Thomas Nashe’s life, like his fiction, was structured around journeys. However, this should not be taken to mean that Nashe celebrated mobility. He did not travel a great deal, even by the standards of an age when movement from one place to another was difficult, often discouraged, and strictly regulated. He left Lowestoft, Suffolk, his birthplace, to study at St. John’s College, Cambridge in the autumn of 1582. He then left Cambridge to go to London in 1588, and remained in the city for much of the rest of his life, apart from a visit to stay with Sir George Carey on the Isle of Wight, Christmas 1593, probably his one journey overseas. We also know that he stayed with the antiquary, Robert Cotton, in Conington, Huntingdonshire, just over fifty miles from London, in February 1593. He was forced to leave London in 1597, after the play he wrote with his friend, Ben Jonson, *The Isle of Dogs*, proved too controversial for the censors. After it was performed at one of the Bankside Theatres, the authorities promptly closed down all the theatres and Nashe fled to Great Yarmouth, staying in the country for another year or so. It is quite likely that he returned to London before he died, perhaps to work with some of his friends, but he may well have been forced to flee again after he was named in the Bishops’ Ban of 1 June 1599, an edict which prohibited the publication of satire and some forms of historical works, Nashe probably died in 1601, no one knows where or how. He therefore lived almost all of his life within a triangle between London, Cambridge and the East Anglian coast.

Nashe does not habitually represent travel or movement favourably and it is always associated with hardship, misery and, above all, waste in his writings. Jack Wilton, the unfortunate traveller, learns the hard way that travel does not necessarily teach the traveller anything. After he is saved from being executed in Rome for a crime that he did not commit – the first of three tales of executions that characterise Wilton’s experience in the city – Wilton visits the English earl whose testimony of what he heard in a barber’s

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shop reprieved his compatriot to thank him. The earl delivers a devastating speech warning Wilton that travel is a futile and delusive process:

Countriman, tell me, what is the occasion of thy straying so far out of England to visit a strange Nation? If it be languages, thou maist learne them at home; nought but lasciousnesse is to bee learned here. Perhaps, to be better accoutted of than other of thy condition, thou ambitiously vndertakest this voyage: these insolent fancies are but Icarus feathers, whose wanton waxe, melted against the Sunne, will betray thee into a sea of confusion.

The first traueller was Cain, and he was called a vagabond runnagate on the face of the earth. Trauaile (like the trauaile wherein smithes put wilde horses when they shoo them) is good for nothing but to tame and bring men vnder.

God hath no greater curse to lay vpon the Israelites, than by leading them out of their owne countrey to liue as slaues in a strange land. That which was their curse, we Englishmen count our chiefe blessednesse; hee is no bodie that hath not traueld[].

The earl’s speech continues for several pages, arguing that the foolish English are easy targets for unscrupulous foreigners eager to take advantage of them, and that English travellers return home much worse than they were before. In the fictional earl’s eyes, mobility should be avoided at all costs. Those Englishmen who choose to travel will learn a series of terrible habits from each country: from contact with the French they will learn to be deceitful and obsessed with pointless gradations of good taste; from Spain they will learn to be boastful; from Italy, a host of bad habits, “the art of atheisme, the art of epicurising, the art of whoring, the art of poisoning, the art of Sodomitie,” as well as the devious art of the courtier; and from the Danes and the Dutch they will learn excessive drinking (300-02).

Of course, the earl’s speech cannot be taken at face value: he is an exile, and so craves the delights of stasis in the same way that the restricted and the sedentary desire the freedom of movement, as his last sentence reveals: “The diuel and I am desperate, he of being restored to heauen, I of being recalled home” (303). But he makes a telling point that is hard to dispute and which cuts to the heart of what is at stake in travel and travel writing: “What is here but we may read in bokes, and a great deale more too, without stirring our feete out of a warme Studie?” (299). Nashe is making a pointed joke that challenges the reader to think about what we can possibly learn from leaving our homes to see other places. The earl’s stereotypes of Europeans show that he has learned nothing from his experience of travel and he is right that he would be better off staying at home as he simply repeats what he has learned from the accounts of other travellers. But then, he is a fictional character cre-

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ated by Nashe, so what the earl says does not have to be taken at face value. Nashe never went abroad, so perhaps one of his points may be the opposite of what he seems to mean, that actually travelling does provide us with real knowledge.4

On the other hand, questions remain. It is perhaps true that information about other countries is best learned without ever visiting them. Virtually all Englishmen and women learned about the world from books, images and conversation in a time when mobility was severely restricted. After all, the earl is an earl, one of the elite classes who could be granted a license to travel by the queen, and Jack is a soldier, the only way that most non-elite men got to see Europe (sailors could travel further afield). Travel certainly taught such men relatively little about other countries, and, if they returned home, they were likely to have witnessed as much death and destruction as Jack – if not more. Nashe, although he never served in the army himself, would have known a large number of soldiers in London, especially as so many writers spent time in the army.5 Most significant of all, perhaps, is the question of the transmission of knowledge and whether actually travelling is the most efficient means of acquiring knowledge, or whether there should be one class of person who travels and another who interprets what that person has seen and recorded, a division between the mobile and stationary. This was a central point made by Montaigne in his essay “Of the Caniballes,” in which he relies on the eye-witness account of a servant, “a simple and rough-hewen fellow: a condition fit to yield a true testimony.”6 Travel writers who did not travel – like, for example, Richard Hakluyt – were always dependent on what others told them.7 Perhaps they were like Montaigne’s servant; perhaps, more like Nashe’s exiled earl. In the end it would be up to the listener/reader to decide.

Another way of looking at the same problem was to work out which was the greater evil, travelling or interpreting travellers’ tales. Travel in the early modern world could be a grim affair, even within England itself. Roads were invariably awful, making conditions at best very uncomfortable, and a rate of twenty miles per day was quite reasonable, even by horse (so Nashe could have taken nearly three days to get to Conington). There was the risk of be-

7 See Peter Mancall, Hakluyt’s Promise: An Elizabethan’s Obsession for an English America (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007).
ing held up by highwaymen, especially as one travelled further away from the major cities. Waterways were rather better, but they were slow, limited by geography and were generally used for trade. Most people did not move more than a few miles from where they were born until well into the nineteenth century. Those who could afford a horse did move around much more, mainly, however, within quite restricted areas. There was a ring of houses around London which is where most significant aristocrats lived when they were not in the capital; others had a second residence a little further afield. People who lived beyond these areas tended to come to London less frequently and had much more pronounced regional identities, remaining within their home areas.8

The problem became more acute when travellers went abroad. Crossing the Channel or the Irish Sea was hazardous in itself, and often boats were delayed for long periods while sailors waited for favourable winds and tides.9 There was always the danger of pirates in the seas and then of being attacked by bandits on one’s travels throughout Europe.10 There were further dangers and discomforts: financial hardship, especially the possibility of being exploited by unscrupulous locals; the chance of catching various illnesses, in particular, as a result of rather too much pleasure. In many ways conditions had not improved that much in the last two hundred years, the technological revolutions that made travel more comfortable happening over a hundred years after Nashe’s death.11

All told, for commentators like Roger Ascham, the disadvantages of travel abroad outweighed the advantages by some distance and the best that could be achieved was a waste of time. Ascham’s observations on Italy, published

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posthumously in 1570, surely lie behind Nashe’s sardonic representation of Italy as a land of cruel, cynical luxury in The Unfortunate Traveller:

I was once in Italie my selfe: but I thanke God, my abode there, was but ix. dayes: And yet I sawe in that little tyme, in one Citie, more libertie to sinne, than ever I hard tell of in our noble Citie of London in ix. Yeare. I sawe, it was there as free to sinne, not onelie without all punishment, but also without any mans marking, as it is fre in the Citie of London, to chose, without all blame, whether a man lust to weare Shoo or pantofle [fashionable slipper][...] Yea, the Lord Maior of London, being but a Civill officer, is commonlie for his tyme, more diligent, in punishing sinne, the bent enemie against God and good order, than all the bloodie Inquisitors in Italie be in seaven yeare.12

Jack witnesses a riot of pleasure and murder in Italy, the graphically described violent executions serving no purpose other than to satisfy a cruel blood lust. The connection that the Italians make between death and lust is made clear to Jack when he moves down from Florence to Rome with his mistress:

Attained thether [i.e., in Rome], I was lodged at the house of one Iohannes de Imola, a Roman caualiero. Who, being acquainted with my curtesans deceased doting husband, for his sake vsed vs with all the famili-|aritie that might bee seene, which are as manye as there haue beene Emperours, Consulles, Oratours, Conquerours, famous painters or plaiers in Rome. Tyll this daie not a Romane (if he be a right Romane indeed) will kill a rat, but he will haue some registered remembraunce of it (II, 279).

What seems like a virtue is really a vice. In other cultures looking after those connected with the deceased would be kindly, proper behaviour; but here, there is a morbid connection between love and death, a strange desire to remain connected to the dead, as if they could somehow be kept alive through the objects and the people with which they were associated. Furthermore, this attitude also engenders an indifference to life, as Jack discovers when he is nearly executed, his last confession made, his head put inside the noose and the hangman’s “foote on [his] shoulder to presse [him] downe” (296), before he is reprieved, significantly enough, at the very last second by his fellow countryman. Jack almost became one of the rats remembered only through their sentimental associations with the living, a spectrum of warped thought that preserves the memory of the dead in the same way that relics commemorate the deceased almost as if they were still alive. Or, put another way, removes the need to worry about death.

Inter-continental travel was, of course, far worse still. Voyages were incredibly dangerous. Richard Hore’s attempt to charter a tourist voyage to Newfoundland in 1536 “ended in misery, starvation, and even cannibalism”

12 Hadfield, ed., Amazons, 22.
when the William had to anchor on the south coast of Newfoundland. 13 Many died in ferocious storms, including Humphrey Gilbert (1537-83), last seen, with book in hand, shouting over to the Golden Hind, “We are as near to heaven, by sea as by land.” 14 Others, like Francis Drake, of disease. The Roanoke Colony disappeared in the early 1580s, as Nashe would have known. 15 Natives were not always friendly, and European readers would have known that while many of the Northern peoples whom Protestant colonists met were relatively civilised and friendly, those that the Spanish encountered tended to be rather nastier, often forcing molten gold down the throats of rapacious Europeans, or eating them in ritual feasts, like the frightening Amazonian women of Brazil. 16

Travel, and the implied imperial expansion that went with it, were not regarded as unqualified benefits by everyone. An argument has been put forward that many opposed the idea of empire outright, arguing instead that the English should concentrate on establishing the identity and success of their nation within the already established boundaries. 17 It is also clear that many writers were anxious about expansion and the dilution of English identity that was likely to result from expanding boundaries, taking over other nations, or establishing colonies abroad, both within the British Isles and beyond. Expansion may have been a necessary evil, but it was not something that could or should be celebrated. Writers felt it their duty to warn their readers of the problems that absorbing other nations, people and cultures would involve. If England did become an empire, English identity could not be taken for granted as it would have to evolve and change to accommodate new peoples and places. 18 There was a price to be paid for mobility, one not worth paying.

Matthew Day has made a persuasive case that Nashe strongly opposed the ideological thrust of Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations, Voyages,

Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation (1589). Hakluyt argued that Protestant England urgently needed to expand and populate the Americas in order to oppose the might of the Spanish Empire, which was already far advanced by the second half of the sixteenth century. If they failed to challenge the Spanish, exporting the religious conflict in Europe to the New World, then their enemies would establish a power base that could not be defeated and the fragile Protestant nations, led by England, were in danger of being overwhelmed. Hakluyt was clear that it was his duty to warn his complacent fellow countrymen of the perils they faced, mobilising their resistance by reminding them of the heroic endeavours that they had undertaken in the past, through the compilation of his magnum opus. Hakluyt was no traveller, and like the English earl in The Unfortunate Traveller, preferred to work in the comfort of a warm study than to seek out new lands himself.

The immediate spur for Nashe’s hostility to Hakluyt was undoubtedly the fact that his arch opponent, Gabriel Harvey, heaped enthusiastic praise on the Principall Navigations. In Pierce Supererogation Harvey launched a carefully prepared attack on Nashe, first praising the most worthy contemporary writers: “Ingland, since it was Ingland, neuer bred more honourable mindes, more aduenturous hartes, more valorous handes, or more excellent wittyes, then of late.” He contrasts the serious work of George Gascoigne, Thomas Drant, George Turberville, and Roger Ascham to the “phantastical bibble-bables” of Nashe, which “might haue bene tollerated in a greene, and wild youth” (Sig. Gv). The list culminates in Harvey’s praise of Hakluyt, as he urges his reader to

read the report of the worthy Westerne diswcourses, by the said Sir Humphrey Gilbert: the report of the braue West-Indian voyage by the conduction of Sir Francis Drake: the report of the horrible Septentionall discoueries by the trauail of Sir Martin Frobisher: the report of the politique discouery of Virginia, by the Colony of Sir Walter Raleigh: the report of sundry other famous discoueries, & aduentures, published by M. Rychard Hackluit in one volume, a worke of importance: the report of the hoatt wellcom of the terrible Spanishe Armada to the coast of Inglande, that came in glory, and went in dishonour: the report of the redoubted voyage into Spaine, and Portugull, whence the braue Earle of Essex, and the two valorous Generals, Sir John Norris, and Sir Francis Drake returned with honour: the report of the resolute encounter about the Iles Azores, betwixt the Reuenge of Ingland, and an Armada of Spaine; in which encounter braue Sir Rich-

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20 Hadfield, Literature, Travel, and Colonial Writing, 97-105.
22 Gabriel Harvey, Pierces Supererogation or A New Praye of the Old Ass: A prepatrative to certaine larger discouerces, intituled Nashes s. fame (London, 1593), Sig. Gr. Subsequent references to this edition in parentheses in the text.
ard Grinuile most vigorously & impetuously attempted the extreamest possibili-
ties of valour and fury (Sigs. G1v-G2r).

Harvey is reading Hakluyt exactly as Hakluyt intended, citing his great com-
pilation as a means of demonstrating the heroic history of the English, seek-
ing out far-flung places to colonise and so civilise, thus protecting their
shores against hostile invaders. Harvey continues, citing examples of English
trade spreading abroad, concluding by weighing up “the course of Industry”
and “consequents of Trauail,” which “found profit to be our pleasure,
prouision our security, labour our honour, warfare our welfare,” against
what Nashe and his ilk produce, “corrupt pamphlets... paultringe fidle-
faddles” (Sigs. G2r-v). The long passage concludes with a reference to “the
ruines of Troy” discovered by Alexander, which inspires the great conqueror
to demand the “Harpe of Achilles” to lead him to further military glory.
Harvey is arguing that his fellow Englishmen should adopt similar attitudes
in contrast to the debilitating fare offered them in the pamphlets of Nashe
and Greene. The central reference is to The Iliad, the great epic that is now
transferred through the familiar process of translatio imperii from ancient
Greece to contemporary England. Harvey is further contrasting the folio
volume to the pamphlet; the serious to the trivial; the inspirational work to
the debilitating; the national to the local; and what he is doing to what Nashe
is doing.23 His aim is to create a genuine public sphere of writers all contrib-
uting to the advancement of England and English culture in their various
ways, which does not preclude Nashe’s methods, but does involve attacking
his scurrilous and wasteful aims.

Nashe responded to these taunts in Lenten Stuffe, published in 1599, his
rambling, digressive and brilliantly satirical praise of the red herring, written
after he had retreated to Great Yarmouth in the wake of the Isle of Dogs scan-
dal. The fact that Nashe could still hark back to a pamphlet written by his
opponent in 1593 shows how important certain issues were for both writers.
In the meanwhile he had taken up Harvey’s challenge and seems to have read The Principall Navigations immediately after reading Pierce Supereroga-
tion. In his first response, the last of his tracts excoriating Harvey, Haue with
you to Saffron Walden (1596), Nashe refers to Hakluyt about twenty times.24
The vast sweep and geographical range of Hakluyt’s text is pointedly con-
trasted to the injunction that Harvey return to his home town, a demand that
not only predicted Nashe’s own return home in 1597, but predicted the fate
of Harvey after the Bishops’ Ban.

On the first page of Lenten Stuffe Nashe recounts the events leading up to
his writing the book in a series of neat twists and reversals. The Isle of Dogs
turned “from a commedie to a tragedie two summers past,” leading to “a

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23 For a splendid analysis, see Day, “Hakluyt, Harvey, Nashe,” 290-1.
general rumour that hath filled all England, and such a heauie crosse laide vpon me, as had well neere confounded mee.” In his profound misery, Nashe went “beyond my greatest friendes reach to recouer mee,” and was forced into “exile” where “the silliest millers thombe or contemptible stickele-bank of my enemies is as busie nibbling about my fame as if I were a deade man throwne amongst them to feede vpon” (V, 153). This is a densely allusive and subtly nuanced opening passage, which shows how things can be turned and transformed by will and by fate. The tenor of the passage seems downbeat, perhaps even humble in its acknowledgement of the reversals of fortune, as comedy becomes tragedy. But, of course, this was no accident, as the lost play clearly must have insulted many of the great and good, the Isle of Dogs being the place where the queen kept her hounds, which suggests that the island was used as a representation of the court, with the courtiers seen as sycophantic, needy, aggressive and scarcely human dependents feeding off the monarch. As David Riggs has commented, what we know about the play “indicate[s] that it was an exceedingly subversive play.”

Nashe’s fate looks bad if his words are read superficially, but his words suggest that his misfortune and the persecution that he suffers are really signs of his importance and achievement, which go beyond what even he had imagined beforehand. In his apparent abjection, Nashe judges himself to be the figure whose actions create rumours that fill all of England, leading to an exceedingly cheeky comparison of himself to Christ carrying the cross. Gabriel Harvey might think that Nashe is trivial, but the rest of the nation disagrees and casts its eyes towards Nashe. Nashe, pretending to be humiliated, is actually showing that what he does eclipses and obliterates the apparently important works that Harvey recommends, in particular, Hakluyt’s Principall Navigations. In fact, it is his enemies – again, the principal target is Harvey – who are trivial in their complaints against him, unable to realise the significance of what he has achieved. While Harvey, for all his attempts at humour, solemnly pronounces on the great works of the English nation, Nashe shows that everyone is looking in the wrong place. What people think is great is actually trivial, and what they imagine to be trivial is really important. They might imagine – or hope – that he is dead, but, in writing Lenten Stuffe, he will show them how profound he can be if only read properly. He is an exile, like the earl in The Unfortunate Traveller, and like him, he is in a position to utter serious truths about England and the ways in which its boundaries should expand or contract.

Lenten Stuffe takes as its subject an everyday object, the red herring, traditionally ordinary fare eaten by the poor, and by the better off in Lent, and shows how it is actually the worthy focus of heroic legend, one of the most

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noble foodstuffs, a glory that sustains the nation.26 Again, especially given the title of his previous work, there is a pointed contrast between Nashe and Harvey, the latter coming from a more up-market place, one that obtained its name from the daffodils grown there. Saffron was a much valued commodity that produced yellow dye, a colour of high status, one of the key jokes against the social-climbing Malvolio in *Twelfth Night.*27 In imitation of Harvey Nashe assembles ponderous lists of different categories of important and valuable examples of intellectual property, weaving together different textual elements, styles and registers to make his points. He describes his journey to Yarmouth in terms familiar to any reader of romance, as “variable Knight arrant adventuresses and outroades and inroads, at greate Yarmouth in Norfolke I arriued in the latter ende of Autumnne.” Adopting one of his earlier pseudonyms, Nashe then proclaims that “this is a predestinate fit place for *Piers Pennilesse* to set vp his staffe in” (154).

Nashe’s range of allusions carefully echoes Harvey’s chain of connections in *Pierce Supererogation.* In a provocatively disgusting image Nashe compares the effects of the hospitality he receives in Great Yarmouth to a well-known story about Homer:

Tooke I vp my repose, and there mete with such kind entertainment and begnigne hospitality when I was *Vna litera plusquam medicus* as Plautus saith, and not able to liue to my selfe with my owne iuce, as some of the crummes of it, like the crums in a bushy beard after a great banquet, will remaine in my papers to bee seene when I am | deade and vnder ground ; from the bare perusing of which, infinite posteri- ties of hungry Poets shall receiue good refreshing, euen as *Homer* by *Galataeon* was pictured vomiting in a bason (in the temple that *Ptolomy Philopater* erected to him) and the rest of the succeeding Poets after him greedily lapping vp what he disgorged. (154-5)

Nashe does not say that he consumes so much that he is sick, as the actual comparison is between the crumbs that he leaves behind in his papers, and Homer vomiting, the leavings of each poet being greedily consumed by subsequent writers. But the nature of the comparison invites the reader to make this connection and to conclude that even Nashe behaving at his lowest is more valuable than other writers’ most high-brow efforts. Furthermore, there is surely a reference to the death of Robert Greene, who apparently expired


Mobility in the Works of Thomas Nashe

after a “surfeit of pickle herringe and Rennish wine,” as Harvey had reported soon afterwards.

A key target here is Harvey’s reference to Homer, and Nashe is picking up Harvey’s citations of Homer and Homeric themes at key points in Pierce Supererogation. This point is secured by the next reference to Homer as “That good old blind bibber of Helicon,” a direct quotation from Harvey. Nashe deliberately plays on the more lowbrow stories of Homer’s life, bringing Harvey’s exalted register back to the demotic, but also demonstrating that there is an erudition that can undermine the pretensions of the literary social climber while signalling the user’s rootedness in the stuff of everyday life, rather than the pointless mobility of imperial expansion. While Harvey wants to think about the Iliad, Nashe would like to remind readers that there was another side to Homer. What links both references, a suppressed but vital connection, is Homer’s other epic of travel, The Odyssey. Nashe deliberately skirts around this issue in developing the comparison between himself and Homer, by making two negative comparisons. First he states: “I alleadge this tale to shewe howe much better my lucke | was then Homers, (though all the King of Spaines Indies will not create me such a niggling Hexameter-founder as he was)” (155-6). Then, a few sentences later he claims: “I am no Tiresias or Calchas to prophecie, but yet I cannot tell, there may bee more resounding bel-mettal in my pen then I am aware, and if there bee, the first peale of it is in Yarmouthes” (156). Nashe is showing that he knows everything about Homer: both his epics and the slightly sordid tales of his personal life, producing the last first before revealing his literary sophistication. His epic tale of Yarmouth is to be set against the epics of ancient Greece, as well as the epics and romances of the modern world, which have inspired the Spanish to conquer the New World.

Nashe adapts part of the story of the foundation of Britain from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britainniae, and makes it resolutely local. Great Yarmouth is described as “A towne it is that in rich situation exceedeth many citties, and without the which, Caput gentis, the swelling Battlementes of Gurguntus, a head citty of Norffolke and Suffolke, would scarce retaine the name of a Citty, but become as ruinous and desolate as Thetforde or Ely” (156). Gurguntius, or Gurgunt Barbitruc, was the legendary king of the Britons after Belinus, the first king to rule all of Britain. He was a warrior-sea king and was best remembered for establishing the British Empire by con-

29 Harvey, Pierce Supererogation, Sig. V1v.
querering the Danes after they refused to pay him tribute; discovering the Orkneys; and giving Partholoim, a Spanish exile, permission to settle in Ireland, one of the key claims that the Britons had to rule Ireland, frequently used later to legitimise English possession. Nashe translates these epic stories of national self-definition and discovery to a regional context so that Gurguntius becomes the ruler known for building the battlements on Great Yarmouth’s city walls, defences that have preserved the city and prevented it from becoming as enfeebled as Thetford and Ely. The joke becomes more pointed as a comment on regional pride if the reader knows that both towns had more illustrious pasts than Great Yarmouth. Thetford was known as the stronghold of Boudicca, later the seat of the Anglo-Saxon kings of East England, and then became a bishopric in the Middle Ages; Ely was also an important religious centre with a magnificent cathedral. The Suffolk town of Great Yarmouth, in contrast, although wealthy, had a much less impressive history than its Norfolk rivals. Nevertheless, its future might well be rather brighter.

Warming to his theme, Nashe moves forward in history as he looks out at the fleet of fishing boats in the harbour:

The delectablest lustie sight and mouingest obiect, me thought it was, that our Ile sets forth, and nothing behinde in number with the invincible Spanish Armada, though they were not such Gargantuan boisterous gulliguts as they, though ships and gallessasses they would haue beene reckoned in the nauy of K. Edgar; who is chronicled & registred with three thousand ships of warre to haue scoured the narrow seas, and sailed round about England euery Summer. (157-8)

The splendid fleet of Yarmouth fishing boats resembles the Armada, and also that of the Saxon king, Edgar, whose naval exploits helped establish the British Empire. Hakluyt describes Edgar as “one of the perfect Imperiall Monarches of this British Empire,” famous for his “grand navie” of 4000 ships, which he divided into four equal parts for “his Sommer progresses… sailing round about this whole Isle of Albion.” Nashe’s subtle move here is not to contrast the strength of Edgar’s navy to that of the defeated Armada, so making a patriotic point that would support the purpose of Hakluyt’s extensive folios. Rather, he sets the ships in Yarmouth harbour against those of the best Spanish and English fleets, making an analogous point to the one about Gurguntius. England’s true glory lies in her local identities and the constituent parts of the nation that make the whole when put together, not


the delusion of expansion dictated by the powerful: her citizens should be looking inwards, not outwards. The use of the adjective “Gargantuian,” the first recorded in the *OED* – although it is a response to Harvey’s coinage, “Gargantuist” in *Pierce Supererogation* – refers to Rabelais’ prose epic of excess, appetite and bodily functions, which both Harvey and Nashe had undoubtedly read in French. The reference supports the point made about Homer earlier: high status literature does not simply refer to high status people and events and certainly does not preclude reference to the lives and concerns of ordinary people. Nashe is also asserting his ability to read Rabelais properly, as a writer of the people, whose subjects might well include eating and vomiting. In doing so he reminds his readers that even Homer did these things, a lesson that the literal-minded Harvey cannot get right with his insistence that high-minded writers only wrote about high-minded affairs.

Having made these connections, exactly the same ones that Harvey made in *Pierce Supererogation* but now used in a radically different way, Nashe indulges in more extensive – and extensively referenced – parodies throughout the narrative. In one substantial passage Nashe uses the rhetorical trope *occupatio* (paralepsis), which, according to Abraham Fraunce, was “A kind of irony, a kind of pretended omitting or letting slip of that which indeed we elegantly note out in the very show or praetermission.” Nashe claims that he has scoured Hakluyt for references to Great Yarmouth and found none, and so wonders how it can be so successful and wealthy:

> I mused how Yarmouth should be inuested in such plenty and opulence, considering that in M. *Hackluits* English discoueries I haue not come in ken of one mizzen mast of a man of warre bound for the Indi es or Mediterranean sterne-bearer sente from her *Zenith* or *Meridian*, Mercuriall brested M. *Harborne* always accepted, a rich sparke of eternity first lighted and enkindled at Yarmouth, or there first bred and brought forth to see the light, who since, in the hottest degree of *Leo*, hath ech-oing noysed the name of our Ilande and of Yarmouth so Tritonly that not an infant of the curtailed skinclipping pagans but talk of London as frequently as of their Prophets tombe at *Maecha*, & as much worships our maidenpeace as it were but one sun that shin’d ouer them all (173).

The exception of William Harborne (c. 1542-1617), the first English ambassa-dor to Turkey, who was born in Great Yarmouth, proves the rule, and leads to a digression, one of the ‘red herrings’ that gives *Lenten Stuffe* its title. We all realise that Harborne just happens to have been born in Great Yarmouth and he does not endlessly advertise this fact so that the town is as well-

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35 On Harborne, see the *ODNB* entry by Christine Woodhead.
known throughout the Ottoman Empire as Mohammed’s tomb at Mecca; nor does Hakluyt mention Harborne’s birthplace. The last section of the sentence undercuts the rest when the reader realises that the same sun does indeed shine over both the Ottomans and the English. One does not need to travel there to realise this banal fact. The point is that there are basic concerns that everyone has, wherever they live and whatever they do, and no movement is required to understand this, exactly as the fictional earl in *The Unfortunate Traveller* claimed. Certain key aspects of life are the same whether people live in Yarmouth or Istanbul, a fact that the grand schemes of Hakluyt – and Harvey – simply do not realise. In writing *Lenten Stuffe* Nashe is revealing the reality of England in ways that have escaped the attention of those who think they are writing about the nation, but who actually miss what is all around them, foolishly thinking that they have to move away from their homeland in order to understand it, whereas they only have to open their eyes. His description of his journey to Great Yarmouth tells readers more about what matters to them than they will find in the pages of *The Principall Navigations* – or indeed, *Pierce Supererogation* – because it uncovers and makes available what really sustains the English, herring rather than saffron, the voyages of local fishing fleets rather than dangerous and often pointless overseas travel.

*Lenten Stuffe* takes what might seem a perverse confrontational position. Nevertheless, for all its comic bluster and multiple layers of irony, it is a deeply serious work that thinks about the nation and the movement that is required to understand as well as sustain it. Many writers were eager to establish and represent exactly what England was and how it should be conceived, as it became possible to survey, quantify and chart the nation, establish its boundaries and compare it to its neighbours, rivals and distant outposts. The urgency became more apparent in the 1590s as the Tudor dynasty neared its end and the English wanted to know who they were and where they lived. Nashe has produced a humorous reminder of what people needed to know and what was often left out of what he saw as grandiose and dangerously deluded visions of imperial expansion. Later on in *Lenten Stuffe*, Nashe conjures a fantastic vision of the red herring becoming a dried flying fish travelling as far as the limits of the Old World:

> [T]he red herring flyes best when his wings are dry: throughout Belgia, high Germanie, Fraunce, Spaine, and Italy hee flyes, and vp into Greece and Africa, South and Southwest, Estrich-like, walkes his stations, and the Sepulcher Palmers or Pilgrims, because hee is so portable, fill their Scrips with them, yea, no dispraise to the bloud of the Ottomans, the Nabucedonesor of Constantinople and Giantly

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Antaeus, that neuer yawneth nor neezeth but he a frighteth the whole earth, gormandizing, muncheth him vp for his imperiall dainties (192).

The style of the sentence becomes ever more inflated as the herring proceeds on his epic journey, a parody of the movements of the bravest English explorers. A key point is that travel requires sustenance, and so cannot be undertaken without preserved food, almost invariably dried. Here, however, the herring’s progress is represented as if it were an end in itself. Nashe is reminding readers that they must not lose sight of what they have at home, its importance and how what seems more important is invariably nourished by something that is easy to overlook. Too much food makes those who overindulge sick, even if their leavings are as valuable as those of Homer or Nashe. Nevertheless, everyone needs to be sustained in leaner times by Lenten stuff, which is why the Yarmouth fleets are so much more valuable than their more celebrated counterparts.
Works Cited


