Doctourship and greedie pothunter after applause . . .

Take truths part, and I wil prove truth to be no truth, marching out of thy dung-voiding mouth . . .

Gaffer Iobbernoule, once more well over-taken, how dost thou? how dost thou? hold up thy heade, men, take no care; though Greene be dead, yet I may live to do thee good . . .²⁸

'Gaffer Iobbernoule' – a version of 'Hobbinol', Spenser's pastoral name for Harvey – is only one of the fantastic nicknames Nashe cooks up: Gamaliel Hobgoblin, Gilgils Hobberdehoy, Gregory Habberdine, Gabriel Hangtelow, Timothy Tiptoes, Braggadochio Glorioso, Infractissime Pistlepragmos, Gibraltar, Galpogas, Gabrielissime, etc. Arrayed in these carnival masks, Harvey is paraded through the pamphlet, his embarrassments and disappointments revived, his buffooneries embroidered, his literary pretensions dissected.

There were many who felt that, however amusing, Nashe's harangue showed him in a poor light. As he says, 'I know there want not welwillers to my disgrace, who say my onely Muse is contention'.²⁹ They had a point: the reader of Nashe is often prey to disappointment, so much talent squandered on essentially negative utterance. Anyone who wished to defend *Strange Newes* could make, perhaps, three salient points (leaving aside a fourth, no less valid: that the pamphlet is often very funny). The first and most obvious is the pamphlet's partial motive to defend the memory of the dead Greene:

In short tearmes, thus I demur upon thy long Kentish-tayld declaration against Greene.

He inherited more vertues than vices . . .

Why should art answer for the infirmities of maners? Hee had his faultes, and thou thy follyes.

Debt and deadly sinne, who is not subiect to? With any notorious crime I never knew him tainted (& yet tainting is no infamous surgerie for him that hath beene in so many hote skirmishes).

A good fellowe hee was, and would have drunke with thee for more angels then the Lord thou libeldst on [the Earl of Oxford] gave thee in Christs Colledge . . .

Hee made no account of winning credite by his workes, as thou dost, that dost no good workes, but thinkes to be famosed by a strong faith of thy owne worthines.³⁰

This is the opposite of shrill. It has a clarity and balance perhaps unusual in Nashe. He resists any temptation to glorify his friend: Greene, he says, was a man, no better and no worse than men should be, and it is no business of others to go around moralizing on his faults. We get Nashe's underlying strengths in this: beneath the rather manic hurly-burly of his usual *persona*, over-reacting and often over-writing, we hear someone tolerant, morally relaxed, emancipated from the claustrophobic conventions. 'Debt and deadly sinne, who is not subiect to?' – it is the tone of Hamlet to Polonius, 'use every man after his desert, & who shall scape whipping?'³¹ There is a lot of Polonius in Harvey – sententious, interfering, righteous – and, perhaps, not a little of Hamlet in Nashe.

The second point to make about *Strange Newes* is its championing of the satirist's freedoms and rights. Harvey said that 'Invectives by favour have bene too bolde, and Satyres by usurpation too-presumptuous', and that they threatened 'all good Learning and civill Governement'. Nashe takes this up: 'as touching the libertie of Orators and Poets, I will conferre with thee somewhat gravelie', and indeed he does, in good scholarly vein. Cicero, he says, is best remembered for his *Philippics*, 'sound Physick applide to a body that could not digest it': but for these he would 'have bene sentenced by a generall verdict of histories for a tимерous time-pleaser'. Aristophanes is praised as one who mingled 'delight with reprehension'. The satires of Horace, Perseus and Juvenal are 'excellently medicinable', though perhaps too 'harsh in the swallowing': their 'Phrigian melodie, that stirreth men up to battaile and furie' should have been tempered with 'the Dorian tune, that favoereth mirth and pleasure'. The poet must be resolute: 'fawning and crouching are the naturall gestures of feare'; he must boldly 'infamize vice and magnifie vertue', and counter 'the generall abuses of the time'. In classical Rome, 'it was lawful for Poets to reprove that enormitie in the highest chairs of authoritie, which none else durst touch'. The writer that shirks this task 'haply may tickle the eare, but never edifies'.³² Nashe's muck-raking invective is not, perhaps, the best instance of the writer as moral critic, but one might say that its very indecorousness is in part a challenge to the whole notion of permitted literary limits. As he says to Harvey, 'if I scolde, if I raile, I do but *cum ratione insanire*' – rant with a reason.

The third and final point is stylistic. The satirists whose 'too-presumptuous' liberty Harvey deplores have, says Nashe, 'brought in a new kind of a quicke fight, which your decrepite slow-moving capacite cannot fadge with'. This idea of nimbleness and linguistic agility is absolutely central to Nashe: it is his stylistic *credo*. Harvey is characterized as ponderous, ill-equipped, 'flourishing about my eares with his two-hand sworde of Oratory and Poetry', yet managing only to shake 'some of the rust of it on my shoulders'. He is 'an unweldy Elephant',

an 'olde mechanically meeter-munger'. He writes 'pan-pudding prose' and verses that 'run hobling like a Brewers Cart upon the stones'.

I wote not how it fals out, but his invention is overweapond; 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. Coldly and dully *idem per idem*, who cannot indite? But with life and spirite to limne deadnes it selfe, *Hoc est Oratoris proprium*.

'Over-weapond' is a marvellous description of Harvey's syntax, with its unwieldy symmetries and over-extended metaphors. There is, as Nashe says, something almost contagious about its mental atmosphere:

A bots on thee for mee for a lumpish, leaden heeld letter-dawber, my stile, with treading in thy clammie steps, is growne as heavie gated as if it were bound to an Aldermans pace. . . . 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.³³

It is not only that Nashe has the light touch so woefully absent in Harvey. With the lightness comes versatility. Nashe's prose is a more pliable, more sensitive instrument: it registers shifts and nuances while Harvey's only bangs out a self-righteous tympany. In *Strange Newes* Nashe scarcely uses this instrument to the full: perhaps he never did. But he knew its potential power, and the more so by contrasting it with Harvey's 'pan-pudding' syntax. The dog-fight with Harvey, as with Martin, gave Nashe a sense of his own literary and psychological outline, indeed much of his satirical aggression has this self-defining urge behind it. This may sound like insecurity, but it gives his prose a psychological dimension, a 'new kind' of authenticity, which Harvey the *rhetor* was powerless to answer:

Thy soule hath no effects of a soule, thou canst not sprinkle it into a sentence, & make everie line leape like a cup of neat wine new powred out, as an Orator must doe that lies aright in wait for mens affections.³⁴

Like many of Nashe's pamphlets, *Strange Newes* offers sudden mirrored glimpses of himself at work on it – 'trip and goe, turn over a new leafe' . . . 'quods, quods, give me my Text pen againe, for I have a little more

Text to launce' . . . 'bee it spoken heere in private'. He is in some cramped little study at Croydon, 'here on our prating bench in a close roome', with 'none in company but you, my approved good frendes, *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets*'. It is winter: 'the weather is cold and I am wearie with confuting'. He falls sick: 'even in the packing up of my booke, a hot ague hath me by the back' – a burning fever, perhaps influenza, no doubt to be blamed on the '*malaria*', or bad air, of marshy Croydon. But he remains resolute: 'maugre sickness worst, a leane arm put out of the bed shall grind and pash every crum of thy booke into pin dust'. A few pages on, still ill, '*feci, feci, feci*, had I my health, now I had leysure to be merry, for I have almost washt my hands of the Doctour'.³⁵ It is all expressive of Nashe's nervous, jabbing, adrenal energy: burning hot, pinched with cold, working on the brink of exhaustion and disquiet. These burning fevers, he says in *The Terrors of the Night*, bring delirious dreams 'of frayes, lightning and thunder, of skirmishing with the divell, and a hundred such like'.³⁶ On this note of distemperature and skirmish we enter the stormier waters of 1593.

If Nashe returned at all to London in the winter of 1592–3 he has left no traces of his visit. The next we hear of him is in February 1593: he is still in the country, but no longer at Croydon. 'It was my chance in Februarie last', he writes in *The Terrors of the Night*, 'to be in the Countrey some threescore myle off from London.' He describes the surroundings as 'low marish ground', with 'almost as rotten a Clymate as the Lowe Countreyes, where their mystie ayre is as thicke as mould butter, and the deaw lyes like froathie barme on the ground'. It is a 'quarter not altogether exempted from witches'. It has been convincingly shown that the area Nashe is describing is Conington in Huntingdonshire; that he was the guest at Conington manor of the illustrious scholar, Robert Cotton; and that while there he composed the first draft of *The Terrors of the Night*.³⁷ Conington fits in every respect. It is about seventy miles from London. It is in fen country, standing by the marshlands of Whittlesey Mere, the largest lake in southern England. Camden describes the area in his *Britannia* of 1594:

These Quarters, considering the ground lying so low, and for many moneths in the yeare surrounded and drowned, in some places also floting (as it were) and hoven up with the waters, are not free from the offensive noisomnesse of Meres and the unwholesome aire of the Fennes.³⁸

This accords precisely with Nashe's topography of 'low marish ground' and a 'rotten' misty climate. Nashe's reference to witchcraft in the area also figures, for eight miles from Conington was the village of Warboys, home of the 'Three Witches of Warboys' – John, Alice and Agnes

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