



CHICAGO JOURNALS

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Source: *Renaissance Drama*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 113-137

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#) for [Northwestern University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/674684>

Accessed: 12/01/2015 13:53

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A Gentleman May Wander: Inheritance, Travel, and the Prodigal Son on the Jacobean Stage

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The story of the prodigal son was one of the most popular comic plots on the English Renaissance stage, featured in at least forty plays of the period ranging from Tudor scholastic drama such as Thomas Ingeland's *The Disobedient Child* (ca. 1559–70) to satirical city comedy such as Ben Jonson's *The Staple of News* (1626).¹ Although allegorical and exegetical interpretations of the parable were common throughout the Middle Ages, variations on the biblical story of the prodigal's waywardness and repentance, journey and return gained in popularity throughout the late sixteenth century and, especially, in the early decades of the seventeenth century.² In evaluating the significance of this literary trend, critics have tended to emphasize the malleable structural features of the prodigal archetype, the usefulness of this narrative as a didactic tool for articulating humanist pedagogical values, or the fruitful connections between the prodigal son topos and contemporary concerns about social morality, especially within the vibrant setting of the London metropolis.³ However, these

1. Dates of plays given parenthetically refer to the estimated year (or date range) of first performance found in Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700: An Analytical Record of All Plays, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies, &c.*, rev. S. Schoenbaum, 3rd ed., rev. Sylvia Stoler Wagonhein (London: Routledge, 1989). Dates in parentheses for all other nondramatic texts indicate the year that a work was first published.

2. See Darryl Tippens, "Shakespeare and the Prodigal Son Tradition," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 14 (1988): 57–77. For the popularity of the prodigal son story in early modern drama, particularly city comedy, see Alexander Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 33–53. The most complete survey of early modern prodigal plays remains Alan R. Young, *The English Prodigal Son Plays: A Theatrical Fashion of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1979).

3. See, e.g., Ervin Beck, "Terence Improved: The Paradigm of the Prodigal Son in English Renaissance Comedy," *Renaissance Drama* 6 (1973): 107–22; David Bevington, *From Mankind to*

critical accounts leave largely unexplored the economic contours of the prodigal plot and, in particular, the cultural significance of staging not simply the prodigal son but the prodigal heir in Jacobean England, a period in which new socio-economic pressures were transforming inheritance practices, including the traditional doctrine of primogeniture. By reading several prodigal son plays that position this figure within the context of early seventeenth-century inheritance practices, I expand the critical focus on prodigality to account for the complex social work this story may have been performing within early modern England's burgeoning mercantile economy. In doing so, I offer a new model for reading the Jacobean prodigal paradigm, one that may help account for the renewed popularity of the genre in the period.

Focusing in particular on John Fletcher's *Monsieur Thomas* (1610–ca. 1616) and Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me* (1604–5), two Jacobean plays that prominently feature the figure of the prodigal son, I examine how these plays address or attempt to resolve the problem of the male heir who proves himself undeserving of his hereditary rights. As is the case with many early modern plays that take up the story of the prodigal son, these texts rewrite the biblical story so that the eldest or only son, rather than the younger, is the one described and staged in terms of his wayward behavior. In doing so, these texts not only raise the stakes of the story by pinning all hopes for proper succession on a delinquent son or heir, but they also revise the implications of prodigality itself to suit new economic realities. By staging scenes of physical travel as well as deploying more metaphoric tropes of moral and social displacement, Fletcher and Heywood figure the prodigal heir as disruptive to traditional patterns of inheritance. However, by equating prodigality with travel, these plays also revise the traditional understanding of primogeniture by redefining prodigality as potentially productive, providing elite⁴ Englishmen with a better understanding of risk and a loss of naïveté that will ultimately benefit them when they return to their familial responsibilities. In the process of recuperating their protagonists'

Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare*; and Tippens, "Shakespeare and the Prodigal Son Tradition."

4. In this article, I use the term "elite" to describe both aristocratic men (the sons of landed gentry) and wealthy merchants who, by virtue of their profession, were able to attain similar status and effectively rise up in the social ranks. For a discussion of social mobility at the upper ranks of English society and the complex and often contradictory definitions of gentleman status, see Keith Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1982), esp. 17–38. As Wrightson demonstrates, despite the highly stratified nature of early modern English society, "the line dividing gentlemen from the rest in the body of society was a permeable membrane" (23).

prodigality for socially and economically acceptable ends, these plays articulate a powerful counternarrative of patriarchal authority, one that values risk, improvisation, and even itinerancy as integral components of elite masculinity.

English common law beginning in the mid-thirteenth century regulated land distribution according to the doctrine of primogeniture, which stipulated that in the absence of a will specifying an alternative distribution, all real property descended to the eldest son at his father's death. However, despite the supposedly universal application of primogeniture in early modern England, patrilineal succession was subject to more frequent modifications and deviations in the early seventeenth century than it had been a century earlier. As historians have demonstrated, biological factors, such as poor diet and high adult mortality rates, had produced an erratic aristocratic fertility pattern, and high interest rates coupled with a general decline in aristocratic land holdings placed many families in precarious financial situations.⁵ Although the end result of these pressures was to "increase the amount of property settled on the son and heir" and prevent the alienation of the family estate, largely through the device of the strict settlement, this legal process was not fully instituted until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁶ The decades around the turn of the seventeenth century thus constituted a pivotal period, poised during an economically tumultuous time in which the laws of primogeniture could seem unnecessarily restrictive and practically untenable for many elite families, yet before the increase in strict settlement and decline in daughters' inheritance rights that would take hold by the eighteenth century. As a result, the socio-economic position of male heirs at the higher levels of society was more tenuous in Jacobean England than it was in the periods immediately preceding and following it.

The growth of English consumerism and the marked increase in mercantile activity during the period also affected the stability of elite families and, specifically, the economic risks often assumed by male heirs. The number of imported goods rose dramatically during this period, as the increase in England's purchasing power facilitated a dependence on goods produced outside the home. This transformation was further aided by "the growth of English commercial and

5. On the doctrine of primogeniture and the challenges it faced in the early modern period, see Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), 113–39; Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993); Eileen Spring, *Law, Land, and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); and Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641*, abr. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

6. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 84.

colonial power, which brought much lower prices for some products.”⁷ As Craig Muldrew has demonstrated, this burgeoning consumption led to an increased reliance on networks of debt and credit. He notes that by the end of the sixteenth century, “the peerage and gentry were . . . heavily involved in credit networks as increasing expenditure required estate holders to maximize profits from rent and other resources. The great expenses of building, hospitality and other forms of conspicuous expenditure required to define their status competitively meant that they were great borrowers and needed a great deal of credit.”⁸ Such expansive credit relationships complicated the ideological impetus of primogeniture, which aimed to preserve familial wealth intact and without risk to the estate.

Furthermore, at the same time that the aristocracy was seeking credit to underwrite their household consumption, they were also spending more time away from their estates to pursue potentially more lucrative mercantile ventures abroad.⁹ By the early seventeenth century, foreign trade held out the promise of much greater return on investment than did domestic land holdings. Indeed, highly successful merchants were often able to “achieve the necessary qualification for gentility,” as their ability to acquire substantial amounts of wealth through trade could enable them to purchase the lands and titles by which gentility was conventionally defined.¹⁰ At the same time, the practice of earning wealth through trade instead of through rents on land was in itself becoming a more acceptable and lucrative practice in the period, drawing both landed gentlemen and enterprising merchants alike with its promise of massive returns. As a result, overseas trade became a central part of England’s commercial economy, making credit arrangements all the more important yet also more difficult and

7. See Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict and London’s Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 43. On the rise of England’s consumer economy, see also Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 1–13; Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978); and Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 171–81.

8. Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: St. Martin’s, 1998), 96–97. For a discussion of how drama of the period negotiated England’s increasingly credit-based economy, see Jean E. Howard, *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598–1642* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 68–113.

9. See Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); and Kari Boyd McBride, *Country House Discourse in Early Modern England: A Cultural Study of Landscape and Legitimacy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

10. See Wrightson, *English Society*, 27–28.

risky to guarantee.¹¹ As Thomas Mun, Edward Misselden, and other economic theorists of the period argued, bullion sent abroad as an investment in foreign imports could be productively transformed in time into the future wealth of the country. Mun, for instance, insisted that “monys sent out in trade” would eventually “come back again in treasure.”¹² Though risky, loss could eventually result in great economic gain.¹³ These new economic theories and practices emphasized ephemeral exchanges of commodities over more concrete land transactions and highlighted the flexible projections and toleration of risk needed to conduct long-distance trading ventures in which profits were both physically and temporally distant from the site of initial monetary outlay. In order to grow and stabilize their familial resources, then, many aristocratic gentlemen and up-and-coming merchants turned their focus outward, seeking wealth in the precarious yet potentially lucrative mercantile ventures located far away from both the family estate and England itself.

The risks of such ventures were certainly not lost on contemporary social commentators, many of whom concentrated their disapproval on the vice of prodigality, especially that of young men and heirs. As Muldrew makes clear: “Too much building, drinking and fine clothes were the usual symptoms of luxury, and not only did such things consume estates, but they distracted from the time spent earning a profit. Youthful prodigality was especially condemned, because discipline was so difficult to internalize, and it was precisely at the point when a business or trade was being started up that debts were large and profit was needed to pay them if success was to be achieved.”¹⁴ Popular literature of the period, including ballads, also responded to these concerns in their representations of the prodigal youth, often depicting in stark terms the negative effects of a son’s reckless spending on the family estate. For instance, in the ballad “The Extravagant Youth, Or, An Emblem of Prodigality,” a son laments his current “sad and deplorable dismal state,” a direct result of living his life as a “wild and excravagant [*sic*] race” consisting of gaming, courting, and purchas-

11. On the growth of England’s overseas trade during this period, see Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*; Ralph Davis, *English Overseas Trade, 1500–1700* (London: Macmillan, 1973); W. E. Minchinton, *The Growth of English Overseas Trade in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Methuen, 1969); and the essays in *Global Traffic: Discourses and Practices of Trade in English Literature and Culture from 1550 to 1700*, ed. Barbara Sebek and Stephen Deng (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). On the link between overseas trade and credit, see Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation*.

12. Thomas Mun, *England’s Treasure by Forraign Trade* (London, 1664; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1928), 19. Although not published until 1664, Mun’s treatise was written between 1623 and 1628.

13. See Valerie Forman, *Tragicomic Redemptions: Global Economics and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), esp. 1–6.

14. Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation*, 302.

ing expensive clothes. His status as his “old Father’s Heir” seems to have given him tacit permission to live riotously; his father gave him “all his free-hold land,” but the son “mortgag’d and sold and spent so fast” that eventually his father’s “whole estate was quite decayd.” The ballad concludes with a warning to all “Young Gallants” to shun such financial ruin.¹⁵ The causal link between the male heir’s youthful prodigality and the destruction of the family estate could hardly be more explicit. Prodigality, defined in terms of excessive consumption and risky economic ventures (such as gambling and foreign trade), directly threatened the landed wealth of the English gentry and the ideology of familial continuance on which the system of primogeniture depended.

The association between wayward youth and foreign trade is explored and consolidated in many prodigal son plays of the period through a focus on the prodigal’s travel abroad. Foreign travel, of course, is a feature of the original biblical parable, in which the prodigal son “gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living” (Luke 15:13, AV). However, this plot element is greatly expanded and developed in prodigal son plays of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the earliest of which tended to define the prodigal’s travel in almost purely negative terms. Early Tudor didactic dramas, for instance, such as George Gascoigne’s *The Glass of Government* (1575), tend to reiterate the warnings about foreign travel expressed by Roger Ascham and other writers, focusing on the imminent danger of such travel for the prodigal male heir rather than on its potential educational or moral benefits. Many English writers were deeply concerned about the “moral and physical dangers posed by foreign places”—in particular, Catholic countries such as France and Italy—and harbored “more fundamental doubts about the wisdom of being on the move.”¹⁶ In his treatise on the education of England’s young, elite males, for example, Ascham famously condemns “the fansie that many yong gentlemen of England have to travell abroad” (H3r), and specifically warns against travel to Italy.¹⁷ In arguing that learning was far more profitable to young gentlemen than experience through travel, Ascham espouses a position that privileges stasis over change, piety and solidity over in-

15. “The Extravagant Youth, Or, An Emblem of Prodigality” (London, late seventeenth century). Pepys 2.92.

16. See Anthony Parr, introduction to *Three Renaissance Travel Plays*, ed. Parr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 1–54, esp. 2. For concerns about the potential conversion of Protestant travelers, see also Robert Dallington, *A Method for Travell* (London, 1605), and Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 316–17.

17. Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London, 1570). All citations refer to this edition of the text. On Ascham’s condemnation of foreign travel for pedagogical purposes, see Sara Warneke, *Images of the Educational Traveller in Early Modern England* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 41–73.

vention. Ascham fully believes that travel will transform young men, but only in negative ways, calling it a “mervelous dangerous” (H3r) enterprise that will lead to sin and “factious hart[s]” (K2r). Foreign travel, like the prodigality with which it was closely associated, leads young men away from the path of duty and must, therefore, be avoided if they are to grow up to be properly educated and morally upstanding gentlemen.

Ascham’s warnings were very influential, but they were clearly not heeded by all. In addition to being increasingly necessary and desirable for economic reasons, foreign travel held a considerable allure for young men in this period, as it promised both a recreational tour of cultural, artistic, and historical sites and an educational exploration of foreign customs and intellectual culture. Thousands of Englishmen traveled abroad during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, often with the goal of learning new languages or observing foreign customs and practices.¹⁸ Indeed, pedagogically motivated travel to Europe became “an established and popular practice among English gentlemen that culminated in the Grand Tour of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”¹⁹ Beyond the specific pedagogical goals that might be associated with any given trip, it was generally assumed (or at least hoped) that travel abroad would help to promote and perfect the social development of young men, capping off their formal education with experiential lessons in civility. Additionally, the growth of non-European maritime trade in the New World, the East Indies, and elsewhere transformed travel in the early Jacobean period by linking the search for profit in a global, protocapitalist economy to a desire for adventure in uncharted, potentially colonial spaces. In the first few decades of the seventeenth century, then, elite Englishmen traveled for study, leisure, and the pursuit of economic gain in larger numbers than ever before, and by the 1630s “tourism was commonplace and colonial voyages had become routine.”²⁰ Attuned to these shifting attitudes toward travel and to new economic conditions that favored overseas trade, some prodigal plays from the Jacobean period tend to emphasize a strikingly different set of concerns from their early Elizabethan counterparts. The conservative, didactic remonstrances against foreign travel and filial disobedience characteristic

18. On the number of Englishmen who traveled abroad, see Warneke, *Images of the Educational Traveller*, 1.

19. Ibid. See also Edward Chaney, *The Grand Tour and the Great Rebellion: Richard Lassels and “The Voyage of Italy” in the Seventeenth Century* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1985), 40; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 297–321; and Parr, introduction to *Three Renaissance Travel Plays*, 2. On English travelers to Italy, see Jonathan Bate, “The Elizabethans in Italy,” in *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare’s Time*, ed. Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michele Willems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55–74.

20. See Parr, introduction to *Three Renaissance Travel Plays*, 6.

of writers such as Ascham and Gascoigne give way to a more complex emphasis on foreign travel in regards to both prodigality and elite male identity formation.

John Fletcher's Jacobean comedy *Monsieur Thomas* offers a fascinating re-assessment of the prodigal's travel as both a challenge to primogeniture and a potentially productive educational experience. Marked by parodic send-ups of foreign travel and the prodigal paradigm, Fletcher's text exudes sophisticated nonchalance, a stance almost antithetical to humanist playwrights such as Gascoigne.²¹ In the play's main plot, based on the second part of Honoré d'Urfé's *Astrée* (1610), the middle-aged Valentine returns home from travel abroad with a younger companion, his "noble friend" (1.1.43) Francisco, who soon falls in love with Cellide, Valentine's much younger betrothed.²² After the ensuing romantic conflict, it is revealed that Francisco is actually Valentine's son who had been "lost at sea" (1.1.33) as a child; father and son are reunited, and Francisco marries Cellide. The subplot, however, centers on the odd behaviors of the prodigal Thomas of the play's title, who has also recently returned home from his travels in France (where he acquired the title "Monsieur"). Thomas's father, Sebastian—who cherishes his family's three-hundred-year tradition of mad behavior—is appalled at Thomas's seemingly reformed manners since his return. As events unfold, we learn that Thomas's newfound piety is merely a hoax devised to goad his father, who threatens to disown him. In his courtship of Mary, by contrast, Thomas continues his "gambolls," "mischeifes," and "quarrells" (1.2.100, 102) until, in a conclusion that manages to leave many of the contradictions in Thomas's behavior unresolved, he is reconciled to both her and his father.

Prodigality may be treated lightly in *Monsieur Thomas*, but it is nevertheless invoked as a key obstacle to the proper propagation of lineage. Throughout this comedic reversal of the prodigal son's return home, Fletcher defines prodigality explicitly, if parodically, as a threat to patrilineality. After first witnessing Thomas's seemingly reformed behavior, Sebastian laments that his son is "undone without redemption" because he "eates with picks" (1.2.57). His despair at his son's newfound manners—a jab at the affected behaviors acquired by English travelers to Europe²³—quickly segues into concerns about inheritance. He

21. Fletcher's treatment of the prodigal in *Monsieur Thomas* shares some structural and tonal elements with Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607). In both comedies, the prodigal paradigm is subject to parodic treatment and to a degree of generational reversal, as the fathers in both texts (Merrythought in *Pestle* and Sebastian in *Monsieur Thomas*) exhibit at times as much prodigal behavior as their sons.

22. John Fletcher, *Monsieur Thomas*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4:427–535. All citations refer to this edition of the play.

23. In his *New and Choise Characters of severall Authors* (London, 1615), for example, Thomas Overbury includes the use of toothpicks in his derisive sketch of an "affectate Traveller" (C5v–C6v). See also Warneke, *Images of the Educational Traveller*, 217–48.

muses: "I have no more sonnes; / And this no more mine owne, no spark of nature / Allows him mine now, he's growne tame" (1.2.60–63). Though the sentiment is reversed—it is Thomas's tameness, rather than his wildness that bothers Sebastian—the effect is the same: behavior deemed dissolute in the father's eye renders the son's status as heir suspect. Although, in an allusion to the biblical parable, Sebastian assumes that his "most canonicall deere neighbours" will "say I have found my sonne, and rejoyce with me / Because he has mew'd his mad tricks off" (1.2.65–67), he himself has a rather different interpretation of events. Indeed, Sebastian immediately determines to disinherit his son, saying:

But I am sure, this Monsieur, this fine gentleman
 Will never be in my books like mad Thomas.
 I must goe seeke an heire, for my inheritance
 Must not turne secretary: my name and quality
 Has kept my land three hundred yeers in madness,
 And it slip now, may it sinke.

(1.2.68–73)

For Sebastian, his son's lamentably altered behavior signifies a fundamental change in identity—from "mad Thomas" to the Frenchified "Monsieur"—that dictates a loss of inheritance, placing Sebastian in the unnatural position of going out to "seeke an heir." The right of succession, that is, must be guaranteed through appropriate behavior, and Thomas's "fine" antics, by removing him from the "three hundred yeers in madness" maintained by his ancestors, threaten the stability of the family line.

The endangered integrity of the patrilineal line remains the sticking point for Sebastian throughout the play. His fears are finally allayed in act 4 when, in a scene that marks the turning point in Thomas's behavior, Sebastian, a widower hoping to produce another heir, parades four of his possible marriage partners onstage for his son's benefit. Before choosing his bride, Sebastian asks Thomas to reveal which of the women he has "laid aboard," concerned "for feare we confound our Genealogies" (4.2.145, 144). Sebastian is overjoyed to learn that Thomas has slept not only with all four of the maids, but also with all of the other possible marriage partners his father can think of. Thomas's promiscuity wins him a place back in his father's graces; Sebastian announces, "thou are mine owne yet" (4.2.153) and caps off the reunion with a gift of twenty pounds, a symbolic return to rightful inheritance. Undeniably comic, the scene nevertheless asserts that male promiscuity threatens the legibility of patrilineal inheritance, confounding genealogies by introducing, in this case, the risk of incest. But if Thomas's prodigality endangers Sebastian's family tree, the cele-

bration of male promiscuity that ends the scene is not simply a parodic reversal of social mores. Instead, Thomas's renegade behavior is specifically rewarded as a sign of proper masculinity, a return to form as his father's "owne boy" (4.2.166). The play's comic inversion not only turns the tables on Jacobean social decorum, but in doing so it also makes visible an alternative definition of ideal masculine subjectivity, one paradoxically founded on prodigality, the very vice that seems most likely to undermine hereditary succession.

Codes of ideal, elite masculinity in the period often emphasize such qualities as refinement, strength, temperance, and self-control, specifically proper control of physical excess achieved through a balance of the bodily humors.²⁴ As Alexandra Shepard has demonstrated, however, many men, often those in dependent positions as defined by age, occupation, or birth order, developed alternative codes of masculine behavior that could take somewhat surprising forms. Despite (or perhaps because of) the restrictive nature of prescriptive definitions of elite masculinity, many young men sought out alternative markers of masculine social status, including "excess, prodigality and violence."²⁵ Furthermore, these forms of behavior were not always regarded as completely antithetical to traditional patriarchal mandates, but were "sometimes accommodated within them."²⁶ Elite masculinity, in other words, could be defined in terms of thrift, self-regulation, and morally upright behavior, but it could also be defined in terms of excess and prodigality. Certainly in the parodic world of Fletcher's comedy, prodigal behavior gets championed as the very sign of patrilineage: Thomas's promiscuous and mad behaviors confirm him as his father's rightful son and heir. But Fletcher's seeming reversal of masculine norms builds on alternative codes of male behavior that were widely available in early modern culture, suggesting that prodigality could be considered constitutive of rather than merely antithetical to masculine subject formation.

This paradoxical connection between prodigality and ideal masculinity is discursively elaborated and explored in the play's narrative account of Thomas's

24. On ideal masculinity and its link to both self-control and the humoral body, see Bruce Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); and contemporary treatises such as Richard Braithwait, *The English Gentleman* (London, 1630).

25. Alexandra Shepard, "Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England c. 1580–1640," *Past and Present* 167 (2000): 75–108, esp. 105. Paul Griffiths similarly argues that young people could chart "a rival course of entry into the adult world" through the social life of the alehouse. See his *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England 1560–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 206.

26. Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 106.

foreign travels. Though Thomas's excursion to France composes the prehistory of Fletcher's comedy, the journey reverberates throughout the play, providing a lens through which to interpret Thomas's character. Thomas's servant and travel companion Launcelot, for instance, announces to Sebastian the return home of his master in terms that highlight the risks and adventures of his forays abroad:

Monsieur Thomas, (for so his travell stiles him)
 Through many forraigne plots that vertue meets with,
 And dangers (I beseech ye give attention)
 Is at the last ariv'd.

(1.2.14–17)

In Launcelot's account, the return home of the prodigal is colored by the dangers he faced on the journey. Indeed, the anticlimactic reunion of father and son in the first act, in which an attempt at benediction is stalled by seemingly antithetical codes of behavior, seems far less interesting dramatically than Thomas's offstage encounters abroad. If Launcelot's enticing description serves as a preface to Thomas's return, it also invites the audience's imagination to travel *out*—away from the play's present action to speculate, however briefly, about what the play will not stage. Similarly, when Thomas's sister Dorothy tells him that Mary refuses to see him because she has heard of “the gambolls that you plaid since your departure, / In every Towne ye came, your severall mischeifes, / Your rowses, and your wenches” (1.2.100–102), we, like Mary, are transported momentarily away from England to the foreign scene of Thomas's debauchery. These and similar stories make use of a spatialized narrative dependent on the physical act of journeying and the displacement that it entails to construe Thomas's travel in terms that are both exciting and dangerously delinquent.

Launcelot's references to the “forraigne plots” and dangers that await English travelers to Europe would have resonated with many in Fletcher's audience, as the paradoxical pleasures and dangers of such travel were popular topics in many of the guides written for travelers around the turn of the seventeenth century. Partly in response to widespread concerns about the dangers of foreign travel, partly due to the increase in the sheer number of travelers to Europe, popular guidebooks outlining proper conduct for those Englishmen headed abroad began to be published beginning in the 1570s and continuing into the 1640s. Published during a period in which new financial incentives to travel took their place alongside both long-standing social and educational motives in favor of traveling and ideological concerns about the potential for travel to corrupt, these guides perform a careful balancing act, exposing in the

process many of the contradictions that helped to shape the figure of the elite traveler in early modern England.

Unlike earlier treatises such as Ascham's that argue against foreign travel for young men, these later Elizabethan and Jacobean guidebooks expound at length on the many and various benefits of travel. "Forraine Travell," James Howell would announce in 1642, serves to "enrich the mind with Knowledge, to rectify the Judgement, and compose outward manners" (Bir, Biv)—a general position widely shared by the guidebook authors, many of whom then proceed to detail the more specific benefits of travel.²⁷ William Bourne, in *A booke called the Treasure for travellers* (1578), cites in particular the political and military benefits of foreign excursions. He argues that "travaylers into other Countries" are "very necessary members in the common weal in divers respectes," able to "profyt theyr owne Countrie" by learning about foreign laws, governments, commodities, social customs, and military resources (**iii^r—**iii^v).²⁸ In a similar vein, Jerome Turler highlights the financial gains to be had from travel, particularly for merchants, but also for young Englishmen in general who, he notes, are "moste commonly employd in traveill" during their "youth and flouishing yeeres" (A4r).²⁹ According to Turler, "the commoditie and profit of traveling is dispersed throughout and in all things of the world, and there is not humane action or trade to be founde, but it may bee bettered and holpen by traveil" (C4v). Turler's yoking of both commodity and profit to travel makes explicit something that is often suggested by the repeated use of the words "profit" and "profitable" in these guides: travel abroad held out the promise of significant economic incentives for many young men.³⁰

These guidebooks also share a general emphasis on the benefits that the traveler will bring back with him when he returns to England. Bourne emphasizes the tactical military and political knowledge that European travel will yield. Howell is even more effusive about the benefits that a traveler can—and

27. James Howell, *Instructions for Forreine Travell* (London, 1642). All citations refer to this edition of the text.

28. William Bourne, *A booke called the Treasure for travellers, divided into five Bookes or partes, contanyng very necessary matters, for all sorts of Travailers, eyther by Sea or by Lande* (London, 1578).

29. Jerome Turler, *The Traveller* (London, 1575). All citations refer to this edition of the text.

30. See, for example, Sir John Stradling's translation of Justus Lipsius's *A Direction for Travailers* (London, 1592) and his repeated advocacy that travel should be done for profit, not pleasure. All citations refer to this edition of the text. For the shift in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period away from an understanding of travel as work or "travail" (an alternate spelling) toward a more modern understanding of travel as leisure and knowledge acquisition, see Daniel Vitkus, "Labor and Travel on the Early Modern Stage: Representing the Travail of Travel in Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* and Shakespeare's *Pericles*," in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 225–42.

indeed should—bring home. He states matter-of-factly that the “most materiall use . . . of Forraine Travel is to find out something that may bee applyable to the publique utility of one’s own Countrey” (K8v), something, he argues, that “his parents, kindred and acquaintance, yea his Prince will expect at his returne” (B11v). Travelers abroad thus take on a moral imperative to better themselves so as to return fit for public “utility” in the family, community, and commonwealth. As Sir John Stradling succinctly concludes in his translation of Justus Lipsius’s *A Direction for Travailleurs* (1592), to be a “profitable Travailer,” you must “come home better then you went out” (B11r). The apparent simplicity of Stradling’s formulation masks the urgency behind it. For the writers of these guidebooks, the proper return was everything. Young men headed abroad needed to be active seekers of knowledge and other means of self-advancement; it was not enough merely to travel and return home, but instead to “find out something” abroad that could be brought home and made personally, socially, or economically profitable.

Indeed, the stridency with which some of these authors emphasize the return home reveals a great deal about the paradoxical pressures and pleasures that could tempt young male travelers. Turler is adamant on this point: “Youngemen that travell, must bee admonished of this one thinge, that whilst they bee viewing althing, searchinge, and learninge, they bee also mindfull of their retourninge into their owne Cuntreye” (E7r). Proper foresight about the return home, in other words, colors all of the intermediary activities that take place during the journey. Stradling similarly defines beneficial travel according to its narrative arc. He is at pains to differentiate between “wandering,” which he describes as merely gazing or wondering, and “searching,” by which one may “attaine to true pollicie, and wisdom” (A3v). Like Howell, Stradling advocates an active process of finding and self-improvement through travel; he urges travelers to “search” instead of “wander,” because searching implies a known endpoint or goal. However, Stradling’s uneasy awareness of the difficulty of separating mere wandering from true searching is palpable throughout the treatise and, indeed, is the reason for writing it. If these travel guides share a keen awareness of the temptations and moral dangers that await Englishmen abroad, causing them to linger or become corrupt, they also seem to share the conviction that these threats can be allayed by insisting on a specific trajectory, a journey that leads invariably back home. In one sense, then, the conservative warnings against foreign travel in earlier Tudor literature are replaced in these guidebooks by an equally conservative but differently inflected narrative that allows for and even advocates travel, yet rigorously cordons off its potential dangers.

And yet, what makes these texts truly fascinating—and resistant to easy generalizations about their didactic intentions—is precisely their inability to separate travel from its incipient risks and indeed a notion, however sub-

merged, that the risks themselves make the journey worthwhile. Strikingly, what emerges in these guides is an awareness that the maturation of young Englishmen, their very process of subject formation, is linked to the vagaries and self-alienating experience of foreign travel. Turler states this connection most clearly: “if there be any thinge in the world that wyll bring a man into consideration of his owne state: surely traveill wyll do it” (D3v). In his advocacy of the gains to be had from travel, Turler makes the somewhat radical implication that a young man’s “owne state” may be found not at home, but abroad, in the act of travel itself. For Turler and the other guidebook authors, travel becomes a means of self-realization and a process whereby young Englishmen may actively find their “owne state” in personal, social, and economic terms. This insight is consistently counterbalanced in these texts by concerns about its opposite possibility—that one may instead lose oneself abroad. Howell worries that foreign travel “oftentimes makes many to wander from themselves, as well as from their Countrey” (I3v), and Dallington, in a slightly different formulation, suggests that a man must travel “out of himselfe” if he is to return home with the advantage of new knowledge. For all of these writers, then, foreign travel necessarily puts the subjectivity of young English gentlemen at risk. However, in consistently emphasizing the transformation and moral betterment of the traveler, these treatises also suggest that it is only through the process of travel—risks and all—that these men can fully become upstanding adults, householders, and English citizens. Travel, like the prodigal waywardness to which it is often uneasily aligned, indexes changing perceptions about the potential financial benefits of risk-taking and improvisational bravado, qualities that can then in turn become the basis for alternative models of masculinity that diverge from traditional ideals.

Fletcher’s *Monsieur Thomas* brings to dramatic life many of the central contradictions about Continental travel that characterize the period’s guidebooks. The potential hazards involved in finding (and potentially losing) oneself abroad are made explicit by Thomas’s wildly inconsistent behavior after returning from France. To his father, he appears to be refined in manners and action, no longer adhering to his wayward, youthful ways. As Sebastian exclaims: “my grand curse / Hang ore his head that thus transofrm’d thee: travell?” (I.2.62–63). This is exactly the kind of transformation that authors such as Howell and Turler advocated, yet it is antithetical to Sebastian’s desires for his son, one of the play’s many keen ironies. To Mary and his other acquaintances, however, Thomas remains wild and unreformed, despite the expectation that travel would improve his behavior. As Dorothy tells him, though Mary still loves him and has “waited for [his] reformation, / To which end travell was propounded by her Uncle,” she has resolved to consider seriously reports of his bad behavior abroad (I.2.105–6), a reaction that is almost the mirror opposite of Sebastian’s.

The result, Dorothy fears, is dire: “ye have lost her / For any thing I see, exil’d your self” (1.2.109–10). In his relationships with both his father (for whom he’s “no more mine owne”) and his future wife—the relationships that are most central to the successful continuance of the patrilineal family—Thomas has symbolically lost his “self,” a loss that stems directly from his foreign travels. The discrepancy in Mary’s and Sebastian’s responses to Thomas’s behavior reflects, of course, Thomas’s own performative manipulation of the prodigal son motif, as he plays the role of the prodigal reformed in order to irk his father, while emphasizing his wildness while around Mary. And yet, these discrepancies also highlight the fundamental problem faced by the writers of early modern travel guides: the educational benefits of travel that these writers espouse so vehemently, including the ability of travel to transform young men into moral, culturally astute, and economically adept adults, cannot be cleanly separated from the prodigal behaviors that such travel often involves. Thomas’s parodic embodiment of both the wishes and fears espoused by the prescriptive literature certainly makes him a witty, likable comic hero, but the play’s ultimate justification of his schizophrenic behavior through the restoration of his inheritance makes clear that the risks associated with his travel are, in the end, constitutive of his reward.

Prodigality, tightly linked to foreign travel in the play, thus gets revised to mean a self-alienating educational experience, viewed by some as corrupting, by others as reforming. On the one hand, the madness associated with Thomas’s acts of wandering in the text signals the danger that travel poses to familial stability. When Francisco remarks to Thomas, “Thou are a mad companion: never staid Tom?” he replies: “Let rogues be staid that have no habitation, / A gentleman may wander” (3.1.226–28). In choosing the act of wandering over being “staid,” Thomas plays into the fears voiced by the authors of Elizabethan and Jacobean travel guides. The word “wander” in early modern England could imply both physical movement—specifically an idle roaming due to the lack of a stable abode—and also, in Thomas’s usage, a freedom from social convention and restraint. “Staid,” on the other hand, could mean both sober judgment and the condition of being fixed, permanent, or settled.³¹ Both a literal statement about his travels away from home and a spatial and moral metaphor that characterizes his behavior and state of mind, Thomas’s decision not to remain staid marks him as a profligate tourist who, as Howell feared, has wandered from himself.

31. See *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “wander,” verb, defs. 1a and 3a, and “staid,” adjective, defs. 1 and 2.

However, Thomas's response to Francisco also suggests the dangers of remaining "staid" in a new economic climate that demands risk taking and flexibility. Although the experience of travel might endanger the stability of Thomas's social and familial status, it nevertheless brings with it a sense of freedom and improvisational movement, qualities that were becoming increasingly valuable in England's protocapitalist, mercantile economy. Significantly, it is Thomas's status as an elite gentleman that enables both his travel and the educational benefits it provides. Because itinerant workers and the displaced poor could be whipped and imprisoned for vagrancy in the period, Thomas's flippant rejoinder—"let rogues be staid that have no habitation"—allows him to assert his class privilege by claiming to be immune from such statutes.³² The ironic implication of Thomas's words, of course, is that gentlemen may wander precisely because they, unlike vagabonds, *have* habitation, a stable place of residence from which they can wander. Thomas's response reformulates prodigality as a useful experience at the same time as it establishes a complex model of elite masculine identity, a subject position based on both the social privilege and (in Thomas's case) land-holding rights commensurate with gentleman status and the freedom, and even the moral laxity, granted by the physical and symbolic movement away from those guarantors of stasis and continuity. If elite men were often judged in terms of their credit, based largely on their perceived financial stability and "command of varied resources,"³³ then *Monsieur Thomas* suggests that such men were also increasingly being assessed according to the less quantifiable, but no less valuable, attributes of craftiness, risk toleration, and playful innovation. Indeed, these attributes are depicted as necessary in order to secure both economic profitability and credit. The concept of "wandering," that is, encapsulates all the behaviors and attitudes that young gentleman travelers should avoid, but it also highlights the sprit of masculine bravado, adventure, and excitement that often made such travels appealing and potentially productive in the first place.

The conclusion of *Monsieur Thomas* does not do much to clarify either the discrepancies in Thomas's behavior throughout the play or the alternative models of masculinity that these behaviors represent. Thomas is oddly, and with-

32. On early modern vagrancy laws, see A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560–1640* (London: Methuen, 1985); A. L. Beier and Roger Finlay, "Introduction: The Significance of the Metropolis," in *London, 1500–1700: The Making of the Metropolis*, ed. Beier and Finlay (London: Longman, 1986), 1–33; and Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 12–32.

33. Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 187.

out compelling explanation, able to placate both his father and his future wife: Sebastian sees enough of Thomas's madcap behavior to admire, leading him to reinstate his son's inheritance, and Mary seems either sufficiently convinced that Thomas has reformed his ways or willing to accept him regardless. After the various reunions and celebrations that cap off the play's final scene, Mary quickly, and without stated rationale, agrees to marry Thomas, telling him: "Now sir, for you and I to make the feast full" (5.12.118). But Thomas at first appears to reject her, announcing to the gathered company that he is "for travell once more" (5.12.125)—a proposal to which Sebastian and Mary both hastily object. In response, Thomas unfolds his meaning:

Hold your selfe contented: for I say I will travell,
 And so long I will travell, till I finde a father
 That I never knew, and a wife that I never look'd for,
 And a state without expectation,
 So rest you merry gentlemen.

(5.12.125–29)

Resorting to a riddle that pokes fun at both the Valentine and Francisco "lost child" plot and at his own progress as a prodigal, Thomas manages to allay concerns about his social stability by dexterously suggesting that, since he is newly reconciled with both father and future wife, he has no further need of travel. However, although the prerequisites of Thomas's conditional statement appear already to have been fulfilled, the enigmatic quality of his words—and their emphasis on the seeking and looking that precede contentedness—calls into question the sincerity of his pronouncement against travel. Clearly, travel is opposed to comic closure, as well as to the marriage, habitation, and "staid" stability that such closure usually entails, and thus must be resisted here at the conclusion to Fletcher's play. At the same time, unlike the biblical parable of the prodigal son to which the play slyly alludes, Thomas's words indicate that the terms of his own personal reformation are neither obvious nor compelling. No matter how agilely Thomas transforms his plans for future travel into a contented determination to remain at home, the play nevertheless ends by gesturing beyond its concluding dialogue toward a search for family and a sense of belonging that travel alone promises to fulfill. For, in Thomas's formulation, it is travel that allows the son to find the father and the wife "never look'd for" and to achieve "a state without expectation."

In *Monsieur Thomas*, Fletcher suggests that foreign travel and the prodigality to which it is so closely associated effectively enable Thomas to become a worthy heir and resecure his inheritance. For of course it is the wild Thomas,

not the falsely prim one, who captures the attention of the audience and who ultimately earns the respect (and fortune) of his father, and that wildness—despite Sebastian’s misinformed conclusions—has been sustained, nurtured, and even created by the “forraigne plots,” “gambolls,” and “rowses” in which Thomas engaged while abroad. The play thus articulates the same paradoxical link between travel, prodigality, and the worthiness of the male heir that was often implied by contemporary prescriptive writers attempting to justify Continental travel for young, elite men. Prodigality, connected to foreign travel and to the range of (both problematic and exciting) possibilities that such travel could bring, is clearly a direct threat to patrilineal succession. But at the same time, the act of traveling itself, the movement of wandering away from home, is intimately bound up with the process of identity formation for the male heir. Prodigality thus gets reconstituted as a potentially disruptive yet necessary skill for elite Jacobean men, providing evidence of risk toleration and an ability for crafty manipulation during a period in which such skills are increasingly necessary to participate in the lucrative new economies centered around foreign investments and commodity exchanges. Travel, whether it be physical travel abroad or more symbolic travel away from traditional behavioral norms or patriarchal ideologies, becomes valuable precisely because it engenders a degree of dissolution and waywardness. What emerges in Fletcher’s play, then, is not a straightforward vindication of travel, but rather a palpable, and often uneasy, awareness that the qualities that make a son a desirable heir may in fact stem directly from the messy acts of wildness and wandering that travel implies. Like the travel guides, in other words, *Monsieur Thomas* exposes the perils as well as the potential benefits of finding one’s self abroad.

This complex recuperation of prodigal behavior in terms of the risk, itinerancy, and economic flexibility demanded by foreign travel and investment practices reflects in part the overlap between the qualities indicative of highly successful merchants in the period and the skills increasingly required of young gentleman heirs such as Thomas. Like *Monsieur Thomas*, Thomas Heywood’s city comedy *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part II*, depicts the prodigal sole heir of an elite family whose Continental travel and riotous behavior throw inheritance and succession into question. However, Heywood’s play sets this story squarely within the burgeoning mercantile center of London and emphasizes the great risks and vast rewards made possible by new forms of economic speculation and foreign trade. As such, this play, even more so than *Monsieur Thomas*, helps to articulate the potentially positive character of prodigality. Heywood’s play dramatizes the life of Thomas Gresham, a London citizen and merchant most famous for founding the Royal Exchange in 1568. As depicted in the play, Gresham is a “fabulously wealthy speculator” who is associated (anachronistically) with the North African sugar trade as well as with domestic

and Continental economic pursuits.³⁴ His elite status, therefore, derives from his notable success as a merchant rather than traditional land tenancy, but the vast sums of money involved make the question of inheritance no less significant than it was for Thomas in Fletcher's comedy. Gresham's nephew, Jack, is his sole heir, but the portion that Jack should have inherited from his own father is being kept from him by his uncle ("My father gaue me a portion, / You keepe away my due" [D2r]), a plot point that is never fully explained in the play.³⁵ Given the episodic nature of the comedy, however, and Heywood's adherence to key elements of the prodigal paradigm (including Jack's rejection of his uncle, his consorting with prostitutes and lavish spending, and his eventual return and reform), this plot device positions Jack as a man in search of his rightful inheritance, one who must earn his position as heir through his performance of the traits deemed desirable by his family.

In *If You Know Not Me*, those traits are explored and defined through Jack's travel to France. In order to "confirme" his nephew's "resolution" to curb his prodigal ways, Gresham proposes to send Jack to France to serve as a factor for the merchant Hobson (A4v). Hobson accepts Jack's service despite the fact that Jack is a "yong gentleman" who Hobson claims "looks more like my Master then my seruant" (B1v). Jack's foreign travel, however, serves to amplify rather than amend his wayward behavior. Declaring his uncle an "old chuffe" (C2v), Jack first cons Gresham out of a hundred pounds and then flees to France on his own accord. He sends a letter to his uncle explaining his actions that reads: "I am a Marchant made by chance, / and lacking coyne to venture: / Your hundred pound's gone toward France" (D2r). Jack's flippant response connects his own prodigality not only to his travel abroad but to the potentially prosperous and laudable venturing of mercantile business, an occupation his uncle certainly knows well. Jack rewrites his flight to France in terms of savvy business dealings, with the pilfered hundred pounds supplementing his own lack of funds. In his own narrative at least, Jack the prodigal is indistinguishable from Jack the merchant "made by chance," a move that helps to discursively elaborate the potential benefits to be gained from apparently reckless, prodigal behavior.

34. See Jean E. Howard, "Competing Ideologies of Commerce in Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part II*," in *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England*, ed. Henry S. Turner (New York: Routledge, 2002), 163–82, esp. 172, 173.

35. Earlier in the play, Jack similarly accuses his uncle of "cosen[ing]" him of his "patrimonie" (A4r) without further comment. Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part II* (London, 1606). All citations refer to this edition of the play.

Jack's description of his own foreign travel helps to clarify what some of those benefits are. In planning to steal the hundred pounds from his uncle, Jack fantasizes that such a sum could "make a man merry halfe a yere together in France." Specifically, he hopes to be able to "command wenches or any thing," adding: "shall a yong man as I am, and though I say it indifferent proper, goe into a strange country, and not shew himself what mettell hee is made of when a comes there" (C3r). Traveling abroad and demonstrating sexual command over women thus helps establish a kind of manly mettle that reaffirms both Jack's own masculine identity and prowess and his status as an authoritative Englishman in a "strange country." Such nationalist rhetoric helps establish a model of elite male behavior that is grounded in such prodigal actions as whoring and bravado but that also helps to correct perceptions of the English as vulnerable to foreign influence and lacking in wariness, attitudes based in geohumoral interpretations of England's northernness.³⁶ A scene set in a French brothel later in the play highlights this concept of English masculine mettle through the praise given to Jack by a French courtesan. In a litany of nationalist stereotypes, she claims to have "tride ere now" the "sweatie Spaniard," the "carowsing Dane," the "soggy Dutch-man," the "fiery French," and the "briske Italian," but finds the Englishman to be "the truest men" of all. Jack responds by again conflating the language of mercantilism with his prodigality, describing the courtesan as the "ware" that he will "venter" on, even if he "be a looser by the bargaine" (Giv). Through this episode, we see that the naïveté and vulnerability typically associated with the northern English have given way to sophisticated confidence and an appealing masculine mettle. Jack's prodigal travel to France thus helps to consolidate his English hardiness and his masculine bravado, defined here in sexual as well as economic terms.

Perhaps even more striking is the way in which Jack's prodigality is recuperatively described by his uncle and resituated within a positive narrative of risk-taking economic enterprise. Upon learning of Jack's flight to France and his theft of his hundred pounds, Gresham is initially upset, calling his nephew a knave and "Mad Iacke." However, just a few lines later, Gresham expresses a hesitant admiration for Jack's misdeeds and witty spirit. He tells Hobson:

I know he is wilde,
 Yet I must tell you ile not see him suncke:
 And afore-god it hath done my heart more good,
 The knaue had wit to doe so mad a trick,
 Then if he had posited me twice so much.

36. See Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. 48–66.

Nor does Gresham rest at praising Jack's display of wit, but he completes the narrative by foreshadowing the positive endpoint of his nephew's prodigal behaviors. In his madcap behavior, Gresham explains, Jack "is the more like his Vncle . . . When I was yong I doe remember well, I was as very a knaue as he is now" (D2v). Gresham thus neatly ties Jack's prodigal waywardness with his own life history, one that culminates (as Heywood's play showcases at length) in extraordinary wealth gained through a highly successful career as a merchant.³⁷ For Gresham, speculation is more valuable than thrift; he prefers the forward-thinking possibilities of investment rather than the safer, staid security of more traditional economic practices.³⁸

Indeed, an overly restrictive emphasis on thrift is both at odds with Gresham's own risky mercantile business and with the new model of expansive investment opportunities that bring with them the potential for much larger gains than land transactions. In one of the play's set-piece scenes, for instance, Gresham learns about several spectacular financial losses that he has suffered through his many trading ventures. Instead of lamenting this news, Gresham grinds up a pearl worth £15,000 in a cup of wine and drinks it in a toast to Queen Elizabeth. In explaining this dramatic and seemingly reckless gesture, Gresham once again conjures up the image of prodigality: "I doe not this as prodigall of my wealth, / Rather to shew how I esteeme that losse / Which cannot be regain'd" (F2v). Gresham's bravura gesture thus reworks prodigality as sprezzatura—a risk-taking extravagance and improvisational quality that Heywood depicts as dangerous, but also utterly appealing. Prodigality may be the antithesis of thrift, but texts such as *If You Know Not Me* suggest that prodigality—not frugality—is becoming more and more necessary for participation in England's new economies.

In its depiction of Jack's travel to France, *If You Know Not Me* articulates both potential losses and the great benefits to be gained through wayward wandering and prodigality. Jack's travel itself conflates mercantile business with prodigal aimlessness, suggesting that the two are more closely aligned than they may initially appear. Jack's travels also help to establish his manly mettle and hardiness, thereby making visible an alternative model of elite masculine identity based not on restraint or self-regulation but on wit, gamesmanship, and confident improvisation. These are precisely the qualities displayed by successful

37. Leggatt similarly emphasizes the positive treatment of Jack's prodigality in the play, arguing that Jack "is evidently going to join the respectable world of prosperous citizens represented by his uncle" (*Citizen Comedy in the Age of Shakespeare*, 43).

38. Early in the play, for example, Gresham orders his factors to travel abroad to Venice, Portugal, and Barbary to pursue trading ventures, claiming that "where much is spent, / Some must be got, thrift should be prouident" (A3r).

merchants such as Gresham, as the play's discursive association between Jack's prodigality and Gresham's financial successes makes clear. As Jean Howard has argued, in the character of Gresham, Heywood stages a "new kind of merchant hero," a figure who rejects older economic practices such as thrift and "steady achievement" in favor of toleration for "enormous financial risks," speculation, and extravagance.³⁹ In the prodigal figure of Jack, we see a Gresham-in-training: a man who, through his reckless waywardness, epitomized in his travel to France, is learning the skills of risk and speculation that will enable him eventually (the play insinuates) to be as successful as his uncle and, indeed, the rightful heir to both his father's and his uncle's fortunes. For although the precise nature of Jack's inheritance from his father is never explained, the play does make clear that it is his wit and crafty behavior that eventually earn him his uncle's respect and, as a result, his inheritance. Learning of Jack's flight to France, Gresham exclaims that both "this flight" and the theft of the hundred pounds "makes me thy Vncle right" (D3r). As in *Monsieur Thomas*, despite the fact that the prodigal's travel threatens to unravel familial continuance and stability, in *If You Know Not Me* such activity ultimately helps suture familial bonds and restore rightful inheritance. Once again, we see the productive tension between finding and losing oneself abroad.

Recuperatively understood in and through the educational travel tour, prodigality in *Monsieur Thomas* and *If You Know Not Me* comes to be reformulated as a potentially productive experience for the elite male heir, a literal and symbolic path by which he might rework inherited characteristics and creatively transform them into a more flexible set of social skills better suited to the economic innovations of the period. Once prodigality is linked to foreign travel, however, it becomes possible for dramatists of the period to find and explore the educational potential of similar prodigal behaviors closer to home. Indeed, despite contemporary concerns about the dangers of Continental travel for young, elite men and the explicit connection made between travel and prodigality in the biblical parable, many if not most of the prodigal son plays from the early seventeenth century do not depict or describe their wayward heroes traveling to the Continent or elsewhere. The uncertainties surrounding young men's physical travel instead get redirected and redeployed in prodigal plays that turn their attention to the more local and metaphoric dislocation of their heroes.

For example, several prodigal son plays from the early seventeenth century emphasize the waywardness of their protagonists' behavior not by literally sending them abroad but instead by staging their prodigality in scenes set outdoors or away from the family home or by depicting these characters in

39. Howard, "Competing Ideologies," 174–75.

spatial terms that align them with wandering and aimlessness. The anonymous author of *The London Prodigal* (1603–5) establishes the dissolution of its prodigal character, Matthew Flowerdale, by placing him almost exclusively in outdoor settings. Unmoored from the stability promised by patriarchal imperatives, Matthew spends his time on the street or on the threshold of homes, living a life of itinerancy. Similarly, John Fletcher's *The Elder Brother* (1625[?]) features the prodigal younger son Eustace who is physically ejected from his father's house. In James Shirley's *The Brothers* (1626), the prodigal Luys performs various schemes throughout the play in order to secure a better allowance than the one offered by his father; he ends the play taking up residence not with his father, but with Don Pedro, who offers to share his fortune with him so that they can continue their debauched activities together. And in Thomas Heywood's *The English Traveller* (ca. 1627), despite the fact that Young Lionell, the prodigal only son of a prominent merchant, is *not* the traveler of the play's title⁴⁰ and indeed remains at home in England managing his father's household while he travels on mercantile business, the play nevertheless consistently describes his prodigal activities in terms of disorderly placelessness. Through metaphors that connect him to sea travel, Heywood effectively disconnects Young Lionell from any sense of fixed location or stability, despite his conventional domestic surroundings. By deploying tropes of itinerancy and displacement to stage the prodigal male heir, dramatists underscore that it is the sons' wandering "from themselves" (to return to Howell's phrase) and not literal travel per se that throws patrilineal inheritance into jeopardy.

The dangers implicit in such wandering, however, can also yield social benefits for both the heir and his family fortunes. Even in *Monsieur Thomas*, we see that prodigality is associated not only with physical travel but also with a more general pattern of aimless excursions and indeterminate locales that helps to establish Thomas's masculine identity in his father's eyes. Complaining about his son's changed behavior since his return to England, Sebastian laments:

When did he ride abroad since he came over?
 What Taverne has he us'd to? what things done
 That shewes a man, and mettle? when was my house
 At such a shame before, to creept to bed
 At ten a clocke, and twelve, for want of company?
 (3.2.12–16)

40. That label applies to Geraldine, a character in the play's main plot.

In his ironic reversal of proper moral behavior, Sebastian resents the fact that Thomas has *not* taken the opportunity to ride abroad or frequent taverns, or come home secretly late at night. Fletcher thus satirically exposes the connection between prodigality and more literal forms of waywardness, here characterized as local rather than long-distance travels. More importantly, Sebastian's negative assessment of his son highlights the significance of ambivalence and placelessness to the representation of the prodigal. The dissolute son whom Sebastian desires would not only ride abroad, but would be to a large extent unlocatable—traveling to unnamed taverns and creeping into bed after a flurry of unspecific (yet clearly debauched) activities. It is this imprecision and fluidity of spirit that “shewes a man, and mettle,” at least for Sebastian. Defined ironically, masculinity in *Monsieur Thomas* nevertheless is determined in part by how one behaves spatially, by whether one remains fixed at home or travels abroad—either to Europe or to the tavern. As in *If You Know Not Me*, manly mettle is defined in terms of hardiness, but also as a celebrated waywardness.

Although it would seem likely that texts from the period would tend to associate ideal masculinity with a certain spatial fixity, especially when primogeniture and the inheritance of great wealth are at issue, plays such as *Monsieur Thomas* and *If You Know Not Me* disrupt this expectation by connecting the social and moral development of the prodigal heir to scenes of itinerancy and displacement. Rather than depicting the eldest son as acquiring his most well-defined and stable persona when he is associated most directly with the stability implied by the family estate, these plays often suggest the opposite. That is, prodigality and the travel or metaphoric displacement with which it is often associated in these texts offers a compelling alternative model of elite male subjectivity that questions and revises the implications of primogeniture. In plays such as *Monsieur Thomas* and *If You Know Not Me* that spend a disproportionate amount of dramatic time on the renegade activities of their young prodigals as opposed to their sober acts of contrition, masculine identity is formed as much in the places apart from home—in the very act of prodigality—as in their final “staid” and generally conservative domestic conclusions. By discursively linking prodigality with masculine subject formation, these plays expose the contradictions of patriarchal ideology as it attempted to consolidate codes of manhood in a period of dramatic economic and social change. Unlike the mid-sixteenth-century didactic plays that harshly punish prodigal behavior, these examples of Jacobean prodigal plays make room for displacement and waywardness on the literal and metaphorical journey back to the family estate. As such, they construct an alternative model of patriarchal authority in which prodigality, and the foreign travel or physical displacement with which it is frequently linked, is not so much a condemned vice as an enabling and even at times welcome component of elite masculinity. The figure of the economically

savvy, risk-taking prodigal son offers an appealing alternative to the “staid” fixedness of the gentleman’s estate and traditional forms of wealth acquisition, and it opens up a space in which the young male heir may be newly constituted according to a different, more flexible set of social and personal criteria that is better suited to the new economic climate of the period.

The association of prodigality with both foreign travel and a more conceptual sense of placelessness in these plays is symptomatic of a range of larger concerns about elite male heirs, including not only their physical travel abroad, but also their indebtedness, the possibility of the alienation of their inherited estates, and their participation in risky mercantile ventures. But the dramaturgical association of elite male heirs with tropes of displacement provides a potential solution to the social problems it invokes, a fact that may help account for the heightened popularity of this story in the period. The challenges to the traditional system of primogeniture that were becoming more prominent and urgent by the early decades of the seventeenth century required innovative new ways of redefining that system to coincide with shifting social conditions. Plays such as *Monsieur Thomas* and *If You Know Not Me* offer a visible and culturally significant venue in which to imagine new formulations of inheritance patterns and a more expansive definition of what subject positions were possible within primogeniture. On the one hand, itinerancy as a dramatic trope becomes a kind of ironic solution to historical concerns, in that it enables a specific discourse of elite male identity formation to emerge at precisely the time when the social and economic realities of Jacobean England—the sheer difficulty of finding a suitable male heir—made adherence to a rigid model of patrilineal inheritance increasingly untenable for many families. The reconfiguration of the prodigal heir thus becomes a useful option when options are limited, effectively broadening the scope of appropriate conduct for the heir and recuperating prodigal behavior to serve the interests of a system based on primogeniture. However, the equation of prodigality with travel does not merely serve to preserve the system of patrilineal inheritance but to reconstitute the very definition of conduct on which that system is based. As such, the wandering, self-alienated stage figure of the prodigal son as dramatized in these Jacobean plays enables a significant revision of prodigality itself, redefining a traditional vice as a key virtue and necessary skill in the new economies of seventeenth-century England. Thus it is that such unlikely activities as foreign travel, wasteful spending, and even aimless wandering will, in Turler’s words, “bring a man into consideration of his owne state.”