to be right that Nashe was still missing from London. Or if he had returned, he had done so furtively, not in Ciceronian triumph.

Nashes Lenten Stuffe was his last work. It is not his most readable, probably *The Unfortunate Traveller*; nor his most wittily satirical, *Pierce* or the Harvey lampoons, according to taste; but it is, perhaps, his masterpiece. In this work, as Steane says, 'he is his most fully and distinctively developed self'. The work grew, quite genuinely, out of a desire to thank the town of Great Yarmouth for the 'kind entertainment and benigne hospitality' it had shown him. It is a return gift in his own currency: 'I had money lent me in Yarmouth, and I pay them againe in prayse.' If there is any 'resounding belmettall' left in his pen, 'the first peale of it is Yarmouthes'.[5] The work opens, as promised on the title-page, with a description and history of the town. Some twenty pages long in the original edition, this is a superb piece of descriptive journalism, a prototypical 'feature article'. Some of it is lifted out of Camden's *Britannia*, but often transformed in the translation: Camden's '*Cerdicus bellicosus Saxo*' becomes 'one Cerdicus, a plashing Saxon, that had reveld here and there with his battleaxe'. There were more detailed, local sources he used. The distant antiquities of Yarmouth, '*An. Do.* 1000 or thereabouts', he claims to have 'scrapte out of wormeaten parchment', and he certainly made full use of a 'Chronographycal Latine table, which they have hanging up in their Guild Hall', which related 'in a faire texte hande' the deeds and worthies of the town and 'all their transmutations since their Cradlehoode'. Camden also mentions this '*tabula Chronographica antiqua*', though he says it was displayed '*in templo*', presumably meaning the church. Nashe transcribed passages from this into his notebooks – 'my Tables are not yet one quarter emptied of my notes out of their Table'.[6] It appears that he also had access to another document, a free English translation from the Latin *tabula* made by a prominent citizen, Henry Manshyp senior, in the 1560s. This manuscript – treating of 'the Foundacion and Antiquitye of the Towne of Great Yermouthe' – is frequently echoed in *Lenten Stuffe*, often *verbatim*. Once again one notes Nashe's instinctive jazzing-up of factual material. Where the Manshyp MS has simply 'marshes and fennes', Nashe substitutes 'the fennie *Lerna* betwixt, that with Reede is so imbristled'. Manshyp blandly recounts how, in the time of William the Conqueror,

> the saide sande did grow to be drye and was not overflowen by the Sea, but waxed in heighte and also in greatnes, in so muche as greate store of people of the Counties of Norff. and Suffolke did resorte thither, and did pitche Tabernacles and Boothes . . . to sell their Herringes, fish and other comodoties.

Nashe puts it like this:

> this sand of Yarmouth grew to a setled lumpe, and was as drie as the sands of Arabia, so that thronging theaters of people (as well aliens as Englishmen) hived thither about the selling of fish and Herring . . . and there built sutlers booths and tabernacles, to canopie their heads in from the rhewme of the heavens.[7]

With a few deft strokes the scene comes to life.

The Manshyp MS seems to have been in the possession of the author's son, Henry Manshyp junior, a former Town Clerk and a leading member of the municipal Corporation. Nashe probably got to know him: he may be the 'gentleman, a familiar of mine' that Nashe speaks of 'communing' with at Yarmouth, and who seems partly to have inspired *Lenten Stuffe*.[8] Nashe must have had some *entrée* into municipal circles to get all the details he retails so punctiliously: Yarmouth's new cannon emplacement, we learn, is 167 yards in 'compasse about the wall'; 20 ft 6 inches in height; the 'bredth of the foundation' 9 ft; the 'depth within ground' 11 ft; and so on. Harbour costs 'these last 28 yeares' amount to £26,256 4s 5d. This latter must come straight out of the Yarmouth 'haven book'.[9] Here is the plausible, enquiring, educated Nashe, flattering the local worthies with his promise to write up the 'length and bredth of Yarmouth'. He praises, rather untypically, the 'grave substantial burgers' of the town, their upstanding 'marchantly formallity'. He left happy memories with Manshyp, who says, in his own *History of Great Yarmouth* (1619), 'here by way of merriment let me remember to you an odd conceit of a late pleasant-pated poet, who making a catalogue of national gods or patrons . . . termeth Red Herring to be the titular God of Yarmouth'.[10] Nashe made much fuss of his enmities, but a more pervasive use of his talent for 'getting on' with people. Like the 'vagrant' young wastrel in *Pierce*, he 'lookes into all Estates by conversing with them'. And for all the linguistic eccentricities of *Lenten Stuffe*, there is a rich central celebration of ordinariness. As he says in the preface, anyone can 'write in prayse of vertue and the seven Liberall Sciences', but to 'wring iuice out of a flint, thats Pierce a Gods name, and the right tricke of a workman'. He becomes our voluble 'pleasant-pated' guide: 'I shall leade you a sound walke about Yarmouth'.[11] First, 'looke wistly upon the walles, which, if you marke, make a stretcht out quadrangle with the haven'. He spiels off their measurements, notes the sixteen towers, the ten town-gates, the fortifications 'underfonging and enflancking them', the cannon to repel 'Diego Spanyard' and 'strike the winde collicke in his paunch if he praunce to neere them'. We set off through the town. He has been 'walking in her streetes so many weekes togither' he knows every inch of them. The main thoroughfares 'are as long as threescore streets in London', while a warren of little 'lans' and 'scores' – some 140 of them, in fact – criss-cross through the town. We

briefly survey the 'voide ground' and 'liberties' at the edge of town; the 'levell of the marshes' off east to Norwich, 'sixteene mile disiunct'; then up to the disused, 'gravelled up' harbour at Caister, 'by aged Fishermen commonly tearmed Grubs haven'; and to Gorleston, a 'decrepite overworne village' amid 'slymie plashie fields'. But the topographical life and soul of Yarmouth is its harbour. Its size, he says, is deceptive:

> A narrow channell or *Isthmus* in rash view you woulde opinionate it: when this I can devoutly averre, I beholding it with both my eies this last fishing, sixe hundreth reasonable barkes and vesselles of good burden (with a vantage) it hath given shelter to at once in her harbour, and most of them riding abrest before the Key betwixt the Bridge and the Southgate. Many bows length beyond the marke my penne roves not, I am certain: if I doe, they stand at my elbow that can correct mee. The delectablest lustie sight and movingest 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 boysterous gulliguts as they. . . . That which especiallest nourisht the most prime pleasure in me was after a storme, when they were driven in swarmes and lay close pestred together as thicke as they could packe; the next day following, if it were faire, they would cloud the whole skie with canvas, by spreading their drabled sailes in the full clue abroad a drying, and make a braver shew with them then so many banners and streamers displayed against the Sunne on a mountaine top.

This is vivid and oddly moving. The hard-bitten polysyllabic pamphleteer, the city wit with a chequered past, here jostles happily with the old salts and fish-wives on the quay – 'they stand at my elbow that can correct me' – and is rapt by this 'lustie sight' of ships and sails and 'close pestred' activity. There is nostalgia in it, a sense that the wheel is come full circle and Nashe is back where he began, the little boy on the waterfront at Lowestoft. He never quite lost that child's eye: its magnifications, its sense of suddenness, its fascination slipping into fear. There is undoubtedly an encomium of his native East Anglia, a *recherche du temps perdu*, wrapped up in *Lenten Stuffe*.

Central to his description of Yarmouth is an idea of struggle and effort. The town itself is 'reared and enforced from the sea most miraculously'. Like some mythological giant, 'forth of the sands thus struglingly' Yarmouth 'exalteth and liftes up his glittering head'. It is 'rampierd' against the 'fumish waves battry', a hard-won solidity, a bulwark of human resistance against the 'universall unbounded empery of surges'. The fishery which is Yarmouth's economic foundation is itself a constant battle. To be 'in Yarmouth one fishing' is to behold a 'violent

motion of toyling Mirmidons', a 'confused stirring to and fro of a Lepantalike hoast of unfatigable flud bickerers and foame curbers'. To plumb 'the captious mystery of Mounsieur herring' is an arduous art. He puts the fishermen 'to their trumps' and 'scuppets not his benificence into their mouthes' without a struggle. The 'driftermen' – as herring-fishers are known – are no 'shorecreepers, like those Colchester oystermen'. The herring 'keepeth more aloof' and

> those that are his followers, if they will seeke him where hee is, more then common daunger they must incurre. . . . Fortie or threescoare leagues in the roaring territory they are glad on their wodden horses to post after him, and scoure it with their ethiope pitchbordes till they be windlesse in his quest and pursuing. . . . Let the carreeringest billow confesse and absolve it selfe before it pricke up his bristles against them, for if it come upon his dancing horse and offer to tilt it with them, they will aske no trustier lances then their oares to beat out the brains of it . . .

Nashe's image of the fishermen as warriors, the *chevaliers* of the sea, elaborates the sense of toil and toughness intrinsic to Yarmouth, and this whole motif in the pamphlet spills over into a reflection of his own struggles. 'My state', he says, 'is so tost and weather-beaten that it hath nowe no anchor holde left to cleave unto.'[12] The hard-edged, palpable fact of Great Yarmouth, the bravery of its herring-men 'holding their owne pell-mell in all weathers', become images of survival, lessons in grace under pressure.

Thus the herring: a 'treasure' won out of dangerous 'profundities', the economic life and soul of 'this superiminente principall metropolis of the redde Fish'. The red herring, or kipper, is a prime piece of 'English marchandise', a national product:

> Of our appropriate glory of the red herring no region twixt the poles articke and antartick may, can or will rebate from us one scruple. On no coast like ours is it caught in such abundance, no where drest in his right cue but under our Horizon; hosted, rosted and tosted heere alone it is.

It brings in foreign currency – 'to trowle in the cash throughout all nations of Christendome, there is no fellowe to the red herring'. Through trade it converts into 'wine and woades', into 'salt, canvas, vitre and a great deale of good trash'. It provides employment, 'sets a worke thousands' who would have 'begd or starvd, with their wives and brattes, had not this Captaine of the squamy cattell so stoode their good Lord and master'. It is a bulwark of religious observance: but for the pickled

herring, Lent would be 'clean spung'd out of the Kalendar'. It is even a potent medicine, a 'counter-poyson to the spitting sickness', an antidote for 'all rheumatique inundations', and '*ipse ille* agaynst the Stone'. Above all it is nourishment, food for the belly, a 'chollericke parcel' of vitamins, such a 'hot stirring meate' that it makes 'the cravenest dastard proclaime fire and sword' and hardens 'his soft bleding vaines as stiffe and robustious as branches of Corrall'. It is, moreover, food for all, plenteous and cheap, 'every mans money':

> every housholder or goodman Baltrop, that keepes a family in pay, casts for it as one of his standing provisions. The poorer sort make it three parts of there sustenance; with it, for his dinnier, the patchedst Leather piltche *laboratho* may dine like a Spanish Duke, when the niggardliest mouse of biefe will cost him sixpence.[13]

Again we touch the kernel of hard reality within the exotic ornations of *Lenten Stuffe*. It is what it claims to be: a 'prayse of the red herring', the food that sustained him through the hard days of Lent 1598.

Now Nashe begins in earnest his mounting surreal rhapsody on the theme of the red herring. He makes of it an apotheosis of poetic beauty: Helen's face was 'triviall' in comparison with 'our dappert Piemont Huldrick Herring, which draweth more barkes to Yarmouth bay then her beautie did to Troy'. It becomes a monarch, the 'king of fishes', 'Caesarian Charlemaine Herring', 'Solyman Herring' – 'stately borne, stately sprung he is, the best bloud of the Ptolomies no statelier'. Its sovereign splendour draws down planetary influences – 'the lordly sonne, the most rutilant planet of the seven, in Lent when Heralius Herring enters into his chiefe reign and scepterdome, skippeth and danseth the goats iumpe on the earth for ioy of his entrance'. It becomes an icon: it was not an image of Jupiter that Dionysius of Syracuse plundered, 'no such Iupiter, no such golden coated image was there, but it was a plaine golden coated red herring'. The 'true etimologie' of Mortus Alli, worshipped by the Persians, is '*mortuum halec*, a dead red herring'. The herring is a repository of occult wisdom – philosophers claim the Golden Fleece 'to be nothing but a booke of Alcumy'; Nashe will prove 'the redde Herrings skinne to be little lesse: the accidens of Alcumy I will sweare it is'. The curing of the herring is indeed an alchemical *magnum opus*, as the fish undergoes a 'transfiguration *ex Luna in Solem*, from his duskie tinne hew into a perfit golden blandishment'. The kipper is thus the alchemist's vaunted '*aurum philosophicum*' – 'of so eye-bewitching a deaurate ruddie dy is the skincoat of this Lantsgrave, that happy is that nobleman who for his colours in armory can neerest imitate his chimicall temper'.[14] And so it goes on – Nashe wrests the herring to the

centre of every conceivable mental enterprise. There are jokes, anecdotes, proverbs, burlesques, fables, political allegories:

> My conceit is cast into a sweating sickenesse with ascending these few steps of his renowne; into what a hote broyling Saint Laurence fever would it relapse then, should I spend the whole bagge of my winde in climbing up to the lofty mountaine creast of his trophees?

That the possibilities are endless is really the point of *Lenten Stuffe*. The herring becomes anything his wit can transform it into. Give me a subject, Nashe says, *any* subject, and I will give you a pamphlet. There are precedents for this:

> I follow the trace of the famousest schollers of all ages, whom a wantonizing humour once in their life time hath possest to play with strawes, and turne mole hils into mountaines.

He gives a long list of the 'wast authors' through history who have 'terleryginckt it so frivolously of they reckt not what'. Homer, for instance, 'of rats and frogs hath heroiqut it'.[15] But it remains a quintessentially Nasheian performance, a hymn to the inexhaustibility of language, a quirky pageant of responses and reverberations. The red herring is, in the axiomatic sense, a complete red herring, and as such it is Nashe's metaphor for life itself. His 'prayse of the red herring' becomes a paradigm for the mind's peripheral agitations around an elusive, perhaps non-existent, core of meaning. And if the red herring tells us life's secret, then that secret is the plain fact of survival. The metaphor doubles back: the herring is food on his plate, the 'stuffe' of life in a hard 'lenten' world. The wits back in London will scoff – 'alas, poore hungerstarved Muse', they will say, 'was it so hard driven that it had nothing to feede upon but a redde herring?' – but the fishermen of Yarmouth will take his meaning. It is for them he prays at the end of the pamphlet – 'No more can I do for you than I have done, were you my god-children every one: God make you his children and keepe you from the Dunkerks' – and to them he appeals, his 'storm-tost' fellows, to drink 'the health of Nashes Lenten-stuffe', and

> let not your rustie swordes sleepe in their scabberds, but lash them out in my quarrell as hotely as if you were to cut cables or hew the main mast over boord, when you heare me mangled and torne in mennes mouths.[16]

Our first clear sighting of Nashe back in London is not until early 1599,

some eighteen months after his flight from 'the signe of the seargeants heade'. On 11 January, publisher Cuthbert Burby entered his copy of *Lenten Stuffe* at Stationers' Hall. Nashe's position was still parlous, for the scribe added the words, 'upon Condicon that he [Burby] gett yt Laufully Aucthorised'. This does not prove that Nashe was back in town – he could have sent the manuscript to Burby – but he was certainly in London when he wrote the latest section of the pamphlet, the address 'To his Readers, hee cares not what they be'. This may have been written after the registration on 11 January, but since he bids his readers 'stay till Ester terme' for his next pamphlet (an empty promise, as it turns out), we can assume he was expecting *Lenten Stuffe* to appear during the previous, Hilary or Lent, term. Nashe was, therefore, writing his preface, in London, before the end of the Lent term in mid-February.[17]

Lenten Stuffe duly appeared, presumably 'laufully aucthorised'. In June, however, a new 'crosse' was 'laide upon' our hard-pressed pamphleteer. It was not particularly *Lenten Stuffe* that provoked it: it was a total, blanket suppression. On Friday 1 June 1599, from the familiar precincts of Croydon Palace, Archbishop Whitgift issued a series of 'commaundements' in his capacity as chief censor. He ordered the immediate calling in of various 'unsemely Satyres & Epigrams', including Hall's *Virgidemiarum*, Marston's *Scourge of Villany*, Guilpin's *Skialetheia*, Middleton's *Microcynicon*, Cutwode's *Caltha Poetarum*, Sir John Davies' *Epigrams* and Marlowe's *Elegies*. And, to make a clean sweep of it, he commanded

> that all Nasshes bookes and Doctor Harveyes bookes be taken where-soever they maye be founde, and that none of theire bookes bee ever printed hereafter.[18]

There is a sidelong tribute in this attempt to erase Nashe totally from the record, an acknowledgment of him as the *fons et origo* of this dissident satirical hubbub. Maybe Nashe felt, also, a bitter satisfaction in having dragged the Doctor down with him into unacceptability. In real terms, however, the prohibition was a catastrophe for him. On the following Monday, 4 June, various books 'presently thereuppon were burnte' at Stationers' Hall. Amid the smoke of the Elizabethan police-state, Nashe begins to fade from view.

There was little time left him. There is a stamp of finality on *Lenten Stuffe*, an intimation of death:

> Some of the crummes of it, like the crums in a bushy beard after a greate banquet, will remaine in my papers to bee seene when I am deade and under grounde . . .

> While I have sence and existence I will praise it . . .
>
> Commend thy muse to sempiternity, and have images and statutes erected to her after her unstringed silent interment . . .
>
> Stay, let me looke about, where am I? In my text or out of it? Not out for a groate: out for an angell: nay I'le lay no wagers, for now I perponder more sadlie uppon it, I thinke I am oute indeed. . . .[19]

Lenten Stuffe is Nashe's swan-song, one last desperate 'feate' before the curtains close. In the new century we hear of him just faintly. *Summers Last Will* was published in 1600, registered on 28 October, again by Cuthbert Burby. Apparently the prohibition of 1599 had petered out, in the manner of these state fulminations. The play had, ironically, been written for Whitgift himself. Another work issued in 1600 may give us some clues about Nashe in the last year of his life. This was *The Hospitall of Incurable Fooles*, published by Edward Blount, a translation from the Italian of Tommaso Garzoni (*L'Hospidale de' Pazzi Incurabili*). In one copy of this is a memorandum, in an early-seventeenth-century hand, which reads: 'Tho. Nashe had some hand in this translation and it was the last he did as I heare.'[20] The note is signed, 'P.W.'. Whoever this was, he pitches his assertion convincingly. Not that Nashe *did* the translation, which might argue a better command of Italian than there is reason to assign to him, but that he 'had a hand' in it. That it was the last thing Nashe wrote is also plausible: if he was involved, it would certainly be his last known piece. The text itself leaves one guessing, but two pieces in the prefatory matter that are not from Garzoni's original Italian deserve attention. These are a burlesque dedication by 'Dame Folly' to her 'special benefactresse, Madam Fortune', and an address, 'Not to the Wise Reader', signed '*Il Pazzissimo*'. There are moments in these which *could* be Nashe, throwing out to the wisest of his foolish readers a rich hidden irony – the malcontent Pierce fawning on 'Madam Fortune' and scoffing the 'poore despised Nation of Poets' that

> defame and traduce your Ladyshyp with the imputative slanders of niggardize and instability, when I (which have known you more inwardly then a thousand of these candle-wasting Booke-wormes) can affirm you to be the most bounteous, open-handed, firme, unswayed, constant Ladie under Heaven.

The pieces have a vein of mock self-deprecation, an authorial shrug, which is typical of Nashe:

> This I did carelessly, accept you of it as lightly. . . . Even your Phisicall