

Edited by Simon Barker and Hilary Hinds

Companion Texts: The Plays

The Changeling

Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594)

At my first coming to Rome, I – being a youth of the English cut – ware my hair long, went apparelled in light colours, and imitated four or five sundry nations in my attire at once; which no sooner was noted but I had all the boys of the city in a swarm wondering about me.

I had not gone a little farther but certain officers crossed the way of me, and demanded to see my rapier; which when they found (as also my dagger) with his point unblunted, they would have haled me headlong to the strappado, but that with money I appeased them. And my fault was more pardonable in that I was a stranger, altogether ignorant of their customs. (Note by the way that it is the use in Rome for all men whatsoever to wear their hair short; which they do not so much for conscience' sake, or any religion they place in it, but because the extremity of the heat is such there that, if they should not do so, they should not have a hair left on their heads to stand upright when they were scared with sprites. And he is counted no gentleman amongst them that goes not in black; they dress their jesters and fools only in fresh colours, and say variable garments do argue unstaidness and unconstancy of affections.)

The reason of their strait ordinance for carrying weapons without points is this: the bandittos, which are certain outlaws that lie betwixt Rome and Naples, and besiege the passage that none can travel that way without robbing. Now and then, hired for some few crowns, they will steal to Rome and do a murder, and betake them to their heels again. Disguised as they go, they are not known from strangers; sometimes they will shroud themselves under the habit of grave citizens. In this consideration, neither citizen nor stranger – gentleman, knight, marquis, or any – may wear any weapon endamageable upon pain of the strappado. I bought it out; let others buy experience of me better cheap.

[...]

So let others tell you strange accidents, treasons, poisonings, close packings in France, Spain, and Italy. It is no harm for you to hear of them; but come not near them.

'What is there in France to be learned more than in England but falsehood in fellowship, perfect slovenry, to love no man but for my pleasure, to swear *Ah*,

par la mort 'dieu! when a man's hams are scabbed? For the idle traveller – I mean not for the soldier –, I have known some that have continued there by the space of half a dozen years, and when they come home they have bid a little wearish lean face under a broad French hat, kept a terrible coil with the dust in the street in their long cloaks of grey paper, and spoke English strangely. Naught else have they profited by their travel save learnt to distinguish of the true Bordeaux grape, and know a cup of neat Gascon wine from wine of Orleans. Yea, and peradventure this also: to esteem of the pox as a pimp, to wear a velvet patch on their face, and walk melancholy with their arms folded.

'From Spain what bringeth our traveller? A skull-crowned hat of the fashion of an old deep porringer; a diminutive alderman's ruff with short strings like the droppings of a man's nose; a close-bellied doublet coming down with a peak behind as far as the crupper and cut off before by the breastbone like a partlet or necktcher; a wide pair of gaskins which ungathered would make a couple of women's riding-kirtles; huge hangers that have half a cowhide in them; a rapier that is lineally descended from half a dozen dukes at the least. Let his cloak be as long or as short as you will; if long, it is faced with Turkey grogram ravelled; if short, it hath a cape like a calf's tongue and is not so deep in his whole length (nor hath so much cloth in it, I will justify) as only the standing cape of a Dutchman's cloak. I have not yet touched all; for he hath in either shoe as much taffety for his tyings as would serve for an ancient, which serveth him, if you will have the mystery of it, of the own accord for a shoe-rag. A soldier and a braggart he is, that's concluded. He jetteth strutting, dancing on his toes with his hands under his sides. If you talk with him, he makes a dishcloth of his own country in comparison of Spain. But if you urge him more particularly wherein it exceeds, he can give no instance but "In Spain they have better bread than any we have" when, poor hungry slaves, they may crumble it into water well enough and make misers with it; for they have not a good morsel of meat – except it be salt pilchards – to eat with it all the year long; and (which is more) they are poor beggars, and lie in foul straw every night.

'Italy, the paradise of the earth and the epicure's heaven – how doth it form our young master? It makes him to kiss his hand like an ape, cringe his neck like a starveling, and play at hey pass, repass, come aloft when he salutes a man. From thence he brings the art of atheism, the art of epicurizing, the art of whoring, the art of poisoning, the art of sodomitry. The only probable good thing they have to keep us from utterly condemning it is that it maketh a man an excellent courtier, a curious carpet knight; which is, by interpretation, a fine close lecher, a glorious hypocrite. It is now a privy note amongst the better sort of men, when they would set a singular mark or brand on a notorious villain to say he hath been in Italy.'