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Article abstract

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# Red Herrings and the “Stench of Fish”: Subverting “Praise” in Thomas Nashe’s *Lenten Stuffe*

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*In Lenten Stuffe, “praise” emerges as a red herring diverting readers from recognizing how Thomas Nashe telescopes his chorography of Yarmouth into a catalogue of arbitrary Crown rule from William the Conqueror’s rule through the English Reformation. So too is Nashe’s apology for contributing to the seditious play, Ile of Dogs. Historical circumstances surrounding the Swan Theatre and a stolen diamond complicate conventional readings of this incident, Nashe’s exile, and subsequently, the sincerity of Nashe’s encomium. Lastly, this essay examines Nashe’s projection of the Butcher and Fishmonger’s debate surrounding the arbitrariness of Lenten laws from Erasmus’s colloquy “A Fish Diet” into the red herring’s fictional ascent to human and divine monarchy. Erasmus’s joke in “Fish Diet” is at the expense of the Fishmonger, but Nashe elides his geographical and political targets to generate a subtext of outrage directed at Crown rule and English Reform.*

*Dans Lenten Stuffe, la louange apparaît comme un leurre empêchant les lecteurs de reconnaître la façon dont Thomas Nashe condense sa chorographie de Yarmouth en un catalogue des lois arbitraires de la Couronne pendant le règne de William le Conquérant et la Réforme anglaise. Il en est de même pour les excuses de Nashe quant à sa contribution à la pièce de théâtre séditieuse, Ile of Dogs. Les circonstances historiques entourant le Théâtre du cygne et un diamant volé compliquent la lecture conventionnelle de cet incident, l’exil de Nashe, et, par la suite, la sincérité de son panégyrique. En dernier lieu, cet essai examine la projection par Nashe du débat entre le boucher et le poissonnier, concernant le caractère arbitraire des lois du carême et provenant du colloque d’Erasmus « Un régime de poisson », sur l’ascension fictive du hareng saur à la monarchie humaine et divine. La blague d’Erasmus dans « Un régime de poisson » est au détriment du poissonnier, mais Nashe omet ses cibles géographiques et politiques pour générer un discours sous-entendant l’indignation dirigée à la Couronne et à la Réforme anglaise.*

As good a toy to mocke an ape was it of hym that shewed a country fellow the red sea, where all the Herrings were made, [...] and the ieast of a Scholler in Cambridge, that standing angling on the towne bridge there, as the country people on the market day passed by, secretly bayted his hook wyth a red Herring wyth a bell about the necke, and so coneuying it into the water that no man perceiued it, all on a sodayn, when he had a competent throng gathered about hym, vp he twicht it agayne, and layd it

openly before them; whereat the gaping rurall fooles [...] neuer sawe such a miracle of a red herring taken in the fresh-water before.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Nashe's *Lenten Stuffe* epitomizes the idea of the "red herring" as a diversionary tactic. Ostensibly, *Lenten Stuffe* represents payment of a debt Nashe incurred at Yarmouth. In lieu of money, Nashe offers "The Description and first Procreation and Increase of the town of Great Yarmouth in Norffolke: with a new Play neuer played before, of the prayse of the RED HERRING." Following a dedication to Humfrey King, Nashe's epistle contextualizes the pamphlet as "a light friskin of my witte, like the prayse of iniustice, the feuer quartaine, *Busiris*, or *Phalaris*, wherein I follow the trace of the famousest schollers of all ages" (1:151). Here Nashe follows Erasmus's prefatory catalogue of authorities put forth in the *Praise of Folly*.<sup>2</sup> Conventionally, this "curriculum catalog" sets the tone by invoking authoritative models that inform the author's plan.<sup>3</sup> Erasmus's and Nashe's invocations of Isocrates and Lucian inform the satirical *modus operandi* of their texts, while the connotations of tyranny associated with the ancient kings *Busiris* and *Phalaris* adumbrate a subtext that undercuts the encomia promised by both. Nashe draws attention to thematic subterfuge by additionally offering "the prayse of iniustice" as a "model" that appears to be of his invention (4:377). In the context of Nashe's recent exile and persecution by the Privy Council following *Ile of Dogs*, this juxtaposition of thematic praise and injustice surrounding the red herring foreshadows Nashe's sustained criticism of arbitrary favour and inequity perpetuated by Crown authorities.

Despite professing to have modelled *Lenten Stuffe* on the works of Bede, Stow, Holinshed, Camden, and Vergil, Nashe weaves a discursive intertextual network of chronicle, autobiography, satire, and allegory that functions defensively to complicate interpretation. Its complexity has historically diverted readers from recognizing the critical subtext at stake in *Lenten Stuffe*. Although

1. *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, 5 vols. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), vol. 3, p. 212. Further citations to this edition of Nashe's work are given parenthetically by volume and page number after quotations in the text.

2. Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, ed. Hoyt Hopewell Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 9.

3. Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask, Bollingen Series 36 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953), pp. 48–51.

C. S. Lewis states that *Lenten Stuffe* is one of Nashe's "best works," he believes "if asked what Nashe 'says,' we should have to reply, Nothing."<sup>4</sup> Following Lewis, Stanley Wells argues that *Lenten Stuffe* "is not in itself a highly controversial work. In plan it is as attractively dotty as anything he ever wrote; its ostensible theme is indicated by the subtitle."<sup>5</sup> Jonathan V. Crewe, Robert Weinmann and David Hillman, and Peter Holbrook have pushed early discussions of Nashe's "themelessness" into persuasive arguments regarding Nashe's subversion of rhetorical practices, but have not discussed the subversive thematic connotations at play in his work.<sup>6</sup> Most recently, Andrew Hadfield has acknowledged how the herring's epic journey parodies "the bravest English explorers," yet his discussion leaves Nashe's praise of Yarmouth intact.<sup>7</sup> In sum, the scholarly consensus surrounding *Lenten Stuffe* still seems much as Nashe's biographer Charles Nicholl writes: "it is what it claims to be: 'praise of the red herring,' the food that sustained him during the hard days of Lent in 1598."<sup>8</sup>

But I contend that Nashe's fiction of the herring's ascension to a piscatorial monarchy is *not* what it claims to be. Nashe's chronicle of Yarmouth presents a lively, yet prejudiced, history of the town's evolution. "Praise" emerges as a red herring diverting readers from recognizing how he telescopes Yarmouth's history into a catalogue of arbitrary Crown rule that begins with William the Conqueror and extends through the English Reformation. The first part of this essay shows how careful reading of Nashe's revisionary chronicle of Yarmouth reveals a critical subtext directed at the Crown's long history of securing—and benefitting from—Yarmouth's wealth at the expense of her neighbours, primarily Nashe's home town, Lowestoft.

4. C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 416.

5. Thomas Nashe, *Selected Writings*, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 20.

6. Jonathan V. Crewe, *Unredeemed Rhetoric: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); Robert Weimann and David Hillman, *Authority and Representation in Early Modern Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Peter Holbrook, *Literature and Degree in Renaissance England: Nashe, Bourgeois Tragedy, Shakespeare* (London: Associated University Press, 1994).

7. Andrew Hadfield, "Lenten Stuffe: Thomas Nashe and the Fiction of Travel," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 41, no. 1, *Travel and Prose Fiction in Early Modern England* (2011), p. 77.

8. Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 262.

Not only is Nashe's praise disingenuous, but as part two contends, so is his apology for contributing to the *Ile of Dogs*, a play deemed seditious by the Privy Council. Following the arrest of his colleagues, including Ben Jonson, Nashe's possessions were seized and he was forced into exile. As I shall demonstrate, historical circumstances surrounding the Swan Theatre and a stolen diamond complicate conventional readings of the *Ile of Dogs* incident, Nashe's exile, and subsequently, the sincerity of Nashe's encomium.

Finally, this essay examines the implications generated by Nashe's incorporation of Erasmus's colloquy "A Fish Diet" into his fiction of the red herring's ascension to human and divine monarchy.<sup>9</sup> From Erasmus's text, Nashe projects the Butcher and Fishmonger's debate surrounding the arbitrariness of Lenten laws onto his chronicle of Yarmouth and praise of the red herring.<sup>10</sup> Erasmus's joke in "A Fish Diet" is at the expense of the Fishmonger, but in *Lenten Stuffe*, Nashe elides his targets—geographical and political—through a subtext of outrage directed at Crown rule and English Reform.

Although Lorna Hutson acknowledges that *Lenten Stuffe*'s "density challenges the inventive capacity of the reader just to keep making sense of it all," we have yet to realize that Nashe's gallimaufry of intertexts, metaphorical gestures, and topical nods functions as a defensive posture in order to levy political satire from a (temporarily) safe vantage point.<sup>11</sup> Throughout his chronicling of Yarmouth, Nashe diverts readers from realizing that the "ieast" played by a "Scholler in Cambridge" who "secretly bayted his hook wyth a redde Herring" is on them (3:212). By the time Nashe mockingly apologizes for "fishing before the nette, or making all fish that comes to the net in this history," readers have swallowed his hook, line, and sinker.

9. *The Colloquies of Erasmus*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 312–57.

10. Although this paper focuses on Erasmus's influence on *Lenten Stuffe*, Nashe's sources are plentiful. As Arthur F. Kinney argues, Juvenal's mock epic tale of the turbot in the fourth satire is also an important source; see his *Humanist Poetics: Thought, Rhetoric, and Fiction in Sixteenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), p. 360. Nashe's biblical allusions to Mark 1:16–18 and Luke 5:2–10, as well as his nods to Aesop's "Fisherman and the Fish" fables, are also worth pursuing. See *Aesop's Fables*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), nos. 240 (p. 118) and 248 (p. 138).

11. Lorna Hutson, *Thomas Nashe in Context* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 248.

### "At Wrig Wrag"

In Nashe's epistle to readers, his argumentative tone and low diction are immediately at odds with the title's promise of "The Procreation and Increase of the town of Great Yarmouth" and praise of its fishing industry:

*Nashes Lentenstufte*: and why *Nashes Lentenstufte*? some scabbed scald squire replies, because I had money lent me at *Yarmouth*, and I pay them againe in prayse of their towne and the redde herring: and if it were so, goodman Pig-wiggen, were not that honest dealing? pay thou al thy debtes so if thou canst for thy life: but thou art a Ninnihammer; that is not it; therefore, *Nickneacaue*, I cal it *Nashes Lenten-stufte*, as well for it was most of my study the last Lent, as that we vse so to term any fish that takes salt, of which the Red Herring is one the aptest. (3:151)

Nashe's derision suggests that this "scabbed scald"—probably one of Nashe's critics or enemies—has made an incorrect assumption about his motivation. This rationale for the pamphlet's genesis is further subverted by Nashe's use of the subjunctive: "if it were so," and "were not that honest dealing?" Finally, the reader who finds this other speaker credible is treated to the scathing sobriquets "Ninnihammer" and "Nickneacaue." A "ninnihammer" is a "block-head," and a "nickneacaue" is apparently one of Nashe's superlative neologisms suggesting something like "blockheadest."<sup>12</sup> By the time Nashe features the "Red Herring," its veracity as the object of encomia has been corrupted by the context. Although Henry S. Turner has rightly observed that Nashe's "account rather reflects the pique of an exile out of favor,"<sup>13</sup> modern readers have yet to recognize the author's vitriolic censure of Yarmouth's excessive wealth in contrast to her "moath-eaten" neighbours (3:174).

Our failure to recognize the subtext of censure in *Lenten Stufte* is the mark of Nashe's success as a diversionary tactician. One of Nashe's favourite moves is *occupatio*; in other words, he delights in repeatedly telling readers what he is *not* doing:

12. *Oxford English Dictionary*, OED Online (December 2013), s.v. "ninnihammer, n."

13. Henry S. Turner, "Nashe's Red Herring: Epistemologies of the Commodity in "Lenten Stufte" (1599)," *ELH* 68, no. 3 (2001), p. 542.

Here I could breake out into a boundlesse race of oratory, in shrill trumpetting and concelebrating the royall magnificence of her gouvernement, that for state and strict ciuill ordering scant admitteth any riuals: but I feare it would be a theame displeasent to the graue modesty of the discreet present magistrates; and therefore consultiuely I ouerslip it [...] [to] acquaint you with the notable immunities, franchises, priuileges she is endowed with beyond all her confiners, by the discentine line of kings from the conquest. (3:158–59)

Refusing to offer praise, Nashe states that he could concelebrate Yarmouth, but he will not. Ostensibly, Nashe “overslip[s],” or omits, his “concelebration” of “royal magnificence” because it would not please the “graue modesty” of the “discreet present magistrates.” But Nashe protests too much as he repeats the near synonyms “grave,” “modest,” and “discreet” to describe the current Crown officials. This repetition suggests that these magistrates would like nothing better than the fanfare of praise that Nashe ironically withholds. Moreover, Nashe’s choice of the word “concelebrating” projects the idea of the priesthood onto the magistrates to suggest that they are like young priests and newly ordained.<sup>14</sup> In the context of the Protestant Reformation, this cynical truth conveys an undertone of sedition that reverberates throughout this passage and the larger work. Finally, Nashe offers a chronicle of Yarmouth’s “notable immunities,” “franchises,” and “priuileges” that sound like praise; yet as Nashe leads us through this “discentine” line of kings, he emphasizes how Yarmouth’s fishing liberties have been dispersed arbitrarily and at the expense of neighbouring towns.

As Turner and R. C. L. Sgroi have established, Nashe’s chronicle traces a history of piscatorial politics in Yarmouth.<sup>15</sup> However, closer examination casts suspicion on his treatment of the Crown itself. Implying that William the Conqueror was the first to give Yarmouth her “priuileges,” Nashe’s description of King John’s extension of her “liberties” sets a queasy tone for the monarchs that follow:

King *Iohn*, to comply and keep consort with his auncestors in furthring of this new water-worke, in the ninth yeare of the engirting his annoynted

14. OED, s.v. “concelebration, n.”

15. Turner, pp. 529–61; R. C. L. Sgroi, “Piscatorial Politics Revisited: The Language of Economic Debate and the Evolution of Fishing Policy in Elizabethan England,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 35, no. 1 (2003), pp. 1–24.

browes with the refulgent Ophir circle, and Anno 1209., set a fresh glosse vppon it, of the towne or free burrough of Yarmouth, and furnisht it with many substantial priuiledges and liberties, to haue and to holde the same of him and his race for fifty fiue pound yearly. (3:163)

Ronald B. McKerrow persuasively argues that the sources for this passage are Leland's *Collectanea* and Henry Manship's chronicle of Great Yarmouth, but these texts include only the mention of dates and liberties allocated to Yarmouth (4:381–82).<sup>16</sup> Nashe invents the details, and his lavish description of King John's ascension as "the engirting his annoynted browes with the refulgent Ophir circle" in the same sentence as the £55 fee per annum of "priuiledges and liberties" is suspect.

Arguably, Nashe raises his diction to observe the rhetorical decorum expected when speaking of kings, but in the context of King John's reputation for despotism, his hyperbolic adjectives parody the elevated diction associated with kingship. Few, if any, English chroniclers present a favourable portrait of King John. For example, Manship parenthetically comments that John was "in his reign very disastrous."<sup>17</sup> Raphael Holinshed's discussion is more comprehensive and even-handed than Manship's, yet he still reproaches John for making decisions in "heate and furie," and criticizes him for "banketting" and passing time "in pleasure with the queene his wife, to the great greefe of his lords" during the tempestuous winter of 1203.<sup>18</sup> Holinshed additionally reflects that John's reign may have been more successful had he "not sought with the spoile of his owne people to please the imaginations of his ill affected mind."<sup>19</sup> Nashe's ostensible

16. Thomas Hearne reprinted Leland's *Collectanea* in 1770. McKerrow establishes Hearne's text as a reprint of the "Chronographical Latine table, which they haue hanging vp in their Guild hall" (see vol. 3, p. 161; McKerrow, vol. 4, p. 372). The final "Manship" manuscript was edited by C. J. Palmer and printed in 1847. However, McKerrow correctly claims that "Nashe's description corresponds far more closely to [Manship] than to Hearne's transcript of the Table. Not only does this manuscript add a number of details which are used by Nashe, but the coincidence of language is so striking that there can be [...] no doubt that the two accounts are very closely related" (vol. 4, p. 373).

17. Henry Manship, *The History of Great Yarmouth*, ed. Charles John Palmer (Great Yarmouth: L. A. Meall / London: J. R. Smith, 1854), p. 2, to accessed through the Harvard University Library, June 11, 2011, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.FIG:005948439>.

18. Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 6 vols. (London: J. Jonson, et. al., 1807 / New York: AMS Press, 1965), vol. 2, pp. 286–87.

19. Holinshed, p. 337.



encomium of John's reign is further corrupt if we read William Shakespeare's 1596 play *The Life and Death of King John* as a barometer of Elizabethan attitudes toward the monarch.<sup>20</sup> Shakespeare represents John as a tyrant responsible for his own tragedy. Nashe's oblique criticism of King John is not personal, but political; and it portends his censure of the monarchs that follow.

Nashe emphasizes inconsistent adjudication of Crown equity in his narration of Henry III's self-contradictory rulings regarding Yarmouth's deadly acts of piracy in 1240. Here, Yarmouth seamen violently attack neighbouring vessels:

In a sea battell her shippes and men conflicted the cinque ports, and therein so laid about them that they burnt, tooke, and spoyled the most of them, whereof such of them as were sure flights...ranne crying and complayning to King *Henry* the second; who [...] set a fine of a thousand pound on the Yarmouth mens heads for that offence, which fine in the tenth of his reigne hee dispenc't with and pardoned. (3:163–64)<sup>21</sup>

Nashe's description of Yarmouth's piracy is brutal, and he suggests that the "offence" should have been punished. However, by including Henry III's retraction of Yarmouth's sentence, he tacitly criticizes the Crown's erratic execution of reward and punishment.

Nashe's discussion of Yarmouth's arbitrary allocation of privileges by King John and Henry III culminates in Edward III's mandate giving the town permission to charge a toll for all fish brought into her harbour.<sup>22</sup> Also awarding Yarmouth control of the Kirtley Road (the main route from the harbour to the countryside), Edward's legislation effectively granted Yarmouth a monopoly on the Norfolk coast fishing industry. Neighbouring towns, notably

20. William Shakespeare. *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), pp. 425–52.

21. Curiously, neither McKerrow nor Nashe's more recent editor, J. B. Steane, has caught Nashe's mistake in this history; see Steane's Introduction to *Thomas Nashe: The Unfortunate Traveller and Other Works* (London: Penguin Books, 1985). "Henry the second" does not follow King John; Henry III does. Whether this is Nashe's error or a compositor's we cannot know, but I point to it because the historical facts Nashe associates with "Henry the second" tie instead to Henry III's reign. See also Manship, p. 68. The "Cinque Ports" is an alliance of English coastal towns: Hastings, New Romney, Hythe, Dover, and Sandwich.

22. Turner, p. 18.

Lowestoft, began what would be centuries of petitioning the Crown for relief from Yarmouth's tolls. Nashe emphasizes the disproportionate distribution of political liberties by contrasting Yarmouth's superfluous wealth to the dilapidation that characterizes her neighbouring towns:

It were to be wished that other coasters were so industrious as the Yarmouth, in winning the treasure of fish out of those profundities[;] [...] it would be as plentifull a world as when Abbies stooede; and now, if there be any plentifull world, it is in Yarmouth. Her sumptuous porches and garnisht buildings are such as no port Towne in our Brittish circumference [...] may suitably stake with. (3:171)

Nashe's double-edged rhetoric cuts deeply into the notion that Yarmouth's "industry," or labour, had much to do with the town's success. "Winning the treasure of fish" is not a result of hard work, but the luck of the monarch's favour. Nashe's irony resounds in the "plentifull world" that existed "when Abbies stooede." Of course, Nashe exploits stereotypes of Catholic monks, notorious then for great wealth in contrast to the poverty of surrounding neighbours. But the real enmity is between Yarmouth and Lowestoft. Nashe describes these towns "at wrig wrag," sucking "from their mothers teates serpentine hatred from one another" (3:195). The image of these rival towns nursing "serpentine hatred" from infancy decisively strips the gloss of praise from Yarmouth when we remember that Nashe hails from Lowestoft. Edward III's charter remains at the crux of this acrimony, and for the majority of Elizabeth's reign, Lowestoft and her neighbours will petition the Crown for relief from Yarmouth's domination in vain.

Following his overview of Edward III's legislation, Nashe traces the Crown's continued generosity to Yarmouth through Henry V, Henry VI, Edward IV, Henry VII, and Henry VIII before returning readers to contemporary Elizabethan England: "His daughters Queene Mary and our *Chara deum soboles*, Queene Elizabeth, haue not withred vp their handes in signing and subscribing to their requests, but our virgin rectoresse most of al hath shoured downe her bounty vpon them, graunting them greater graunts then euer they had" (3:165). Nashe's censorious tone dominates his narrative. Neither Mary nor Elizabeth "withered vp their hands" offering aid to Yarmouth's neighbours. Instead, Elizabeth allocates Yarmouth's fishing guild "greater graunts then euer

they had.” “If it were so” that Nashe’s *Lenten Stuffe* is purely encomiastic, then his representation of Elizabeth’s generosity could be read as proper homage to his queen. But this pamphlet is titled *Lenten Stuffe*. Therefore, these “greater graunts” likely refer to the most controversial legislation of the fishing industry during Elizabeth’s reign: the implementation of Wednesday fish days, or “political Lent.”

Political Lent is at the heart of a 1563 statute put forth to raise money to restore the navy under the guise of shoring up England’s fishing industry. The Crown’s logic was that by increasing the demand for fish, it could raise much-needed funds for new ships. Sgroi wryly observes that “a major consequence of the 1563 act was to raise the profile of fishing by forcing people to consume fish for their country even if they would no longer observe fish days for conscience.”<sup>23</sup> Yet Sgroi misses Nashe’s dark joke when she comments on the propaganda war surrounding political Lent, and claims Nashe “weighed in, on Yarmouth’s side” in *Lenten Stuffe*.<sup>24</sup> Any sense that *Lenten Stuffe* represents the “celebration of the success of the herring industry at Yarmouth” is consistently subverted by the text itself.<sup>25</sup> In the context of the subjective rulings of King John, Henry III, and Edward III, Elizabeth’s approval of “political Lent” epitomizes the corruption of both law and religion by the Crown that is, for Nashe, writ large.

However vexed Nashe’s political attitudes are, he is self-consciously aware of the Crown’s power. In varying degrees throughout *Lenten Stuffe* we find him carefully dispersing his own authority and assuming rhetorical disguises. For example, Nashe veils his criticism of “Crowners” in chorography:

The liberties of it on the fresh water one way, as namely from Yarmouth to S. Toolies in Beckles water, are ten mile, and from Yarmouth to Hardlie crosse another way, ten mile, and conclusiuely, from Yarmouth to Waybridge in the narrow North water tenne mile[...] and if any drowne themselues in them, their Crowners sit vpon them. (3:166–67)

Nashe criticizes “Crowners” for having the audacity to “sit vpon”—to posthumously suppress—individuals who happen to drown in the “wrong” place:

23. Sgroi, p. 9.

24. Sgroi, p. 21.

25. Sgroi, p. 21.

Yarmouth. Nashe further undercuts Yarmouth, and by extension, the Crown, in his explication of the conditions under which he began this pamphlet: “I had a crotchet in my head, here to [...] run astray thorowout all the coast townes of England, digging vp their dilapidations [...] not for any loue or hatred I beare | them, but that I would not be snibd, or haue it cast in my dishe that therefore I prayse Yarmouth so rantantingly” (3:167). From the context of the Crown’s disproportionate allocation of “liberties,” Nashe outlines the stark contrast between Yarmouth and the rotten dilapidation of the nearby coastal towns, among which, of course, is Lowestoft. Nashe again derails his praise by qualifying it with the adverb “rantantingly.” Paula Blank observes that here Nashe “exposes the satirical nature of his own treatise [...] If he praises Yarmouth, he does so ‘rantantingly’—in an exaggerated, entirely disproportionate manner.”<sup>26</sup> At the same time, Nashe distances the text from encomium by declaring that he does not want such “rantanting” praise cast in his dish. Lastly, if we haven’t gotten the joke yet, he directly reminds us that he is from “*Leystofe*, in which bee it knowne to all men that I was born,” no doubt sucking hatred of Yarmouth from his mother’s teat (3:205). Nashe’s joke is a dark one, and as we will see in the context of the *Ile of Dogs* scandal and Erasmus’s “A Fish Diet,” it will grow darker yet.

### “Leude and Mutynous Behavior”

Nashe’s loyalty to Lowestoft is one source of motivation for this treatise detailing the Crown’s legislative inequities. But his experience at the hands of Elizabeth’s Privy Council in 1597 following his contribution to *Ile of Dogs* also calls attention to the subtext of injustice running throughout *Lenten Stuffe*. On August 15, 1597, Privy Council minutes record the arrest of Nashe’s co-author of *Ile of Dogs*, Ben Jonson, and players Robert Shaa and Gabriel Spencer, for their participation in a play “contanyng very seditious and sclanderous matter.”<sup>27</sup>

26. Paula Blank, *Broken English: Dialects and the Politics of Language in Renaissance Writings* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 76.

27. Alice Lyle Scoufos cites the *Ile of Dogs* incident as preceding the July 28 ban on theatres, in “Nashe, Jonson, and the Oldcastle Problem,” *Modern Philology* 65, no. 4 (1968), pp. 307–24. Brian Vickers also posits July 1597 as the time when “some of those responsible were sent to prison, along with the playwright Ben Jonson”; see his “Incomplete Shakespeare: Or, Denying Coauthorship in 1 Henry VII,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2007), pp. 311–52, p. 316. However, according to E. K. Chambers’s publication of the Privy Council transcripts in *The Elizabethan Stage*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), the correct dates are as I present them.

Hadfield notes that “the lost play clearly must have insulted many of the great and good, playing on the Isles of Dogs as the island where her queen kept her hounds as the court.”<sup>28</sup> Still, the Privy Council’s aggressive closure of the *Ile of Dogs* is irregular, partly because there appears to have been no follow-through searching out the remaining participants, and also because it was the only play singled out following the July 28 blanket ban on London theatre productions.<sup>29</sup> William Ingram has offered a persuasive argument that seditious content was not the cause of the *Ile of Dogs*’s closure. Instead, Ingram suggests that the Privy Council was more interested in the Swan Theatre’s proprietor, Francis Langley, and his involvement with a stolen 26.5 carat diamond. Later in this section, I will put pressure on Nashe’s invocation of a “Cornish diamond” that may, in small part, support Ingram’s argument. Although the theatres were back in business within seven months, and Nashe’s colleagues were released from prison after seven weeks, Nashe claims to have been subjected to two years of exile and forced unemployment, which, as he explains, “is as great a maim to any mans hapinesse as can bee feared from the hands of miserie; or the deepe pit of dispartie wherinto I was falne, beyond my greatest friendes reach to recouer mee” (3:153). Overall, he suggests that his punishment does not fit his alleged crime.

Because Nashe’s exile leads to “misery and despair,” his opening remarks about his role in *Ile of Dogs* have often been read as sincere. Most critics have joined Brian Vickers to take Nashe’s “self-exculpating” remarks at face value.<sup>30</sup>

The strange turning of the *Ile of Dogs* fro[m] a commedie to a tragedie two summers past, with the trouble-some stir which hapned about it, is a general rumour that hath filled all England [...] That infortunate imperfit Embrion of my idel houres, the *Ile of Dogs* before mentioned, breeding vnto me such bitter throwes in the teaming as it did...I was so terrified with my owne encrease (like a woman long traailing to bee deliuered of a monster) that it was no sooner borne but I was glad to run from it. (3:153–54)

28. Hadfield, p. 76.

29. Causes cited for the July 28 closing of the theatres are broad-ranging and mainly centred on plague, crime, idleness, and vagrancy. See “Privy Council Minute, 28 July 1597,” from *Remembrancia*, ii, 171, quoted in Chambers, p. 321.

30. Vickers, p. 316.

Nashe's contextualization of the *Ile of Dogs* with his vivid portrayal of monstrous reproduction accrues connotations of Edmund Spenser's ink-spewing Error in book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>31</sup> There is general agreement that on one important level of Spenser's allegory, Error is emblematic of the spewing of sedition and heresy so recently (in the sixteenth century) facilitated by the advent of print culture. It follows that Nashe's self-juxtaposition with Spenser's beast suggests that he repents his "error" of judgment in the context of *Ile of Dogs*. But repentance does *not* follow. In fact, his striking image of a Spenserian monstrosity is simultaneously undermined by the attached marginal note. Here, Nashe admits writing the induction and first act, but a cry of injustice resounds in the remainder of his explication: "the other foure acts without my consent, or the least guesse of my drift or scope, by the players were supplied, which bred both their trouble and mine to" (3:154). Displacing responsibility for "breeding" onto the players, Nashe suggests they were in "errour," not he.<sup>32</sup>

Nashe's punitive silencing is compounded by the Crown's tacit authorization for Nashe's enemies to publicly slander him, to "nibble about his fame like a miller's thumb" (3:153). For example, Richard Lichfield takes advantage of the opportunity to safely confute Nashe's defamation of his character in the epistle to *Have With You to Saffron Walden* with his mean-spirited 1597 pamphlet, *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe*. Lichfield clearly believes that his cruel payback will go uncontested; he writes of Nashe following the *Ile of Dogs* incident: "so thou art suffered to be quiet [...] thus thou art quite put downe."<sup>33</sup> Lichfield obviously capitalizes on "the machinery of suppression

31. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche (London: Penguin, 1978), book 1, p. 20.

32. Hadfield has provocatively argued these opening postures of humiliation paradoxically reveal Nashe's momentous accomplishment: rumours of his work have "filled all England." Hadfield may also be the first to correctly acknowledge that Nashe exploits his exiled state to "utter serious truths about England," but his discussion focuses primarily on Nashe's representation of then-current English imperialism, specifically in the context of works like Richard Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations*. As Matthew Day has also noted, Hakluyt's friendship with Nashe's notorious enemy Gabriel Harvey does make him a target throughout this work. But it is this essay's goal to elicit Nashe's equally serious criticism of the Crown's history of unjust adjudication that certainly includes his personal experiences following the *Ile of Dogs*. See Hadfield, p. 77.

33. [Richard Lichfield], *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe, Gentleman, by the High-Tituled Patron Don Richardo de Medico Campo, Barber-Surgeon to Trinity College in Cambridge* (London: Printed by E. Allde for Phillip Scarlet, 1597). EEBO editors prefer to list Gabriel Harvey as the author of *The Trimming*, but

[that] rolled into action” against Nashe.<sup>34</sup> However, Nashe’s epistle suggests he has not only been “put downe” by Lichfield, but also by “the silliest millers thumbe.” Scoufos and Nicholl have both correctly followed a chain of fishy puns from the “millers thumb” through the goby, cobbo, and cob fishes to Lord William Cobham, Lord Chamberlain from August 1596 through March 1597, and claim he is Nashe’s “chief enemy in the affair.”<sup>35</sup> But any suggestion that Cobham was directly involved in the Privy Council’s July 28, 1597 decision to close the theatres of London, or the injunction filed against *Ile of Dogs* on August 15, is impossible; Cobham died in March of that year. Evidence suggests Nashe is sincere when he declaratively defers individual lambasting until his next pamphlet, “the *Barbers warming panne*,” promised to Lichfield as payback for *The Trimming* (3:153). Although Nashe’s allusions to Cobham may masquerade as personal satire, close examination reveals that Cobham functions as a red herring. Uninterested in Cobham personally, Nashe invokes him primarily to exploit the Cobham family’s historical role in Crown politics and continue his interrogation of the Crown’s arbitrary mandates of justice.<sup>36</sup>

When Nashe refers to the Cobham family’s *Genethliaca*, or genealogy, as “dropping” from his “inckhorne,” he takes advantage of another opportunity to criticize the Crown’s arbitrary disbursements of liberties (3:167). The Cobham family owes its peerage and power to their ancestor William the Conqueror’s generosity. By glossing the Cobhams’ inheritance of the “syluer oare of barony” and the lands to accompany it, Nashe draws an analogy back to Yarmouth, again suggesting that “winning the treasure” is not a reward for service, but a matter of luck, or, in the Cobhams’ case, the accident of birth (3:167 and 171).

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I contend that Lichfield is, in fact, responsible for this pamphlet. Although Lichfield sides with Gabriel Harvey in his attack on Nashe, there is no reason to believe they are one and the same.

34. Nicholl, p. 243.

35. Nicholl, p. 252.

36. Scoufos offers an excellent discussion of the literary trend, famously evinced in Shakespeare in *Henry IV*, of juxtaposing images of the Lollard knight Sir John Oldcastle (drawn from Holinshed’s *Chronicles* and John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*) and his descendant, William Brooke, seventh Lord Cobham. Scoufos also argues that Nashe personally satirizes Lord Cobham after being “provoked, it would seem, by the harsh treatment meted out to [Nashe and Jonson] for their ‘seditious’ play, *The Isle of Dogs*” (p. 310). Yet Cobham’s death subverts such a claim. Nashe more likely exploits the then-current fashion of satirizing the Cobham family in order to tie them back to their historical association with the Cinque Ports and continue his critique of arbitrary legislation in the context of fishing rights.

Again deploying *occupatio* to underscore how he does *not* describe the exploits of William the Conqueror, Nashe extends his satire to implicate the Crown's historical authority:

To shun spight I smothered these dribblements, & refrained to descant how *William* the Conqueror, hauing heard the prouerbe of Kent and Christendome, thought he had woonne a countrey as good as all Christendome when he was enfeofed of Kent [...] a whole moneths minde of reuoluing meditation I raueling out therein, (as raueling out signifies *Penelopes telam retexture*, the vnweauing of a webbe before wouen and contexted :) It pities me, it pities me, that in cutting of so faire a diamond of Yarmouth, I haue not a casket of dusky Cornish diamonds by me, and a boxe of muddy foiles, the better to set it forth. (3:167–68)

Nashe's contextualization of the first Norman King of England with his own inky "dribblements" parodies heroic chronicles like Holinshed's that highlight William's ferocity, as well as his thoughtful consideration of the people he brought under his rule.<sup>37</sup> Comically impugning his own efficacy in the context of his subject, Nashe concurrently undermines the seminal potency of patrilineal authority through which the Cobhams derive their power. Conflating the Cobhams with their ancestry, Nashe tacitly leverages the association into contemporary criticism at the same time as he rhetorically "unweaves" it. By burying his concatenation of the Cobhams with Crown authority in the depths of historical chronicle, Nashe creates a diversion to obscure the fact that ire, not admiration, informs this passage. Finally, Nashe's juxtaposition of the allusions to Cobham's ancestry in the context of "dusky Cornish diamonds" augments his earlier cry of injustice regarding his punishment following *Ile of Dogs*.

Nashe's wish for "Cornish diamonds" to portray "so faire a diamond of Yarmouth" further deconstructs praise. McKerrow suggests that the reference is to counterfeit diamonds and might refer to "the fraudulent sale of Bristow diamonds set in gold for genuine ones" (4:385). Juxtaposing supposedly counterfeit diamonds and "muddy foiles" as tools to set forth this "diamond" of Yarmouth, Nashe sullies any sense of encomia. Simultaneously, Nashe's

37. See Holinshed, vol. 2, pp. 1–26.



mention of “Cornish diamonds,” may also return his contemptuous representation of Crown authority to the then-present tense. Ingram offers a scenario that could help explain Nashe’s sense of injustice: “Somewhere in 1594 a diamond, which had gone astray from the loot of a Spanish vessel, was shown in Finsbury Fields by a mariner to certain goldsmiths, who said that they had met him by chance at a play in the Theatre at Shoreditch.”<sup>38</sup> The theatre in question is The Swan where Langley produced *Ile of Dogs*. Ingram observes that Langley is not mentioned in the Public Record Office documents in 1597 for being involved in a seditious play, but instead because of this missing diamond. Cobham believed Langley had possession of the diamond and informed his son-in-law, Robert Cecil. Ingram suggests that Cecil put pressure on Langley to surrender the diamond by singling out the Swan’s production of *Ile of Dogs* for immediate closure. According to the Privy Council documents, no other individual play, players, or playwrights were targeted under the broad July 28 order to close the theatres. Nashe’s comparison of Yarmouth to a “duskie Cornish diamond” might suggest his awareness of the scandal, and knowledge of the Crown’s motivation to treat the *Ile of Dogs* players more aggressively than their colleagues.<sup>39</sup>

From the context of Nashe’s recollections of the *Ile of Dogs* incident, his sardonic comment toward the end of *Lenten Stuffe* is provocative: “to draw on hounds to a sent, to a redde herring skinne there is nothing comparable” (3:221). If readers have not yet realized that Nashe’s joke of a scholar baiting his hook with a saltwater herring to triumphantly “catch” it from the (freshwater) river Cam is on us, by now the red herring’s emblematic representation of diversion is unequivocally clear. The red herring draws “hounds to a sent” while simultaneously embodying the protean paradox of the literal and figurative “stuff” of Lent; the fish smells.<sup>40</sup> “Stuffe”—in this vaporous, comedic sense—functions importantly for Nashe as a defensive posture.<sup>41</sup> Rhetorically, the red herring comically diverts readers from recognizing Nashe’s underlying vituperation, even as his invoca-

38. Chambers, vol. 2, pp. 396–97.

39. Arguably, Langley’s supposed involvement with the diamond scandal may have been a red herring, or an excuse to specifically persecute the *Ile of Dogs* playmakers, but even a hint of sedition would have been sufficient to catch the attention of Crown censors.

40. Sixteenth-century connotations of “stuffe” also include “hot air bath” and “vapors.” (*OED*, s.v. “stuffe, n. 2”).

41. Of Erasmus’s and Nashe’s use of comedy to forestall social and political criticism, Walter J. Kaiser explains that it was “dangerous to be more explicit” and “while nothing is sillier than to treat serious

tion of "hounds" points back to the *Ile of Dogs*. Nashe extends the herring's fluid significance to continue his condemnation of arbitrary Crown authority in the context of his just-so story about how the white herring turns red and is subsequently crowned and canonized. Raising the pitch of his invective by eliding the "hounds" so easily seduced by the scent of a red herring with a king, a pope, and his prelates, Nashe represents their collective authority as a consummate joke.

### "The Stench of Fish"

Nashe transposes the historical and topical strains of Crown inequity running through *Lenten Stuffe* into the larger tension between human and divine authority through his invocations of Erasmus's *Praise of Folly* and "A Fish Diet."<sup>42</sup> Specifically, Nashe's allusion to *Folly* undermines the authority of kings. And, through subsequent nods to "A Fish Diet," Nashe translates Erasmus's anxiety surrounding the Church's interpretation of God's laws into a burlesque of Crown authority. Although a strictly biblical reading of this portion of *Lenten Stuffe* would be fruitful, this section examines Nashe's representations of divinity only insofar as it is embodied by the English Crown. Nashe's development of the story of a Yarmouth fishmonger and his "miraculous" red herring transforms his chronicle into a blasphemous allegory of English Reform. Nashe's exploitation of Erasmian irony contributes to his ultimate portrayal of the Crown as an epitome of caprice.

Nashe establishes his indebtedness to *Folly* immediately in his dedicatory epistle to "his worthie good patron, Lustie Humfrey" (3:147).<sup>43</sup> Humfrey's surname is "King," and Nashe gives him a rhetorical second crown by calling him "King of Tobacconists *hic & ubique*" (3:147). King's double crowning reads more like double clowning as Nashe regales us with tavern tattle and descriptions of his patron's malodorous feet (3:148). But then the author's tone shifts when he "consecrates" this work to King's "capering humor alone" (3:149). The opposition between Nashe's choice of "consecrate" and "capering" informs the

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things triflingly, nothing is more graceful than to treat trifling things in such a way that you seem to be less than trifling." *Praisers of Folly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 28.

42. In his study of Nashe's reading, McKerrow comments that whether or not Nashe read Erasmus's *Colloquia Familiaria* in school, "the *Colloquies* of Erasmus [are] almost certainly among the books which would be known to Nashe" (vol. 5, pp. 12–13).

43. See McKerrow, vol 5, p. 377.

following explication of the dedication: "A King thou art by name and a King of good fellowshipped by nature, whereby I [n]ominate this Encomion of the king of fishes was predestinate to thee from thy swaddling clothes" (3:149).

Nashe's use of "predestinate" here works two ways. In one sense, he mocks the Calvinist theory of predestination by coupling it with King's absurd fate as the "King of Tobacconists." But Nashe also foreshadows the intertextual interrogation of patrilineal authority suggested by his satire of the Cobham family's ancestry as he leads us through the red herring's ascendance to monarchy. Humfrey King was foreordained to be a king through the same kind of wordplay Erasmus employs when he dedicates his *Morae* to More. Erasmus explains in his dedicatory epistle, "first, of course, your family name of More prompted me; which comes as near to the word for folly as you are far from the meaning of it."<sup>44</sup> Following Nashe's logic, King was predestined to be a king in the context of Nashe's intertextual juxtaposition with his real/fictional forerunner, Sir Thomas More/Folly.<sup>45</sup> That is to say, King is no more predestined to be a "King" than More is to be foolish. King's kingship and More's folly are both due to the "accident" of double entendre that Nashe and Erasmus exploit for the sake of (skeptical) comedy.

Nashe's allusion to *Praise of Folly* also imbues King, and the herring's allegorical representation of the English monarchy that follows, with the derisive connotations Folly attributes to "real" kings:

Kings leave all these concerns to the gods [...]. They believe they have played the part of a sovereign to the hilt if they diligently go hunting, feed some fine horses, sell dignities and offices at a profit to themselves, and daily devise new measures by which to draw away the wealth of citizens and sweep it into their own exchequer.<sup>46</sup>

At the heart of Folly's satirical attitude towards kings is the belief that they are so "diligent" in their pursuit of pleasure that they exploit their authority for

44. Erasmus, *Folly*, p. 1.

45. As Margaret Ferguson deftly points out, Nashe uses the same rhetorical formula in *The Unfortunate Traveller*: "the phrase 'newes of the maker' exploits the same ambiguity of the genitive that Erasmus exploits in the title *Encomiaum Moriae*, suggesting that Folly and her rhetoric will be both the subject and the object of the oration," in "Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*: The 'Newes of the Maker' Game," *ELR* 11, no. 2 (1981), pp. 165–82.

46. Erasmus, *Folly*, p. 95.

personal gain at the expense of their subjects. In *Lenten Stuffle*, Folly's observations are directly analogous to Nashe's representation of Yarmouth's "liberties" in contrast to her neighbours. The overarching effect of Nashe's prefatory invocation of Folly impregnates the authority of both his historical and his piscine kings with skepticism.

Nashe casts additional suspicion on Humfrey King, and the kings who follow, through the deceptively innocuous description of King's stench: "the chamber is not ridde of the smell of his feet" (3:148). In Nashe's text, stench becomes a metonymy for corruption in the context of both his fetid allegory of the rise of the red herring to monarchy and his allusions to Erasmus's "A Fish Diet." Nashe's piscine allegory begins with his description of a Yarmouth fisherman, who "hauing drawne so many herrings hee wist not what to do withal, hung the residue that he could not sel nor spe[n]d in his shed (3:204). Because of the cold, the fisherman leaves a hot fire burning in the shed, and when he returns, "his herrings, which were as white as whales bone when hee hung them vp, nowe lookt as red as lobster" (3:204). Witnessing the herrings' metamorphosis, the fisherman and his wife "fell down on their knees and blessed themselus, & cride, a miracle, a miracle" (3:204). Literally, Nashe explains how the white herring is accidentally smoked and becomes red. Yet allegorically, and in the context of *Lenten Stuffle's* interest in English chronicle history, Nashe's emphasis on the white/red binary the herring embodies may nod to the English civil wars between the York and Lancastrian dynasties.

In Nashe's fiction, the herring's transformation through the smoking process does not change its essence. The fish remains both white and red, associatively recalling the merging of the York and Lancastrian dynasties with Henry VII's victory, and the succession of the Tudor monarchy up to Elizabeth. But Nashe metaphorically translates this victory as a miraculous accident: the herringman left his fish in a hot shed for too long. Although wars have often been won or lost by happenstance, Nashe's emphasis on the role of accident in the herring's metamorphosis, rather than the fisherman's skillful smoking, informs Nashe's continuing depictions of the arbitrary nature of Crown authority.

Through the "miraculous" herring's encounters with the King of England, and later the Pope, it becomes metaphorically invested with idolatry and superstition. Nashe exploits these connotations to expose the capriciousness of Crown authority as the Yarmouth fishmonger presents the red herring to the English King: "The King was as superstitious in worshipping those miraculous

herrings as the fisherman, licenced him to carry the[m] vp & downe the realme for strange monsters, giuing to Cerdek sands (the birth place of such monstrosities) many priuileges” (3:205). Like the historical Yarmouth fishermen, Nashe’s fictional Yarmouth, the “Cerdek sands,” and his piscator are granted “liberties” at the King’s discretion. By pointing to Yarmouth as the birthplace of monstrosity, Nashe fuses history and fiction to obliterate praise.

From this context, Nashe’s representation of a superstitious king worshipping a miraculous red herring can be interpreted as a loyal (to Elizabeth) Protestant rendering of a naive, idol-worshipping Catholic predecessor. Indeed, this scene of an English red herring king celebrated by the Catholic Church conjures Elizabeth’s sister, Queen Mary. Since Henry VIII created the Church of England (famously motivated by self-interest), English subjects have been forced to follow the monarch’s religion through multiple iterations of Christianity. Although Nashe’s allusion to Mary is likely a diversionary tactic designed to keep his distance from Elizabethan authorities, it also contributes to Nashe’s implicit criticism of the erratic trajectory of the English Reformation. On one level of interpretation, he exploits Catholicism for comedy’s sake: Nashe’s contemporary readers might laugh at their countrymen who also worship the “idol” of the red herring, and who pay the Yarmouth fisherman for the privilege. But here, as in the herring’s continued adventures with the Pope, Catholicism itself functions as a red herring. Nashe’s burlesque of Catholic England ironically capitalizes on the fact that sixteenth-century English Protestants are *supposed* to joke at the expense of those of the “old faith.” Yet on another level, Nashe’s representation of arbitrary adjudication by both historical and fictional English kings points to the pharisaical nature of Crown authority regardless of religion.

Nashe advances his allegory of the red herring in the context of Erasmus’s “A Fish Diet” to chronicle how kingly folly extends beyond capricious generosity toward (Yarmouth) fishermen to the arbitrary dispensation of Lenten laws. After the Yarmouth herringman profits from his “liberties” and wears “his monsters stale throughout England,” he travels to Rome and shows his “miraculous” fish to the Pope. Like the English king, the pontiff also worships the herring, including his stench: “I conceyted no lesse, sayde the Pope, for lesse than a king he could not be, that had so strong a sent, and if his breath be so strong, what is he hymself?” (3:208). The Pope follows Nashe’s prefatory logic metonymically linking stench and kings, established in his dedication to Humfrey King.

But Nashe also reminds us of the adjunct connotations of corruption through his allusion to "A Fish Diet." Discussing the "stench of fish," Erasmus's Butcher argues that rotten meat is "sheer perfume" by comparison.<sup>47</sup> Erasmus finds "the stench of fish" disgusting; he hates fish so much he received a dispensation from the Pope to eat meat on fasting days.<sup>48</sup> Importantly for Erasmus and Nashe, this "stench" also represents the human corruption of divine will articulated by the fasting laws laid down by Church and Crown. In the context that Nashe establishes, the English Crown epitomizes both inconstancy and the abuse of power. These qualities inform both Erasmus's and Nashe's larger anxieties about the administration of divine authority by man.

Underneath the fiction of the Butcher and the Fishmonger, Erasmus levels ironic criticism at the economic expediency that prompts the institution of fast days in "A Fish Diet." Erasmus frames his colloquy as a joke wherein the Butcher tells the Fishmonger that the Pope has lifted the regulations on fasting days; the implication is that the meat industry will now flourish at the expense of fishermen.<sup>49</sup> Because fish is not considered nutritious, consumption is permitted throughout the calendar year. Thus, papal- and Crown-instituted fasting days are a boon to both the fishing industry and the presiding authority collecting taxes. Following Erasmus, Nashe aligns his subtext with the Butcher's in his debate with the Fishmonger, who bears a striking resemblance to Nashe's portrayal of the Yarmouth fisherman. Ironically, Erasmus's Fishmonger grounds his argument favouring fast days in his existing privilege, claiming that the "wisdom of princes and prelates permits us to sell our wares the year round, when you must observe fasts."<sup>50</sup> The Butcher recognizes the Fishmonger's fallacious reasoning and challenges him to defend his argument from the perspective of the Pope. Their Socratic exchange is lengthy, but throughout the Butcher exposes the Fishmonger's irrationality. For example, the Butcher asks how authority can maintain its integrity in the context of multiple interpreters and interpretations. The Fishmonger-as-Pope replies: "If the meaning generally

47. Erasmus, *Colloquies*, p. 316.

48. *The Epistles of Erasmus from his Earliest Letters to his Fifty-first Year*, ed. and trans. Francis Morgan Nichols (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), pp. 11–12. Erasmus also received dispensations for his illegitimate birth and for the wearing of priestly apparel. These dispensations indubitably contributed to his lifelong interrogation of the arbitrary nature of Church mandates. See Erasmus, *Epistles*, pp. 14, 29, 108.

49. Erasmus, *Colloquies*, p. 315.

50. Erasmus, *Colloquies*, p. 318.

accepted hasn't satisfied you, follow the authority of prelates. That's the safest course."<sup>51</sup> Of course, "prelates" are multiple; therefore, the Fishmonger's response does not "answer" the Butcher. Erasmus's Butcher further succeeds in tainting the authority of the (fictional) Pope with extreme skepticism by forcing him to admit that human translations of divine authority are often muddled by circumstance and self-interest.<sup>52</sup>

Nashe's fictional Pope returns the arbitrary authority represented by his Erasmian forerunner to English allegory by recalling Henry III's self-contradictory ruling regarding the Yarmouth pirates. In Nashe's allegory, the Pope's prelates rationalize the fish's stench by arguing that the smell is so strong, he must be a dead king and worshipped accordingly: "*Vna voce* in this splene to Pope *Vigilius* they ran, and craued that this king of fishes might first haue Christian buriall, next, that hee might haue masses sung for him, and last, that for a saint he would canonize him. Al these hee graunted, to bee ridde of his filthy redolence" (3:210). At first, the Pope worships the herring for his smell, but later reverses his decision when he can no longer bear the stench. The Pope's authorization of the herring's Christian burial, masses in his honour, and canonization has no basis whatsoever in canon law, but is instead solely motivated by his distaste for the dead fish's "filthy redolence." Nashe's continuing satire of Lenten "stuff" through the Pope's subsequent canonization of the red herring reiterates the arbitrary nature of the herring's piscatorial ascension by recalling the historical liberties granted the fishing "guilds" of its native Yarmouth:

See if you can finde out such a saint as saint Gildarde; which in honour of this guilded fish the Pope so ensainted: nor there hee rested and stopt, but in the mitigation of the very embers whereon he was sindged [...] hee ordained ember weekes in their memory, to be fasted euerlastingly. (3:211)

Canonizing the herring as "saint Gildarde," Nashe invokes a little-known Catholic saint for the apparent sake of punning on "gild," in the sense of golden riches, and the fishermen's "guilds" of Yarmouth. Nashe's subversive return to the subject of his encomium once more negates praise. Also, the Pope's absurd allocation of fasting weeks to honour a fish recalls the controversy of political Lent and keeps

51. Erasmus, *Colloquies*, p. 329.

52. Erasmus, *Colloquies*, pp. 326–42.

the focus of Nashe's criticism on the contemporary English Crown. Finally, the ridiculousness of this entire scenario translates papal and Crown authority into a joke which, for Nashe and his predecessor Erasmus, is serious business.

Nashe's red herring fundamentally embodies both rhetorical diversion and the thematic subtext he occludes: his attack on the arbitrary and unjust nature of the Crown's authority. Ironically, Nashe criticizes readers of his earlier works who have "fisht out such a deepe politique state meaning as if I had al the secrets of court or common-wealth at my fingers endes" (3:214). However, I would argue that, yet again, he protests too much. In *Lenten Stuffe*, the accrual of Crown criticism underlying Nashe's chronicle, autobiography, and allegory is submerged in comedy, but rises to the surface when we heed his admonition to look "into the text it selfe" (3:214). Moreover, Nashe's tone throughout conveys a sense that since he has already been punished for sedition, he may as well commit the crime.

Unfortunately, Nashe's punishment was not limited to his two years of exile following *Ile of Dogs*. Within six months of the publication of *Lenten Stuffe*, Archbishop Whitgift ordered "that all Nasshes bookes and Doctor Harveyes bookes be taken wheresoever they maye be founde, and that none of their bookes bee ever printed hereafter."<sup>53</sup> Whitgift's censorship is not limited to Nashe and Harvey. But I believe that Nashe's sustained interrogation of Crown authority in *Lenten Stuffe* and the subversion of praise embodied by the red herring certainly contributed to the "blanket suppression" of his works.<sup>54</sup> Although Nashe's rhetorical diversions have historically convinced modern readers that *Lenten Stuffe* "is what it claims to be," his biased chronicle of Crown inequity appears not to have escaped Elizabeth's chief censor.

By pushing past a critical history that dwells on Nashe's themelessness, we recognize that underneath the comedy of *Lenten Stuffe* lies a subtext of political outrage. Although Nashe portrays the world as "decayed and corrupt" in *The Unfortunate Traveler*, by redirecting his invective in *Lenten Stuffe* back to England, Nashe effectively commits literary suicide by Crown.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Francis Meres's sympathetic reference to Nashe during his exile in 1598 appears prophetic: "as Actaeon was woored of his own hounds: so is Tom Nash

53. Stationer's Register, vol. 3, p. 677, quoted in Nicholl, p. 264.

54. Nicholl, p. 264.

55. Kinney, p. 337.



of his *Ile of Dogs*. Dogges were the death of *Euripides*, but bee not disconsolate gallant young *Iuuenall*, *Linus*, the sonne of *Appollo* died the same death.”<sup>56</sup> Meres’s juxtaposition of Nashe and Juvenal speaks to their mutual inability to come to terms with the “wickedness and wretchedness” around them.<sup>57</sup> But the prophecy is realized in Meres’s conflation of Nashe and Linus. According to myth, Apollo’s son Linus was killed by Hercules with his own lyre. Similarly, Nashe’s Crown protest in *Lenten Stuffe* may have been the instrument of his own literary demise.

56. Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia. Wit’s Treasury*. At sig. Oo3v, fol 283v. Printed in McKerrow, vol. 5, p. 148.

57. Meres could also be pointing to the rumour that Juvenal was also exiled at the hands of Roman authorities. However, too little is known about Juvenal’s life to either confirm or deny this rumour. Gilbert Highet makes a persuasive case in favour of Juvenal’s exile in *Juvenal the Satirist: A Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 21–27. However, in the most recent of the Loeb Classical Series texts of Juvenal’s work, Jeffrey Henderson claims there is little evidence to support this biographical claim. See *Juvenal and Perisus*, LCL 91 (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 18.