

The Mysterious Connection  
between Thomas Nashe,  
Thomas Dekker, and T. M.



The Mysterious Connection  
between Thomas Nashe,  
Thomas Dekker, and T. M.:  
An English Renaissance Deception?

By

Donna N. Murphy

**CAMBRIDGE**  
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P U B L I S H I N G

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An English Renaissance Deception?,  
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I dedicate this book to another Tom,  
my husband Tom Murphy,  
and to my daughters Clare and Andrea.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### *Attrib. in Whole or Part to Dekker*

AG	<i>The Artillery Garden</i>	LC	<i>Lantern and</i>
Banq.	<i>The Bloody Banquet</i>		<i>Candlelight</i>
BB	<i>The Black Book</i>	LD	<i>Lust's Dominion</i>
BL	<i>The Bellman of</i>	LLB	<i>London Look Back</i>
	<i>London</i>	LT	<i>London's Tempe</i>
BMC	<i>Blurt, Master</i>	LU	<i>Look Up and See</i>
	<i>Constable</i>		<i>Wonders</i>
BRWR	<i>The Black Rod and the</i>	ME	<i>The Magnificent</i>
	<i>White Rod</i>		<i>Entertainment</i>
CC	<i>The Compter's</i>	MG	<i>The Meeting of Gallants</i>
	<i>Commonwealth</i>		<i>at an Ordinary</i>
DD	<i>Dekker his Dream</i>	MML	<i>Match Me in London</i>
DP	<i>The Double PP</i>	NFH	<i>News from Hell</i>
DT	<i>The Dead Term</i>	NG	<i>News From Gravesend</i>
EC	<i>Essays and Characters</i>	NH	<i>Northward Ho</i>
	<i>of a Prison and</i>	NSS	<i>The Noble Spanish</i>
	<i>Prisoners</i>		<i>Soldier</i>
EMIH	<i>Every Man in His</i>	NW	<i>No Wit, No Help Like a</i>
	<i>Humor</i>		<i>Woman's</i>
EV	<i>English Villainies</i>	OA	<i>The Owl's Almanac</i>
FBNA	<i>Four Birds of Noah's</i>	OF	<i>Old Fortunatus</i>
	<i>Ark</i>	OP	<i>O per se O</i>
FHT	<i>Father Hubbard's</i>	Over.	<i>Sir Thomas Overbury</i>
	<i>Tales</i>		<i>his Wife</i>
GH	<i>The Gull's Hornbook</i>	PC	<i>Plato's Cap</i>
IHW	<i>The Honest Whore I</i>	PG	<i>Patient Grissil</i>
2HW	<i>The Honest Whore II</i>	PP	<i>The Penniless</i>
ITBN	<i>If This Be Not Good,</i>		<i>Parliament</i>
	<i>the Devil is in It</i>		<i>of Threadbare Poets</i>
JMM	<i>Jests To Make You</i>	PT	<i>Paul his Temple</i>
	<i>Merry</i>		<i>Triumphant</i>
KC	<i>A Knight's Conjuring</i>	PWPF	<i>Penny-wise, Pound-</i>
			<i>Foolish</i>

*Attrib. to Nashe*

<i>RA</i>	<i>The Raven's Almanac</i>	<i>Almond</i>	<i>An Almond for a Parrot</i>
<i>RG</i>	<i>The Roaring Girl</i>	<i>Anatomy</i>	<i>Anatomy of Absurdity</i>
<i>RR</i>	<i>A Rod for Runaways</i>	<i>Comets</i>	<i>Two Dangerous Comets</i>
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Satiro-Mastix</i>	<i>Faustus</i>	<i>Doctor Faustus (with</i>
<i>SD</i>	<i>The Sun's Darling</i>		<i>Marlowe)</i>
<i>SDS</i>	<i>The Seven Deadly Sins</i>	<i>Lenten</i>	<i>Lenten Stuff</i>
<i>SH</i>	<i>The Shoemaker's</i>	<i>Pierce</i>	<i>Pierce Penniless</i>
	<i>Holiday</i>	<i>Pref. to</i>	<i>Preface to Astrophel &amp;</i>
<i>SHR</i>	<i>A Strange Horse-Race</i>	<i>A&amp;S</i>	<i>Stella</i>
<i>STW</i>	<i>Sir Thomas Wyatt</i>	<i>Pref. to</i>	<i>Preface to Menaphon</i>
<i>TT</i>	<i>Troia-Nova</i>	<i>Men.</i>	
	<i>Triumphans</i>	<i>Saffron</i>	<i>Have With You to</i>
<i>VD</i>	<i>Villainies Discovered</i>		<i>Saffron-Walden</i>
	<i>by Lantern and</i>	<i>Strange</i>	<i>Strange News</i>
	<i>Candlelight</i>	<i>Summer</i>	<i>Summer's Last Will and</i>
<i>VG</i>	<i>Vox Graculi</i>		<i>Testament</i>
<i>VM</i>	<i>The Virgin Martyr</i>	<i>Tears</i>	<i>Christ's Tears Over</i>
<i>WA</i>	<i>Work for Armorers</i>		<i>Jerusalem</i>
<i>WB</i>	<i>The Whore of Babylon</i>	<i>Terrors</i>	<i>Terrors of the Night</i>
<i>WE</i>	<i>The Welsh</i>	<i>Unfortunate</i>	<i>The Unfortunate</i>
	<i>Embassador</i>		<i>Traveler</i>
<i>WH</i>	<i>Westward Ho</i>	<i>Valentines</i>	<i>The Choice of</i>
<i>WK</i>	<i>The Wonder of a</i>		<i>Valentines</i>
	<i>Kingdom</i>		
<i>WofE</i>	<i>The Witch of</i>		
	<i>Edmonton</i>		
<i>WWW</i>	<i>Wars, Wars, Wars</i>		
<i>WY</i>	<i>The Wonderful Year</i>		

## **PART I**

# **THE MYSTERIOUS CONNECTION**

## CHAPTER ONE

### THOMAS NASHE AND THOMAS DEKKER

“If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck,  
then it probably is a duck.”  
—Test of inductive reasoning

Could English Renaissance author Thomas Nashe have tricked contemporaries into thinking he had died, yet continued living as “Thomas Dekker,” and tricked the rest of us for four hundred years?

Playwright/pamphleteer Thomas Dekker and playwright/pamphleteer Thomas Nashe shared the same writing style, rhythm, syntax, and tone of voice.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, they seemed to share the same mind, and there is a highly suspicious coincidence between when one appeared and the other disappeared. The purpose of this book is to present linguistic evidence that after Nashe was banished from London in 1597, he re-entered the city posing as “Thomas Dekker,” then permanently assumed the identity after he was permanently banned from publishing. It also seeks to broaden the canon of Thomas Dekker by adding several works to his credit.

I will maintain that Nashe carried off the ruse by publishing material not only as “Thomas Dekker,” but, over the course of Dekker’s prolific 34-year writing career, also “T. M.,” “Adam Evesdropper,” “Jocundary Merry-brains,” “Jack Daw,” and “Anonymous,” making it appear that various men could write like Nashe. While in prison he additionally published work, I will argue, under the names “William Fennor,” “Geffray Mynshul,” and “Sir Thomas Overbury” to rouse sympathy for reforming the treatment of debtors. Multiple authorship of plays was common during the English Renaissance, and I will also propose that, as a playwright, Nashe made small, unattributed contributions to Thomas Middleton’s *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman’s* and Ben Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humor*.

His overarching motivation was not fame or fortune. He was driven, I believe, by a desire to help his fellow men improve their moral character. In this sense, he followed in the footsteps of his father, a minister. In other senses he did not, for, instead of preaching fire and brimstone, he penned works brim-full with humor. His writing offered the medicine of mirth to contemporary Englishmen, and afterward a wealth of details regarding city

life to historians. A night watchman whose works shed light onto the dark abuses of society, an ingenuous genius, a dare-devil, a cat with nine lives: all these terms describe our author, but the word that I think best encapsulates him is the title of Margaret Edson's Pulitzer Prize-winning play: "Wit."

## Thomas Nashe

In 1597 Thomas Nashe was in trouble again, as he had been off and on throughout his career as a writer, this time for penning the first part of a play entitled *The Isle of Dogs*. After the play was performed that summer, the Privy Council denounced it as lewd, seditious, and slanderous, and clapped three actors, including co-author Ben Jonson, into the Marshalsea prison. Nashe fled to Great Yarmouth where he spent six weeks in the latter end of autumn, according to his *Lenten Stuffe*, in which he complained that *The Isle of Dogs* affair sequestered him from his ability to support himself financially. We don't know where he went after that, but Francis Meres reported that Nashe was still banished from London in a work registered Sept. 7, 1598.

Thomas Nashe was born in 1567 to William and Margaret Nashe in Lowestoft, Suffolk, where his father was a clergyman. The family was established at the rectory of West Harling, Norfolk when Thomas was six. We know nothing of his early education, but he attended St. John's College, Cambridge University as a sizar, which means that he performed certain menial duties in exchange for food, or "sizes." The date of matriculation was recorded as October 13, 1582, although he probably took up residence near the end of the previous year. Nashe received a Bachelor of Arts, but left in 1588 after two years of work towards his M. A., possibly due to the death of his father the previous year. His mother died in 1589, leaving him parentless by early adulthood. Nashe had no known wife or children.

Thomas Nashe attracted controversy like a magnet. Nashe's first piece to appear in print, a preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* in 1589, offered his candid opinion regarding classical and contemporary authors. For this effrontery Richard Harvey took him to task in his *Lamb of God* the following year. Nashe's retaliation was twofold. I have presented evidence elsewhere that Nashe penned the anonymous *Fearefull and lamentable effects of two dangerous Comets* (*Comets*), 1591, a parody of astrological prognostications.<sup>2</sup> It was a subtle assault upon Richard Harvey, who had predicted dire events during the early 1580s which, fortunately, never occurred. Then, in *Pierce Penilesse* (*Pierce*), 1592, Nashe ridiculed him as

the author of a specific astrological discourse, employing “ridiculous ass” instead of his name.

Richard’s older brother, Gabriel, came to his defense, and thus began an infamous pamphlet war between Gabriel Harvey and Nashe, quite funny on the latter’s part. Gabriel published three broadsides against Nashe. Nashe counter-attacked in *Strange Newes (Strange)*, but then extended a peace offering in his pious tract, *Christs Teares Over Jerusalem (Tears)*. After Gabriel rejected it, Nashe fired back again in *Have With You to Saffron-Walden (Saffron)*, 1596, which he humorously dedicated to Cambridge barber Richard Lichfield. Gabriel Harvey did not answer, and scholars agree Nashe got the better of him. The following year, however, Lichfield lambasted him in *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe*, wherein he repeated a line from *Saffron*: that Nashe came upon Lichfield with a “Dicker of Dicks” (*Saffron* A2v).

The Marprelate controversy also drew Nashe in. Martin Marprelate was the pen name of one or more radical Protestants who wrote against Church of England leaders, berating them for behaving too much like the Catholic hierarchy. Anonymous pamphlets defended the church, and we now know that one of these, *An Almond for a Parrat (Almond)*, was written by Nashe.

Nashe acknowledged spending time in debtor’s prison. He wrote during an age when the publisher owned the copyright rather than the author, who was paid only once for a work. Authors therefore attempted to attract wealthy patrons, and usually combined writing with careers such as lawyers, tutors, tradesmen, intelligencers, or actors. While Nashe probably helped out at John Danter’s printing shop, he had no other career upon which to fall back, leaving him perpetually impoverished.

He spent time behind bars for another reason as well. Goaded on by Gabriel Harvey, London officials imprisoned Nashe for criticizing the city in *Tears*. “London, thou art the seeded Garden of sinne,” wrote Nashe in the first edition, vs. “London, thou art the wellhead of the land, and therefore it behoveth thee to send forth wholesome springs” in the censored, second version.<sup>3</sup> Nashe’s goal was moralistic, an attempt to convince Londoners to reform their evil ways, and no one would have noticed the two-paragraph “offending passage” buried deep inside the book if Harvey hadn’t pointed it out to authorities. The charges against Nashe could have led to lengthy imprisonment, possibly even execution, if the influential George Carey hadn’t stepped in and interceded on his behalf.

As for other prose pieces, *Pierce* sparked speculation that Nashe had intended to parody one or more VIPs in his tale of the Bear and the Fox, a

charge he denied in *Strange. The Unfortunate Traveller* (*Unfortunate*) stirred conjecture that he set out to malign one of England's universities in his portrayal of Wittenberg, an allegation he refuted in his second edition of *Tears*. It is unknown whether *Lenten Stuff* (*Lenten*) was considered controversial, but shortly after it appeared, Nashe was permanently censored.

Nashe wrote plays as well, stating in his 1596 letter to William Cotton that he had remained in London for summer vacation "vpon had I wist hopes, & an after haruest I expected by writing for the stage & for the presse" (McKerrow vol. 5, 194). Only two plays were published under Nashe's name, and one of them, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, supposedly co-authored with Christopher Marlowe, displays only Marlowe's writing style. I do not include *Dido* in the canon of Nashe. The other, a show thought to have been staged at the residence of Archbishop Whitgift, seems to contain satires of the Earl of Oxford as well as Robert Cecil, the son of England's quasi-Prime Minister, Lord Burghley, according to an intriguing interpretation by Rita Lamb.<sup>4</sup> There is no record of reaction to *Summers Last Will and Testament* (*Summer*), but if Lamb is correct, it could only have garnered Nashe more enemies. As for additional dramatic work, Izaak Walton wrote that Nashe penned *Crack Me this Nut*, a lost play listed in Henslowe's Diary on September 5, 1595, as well as *A Fig for my God-Son*, a lost work which cannot be categorized, while William Winstanley noted that Nashe authored a lost play called *See Me and See Me Not*.<sup>5</sup> Many scholars believe that Nashe had a hand in the first act of Shakespeare's *I Henry VI* on the basis of style and uncommon linguistic connections.<sup>6</sup> I have also argued elsewhere that Nashe was an original co-author of *Doctor Faustus* (*Faustus*), published solely under Marlowe's name, bearing responsibility for much of its prose humor.<sup>7</sup> With its conjuring, dramatic use of firecrackers, and a protagonist who sells his soul to the devil and is carried off to hell, *Faustus* sparked fear and controversy.<sup>8</sup>

Nashe wrote poetry, including poems in *Strange*, *Pierce*, and *Unfortunate*, blank verse in *Summer*, and a lost poem entitled *The White Herring and the Red*.<sup>9</sup> Nashe's hilarious poem about a visit to a brothel entitled *The Choice of Valentines* (*Valentines*) circulated in manuscript—it was too racy to have passed muster with church censors—and earned its share of tsks-tsks. An anonymous "translation or rather English paraphrase," according to a sales catalogue, of Garzoni's *The Hospital of Incurable Fools* appeared in 1600. In one copy a contemporary hand wrote, "Tho. Nashe had some hand in this translation and it was the last that he did as I heare. P. W." Charles Nicholl thought that Nashe might have spiced up a

pedestrian version, and Arthur Sherbo proposed that “P. W.” stood for Peter Woodhouse, who published poetry in 1605.<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, Nashe wrote much “privately”:

I can drawe equally in the same yoke with the haughtiest of those foule-mouthed backbiters that say I can do nothing but raile. I haue written in all sorts of humors priuately, I am perswaded, more than any yoong man of my age in England. (*Strange* K3r)

## Thomas Dekker

Soon after Thomas Nashe took to pasture in the English countryside, another author sallied forth who wrote as if he were channeling Nashe. Thomas Dekker first appeared in theater manager Philip Henslowe’s Diary January 8, 1598, when Henslowe purchased a play from him. In February, Henslowe paid to have him discharged from debtor’s prison, and did so again in 1599. Like Nashe, Dekker apparently made the idealistic, foolhardy decision to earn his living via the pen.

In Henslowe’s Diary, Dekker hit the ground running, authoring or co-authoring over forty plays between 1598 and 1602, including fifteen with Nashe’s friend Henry Chettle. He also co-authored plays with Anthony Munday, whom Nashe favorably mentioned in *Almond*, and wrote laudatory poems prefacing two of Munday’s books. Henslowe called him “Dickers” or “Deckers” in 71 diary entries, compared to a version without the “s” in only four, but the playwright consistently signed for money from Henslowe as “Thomas Dekker,” and this is how he is known. Three girls were christened at St. Giles’s Cripplegate in 1594, 1598, and 1602 with their father listed as Thomas Dycker, Dykers, and Dicker.<sup>11</sup> It has been posited that these were Dekker’s children, but no evidence exists to support this; Dekker did not write about them.

Indeed, few additional details about Thomas Dekker’s life have been discovered since Ernest Rhys noted, regarding Alexander Grosart’s attempts to find out about Dekker, that Grosart’s “indefatigable energy of research was probably never exercised to so little purpose in the case of any author.”<sup>12</sup> On the subjects of Dekker’s birth and age, all that scholars have to go on is what he wrote. Since he called London his mother (Dekker never referred to his biological mother), he is assumed to have been born in London. At another point, however, he called London the mother of its inhabitants, regardless of where they were born.<sup>13</sup> If a passage in 1632’s *English Villainies* where he speaks of “my three score years” is to be taken literally, he would have been born in 1572.



No information has come down regarding Dekker's schooling, but he was obviously well educated, with extensive knowledge of Latin, the Bible, and the classics. Mary Leland Hunt speculated that he might have been a soldier in the Netherlands, but in *Wars, Wars, Wars*, 1628, he wrote that he was no soldier, and had never fired a canon.<sup>14</sup> He also punned therein that he who wanted legs was in love with arms, indicating either that he was short or had an infirmity involving his legs by that time. In *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, a character who is lame in the left leg says, "I thanke you dame, si[n]ce I want lims and lands, Ile [trust] to God, my good friends, and to these my hands" (E4v).

All was quiet on the Thomas Nashe front until he published *Lenten* between March 25 and late May, 1599. He must have been in London around that time because he wrote, in his address to the Readers, "I am called away to correct the faults of the press that escaped in my absence from the printing-house." From the first page of his text:

In my exile and irkesome discontented abandonment, the silliest millers thombe or contemptible stickle-banck of my enemies is as busie nibbling about my fame as if I were a deade man throwne amongst them to feede upon. So I am, I confesse, in the worldes outwarde apparance, though perhappes I may proove a cunninger diver then they are aware, which if it so happen, as I am partly assured, and that I plunge above water once againe, let them looke to it, for I will put them in bryne, or a piteous pickle, every one. But let that passe (*Lenten* B1r)

To highlight key points, he said he had been in exile and was like a dead man in outward appearance, but called himself a cunning diver who was partly assured of rising above the water once again.

On June 1, 1599, Archbishop Whitgift banned Thomas Nashe from publishing in the future, and ordered that existing works be called in and destroyed. Nevertheless, Nashe, or at least his writing, "surfaced" once more when *Summer's Last Will and Testament* was printed in 1600; it was an interesting title given that—according to the official version of events—either he had died by then or would soon afterwards. Charles Fitzgeoffrey wrote in *Affaniae*, 1601, that Nashe was dead, but no details such as date, cause of death, or burial site are known. In terms of biography, Nashe and Dekker are polar opposites. We know details of Nashe's birth, parentage, and schooling, but none regarding his death. We know nothing about Dekker's birth, parentage, and schooling, but he is almost certainly the "Thomas Decker, householder" buried on August 25,

1632 at St. James, Clerkenwell, the same year Dekker's writing ceased. His widow, Elizabeth, renounced administration of his estate, an indication that he died in debt. We would also note that one Mary, wife of Thomas Deckers, was buried in Clerkenwell in 1616.

It is true that records were lost for various reasons, and biographical details are missing for certain contemporary authors. We're not sure when Edmund Spenser was born, for example, or when John Webster died. Nevertheless, going quietly into the night was an incongruous ending for a brash genius who waged pamphlet wars against Martin Marprelate and Gabriel Harvey. After all, this is the man who wrote, "I know I shall liue, and not die, till I haue digd the graues of all my enemies" (*Saffron G1r*), and both Harvey brothers died in 1631. Nashe was the sort of man who would have battled Death itself if the two could have gone at it with quill pens and ink pots.

### Similarities Between Nashe and Dekker

Thomas Dekker took up Nashe's banner, however, specializing in Nashe's mediums, plays and pamphlets plus poetry within them, tackling some of the same subjects in the same style. Paul Kocher noted that although others wrote about the seven deadly sins, "none did so more brilliantly or more copiously than Nashe"; Dekker devoted a work to the topic, *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London (SDS)*.<sup>15</sup> He appeared to be well aware of the trouble Nashe got into for criticizing London in *Tears*, for his tone in the preface was defensive:

I call him to witnes, who is all Truth, I call the Cittizens of heauen to witnes, who are all spotlesse, that I slander thee [London] not, in saying thou nourishest seuen Serpents at they brests [the seven deadly sins], that will destroy thee; let all thy Magistrates and thy officers speake for me: let Strangers that haue but seen thy behaviour, be my Iudges: let all that are gathered vnder thy wings, and those that sleepe in thy bosome, giue their verdict vpon me: yea, try me (as thy brabblings are) by all thy Petit and Graund Iurors, and if I belye thee, let my Country (when I expire) deny me her common blessing, Buriall (*SDS A3v-A4r*)

When it came to satire, "Nashe had a gift for seeing and depicting the ridiculous in human behavior," wrote Virginia F. Stern.<sup>16</sup> So did Dekker, who parodied a broad spectrum of London society, from youths aspiring to

be gentlemen in *The Guls Horne-book (GH)*, to papists in *The Double PP (DP)*, to con artists in *The Belman of London (BL)*.

Robert Maslen remarked that Dekker's plague pamphlet *The Wonderfull Yeare (WY)* "shares the witty eclecticism of Nashe's satires. Like *Unfortunate*, it veers from comic to tragic, from elegaic lyricism to graveyard humour."<sup>17</sup> Both were religious men, and Alexander B. Grosart wrote that Dekker's *Foure Birds of Noahs Arke* startles us with its "theological and devotional character, much as Thomas Nashe does with his 'Tears.'"<sup>18</sup> M. T. Jones-Davies found Dekker's humorously absurd treatment of the classical myth about Orpheus and Eurydice in *Newes From Hell (NFH)* similar to Nashe's humorously absurd treatment of Hero and Leander in *Lenten*.<sup>19</sup>

Nashe said that he hoped to write a sequel to *Pierce*. He did not, but Dekker did. Dekker's *NFH*, containing the "Deuils answere to Pierce Pennylesse," eulogized Nashe, I think, exactly as the poet would have wished:

And thou [Nashe], into whose soule (if ever there were a *Pithagorean Metempsuchosis*) the raptures of that fierie and unconfinable *Italian* spirit were bounteously and boundlesly infused, thou sometimes Secretary to *Pierce Pennylesse*, and Master of his requests, ingenious, ingenuous, fluent, facetious, T. *Nash*: from whose abundant pen, hony flow'd to thy friends, and mortall Aconite to thy enemies: thou that madest the Doctor [Harvey] a flat Dunce, and beat'st him at two tall sundry Weapons, Poetrie, and Oratory: Sharpest Satyre, Luculent Poet, Elegant Orator, get leave for thy Ghost to come from her abiding, and to dwell with me a while, till she hath carows'd to me in her owne wonted ful measures of wit, that my plump braynes may swell, and burst into bitter Invectives against the Liefteutenant of Limbo, if hee casheere *Pierce Pennylesse* with dead pay. (*NFH* C2v)

In the expanded edition of *NFH* published the following year called *A Knight's Conjuring*, this passage was removed, but Dekker placed Nashe in an Elysian Grove of Bay Trees along with other deceased poets he wished to honor. Indeed, in Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*, we hear "My tongue speakes no language but an Almond for Parrot, and crack me this Nut" (I.i.53-4), the titles of two pieces by Nashe.

Dekker took a Nashe-like stand of defiance, and punningly compared being a writer to being pressed to death:

For he that dares hazard a pressing to death (thats to say, *To be a man in print*) must make account that he shall stand (like the old Wethercock ouer Powles Steeple) to be beaten with all stormes. Neither the stinking Tobacco breath of a *Sattin-gull*, the *Aconited* sting of a narrow-eyd *Critick*, the faces of a phantastick Stage-monkey, nor the *Indeede-la* of a Puritanicall Citizen, must once shake him. No, but desperately resolve (like a french Post) to ride through thick & thin: indure to see his lines torne pittifully on the rack: suffer his Muse to take the *Bastooone*, yea the very stab, & himselfe like a new stake to be a marke for every *Hagler* (WY A3r)

Dekker sometimes published anonymously, as did Nashe, and as Nashe anonymously championed the cause of the Church of England, Dekker took extraordinary steps to get the word out about prison life and corruption among prison officials. While he was imprisoned, he penned work that was published anonymously and under the names of others, thus protecting himself against his jailors' revenge. His efforts may well have helped to bring about the release of some debtors from prison, including himself.

Moreover, Dekker parodied the interests of Nashe's enemies, Gabriel and Richard Harvey. The title of his *The Wonderfull Yeare* is a play on Harvey's *Gorgon*, or *The Wonderfull Yeare*, while Dekker's title *O per se O* reminds us of a Harvey nickname for Nashe, "A per se A" (*Strange* I4v; the two are inter-related in a Nasheian portion of *Doctor Faustus*, when Robin the clown reads, "*A per se a, t h.e, the: o per se o deny orgon, gorgon*" 1616 edn, C4r). As Nashe did in *Comets*, Dekker wrote a parody of prognositications entitled *The Ravens Almanacke* (RA). The Harveys' father was a ropemaker, and ropemakers got their living going backwards, as pointed out by Nashe's *Strange* (H1v) and two works I will herein propose to be by Dekker, *The Owles Almanacke* (OA C3v) and *The Compter's Commonwealth* (CC D3r). RA contains a story about a Rope-maker called Richard who was a "parlous sour fellow, ill-loved of his neighbors" (F4v).

In Dekker's *Satiro-Mastix* (H2r) a character says "respice funem" (think on the rope's end), the same pun on "respice finem" (think on your end) that Nashe jabbed Harvey with in *Strange* (C2r), and which is also included in a scene with the Gabriel Harvey-like Dr. Pinch in Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* (IV.iv.41-2).<sup>20</sup> In Edmund Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Nashe's tormentor Gabriel Harvey (a friend of Spenser's) is represented by the character "Hobbinol." Dekker wrote,

“Leaue them in unmercifull hands of the Country-hard-hearted *Hobbinolls*, (who are ordained to be their Tormentors,)” (WY D1v).

Both men wrote lively, energetic, vigorous prose that frequently contained amusing descriptions, metaphors, and similes. When F. P. Wilson described Dekker as “the high-flier of wit and humour, the swashbuckler of words and phrases,” he could just as easily have been speaking about Nashe.<sup>21</sup> Louis Ule stated that *Summer* “demonstrates what many have suspected, that Nashe in his writings exhibits the largest vocabulary of any Elizabethan,” but Ule didn’t check Dekker, whose vocabulary was similarly vast.<sup>22</sup> Donald McGinn noted that Nashe carefully composed clever sentences that transitioned from one topic to another; so did Dekker.<sup>23</sup> Sir Brian Vickers characterized Nashe’s verse style as often staccato rather than flowing, with verse sentences that tended to be short and disconnected.<sup>24</sup> This style also occurs in Dekker. Both Nashe and Dekker favored a strong authorial presence in their writing, and both frequently employed the word “almost,” the phrase “up and down,” and parenthetical expressions.

How were the two authors different? E. D. Penry maintained that it was a matter of personality. “Dekker is far less egotistic, far less arrogant... While Nashe craves personal recognition, Dekker would be satisfied with peace and quiet.”<sup>25</sup> Yet it was to Dekker that the players turned during the War of the Theaters, and his satirical comedy *Satiro-Mastix* effectively delivered the knock-out blow. As for personal recognition, Dekker gave it to Nashe in *NFH* (see above) and elsewhere (see later chapters).

Neil Rhodes found a secularization and empathy in the works of Dekker that was absent in those of Nashe, a “switch towards direct social criticism uncluttered by the more histrionic kinds of moral fervour...the description of the dying chandler’s boy in Dekker’s *The Wonderful Year* discloses a mixture of steady, compassionate reporting which is alien to Nashe’s writing...Nashe could see comedy in squalor and violence, but Dekker tended to see only the suffering.”<sup>26</sup> Yet Nashe was not unsympathetic to begin with, and surely his own suffering, a need to reinvent himself so that he sounded different from “Nashe,” plus the process of maturation could have led to writing that demonstrated greater empathy toward others. Might Dekker have been an older and wiser Nashe?

Nashe had bidden farewell to “fantasticall satirism” in the first edition of *Tears*:

In those vaines here-to-fore haue I mispent my spirit, and prodigally conspir'd against good houres. Nothing is there now so much in my vowes, as to be at peace with al men, and make submissiue amends where I haue most displeased...to God and Man doe I promise an vnfaigned conuersion...The Autumne I imitate, in sheading my leaues with the trees, and so doth the Peacock shead his taile. (*Tears* \*3v-\*4r)

But Harvey rejected Nashe's olive branch, pillorying him in *Pierce's Supererogation*. It was clear that even before his banishment from London, whatever work bore Nashe's name on it was bound to spark controversy simply because he wrote it. As Stephen Hilliard noted, "The former self he wanted to leave behind was already public property."<sup>27</sup>

Might Thomas Nashe have given himself a truly new start by disguising himself and returning to London as "Thomas Dekker," then "killing" himself off after he was banned from publishing? Help from others would have eased his transformation, and I will later propose that Thomas Middleton actively aided him, while Ben Jonson knew of his identity switch and kept mum about it. When he spoke of being in the country in *Pierce*, he called himself "the plague's prisoner"; it was London that was, for Nashe, to quote Dekker, "Mother of my life, Nurse of my being" (*RR* B1r). To ban a man like Nashe from publishing would have been akin to a death sentence. Linguistic analysis causes me to believe that Nashe lived on as "Dekker," not employing Dekker as a front man, but physically becoming Dekker (Dekker really was in prison during 1612-1619 and wrote about his experiences there).

It is one thing for an author to copy another; English Renaissance authors sometimes appropriated material from this or that play or book, either in imitation or parody. This type of copying from any given writer might be expected to be found in a few of the imitating author's works, but not throughout his sustained writing career. Nor would he keep mirroring the same author. The joke of the parody wears thin; the aper moves on to copy another; and the professional writer eventually develops his own style and interests. Thus, poet/playwright Thomas Lodge took after John Lyly in his *Euphues' Shadow, the Battle of the Senses*; mimicked Thomas Nashe in his *Wit's Misery*; and imitated Christopher Marlowe in his *The Wounds of Civil War*. Lodge ended up becoming a practicing physician who sometimes translated serious works by others and wrote about medicine.

The relationship between Nashe and Dekker was different. Not only did Dekker's writing share uncommon similarities to Nashe's throughout Dekker's life, but he and Nashe seemed to share the same brain.

## Matches and Near Matches

I will start off by listing twelve examples of similarities between the "two" authors' works, most of which can be shown to be uncommon linguistically. To locate uncommon similarities, I ran word juxtapositions through the searchable *Early English Books Online-Text Creation Partnership (EEBO)* database, which expanded from 25,355 full texts to 32,863 full texts of works written from 1472 to 1700 during the course of my study. Certain works were not searchable and I used other means to examine them.<sup>28</sup> For ease of expression, the term "*EEBO*" includes them as well.

MacDonald Jackson printed a valuable discussion regarding use of this database, emphasizing the special care which must be taken to search for unusual spellings, since texts are uploaded in their original state.<sup>29</sup> I have adopted the following *EEBO* terminology: "fby.10" = "followed by," the second term follows within ten words of the first term; "near.20" = the second term occurs within twenty words either before or after the first; and "\*" = a placeholder for endings, such that "must\*" will find "muste," "mustering," "mustard," etc. The use of *EEBO* enabled me to locate Matches and Near Matches.

When a word, phrase or juxtaposition occurs in *EEBO* in two or more works I posit to involve the hand of the same person, plus no more than one additional occurrence within a forty-year time period, it is called a "Match." "Near Matches" are terms found in such works plus no more than fifteen other pieces within the entire *EEBO* database. I also state when each Match or Near Match occurs in the dramatic or non-dramatic work of other playwrights. I include a few juxtapositions I came across in the *OED* which were not elsewhere in searchable *EEBO* as part of my count. Excluded from my count is 1606's *The Black Year* by Anthony Nixon, who was not a playwright, which incorporated large passages from various pieces by others, including *Comets*.

We find Matches and Near Matches within the writing everyone acknowledges to be by Nashe, as the following examples illustrate. The first two show that Nashe was capable of duplicating a whole sentence or phrase in two different works, while the others show uncommon, recurring word juxtapositions. Words in bold always denote my emphasis.

1. “Not so much as *Feuer quartan*, but the Romanes built a Temple to, thinking it some great God because it shook them so: and another to *ill fortune*, in *Exquillijs*, a Mountaine in Rome, because it should not plague them at Cardes and Dice. No *Feuer quartanes*, *ill fortune*, or *good fortune*, may wring out of vs any good workes” (*Tears* O3r) and “The Romanes dedicated a Temple to the *feuer quartane*, thinking it some great God, because it shooke them so: and another, to *Ill fortune* in *Exquilliis* a Mountaine in Roome, that it should not plague them at Cardes and Dice. Your Graces frownes are to them shaking feuers, your least disfaours, the greatest *ill fortune* that may betide them” (*Summer* I2r)—*EEBO* Match: Plague\* near.30 cards near.30 fortune\*.
2. “As the Elephant flies from the Ram, or the Sea Whale from the noyse of parched bones” (*Pierce* C4r) and “Little creatures often terrifie great beasts: the Elephant flyeth from a Ramme, the Lyon from a Cock and from fire; the Crocodile from all Sea-fish, the Whale from the noyse of parched bones” (*Summer* I2v)—*EEBO* Match: Whale\* near.20 parched bone\*.
3. “His stinking breath, (which smells like the greasie snase [snuff] of a candle)” (*Saffron* X2r), and “That love not to goe in greasie dublets...will make you haue stinking breathes, and your bodies smell like Brewers aprons: rather keep a snuffe in the bottom of the glasse to light you to bed” (*Pierce* F1v)—*EEBO*: Greasy near.30 stinking breath\*.
4. “Now he is no body that cannot drinke *super nagulum*, carouse the Hunters hoop, quaffe *vpsey freze crosse*, with healthes, gloues, mumpes, *frolickes*” (*Pierce* E4r), and “A voni, mounsieur Winter, a frolick *vpsy freese, crosse*, ho, *super nagulum*” (*Summer* D1v)—*EEBO* Match: Upsy freeze near.20 frolic. The one other *EEBO* occurrence of this juxtaposition is in playwright Thomas Lodge’s book, *Rosalynde*, 1592.
5. “Our Sauior breathes out many woes against them...For *Deuouring widdowes houses vnder* pretence of long prayers. Thirdly, for compassing Sea and Land to *seduce*” (*Tears* P1v), and “Thou art the most wretched *seducer*, that *vnder wolues raiment deuourest widowes houses...prayer*” (*Almond* F3v)—*EEBO* Match: Devour\* widow\* house\* near.20 seduce\*. Note also: “We shrowd all subtiltie masking *vnder* the name of simplicitie, all painted holines *deuouring widowes houses*, all gray headed *Foxes clad in*



**sheepes garments”** (*Pierce* G2v). The sentiment about devouring widows’ houses was Biblical (Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47).

Matches and Near Matches enable us to jettison the commonplace as evidence of interconnections. They may be caused by imitation, parody, or coincidence. Coincidence would not, however, produce a large quantity of Matches/Near Matches, while an imitator or parodist would generally not have more than a few of the works by the author he is copying at hand or memorized. A large number of Matches/Near Matches between the work in question and a range of works by a known author is therefore an important indication that the same hand was involved. Throughout this book I supplement Matches/Near Matches with similarities in thought, substance, and style.

Dekker often co-authored pieces with others, and sometimes his contributions can be confidently identified. David Lake and MacD. P. Jackson independently found that in *The Roaring Girl*, Dekker wrote Scenes 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, and 10, while Middleton penned Scenes 3, 4, 5, 8, and 11.<sup>30</sup> According to Peter B. Murray’s research, in *Westward Ho*, Dekker wrote II, IV.ii, and V, while John Webster penned I, III, and IV.i. In *Northward Ho*, Murray assigned Dekker I.ii, II.i, IV, and V li. 360-517, and assigned Webster I.i, II.ii, III, V up to li. 262; V.i. 263-359 is of uncertain authorship.<sup>31</sup> In *The Virgin Martyr*, Fredson Bowers found Dekker’s hand in II, III.iii, IV.ii, and V.i, and Philip Massinger’s in I, III.i, III.ii, and V.ii, with IV.i and IV.iii uncertain.<sup>32</sup> According to W. J. Paylor, Dekker wrote six prison-related sketches for the 1616 edition of *Sir Thomas Overbury his Wife* (*Over.*): A Prison, A Prisoner, A Creditor, A Sargeant, His Yeoman, and A Jailor.<sup>33</sup> In the above works, I only quote similarities to Dekker from those sections viewed to be by Dekker or to be of uncertain authorship. I disagree, on the other hand, with the authorship assignments by Cyrus Hoy in the play *Patient Grissil* (*PG*) by Dekker, Henry Chettle, and William Haughton, as delineated in the following footnote.<sup>34</sup> I therefore report all similarities to *PG* and include line numbering from the Fredson Bowers edition, so that interested readers can explore the issue for themselves.

## Examples of Similarities Between the Works of Nashe and Dekker

### 1. Knowledge of the Same Pasquil

Dekker:

**Sol, Re, me fa, mi, I haue it now, *Solus Rex me facit miseram*:**  
Alas poore Lady tell her no **Pothecary** in **Spaine** has any of that  
*Assafetida* [a type of medicine] she writes for (*NSS* F3v)

Nashe:

O Italie, the Academie of man-slaughter, the sporting place of murther, the **Apothecary**-shop of poison...This [Pope] that is now, is a God made with his [the King of Spain's] own hands as it may appeare by the *Pasquil* that was set vp of him, in a manner of note, presently after his election. **Sol, Re, Me, Fa, that is to say: *Solus Rex me facit***; onely the K. of **Spaine** made me Pope (*Pierce* D1r)—*EEBO* Match: *Solus Rex me facit*.

A pasquil was an anonymous satirical Latin verse affixed to the statue of Pasquil in Rome. Ronald B. McKerrow, the painstakingly detailed editor of Nashe's collected works, was unable to trace the one to which *Pierce* referred.<sup>35</sup> *Pierce* implied that popes tended to be poisoned to death in Italy; Pope Sixtus, who was antithetical to Spain's interests, died in 1590 after five years in office, and was followed in quick succession by three popes satisfactory to Spain, all of whom died within a year of their election. Writing some thirty years later, Dekker knew this back story and added the musical note "mi" for "miseram" to the Latin pun because, within *NSS*, the King of Spain was making a character miserable.<sup>36</sup>

### 2. Misquoting Horace

Dekker:

*Caelum petimus stultitia*, all that are chosen Constables for their wit go not to heauen (*GH* A1v)

Nashe:

I coosned can testify, *Caelum petimus stultitia*, which of vs all is not a sinner (*Unfortunate* B1v)—*EEBO* Match: *Caelum petimus*

“*Caelum ipsum petimus stultitia*” is a quote from Horace which means “we seek the heavens in our stupidity.”<sup>37</sup> Both *GH* and *Unfortunate* misquote it by leaving out “*ipsum*,” and are the only two works in *EEBO* to do so. Nashe sometimes misquoted sources, a trait McKerrow found disturbing as it made it difficult to identify references in Nashe’s works.<sup>38</sup> As for Dekker, he mistermied Plato’s “*annus magnus*” as Plato’s “*mirabilis annus*” (*WY* C1r).<sup>39</sup>

### 3. Natural Phenomena

Dekker:

She [**the World**] roade vpon a Chariot of **Clowdes**, which was always furnished with **Thunder, Lightning, Winds, Raine, Haile-stones, Snow**, & all the other **Artillery** belonging to the seruice of *Diuine Vengeance* (*LC* B3r)

Nashe:

When **the Leuiathan** shall approche, (that with his neesings [sneezes] chaseth **Clowdes**,) and you shall see **lightning and thunder** in the mouthes of all foure **Windes**; When Heauen (in stead of starres) shall bee made an **Artillerie-house** of **Hayle-stones**, and no Plannet reuolue any thing but prostitution and vastitie (*Tears* E3r-v)—*EEBO* Match: Hailstone\* near.30 artillery\* near.30 wind\*

Both pieces associate an entity of immense size, in *LC* the World, in *Tears* the Leviathan (juxtaposed with “planets”), with the natural phenomena of clouds, thunder, lightning, wind, and hailstones. Both further associate these phenomena with the military term “artillery.”

### 4. Sympathy for Animals

Both authors sympathized with animals butchered for meat and viewed them as “innocent.” Moreover, in passages from Dekker’s *WA* and

Nashe's *Unfortunate* below, the narrator pities a bear being tormented for sport, and compares him to men being led to whipping posts in the former, and Anabaptists being led to execution in the latter. Both works also associate colliers (coal carriers) with whipping a blind bear. "Hunks" was the name of a blind bear in London's Paris Garden who was set upon by dogs and men with whips for the entertainment of the audience.

Dekker:

**Innocent Lambs, Shéep, Calves, Pigges, &c. Poultrie** were not more churlishly handled by them...**murdered** (*LC H2r*)

The bloody **massacre** of the poore **innocent pullen** (*BL C4v*)

To kill **innocent** Children, to **kill harmless Cattle** (*WofE H4v*)

At length a **blinde Beare** was tyed to the stake, and in stead of baiting him with dogges, a company of creatures that had the shapes of men, & faces of christians (being either **Colliers**, Carters, or watermen) tooke the office of Beadles upon them, and whipt monsieur *Hunkes*, till the **blood** ran downe his old shoulders: It was some sport to sée **Innocence** triumph ouer Tyranny, by beholding those unnecessary tormentors go away with scratchd hands, or torne legs from a poore **Beast**, arm'd onely by nature to defend himselfe against *Violence*: yet me thought this **whipping of the blinde Beare, moued as much pittie** in my breast towards him, as **the leading of poore starued wretches to the whipping posts in London** (*WA B2r*)

Nashe:

We delight in the murder of **innocent mutton**, in the vnpluming of **pullerie** (*Pierce E2v*)

**Sheep...**in the shambles when the **innocent was done to death** (*Pierce C3v*)

[Poulters] shall **kill** more **innocent Powltry** (*Comets B1v*)

Your **Horses** which you tame and **spurre**, and **cut their mouthes** with raining, and finally **kill** (*Tears C2v*)

**Pittiful**...to see euen a **Beare**, (which is the most cruellest of all **beastes**) to[o] too **bloudily** ouermatcht, and deformedly rent in pées by an vnconscionable number of cures, it woulde **mooue compassion** against kinde...vgly shape...euen such compassion dyd those **ouermatcht vngratious Munsterians** obtayne of many indifferent eyes, who now thought them suffering to bée **shéepe** brought **innocent** to the shambles (*Unfortunate* E2r)

All the **colliers** of Romford, who hold their corporation by **yarking the blinde beare** at Paris garden...the right agilitie of the **lash** (*Unfortunate* M4v)

## 5. Higher and Lower Education

Thomas Nashe sounded like the Cambridge man that he was, using terms specific to his university:

Nashe:

The **masters** and batchellours' **commencement** dinners at **Cambridge and Oxford** are betwixt three and foure in the afternoone, & the rest of the antecedence of the day worne out in disputations: imagine this the **act** or **commencement** of the red Herring, that **proceedeth** batcheler, **master**, & doctor all at once, & therefore his **disputations** must be longer (*Lenten* B4r)

According to the Master of Jesus College:

From the earliest days to times comparatively recent a candidate for a degree at Cambridge was required to maintain a syllogistical dispute in the schools, which disputation was called 'The Act.' If he was successful and admitted to the full privileges of a graduate, he was said to 'commence' in Arts or a Faculty, and the ceremony at which he was so admitted was, and is, called at Cambridge 'the Commencement.' If the Candidate went to a higher degree he was said to proceed.<sup>40</sup>

Nashe also framed debtor's prisons, called the Counters, as institutions of education:

Trace the gallantest youthes and brauest reuellers about Towne in all the by-paths of their expence, & you shall vnfallibly finde, that once in their life time they haue visited that melancholy habitation. Come, come; if you will go to the sound truth of it, there is no place of the earth like it to make a man wise. Cambridge and Oxford may stande vnder the elbowe of it. I vow if I had a sonne, I would sooner send him to one of the Counters to learn lawe, than to the Innes of Court or Chauncery (*Strange* IIv)

But Thomas Dekker, who is not known to have attended either university, sounded like a Cambridge man, too, using similar terminology. He, too, compared prison to a school in *RG*, as both he and Middleton did elsewhere.<sup>41</sup>

Dekker:

*Alexander. A Counter,*  
 Why, 'tis an **Vniuersity** who not sees?  
 As schollers there, so heere men take **degrees**,  
 And follow the same studies (all alike.)  
 Schollers learne first Logicke and Rhetoricke.  
 So does a prisoner; with fine honied speech  
 At's first comming in he doth **perswade**, beseech,  
 He may be lodg'd with one that is not itchy;  
 To lie in a cleane chamber, in sheets not lowsy,  
 But when he has no money, then does he try,  
**By subtle Logicke, and quaint sophistry**  
 To make the keepers trust him.

*Sir Adam.* Say they do.

*Alexander.* Then hee's a graduate.

*Sir Davy.* Say they trust him not.

*Alexander.* Then is he held a freshman and a sot,  
 And neuer shall **commence**, but being still bar'd,  
 Be expulsd from the **Maisters** side toth'twopenny ward,  
 Or else i'th hole be plac't.

*Sir Adam.* When then I pray

**proceeds** a prisoner.

*Alexander.* When mony being the theame,  
 He can **dispute** with his hard creditors hearts  
 And get out cleere, hee's then a **Maister of Arts** (*RG* Dekker  
 portion: Sc. 7, G3v)