

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



‘[T]ween two Currents’: The Triumph of Domestic Tragedy in Heywood’s *The English Traveller*

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And not many dayes after, the yonger sonne gathered al together, and tooke his iourney into a farre country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. (Luke 15.13)¹

If asked to name a Thomas Heywood play that combined both domestic tragedy and the prodigal son theme, one would likely recall the renowned *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603). Heywood’s later work, *The English Traveller* (1624), has never achieved comparable acclaim, and the reasons are understandable. Heywood declares the play a ‘tragicomedy’ (To the Reader, 2) and defines it by its originality, claiming it offers an alternative to the usual topics that animate the early modern stage, for

There have so many
Been in that kind, that he desires not any
At this time in this scene; no help, no strain,
Or flash that’s borrowed from another’s brain. (Prologue, 9-12)²

An odd position, given how closely it repeats the themes of his earlier play. But while *The English Traveller* lacks the originality of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, it presents a far more extensive, nuanced, and often bizarre commingling of domestic tragedy and prodigal son comedy than its predecessor. Though once derided for its ‘moral

¹ All scripture is taken from the Authorised Version, *The Holy Bible* (London [1613]).

² Thomas Heywood, *The English Traveller* in ‘*A Woman Killed with Kindness*’ and *Other Domestic Plays*, ed. by Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 199-283. All quotations are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

earnestness',³ the play has been increasingly recognised for its uncomfortable, even satiric qualities.⁴ Its plots do not combine complementarily; rather, the thematic logic of the domestic tragedy serves to deconstruct the values on which prodigal son comedy had so long relied: the sanctity of the domestic space, the relevance of Aristotelian ethical theories, the supremacy of paternal authority, and the redemptive capabilities of women. *The English Traveller* challenges or entirely dismantles these basic tenets and offers an uneasy, melancholic interpretation of what had once been subject matter for lively yet conservative comedy. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32), which ruled the forefront of English comedy for almost a century, no longer proves a fit subject for an increasingly international, capitalist England and a secular stage in the waxing 1600s. And Heywood demonstrates much of this simply by inviting the action indoors.

The play is certainly a tragicomedy, though one that better fits Philip Sidney's description of a 'mongrel' generic medley than most.⁵ As later critics attest, it is a play 'concerned with the instability of generic conventions' and characterised less favourably elsewhere as a 'poorly unified' 'theatrical mélange'.⁶ Its tragicomic combination is peculiarly segregated: its two plots, one a domestic tragedy and the other a prodigal son comedy, barely interact. It is a tale of two houses, the Wincotts and the Lionels, and their troublesome guests. Each plot concerns a domestic space violated by concupiscence, a landowner disobeyed and his authority usurped, a son instructed on virtue by his father, corrupting false friends, the temptation of carnality, and a happy ending brought about by the financial intervention of the patriarch and evacuation of women. In the first plot, the elderly Wincott and his young wife host two gentlemen at their house, Geraldine and Dalavill. Geraldine and the wife are in love, yet Geraldine will patiently wait until Wincott's natural death to pursue a relationship. Eventually, it emerges that Mrs Wincott has been committing adultery with Dalavill the whole time,

³ Alan Young, *The English Prodigal Son Plays*, ed. by James Hogg (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1979), p. 232. See also Henry Hitch Adams, *English Domestic or, Homiletic Tragedy, 1575-1642* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 170.

⁴ Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (London: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 251-2, pp. 263-9; Richard Rowland, "'Thou Teachest Me Humanitie": Thomas Heywood's *The English Traveller*', *English Comedy*, ed. by Michael Corder, Peter Holland, John Kerrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 137-57; Norman Rabkin, 'Dramatic Deception in Heywood's *The English Traveller*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 1.2 (1961), 1-16; Michel Grivelet, 'The Simplicity of Thomas Heywood', *Shakespeare Survey*, 14 (1961), 56-65.

⁵ Philip Sidney, *The defence of poesie* (London: William Ponsonby, 1595), fol. 11v.

⁶ Rowland, p. 139; 'Thomas Heywood', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.* [online], August 17, 2011 <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Heywood>> [accessed February 24, 2018].

the revelation of which causes her to mimic Anne Frankford and die of shame, though this time unredeemed. The second plot features a young prodigal, Lionel, who hosts a rollicking party for his friends and servants in his father's absence, wasting the family estate on drink, dice, and company. When Old Lionel returns home, the servant Reginald fails to prevent his discovery of the party-wrecked house, but the son's public display of regret, shame, and repentance wins his father's forgiveness. The two foils, noble Geraldine and riotous Lionel, are reunited with the two houses' respective masters and order is restored, although now one house has been thoroughly ravaged and the other has a corpse in the bedroom.

Each plot dramatises the relationship between familial or romantic love and appropriate financial behaviour. Despite some critical perceptions of Heywood's drama as unremarkably bourgeois,⁷ the treatment of prodigality – in the sense of excessive expenditure – in *The English Traveller* astutely anticipates the increasing irrelevance of conventional sixteenth century attitudes to the ethical supremacy of thrift. His representation of prodigality and financial risk is not that of the conventional Aristotelianism of earlier plays built on the *Nicomachean Ethics*' triadic theory of prodigality, liberality, and niggardliness,⁸ but one that engages with the economic utility of international trade, venture capitalism, and financial risk. The play speaks with an Aristotelian lexis. Love and money are confused in Wincott's conception of neighbourly hospitality: while Old Lionel wants not to be proven a 'niggard' in financial matters (3.2.121), Wincott claims, 'to express the bounty of my love, / I'll show myself no niggard' (5.1.55-6). It is hard to highly rate Wincott's ethical position here, as his need here to avow niggardliness, his hospitality, and his frequent entertainment of young men leads directly to his wife's adultery. Elsewhere, Lionel proclaims that 'Lust, disobedience and profuse excess' in conjunction with 'Intemperance, appetite to vice' ruins the 'thrift' of young men's fathers, sharply recalling the Aristotelian understanding of financial excess and moderation (1.2.124-36). In the absence of Old Lionel, the servant Robin extols the joys of riot in an ironic precis of those themes the parable was so often used to warn against:

Waste, riot and consume; misspend your hours
In drunken surfeits; lose your days in sleep
And burn the nights in revels; drink and drab;
Keep Christmas all year long, and blot lean Lent

⁷ *Encyclopædia Britannica*; Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 221.

⁸ See such total condemnations of prodigality in works such as *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality* (c. 1560 – c. 1580), *The Interlude of Youth* (c. 1513), or the Dutch schoolmaster plays.

Out of the calendar; all that mass of wealth
Got by my master's sweat and thrifty care
Havoc in prodigal uses. (1.2.21-7)

Waste, riot, consume, misspend, surfeit, prodigal – this is both the register of excess as denounced as so undesirable in Aristotle, as well as the behaviours so characteristic of the misadventures of early modern prodigals. Similarly, the bawd Scapha instructs Blanda on the unimportance of immediate repentance:

Well look, to't when 'tis too late, and then repent at leisure, as I have done.
Thou seest here's nothing but prodigality and pride, wantoning and wasting,
rioting and revelling, spoiling and spending, gluttony and gormandising. All
goes to havoc, and can this hold out? (1.2.174-8)

Scapha's warning understands the necessarily finite nature of riot, but this premise provides the grounds not for Blanda and Lionel to repent and marry, as such characters might in a more moralistic play, but for Blanda to find herself another man to keep her once Lionel's estate is exhausted.

Encouraged by Reginald, Lionel becomes 'the prince of prodigality', celebrating vicious excess (2.1.80). Although these characters glorify excess and fall into financial ruin as a result, Heywood does not entirely condemn prodigality. Michelle Dowd's reading of the play's economics is enlightening; she argues that Lionel's excesses are characteristic of the son of an overseas merchant whose fortunes depend on 'risky mercantile business' and which would be damaged by the 'overly restrictive emphasis on thrift' that characterises anti-prodigal morality. She speculates, 'Prodigality may be the antithesis of thrift, but texts such as *If You Know Not Me* and *The English Traveller* collectively suggest that prodigality – not frugality – is becoming more and more necessary for participation in England's new economies'.⁹ Lionel's behaviour might be unambiguously vicious by an Aristotelian rubric, but it has increasing utility for the seventeenth century English market. When he has wasted his father's estate in the conventional manner, its restoration is achieved not by a return home but rather by the father's return from a far country, his 'fortunate voyage' (2.2.119) that brought a 'late stock got at sea' (4.6.232). Risky mercantile travel to distant countries, then, becomes the solution to youthful prodigal excess.

⁹ Michelle Dowd, *The Dynamics of Inheritance on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 157.

This is a major departure from traditional prodigal son comedy. The geographical pattern of stray and return is a mainstay of the parabolic plot, but the ‘far country’ is traditionally a source of spiritual and financial ruin, not rehabilitation. In interpreting the parable, St Augustine writes, ‘the rest of the human race, which had turned aside to worship idols, had wandered into a far country. What maketh him so far from Thee Who made thee, as the false god which thy hast made for thyself?’¹⁰ For Augustine, the dissolute ‘far country’ to which the prodigal wandered geographically mapped an idolatrous departure from God. This typological reading depends on a physical pattern of stray and return, and both this pattern and its geographical representation of moral transgression remained a crucial element of Lukan exegeses and adaptations for a millennium. Early modern England was no exception, and its litany of dramatic adaptations of the parable maintained this crucial geographical pattern. The far country was dramatised as taverns, brothels, London, Eastcheap, and even international locales. Prodigals could leave home to visit a smorgasbord of ‘far countries’ to indulge in financial and moral expense, and with a title like ‘The English Traveller’, one might expect little deviation from this trend in Thomas Heywood’s play. Curious, then, that *The English Traveller* keeps the mischief of its prodigal son plot indoors. The interior domestic space is crucial to both domestic tragedies and prodigal son comedies. This importance should not be surprising; indeed, it has been suggested that English domestic plays themselves arose from prodigal son comedy, as ‘In making its particular province the *family* affairs of ordinary parents and children it may be regarded as the first real example of domestic drama’.¹¹ Since the earliest morality plays, prodigal figures would leave their homes and go forth into a corrupting world. This narrative is well-suited to city comedy, in which spendthrift gallants may go out into the city and spend abroad, straying from the sanctity of the domestic space and paternal authority. For Heywood, however, all transgressions are kept indoors and both sons are confined to the homes of honourable patriarchs: Lionel in his father’s home, and Geraldine in the home of his pseudo-adoptive-father, Wincott.

Such domestic confinement is a hallmark of domestic tragedy, yet all but unheard of among prodigal son drama. The Lukan far country remained a popular element for Protestant, typological exegeses that advanced an Augustinian reading of the country denoting distance from God. These readings of the far country as ‘the region of sinne’, as Nehemiah Rogers phrases it, are exemplified by Thomas Cowper: ‘This country is said to be farre, not in regard of the distance of place: the Lord measures the earth in his

¹⁰ Augustine, ‘Psalm CXXXIX’, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, 6 vols (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1857), VI, p. 194.

¹¹ Andrew Clark, *Domestic Drama: A Survey of the Origins, Antecedents, and Nature of the Domestic Play in England* (Salzburg: Salzburg University Press, 1975), p. 121.

fist, and no part of it is farther from the Lord then an other'.¹² The far country lent itself to a range of ideas about sin, vice, and the abandonment of familial, Christian values. It is little surprise that the far country is often configured as London. This is most lucidly expressed in Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1604), wherein it is 'man-devouring' London in which our reformed prodigal, searching for his own prodigal daughter, spent his 'unshapen youth [...] And surfeited away [his] name and state / In swinish riots' (2.2.22-4).¹³ Perhaps the most famous formulation – and one rather sharply defined – is Shakespeare's Eastcheap and the Boar's Head tavern that play host to Hal's stray from his father. These anxieties about urban corruption are an obvious evolution of the more localised structure of the morality plays, in which it is usually an unspecified tavern or other unnamed locale to which the prodigals wander. These locales are defined by their otherness from home, church, and school, those sanctioned places that children may frequent. Even in Jacobean drama, then, the 'far country' maintains this element of the Augustinian reading as a place of geographical and moral transgression. It may also define difference to the status quo, not necessarily a status defined by virtue but by genre. As Dover Wilson observes of the early prodigal son comedy *Acolastus*, 'The far country into which Acolastus now journeys is the land of Terentian comedy'.¹⁴ The far country interrupts and contrasts the morality, tone, and even genre of 'home', which is usually a domestic space, but may appear as court, a place of employment, and even England itself for those works that cast the prodigal as an intercontinental traveller. The far country configures the departure from Christian virtue as a geographical 'elsewhere'.

This is not, of course, the case in *The English Traveller*. The far countries to which Geraldine and Old Lionel travel are not the sites of idolatry and temptation that they are for both patristic and contemporary exegetes. Geraldine, our other English traveller, is explicitly unmotivated by the kind of concupiscence of which the Lukan elder brother accuses the prodigal: he cannot answer Prudentilla's query about which clime breeds the best women because his voyages were spurred by linguistic education, not romance, and women were merely 'common objects [...] Seen, but not much regarded' (1.1.138-9). Crucially, Geraldine is not just a traveller but a traveller who has *returned to his community*. His travel thus serves a social, communal function. We rarely hear Geraldine speak of his own travel; his exploits must be gleaned from the reiterations of his eager audience, Dalavill, Wincott, and the wife. As in *Othello*, the tales of Geraldine's exploits bring pleasure to his social circle: 'my husband / Hath took much

¹² Nehemiah Rogers, *The True Convert* (London: Edward Griffin, 1620), p. 58; William Cowper, *The mirrour of mercie or The prodigals conversion* (London: Edward Griffin, 1615), p. 135.

¹³ Thomas Middleton, *Michaelmas Term* in *Thomas Middleton: 'A Mad World, My Masters' and Other Plays*, ed. by Michael Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 67-136.

¹⁴ John Dover Wilson, 'Euphues and the Prodigal Son', *The Library*, S2-10.40 (1909), 337-361 (p. 340).

pleasure in your strange discourse / About Jerusalem and the Holy Land' (1.1.107-9). Yet unlike in *Othello*, wherein the seductive potential of those reported exploits prompts Desdemona's desires, Geraldine's travel prevents such desires realising into marriage. Because he is physically absent, his childhood love marries Wincott instead. Travel may be socially beneficial but it impedes marital ambitions and one must return home to seek a wife: 'Being an Englishman, / 'Mongst all these Nations I have seen or tried, / To please me best, here would I choose my bride' (1.1.169-71). Yet Geraldine's return is not only to one's *nation* but his *community*: a return to the very same streets and houses in which he lived as a child.

In this way, the travel to a far country is transformed into part of a conservative arc of didacticism and self-betterment. When a heartbroken Geraldine reacts to the wife's adultery by attempting to voyage overseas again, his uninformed father objects to the 'unnecessary travel', asking 'What profit aim you at you have not reaped? [...] Can you either better / Your language or experience?' (5.1.3-9). This second desire for travel is neither motivated by nor useful to the community, and is in fact spurred by his passionate desire to abandon that community. Here, Heywood's conservatism usefully demonstrates the development of how travel is morally conceptualised in prodigal son drama. While English plays written half a century ago stressed the inevitable moral collapse of youths who strayed from home, even Heywood, writing in the early years of colonialism, still acknowledges the financial, social, and communal utility of travel. Geraldine's individualistic travel is a positive not just because it sharpens his nobility, but because he returns to the community and shares his knowledge with them; it only then becomes undesirable once a man has already 'grown perfect' (3.1.150). Once the didactic arc has been completed, travel is only good as professional enterprise, as it is for Old Lionel, whose travel also serves a communal function by settling debts at home with the profits reaped abroad. Although the play concludes this theme conservatively as Geraldine's closing lines declare that his reconciliation with Wincott 'calls me from all travel, and from henceforth / With my country I am friends', travel to the far country ultimately proves permissible due to its utility for the community (5.1.255-6).

Though Old Lionel and Geraldine may be international English travellers in a literal sense, the most important arcs of literal trespass remain on England's shores, within the walls of home. The preoccupation of domestic tragedies with the disruption or violation of the personal, domestic space provides the setting not only for Geraldine's tragedy, but also Lionel's comedy. Heywood's interest in the subject matter for domestic tragedy, what is described in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* as 'a barren subject, a bare scene' animated by a 'dull and earthy Muse', is perfectly set within the home (Prologue,

4-11).¹⁵ This sentiment is laid out more explicitly by Catherine Richardson, for whom domestic tragedy is marked by ‘the familiar nature of the local, [...] the shockingness of the contemporary and [...] those plays for which the nature of the household is the motivating dynamic for action, and in which the meaning of events is therefore shaped by their location.’¹⁶ By combining both the plot and matter of domestic tragedy with the plot of the prodigal son plays, Heywood relocates the transgressive ‘far country’ within the walls of the house. This is a radical reconceptualisation of the parabolic moral framework: it is no longer a youth straying from his home (and with it, education and employment, virtues both Christian and Aristotelian) into the corrupting outside world; instead, that ‘corruption’ is reimagined as something that comes from within. It is fitting that the Lionel household is thought haunted by a vengeful ghost while the doors of Wincott’s house ‘Appear as horrid as the gates of hell’ (5.1.39).

By combining the essential transgression with domestic confinement, the parabolic pattern of stray and return can be inverted. The concerns of domestic tragedy transform a site of grace and paternal authority into one of exclusion and transgression. When Old Lionel returns with wealth and success, he finds his ‘own gates shut upon me / And bar their master entrance’ (3.2.136-7). When Reginald fails to prevent either Old Lionel or the usurers from discovering the ruin of the Lionel estate and he is suspected of murder, the younger Lionel appears and finally performs the customary repentance scene. ‘Next, your blessing / That on my knees I beg’, he tells his father, reproducing the iconic scene of the prodigal on his knees. He confesses to having played the ‘mis-spent youth’ who now ‘Turns his eyes inward, sorry and ashamed’, and repents his wasteful ways (4.6.258-9). Then, in this final scene of reconciliation between the two, Lionel entirely inverts the moral of the parable. For Lionel, his prodigality is configured not only as a sin for which he has repented, but as a *price* by which one buys thrift: ‘You have but paid so much as I have wasted / To purchase to yourself a thrifty son’ (4.6.268-9). For Lionel, the parable does not serve as a warning against prodigality, but rather a means by which it can be justified.

Although Old Lionel redeems his son, his authority is repeatedly challenged. By the end of the play, Old Lionel remains a benevolent, powerful patriarch: ‘let not what’s hereto passed / In your least thoughts disable my estate: / This my last voyage hath made all things good, / With surplus, too’ (4.6.323-6). He is not, however, allowed to assume this role before being first made the butt of Reginald’s jokes and humiliated for his inability

¹⁵ Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness* in ‘*A Woman Killed with Kindness*’ and *Other Domestic Plays*, ed. by Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 71-128.

¹⁶ Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 6.

to see through his servant's incredible claims that the family home cannot be entered as it is haunted by a 'murdered ghost [...] His body gashed and all o'erstuck with wounds' (3.2.189-90); Reginald is safe from the ghost's wrath because, as he repeatedly claims, 'the ghost and I am friends' (211). Great dramatic irony is generated by Old Lionel's mistaken praise of his son having 'grown so thrifty' (94) and his being misled to believe his son's debts are a result of him having sensibly 'purchased land and houses' (82). Such carnivalesque disarray again inverts the unchallenged domestic hierarchy of the parable, with its silent, obedient servants. Although the father's authority is eventually affirmed, these comic scenes fall a long way from traditional conceptions of the prodigal's father as a representation of God. Indeed, some scholars have argued that the decline of prodigal son drama is due in part to an increased disenchantment with such godly patriarchs.¹⁷ While Old Lionel is ultimately allowed to have his authority reinforced, Old Geraldine and Wincott are less fortunate.

Wincott himself is another receding patriarch: moral and valued, yet a victim of his own excessive hospitality, a cuckold, and most likely impotent. The cause of his wife's infidelity is somewhat obscure, as she is initially characterised as not only devoted to her husband but also committed to a potentially lengthy wait to confer her widowhood upon Geraldine. Yet just as she married Wincott when Geraldine went to sea, she falls into Dalavill's arms as soon as Geraldine abandons the Wincott household a second time. The plainest explanation for her adultery is Wincott's excessive hospitality. He positions himself as a figure of universal paternity to the youths that frequent his home and beseeches them to treat his house as if it was their own:

Think this your home, free as your father's house,
And to command it as the master on't,
Call boldly here, and entertain your friends
As in your own possessions. When I see't,
I'll say you love me truly, not till then. (1.1.92-6)

Wincott demands his guests' love, not their respect for his authority, and these exhortations for his guests to treat his home as if it were their own is his wife's undoing. Unlike Dalavill, Geraldine has the good grace to wait until Wincott passes away to act on his feelings, or at least is trying to. Geraldine and Mrs Wincott initially read as a sympathetic forbidden romance, neither wishing to betray the friendship of Wincott or

¹⁷ See Tom MacFaul, *Problem Fathers in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 145 and Fred B. Tromly, *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2010), p. 37.

their own virtue. They are content to wait together until she is able to respectably 'confer [her] widowhood' upon Geraldine (2.1.259). These good intentions are muddled, however, by Geraldine's sudden need to visit Mrs Wincott's bedchamber in the middle of the night. Unable to sleep, Geraldine instead hopes to pass the night in 'the sweet contemplation of her beauty' (4.3.102), filled with 'fiery love' (119). The bedchamber is simply, he says, where they express their 'deep vows' of love and no more, but it is also where Mrs Wincott is caught in bed with Dalavill (4.3.118). Geraldine thus never commits sexual transgression, but Wincott is cuckolded and his authority usurped regardless.

Mrs Wincott's adultery is surprising. The age difference between herself and her husband is acknowledged early in the play – 'cold January and lusty May seldom meet in conjunction', jokes the Clown (1.1.43) – but she insists to Geraldine that she is content to wait until her husband's passing to embark on another relationship. Her sexual needs might be suggested by inviting Geraldine to her bedchamber, but she does not press the issue. Her possible dissatisfaction is further offset by Geraldine's emphasis on the strength of her and her husband's mutual love, for she deserves 'for [Wincott's] sake, to be for ever young, / And he for yours, to have his youth renewed, / So mutual is your true conjugal love' (223-5). She appears content for Geraldine to be 'now my brother' and, after Wincott's death, her 'second husband' (2.1.287-8). Her apparent contentment with waiting for Geraldine makes her affair with Dalavill all the stranger. While her desire for Geraldine is rooted in their long-standing friendship, the only apparent reason for her affair with Dalavill is opportunity in the wake of Wincott's invitation to treat his 'possessions' like their own. When these infidelities are revealed, Mrs Wincott promptly falls in a faint and soon after dies, while Dalavill flees and is never seen again. Wincott recovers from news of his wife's infidelity and death with remarkable haste: he proclaims the superficiality of his intended mourning period, which will make him like those who 'wear blacks without, but other thoughts within' (5.1.263). With no insight into Mrs Wincott's motivations or the nature of her relationship with Dalavill save misogynistic presumption, we have only Wincott's excessive hospitality as cause for these transgressions. The domestic space, which Wincott opens to Dalavill and Geraldine as though he were their father, only becomes corrupted by being thus opened.

Come the end of the play, Wincott is rid of his wife and has adopted a new son – despite Geraldine already having a father present at the dinner party, who makes no comment during this peculiar exchange. He is welcomed into Wincott's family as his heir in a 'marriage of our love' (5.1.255) to mirror Old Lionel's 'new adoption' (4.6.275) of his own son. Lionel has lived excessively and consequently learned the value of thrift, or so

he claims, yet his home and savings remain in ruin; contrarily, Geraldine has not transgressed at all, has his own father, and is yet rewarded with a new heirship. Geraldine's father is himself another receding patriarch. Earlier in the play, he warns his son against adultery:

You are grown perfect man, and now you float
Like to a well-built vessel 'tween two currents,
Virtue and vice. Take this, you steer to harbour,
Take that, to imminent shipwrack. (3.1.150-3)

Geraldine, lacking any intent to pursue Mrs Wincott until her husband's death, is disturbed by his father's ultimatum to either 'resolve for present marriage, / Or forfeit all your interest in [his] love' (184-5). When Geraldine refuses, too independent to bow to his father's arbitrary authority, Old Geraldine resorts to the only means of persuasion at his disposal: to 'abortively, before my time, / Fall headlong to my grave' (206-7). Although he recovers and is eventually convinced of his son's virtue, who promises he will forbear the Wincotts' house, Old Geraldine is ultimately subordinated to Wincott in the final scene.

To exacerbate these discomfiting subversions, the patrifilial theme is further unseated by Wincott's closing intention to bury his wife with the secretly celebratory attitude of 'gallants / That bury thrifty fathers' (5.1.261-2) – an act of which Lionel may soon be guilty. In total, *The English Traveller* presents three father figures, all of whom have their paternal authority challenged or deconstructed, and two of whom have the little kingdoms of their domestic spaces utterly degraded. Heywood does not present here some triumphant overthrow of the older generation by riotous youth, the kind of public humiliation and gulling we see with Touchstone of *Eastward Ho*; Heywood's world is rather more sentimental than that. Heywood's perspective is one that understands the increasing irrelevance of the prodigal son *topos* – a story to affirm paternal authority and the virtue of thrift – and mourns that loss. The play presents an anxious, often melancholic series of queries as to the infallibility of those patriarchs who once so easily stood for God.

In many other prodigal son plots, such as those by Middleton, Massinger, and Beaumont, the weakened older generation is contrasted with the vitality and new marriages of the younger. The young women in these plays are problem-solvers, either by virtue of their wit and financial power, or instrumentally, by marriage to riotous prodigal sons. Considering the total absence of women in the Lukan parable – barring the elder brother's unconfirmed accusation that the prodigal wasted his money on

‘harlots’ (Luke 15.30) – the women of English prodigal son drama are by and large an encouraging, occasionally proto-feminist group. At their most undeveloped and misogynistic, these women are sex workers whose marriages to prodigals curb their excesses. But in *The English Traveller*, women are permitted no such redemptive powers; indeed, there is nothing socially productive about any of the sexual, romantic, or marital relationships in this play. Many prodigal son plays introduced a romantic plot with the prodigal aiming to win the hand of a wealthy widow or heiress, the marriage to whom would restore romantic and economic balance to the play. This occurs in Heywood’s early take on the parable, *2 If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* (1605), and a similar, uncomfortable variation appears in *A Woman Killed with Kindness* with Sir Charles’s attempts to prostitute his sister. *The English Traveller* takes this further, however, and eliminates marriage altogether. Marriage is repeatedly considered and rejected, and the only existing marriage ends in adultery and bereavement. Romantic love proves a site of tragedy or indifference that offers no recourse for financial hardship.

Rather than enforcing union, the interrelation of love and money only creates discord, as can be seen in Heywood’s representation of usurers and usurious imagery. When Mrs Wincott speaks of love, discouraging her husband’s attempts to urge a match between her sister Prudentilla and Geraldine (whom she secretly desires), she interweaves botanical and financial imagery: love, ‘When it freely springs / And of itself takes voluntary root / It grows, it spreads, it ripens’ and produces ‘an usurious crop of timely fruit’ (2.1.24-7). This contamination of the natural by the fiscal recalls the well-known Aristotelian condemnation of usury for its unnatural quality: ‘as the offspring resembles its parent, so the interest bred by money is like the principal which breeds it, and it may be called “currency the son of currency.” Hence we can understand why, of all modes of acquisition, usury is the most unnatural’.¹⁸ A similar uncomfortable use of usurious imagery occurs between Wincott and Geraldine’s father. When Old Geraldine comments that his son spends so much time in the house it is as though he has been ‘adopted [...] into your family’ (3.1.8) (a concern literalised in the final scene when Geraldine is made heir of Wincott’s estate), Wincott casts Geraldine himself as coin:

you’re as kind
As moneyed men, that might make benefit
Of what they are possessed, yet to their friends
In need will lend it gratis. (3.1.11-14)

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by Ernest Baker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 30 (1258a35).

Mrs Wincott takes this image of amicable money-lending, the kind Antonio refuses to engage in with Shylock, and turns it usurious:

And like such
As are indebted more than they can pay
We more and more confess ourselves engaged
To you for your forbearance (3.1.14-17).

Their jests continue, and Dalavill articulates the anxiety undergirding this usurious lexis: 'What strange felicity these rich men take / To talk of borrowing, lending and of use, / The usurer's language right' (24-6). Old Geraldine then invokes a similar metaphor when cruelly warning his son that he risks 'forfeit[ing] all your interest in my love' if he does not marry (185).

Such 'strange' imagery is made stranger still by the literal, threatening usury unfolding in Lionel's plot, as he and his own romantic interest, Blanda, an inexperienced sex worker, are themselves pursued by usurers: 'With these loud clamors, I will haunt thee still' says the usurer to their Machiavellian servant Reginald, 'Give me my use, give me my principal' (3.2.60). Usurers, a literal threat in the comedic plot, provide a romantic metaphor in the tragic – fitting, perhaps, as usury is 'inherently insatiable', as David Hawkes argues.¹⁹ The anxieties of usury were embodied by a litany of usurious villains on the Renaissance stage – including those in pursuit of Lionel, Geraldine's fallen double – and provided a popular antagonist to prodigal heroes. With a liberal father, prodigal son, and usurious antagonist, all three aspects of Aristotle's theory of financial behaviour were represented. With this context in mind, Heywood's configurations of love in usurious terms are not only peculiar and unpleasant but pervert the comfortable opposition between prodigal youths, accompanied by their amours, and the usurers that pursue them which dominated other plays. Heywood will not allow wealthy romantic interests to redeem the souls and purses of either riotous son; in this play, usury serves as both a literal financial threat and productive romantic metaphor.

Usury is not the only metaphor to pervert the socially appropriate intermingling of love and money; proprietary language is another. The chambermaid Bess invokes the image of a landlord when attempting to tell Geraldine of her mistress's adultery: 'You bear the name of landlord, but another / Enjoys the rent' (3.3.70-1). It is, again, a peculiar metaphor. Geraldine is by no means Mrs Wincott's 'landlord'; this title should, surely,

¹⁹ David Hawkes, *The Culture of Usury in Renaissance England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 3.

go to her husband. It is further complicated by Wincott's own configuration of his financial relationship to Geraldine: 'The lands that I have left / You lend me for the short space of my life; / As soon as heaven calls me, they call you lord' (5.1.258-9). Geraldine does become a landlord in this final metaphor, though actual lands have usurped Mrs Wincott's body in Wincott's legacy. The metaphor is also heightened by its literal corollary in Lionel's plot, wherein Reginald spins an elaborate lie about a ghost murdered by his landlord, a 'covetous merchant', which again positions violence in one plot to reflect sexuality in the other (3.2.196). These conceptualisations of Mrs Wincott's body as rent payments recur upon the exposure of her adultery, when Geraldine exclaims, 'think what thou hast lost / To forfeit me', as if he himself were a financial bond (5.1.159-60). This theme is further specified when Mrs Wincott's death makes 'a free release / Of all the debts I owed her' (229-30). Romance remains inextricably financial in Heywood's play, but this is no longer to its benefit. Though such misogynies are unusual for prodigal son drama, they are more comprehensible for domestic tragedy: Mrs Wincott's adultery may not seem so out of character alongside Anne Frankford or Alice Arden. The behaviour of the other women in the play – Prudentilla, Blanda, Scapha, Bess – is similarly unproductive, often inexplicably so. None of Heywood's five women, including the three romantic interests, are permitted a meaningful role in the climax of either plot. Scapha, Blanda, and Bess all disappear off-stage, Prudentilla is reduced to a spear-carrier, and Mrs Wincott dies of shame.²⁰

Mrs Wincott's body and its sexual violation is a classic somatic figuration of the themes of domestic tragedy. This is the only death in the play, though Mrs Wincott's corpse provides a striking contrast to the Lionels' invented ghost. The ghost story is lifted almost directly from Plautus' *Mostellaria*, but Heywood adds the details of the ghost's bodily violation in his gashed wounds. Reginald's ghost story, though a fiction, is an apt one. Reginald's ghost is rather medieval in its comprehensibility: it explains its history, cause of death, and manner of haunting quite lucidly. But like all ghosts, invented or otherwise, it is a metaphor. When Reginald tells Old Lionel, 'O, sir, this house is grown prodigious, / Fatal, Disastrous unto you and yours' (2.2.173-4), he speaks the truth: the wasted inheritance and physical ransacking of the house would indeed be fatal and disastrous to the Lionels had the elder's international ventures not been successful and the younger refused to repent his transgressions. The ghost is explicable in ways that filial disobedience is not; Reginald's bleeding, wounded ghost bodilessly embodies the insubstantial terror of filial disobedience and its capacity to destroy paternal power and legacy. But while the violated body of the ghost merely *represents* domestic degradation, Mrs Wincott's sexually violated body is its cause and embodiment. A

²⁰ For analysis of the other women in this play and its treatment of sex work, see Ezra Horbury, *Prodigality in Early Modern Drama* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2019), pp. 241-7.

minute before her demise, she is conveniently conveyed offstage to her chamber. Unlike Anne Frankford, who dies in a separate manor, Mrs Wincott passes on-site. We are introduced to the physical route to her bedchamber – and it is *her* ‘polluted chamber’ (5.1.139), as she sleeps separately to Wincott, a phrase lifted from Anne Frankford’s ‘polluted bedchamber’ (13.14) – when Geraldine traverses through ‘the stairs and rooms’ (3.4.111) that lead to it, only to find it a place of adultery. The room now houses a corpse. This sharpens Heywood’s misogyny to an absurd degree: earlier in the final scene, Wincott casually remarks that ‘Dinner perhaps / Is not yet ready’ (5.1.70-1), informing us that dinner will be taken in the house; when Wincott then declares in the final lines that it is time to ‘feast’, we are faced with the nauseating implication that the celebratory banquet transpires a few feet beneath a corpse. We may read this as an absurd lack of concern with the dead body of an adulteress, or a rotting reminder of domestic violation that continues to haunt the house after death. Either way, although Old Lionel was driven away from his home by the gory fiction of a ghost, for the Wincott household, the material reality of a woman’s corpse is so unaffecting they feel comfortable dining beneath it.

Thus are Heywood’s anxieties about female sexuality and the household spatialised. The layout of the Wincott house allows for dinner beneath a corpse, but there is no space for legitimate sexual congress or privacy. Throughout the play, private spaces are destabilised: Wincott’s early declaration that his ‘house was never private’ (I.i.81) foreshadows its sexual invasion, the ‘private conference’ (2.1.18) between Dalavill and Prudentilla is witnessed and misread as romantic interest,²¹ the chambermaid Bess learns of the ‘private whisperings of the secret love / Betwixt [Geraldine] and my mistress’ (3.3.69-70) due to her access to Mrs Wincott’s chambers. Because of the dangerous potential of the private space, Geraldine and Mrs Wincott’s shared solitude is loaded with threat. The two have shared much alone time, having grown up together in the same neighbourhood in which they still reside, but this shared history defends rather than questions the legitimacy of their unusual private company: ‘Why, say we be; who should be jealous of us? / This is not first of many hundred nights / That we two have been private’ protests Mrs Wincott (2.1.201-3). The adulterous suggestions are somewhat offset by Mrs Wincott comparing the freedom of her bedchamber to that of Geraldine’s ‘father’s house’ (210), which suggests Geraldine’s wandering around the Wincott house is the result of a conceptual expansion of his father’s house to Wincott’s as part of their shared neighbourhood community rather than a particular desire to pursue adultery with the wife. Of course, Geraldine’s path to the bedchamber does in

²¹ It is Mrs Wincott who makes this misreading, so the error may be deliberate to distract from her own adultery.

fact lead him to adultery, but it is not his own. The discovery is accidental, achieved by eavesdropping to check if Mrs Wincott is asleep, and demonstrates the aural permeability and unstable privacy that characterises Heywood's representation of the household. The private domestic space is one defined by both danger and precarity, in which sexual transgression is both easily achieved yet easily discovered.

The misogyny of the play has been remarked on and it is crucial to its tragic domestic theme,²² but Heywood's wide writing-off of female characters also denies a common comic conclusion of prodigal son comedy. Wealthy women are a common tool in prodigal son drama to solve the prodigal's financial hardships. Heywood himself includes this plot in the earlier *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*. Marriage to a wealthy heiress or widow, or the charity of a noblewoman are the most common means of the prodigal's financial restoration outside of paternal intervention.²³ No such solutions are offered in *The English Traveller*. Blanda initially considers renouncing her profession in order to marry Lionel, as she hopes to 'dress these curls / And place these jewels, only to please him' (1.2.151-2) and will not stand for her mother, the bawd Scapha, to 'teach me aught / That tends to injure him' (172-3). This reflects a common theme in early modern drama, the marriage of the prodigal and his mistress (or a disguised sex worker), which legitimises any pre-existing relationship between the two while also, since such a marriage was considered humiliating, punishing the prodigal for his transgressions. As Theodore Leinwand argues, the prevalence of this theme reflects 'the tremendous desire for orderliness' so common in early modern drama.²⁴ *The English Traveller* seems poised to follow the same plot, but abandons the couple's relationship without comment. Blanda flees at Old Lionel's return and is never heard from again. The bawd Scapha disappears at an earlier point, with no explanation. The chambermaid Bess, though virtuous, appears in only one scene. Meanwhile, Prudentilla, the sister of Mrs Wincott, seems similarly positioned for marriage with one of the young men, yet ends the play unmarried and her role severely diminished. Her only function in the conclusion of the play is to report her sister's death. Heywood dispenses with the traditional wife/whore dichotomy entirely, instead showing both wife and sex worker as equally treacherous. Blanda and Lionel forget their interest in one another, Geraldine never takes up Wincott's suggestion to court Prudentilla, and Mr and Mrs Wincott's

²² David Laird, 'Ironic Oppositions and the Articulation of Dissent in Thomas Heywood's *The English Traveller*', *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate*, 17:2-3 (2007), 175-196; Rabkin; Orlin, pp. 268-9.

²³ For a full study of this trend, see Jennifer Panek, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁴ Theodore Leinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603-13* (Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, 1986), p. 143.

marriage ends in tragedy. This misogynistic evacuation of women also removes their capacity to close plots. Without marriage to Blanda, Lionel remains sexually transgressive, Prudentilla and Geraldine remain alone, and Dalavill has been tempted into adultery with a married woman. Rather than concluding with a marriage between one of these foreshadowed couples, *The English Traveller* ends instead with the adoption of Geraldine by Wincott, creating what David Laird describes as a ‘sanitized Eden’,²⁵ and what is described in the play as a ‘marriage of our love’ (5.1.255). It is Geraldine, not the prodigal Lionel, who is made sole heir to the wealthy Wincott, even though both young men already have fathers. Homosociality supplants heterosexuality yet fails to rectify the world’s ethical and financial imbalances.

In its Lukan form, the parable of the prodigal son is necessarily conservative. It must affirm the values of an older generation over those of the younger, and critics such as Young, Tromly, and MacFaul attribute this structure to the eventual decline of the *topos* from the Renaissance stage.²⁶ Young goes so far as to assert that the prodigal son plot ‘separat[ed] those public theatre dramatists who continued to accept sober didacticism and prudential homiletics as having a place in theatrical entertainment from those writers for the private theatres who vigorously opposed such a view and attached the literary taste and what they saw as the outmoded moralism of the public stage.’²⁷ Despite the many accusations of conventionality, conservatism, and uncomplicated sentiment levelled at Heywood, he throws a wrench into this dichotomy between satiric, private playwrights and sentimental public playwrights. Heywood’s play anticipates the recession of didactic drama, the marginalisation of patriarchal authority, and the fading belief in New Testament *topoi* to sketch out universal relationships between fathers, sons, and homes, but it does so mournfully. Heywood illustrates these declines without celebration, and retains hope in the lingering redemptive power of these tropes, even if that power is limited and finite.

At the centre of these concerns, figuratively and literally, is the home, what for Augustine and thousands of successive writers stood for Christian grace. Such optimism in the redemptive power of the domestic space has no place in *The English Traveller*. Lionel may invite transgression indoors, but Geraldine discovers it has been there all along. Heywood offers us not a joyful defeat of the *senes* by the younger generation, but a melancholic examination of a world in which fathers and husbands fail, homes are destroyed, wives lie and cheat, friendships are cast aside, and the happy note on which

²⁵ Laird, p. 193.

²⁶ Young, p. 280; MacFaul, p. 145; Tromly, p. 37. See also Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Los Angeles: California University Press, 1976).

²⁷ Young, p. 231.

we end is one man adopting another to compensate for the death of his wife, whose corpse rots in the bedroom upstairs. If the parable of the prodigal son concludes with the killing of the fatted calf, to eat, and be merry (Luke 15.23), it is fitting that *The English Traveller* ends instead with a declaration to 'first feast, and after mourn' (5.1.261).