EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

Prodigal Fathers and Virtuous Bastards: The Moral Economy of Inheritance in Richard Brome's *The Demoiselle, or The New Ordinary*

Jakob Ladegaard
Aarhus University
litjl@cc.au.dk

The social and moral worlds of Richard Brome's comedies are shaped by economic practices. Inheritance is one of the most central of these, but Brome scholarship has had little to say about intergenerational transmissions of wealth as a recurring theme in his comedies.[1] This article takes a step towards filling that gap in a study of *The Demoiselle, or The New Ordinary*;[2] arguably the author's most substantial engagement with the economic, social, and moral meanings of inheritance.

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[1] Instead, Brome's treatments of trade and the market have received critical attention in Rachel E. Poulsen, 'The "plentifull Lady-feast" in Brome's "A Madd Couple Well Matcht"', *Early Theatre* 11.1 (2008), 77-97 and Bradley D. Ryner, 'Commodity Fetishism in Richard Brome's *A Mad Couple Well Matched* and its Sources', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 13.3 (2008) <URL: http://purl.oclc.org/emls/13-3/rynecomm.htm> [Accessed 13 April 2021]. Brome's treatment of the socio-economic and cultural practices related to the development of new, fashionable neighbourhoods in London's West End are explored in Adam Zucker, *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 102-143; and Denys Van Renen, *The Other Exchange: Women, Servants, and the Urban Underclass in Early Modern English Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), pp. 51-83.

[2] *The Demoiselle* was likely written and first performed in late 1637 or 1638. It first appeared in print in the 1653 edition of *Five New Playes* by Brome published by Richard Marriott, Thomas Dring and Humphrey Moseley; see Lucy Munro, 'What Knowledge Comes from Foreign Parts? An Introduction to *The Demoiselle, or The New Ordinary*' and 'Textual Introduction', in Richard Brome, *The Demoiselle, or The New Ordinary*, ed. by Lucy Munro, *Richard Brome Online* <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/brome/viewOriginal.jsp?play=DMandtype=TEXT> [Accessed 13 April 2021].

The Demoiselle tells the story of Sir Humphrey Dryground, 'an old decayed knight', who mortgages his ancestral land to Vermin, 'an old usurer'[3] for a thousand pounds. He uses the money on a 'project' (1.1.22)[4] to help Brookall, another gentleman who has fallen prey to Vermin, and whose son Frances has thereby lost his inheritance. To raise money for Frances, Dryground opens an ordinary to attract gamesters to 'rifle' (3.1.470) for the virginity of his pretended French daughter, who is in fact Frances in disguise. When Dryground reveals that the attractive demoiselle is Brookall's son and recounts his misfortunes to the gamblers, some of them freely give him their stakes. At the end of the play, this money enables Frances to marry Vermin's daughter Alice and get Brookall's land as a dowry from the reformed usurer. Dryground also reaps some unforeseen personal benefits from his project. He gets his land back from Vermin and reunites with Eleanor, Brookall's long lost sister, whom Dryground had seduced after the death of his first wife. He also meets their illegitimate daughter, Phillis, who ends up marrying Wat, Vermin's reformed prodigal son. Through these marriages, Vermin's wealth returns to its former owners and passes on to the young generation, while the enmity between their parents is buried. As Dryground, happily concludes: 'This binds us all into a brotherhood' (5.1.1049).

Two opposed economic vices endanger the proper transfer of wealth between generations in *The Demoiselle*: usurious avarice and prodigality. The first relates to Vermin, the other to his son Wat, but also more importantly to Dryground and his son from his first marriage, Valentine. In his critical treatment of these two vices, Brome draws on a long tradition in early modern English culture and drama that was in turn influenced by theological condemnations of moneylending and the Aristotelian idea of avarice and prodigality as two vices opposed to the golden mean of liberality.[5] But in line with Ira Clark's claim that Brome employed his 'talent in adaptive imitation… to create his own, freer style',[6] I argue that *The Demoiselle* not merely imitates, but discreetly reworks the traditions Brome inherited. It does so by paying particular attention to the various ways

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[3] Richard Brome, 'Dramatis Personæ', in *The Demoiselle, or The New Ordinary*. The cited text is a modernized edition of the first printed version of the play. All citations from Brome's works refer to the modernized texts on *Richard Brome Online* (https://www.dhi.ac.uk/brome/).

[4] The modernized texts have no line numbers. Instead, they have numbered act, scene and speaking turns. In my notation, 1.1.22 thus refers to act 1, scene 1, speaking turn number 22.

[5] For a study of the theological and philosophical sources of this tradition and their impact on early modern English culture, see David Hawkes, *The Culture of Usury in Renaissance England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[6] Ira Clark, *Professional Playwrights: Massinger, Ford, Shirley, and Brome* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), p. 174.

in which usury and prodigality threaten the moral and social ideal of inheritance as a central economic practice in a communal life based on trust and gift giving.

In the most thorough critical engagement with usury in *The Demoiselle*, R.J. Kaufmann notes that even though usury had long been an object of critique, interest seems to have grown in the 1630s with a number of plays and pamphlets devoted to the theme.[7] These writings frequently repeat a traditional critique of usury as a self-serving perversion of the Christian obligation to lend freely to the needy. Kaufmann argues that the renewal of this critique in the 1630s expresses a growing concern about 'a rising capitalist economy' driven by self-interest, 'expanding commerce' and 'increased circulation of money'.[8] Since the publication of Kaufmann's study, economic historians like Craig Muldrew have shown that such terms do not adequately describe the economic life of the period. In *The Economy of Obligation*, Muldrew shows that the expanding English economy relied heavily on social networks of credit because of a shortage of ready money. Accordingly, 'the early modern economy was a system of cultural, as well as material exchanges in which the central mediating factor was credit or trust'.[9] In this context, lending was not only a Christian duty, but also an economic necessity, and I argue that Brome criticizes usury not because it is complicit with the expanding economy, but because it hinders the circulation of money and destroys the trust on which the economy rested.

Brome intimates that usury thereby has negative effects on trade and the national economy, but his chief concern is usury's moral and social effect on family and community, particularly the younger generation. As Martin Butler notes, the plays' attacks on usury often use the language of popular moral treatises and sometimes take the form of 'little sermons'.[10] Echoing John Blaxton's *The English Usurer* (1634), *The Demoiselle* thus repeatedly warns that the usurer's ill-gotten wealth will become a curse for the heirs. This notion of usury as a form of economic original sin passed on through generations involves an awareness of death as the premise of all human life, including economic life. Every fortune, even the most miserly guarded, must eventually become a legacy. True to comedy's genre conventions, no one dies in *The Demoiselle*, but Vermin's moral reformation involves his coming to terms with mortality and with inheritance as the destiny of private wealth.[11] The play thus suggests that perceiving wealth as

[7] R.J. Kaufmann, *Richard Brome: Caroline Playwright* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 131-50.

[8] Ibid., p. 131.

[9] Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 1998), p. 4.

[10] Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 211.

[11] Sarah McKenzie contends that 'The comedy stage, dealing with inheritance without death, demonstrates that issues of inheritance crisis are both possible and amusing without the necessity for tragedy; comedy

inheritance, as the temporary possession of a gift that must be passed on, allows for a moral view of economic life that involves the capacity of transcending individual interest. This view is grounded in an idea of the gift of inheritance as metaphorically related to the gift of God's grace that creates a mutually binding covenant between God and his children.[12]

The historical situation hinted at in Dryground's initial mortgaging of his land to Vermin is the widespread indebtedness of landowners at the time.[13] However, Brome not only blames the usurer for this predicament. Dryground himself is a more ambivalent character than Kaufmann's characterization of him as the play's moral educator suggests.[14] Not only did Dryground abandon his lover, Eleanor, he also appears to have wasted much of his inherited wealth. Vermin thus accuses Dryground of 'prodigal waste' (1.1.19) and justice Bumpsey claims that Dryground inherited 'three fair lordships', but now only has a 'a small pittance of *trois cents per annum* / By providence entailed upon the heir' (1.2.124). Dryground is thus not only a moral reformer, but a prodigal in need of redemption.

For this part of the plot, Brome draws on – and adapts – the tradition of prodigal son comedies. Dryground's outmanoeuvring of Vermin is reminiscent of plays like Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605)[15] and Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1626).[16] But Brome departs from his predecessors in more than one way. Firstly, there is the unusual choice of a prodigal *father*, Dryground, as the

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can address and articulate the strains in family relationships which are caused by questions of inheritance precisely because there is no death'; see *Death, Inheritance and the Family: A Study of Literary Responses to Inheritance in Seventeenth-Century England* (PhD dissertation, University of Warwick, 2003), p. 233. While it is true that no one dies in comedies, death is still very much present as a theme in *The Demoiselle* and many other comedies that deal with inheritance. One need only think of Ben Jonson's *Volpone* or the motif of fathers who pretend to die in order to 'posthumously' judge their heirs in comedies like Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (c. 1604) and Jonson's *Staple of News* (1626).

[12] The tendency to fuse discussions of inheritance with theological ideas was widespread in the period. See, e.g., Michael Austin, 'The Genesis Narrative and the Primogeniture Debate in Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 98.1 (1999), 17-39; Jonathan W. Smith, *England's 'Best Birthright': The Law and Theology of Inheritance in Early Modern English Literature* (unpublished PhD dissertation, The University of Michigan, 2010), esp. pp. 16-17; and Joseph S. Jenkins, *Inheritance Law and Political Theology in Shakespeare and Milton: Election and Grace as Constitutional in Early Modern Literature and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[13] See Muldrew, pp. 96-7.

[14] Kaufmann, pp. 141 and 146.

[15] Dates for plays throughout are the 'best guess' of the date of first performance in Martin Wiggins, *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011-).

[16] Munro, p. 1.

protagonist of a prodigal son plot.[17] This reversal is reminiscent of other Brome comedies such as *The Sparagus Garden* (1635) and *A Jovial Crew* (1641) where a father's original transgression causes lasting personal enmity and economic injustices that impact the next generations. These plays reverse the biblical parable of the prodigal son by letting the children redeem the fathers' faults. And not just any children. In all of them, it is an illegitimate child, the living proof of the father's transgression, whose reintegration into the family, signals that the prodigal father has reformed. For illegitimate children to have this dramatic function is highly unusual. In historical reality, such children had restricted inheritance rights and were often vilified.[18] On the Stuart stage, a spurious line of rebellious bastards springing from Shakespeare's Edmund testifies to this cultural stigma.[19] With his insistence on a new, redemptive function for illegitimate children, Brome breaks with this tradition. I shall argue that in *The Demoiselle*, the reintegration of Phillis, who had hitherto lived as a beggar to support her mother, Eleanor, has a parallel function in Dryground's story to that of death in Vermin's: In both cases it is a matter of embracing the repressed, the disorderly and 'wasteful' in order to move from egotism to a moral economy in an extended communal family, a 'brotherhood'.

The stress on communal life is important. The second way in which Brome intervenes in the tradition of prodigal son comedies is thus by changing his protagonist's motivation away from the self-centred attempts of Middleton and Massinger's young prodigals to regain their land.[20] Contrary to what Vermin and the reader familiar with this comic

[17] Erwin Beck notes that in prodigal son plays the father is sometimes also 'prodigal' in some sense; see 'Terence Improved: The Paradigm of the Prodigal Son in English Renaissance Comedy', *Renaissance Drama* 6 (1973), 107-122, (p. 110). See also Ezra Horbury, 'The Unprodigal Prince? Defining Prodigality in the *Henry IV*s', *Shakespeare* 14.4 (2018), 312-325 (pp. 315-316) for a similar point. One example of this is Flowerdale senior in the anonymous *The London Prodigal* (c. 1605) but his apparently harmless sins are well in the past and there is no question about his reformation. Reversely, Brome is careful to point out that Dryground's seduction of Eleanor happened *after* his first marriage and thus was not the result of youthful folly but a more serious moral flaw. The prodigal father as protagonist and subject of moral transformation seems to be Brome's invention.

[18] See Alison Findlay, *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994; repr. 2009), pp. 30-2; and Michael Neill, '"In Everything Illegitimate": Imagining the Bastard in English Renaissance Drama' in *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 127-147.

[19] Elizabethan antecedents for this tradition include Thomas Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1581). For more on this tradition of illegitimate rebels on the early modern stage, see Jakob Ladegaard and Ross Deans Kristensen-McLachlan, 'Selfish Bastards? A Corpus-Based Approach to Illegitimacy in Early Modern Drama', *Memoria di Shakespeare: A Journal of Shakespearean Studies* 7 (2020), 75-110.

[20] To be sure, Witgood in *A Trick to Catch the Old One* secures a lucrative marriage for his mistress, and Welborne in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* assists Margaret, the daughter of his usurious uncle, Sir Giles Overreach, in a plot to marry Welborne's friend Alworth – a parallel to Alicia's marriage to Frances in *The*

tradition expects, Dryground's project is other-oriented and moral. He wants to help Frances, and only as an unexpected by-product does this end up benefitting himself.[21] I believe that this change signals a critical engagement with the tendency that Michelle Dowd sees in several earlier comedies to rethink 'prodigality in terms of risk and investment'.[22] I argue that Brome in *The Demoiselle* replaces self-interested economic behaviours like prodigality (pleasure-seeking consumption), mercantile investment and usury with the gift as a founding mode of economic exchange. In this context, inheritance is an act of gift-giving that allows the community to renew itself and transcend its individual interests. In this way, the play not only performs a reformation of the old prodigal, Dryground, it simultaneously seeks to 'reform' the dramatic tradition of prodigal son comedies that Brome inherited from his predecessors.[23]

1. Usury as original sin

After the initial mortgaging of Dryground's land for a thousand pounds, the conversation between Vermin and Dryground evolves into a moral argument with the following exchange:

> Vermin: But give me leave, now, fairly to admonish
> You to a care how you do part with this.
> You spirited men call money dirt and mud;
> I say it is the eel.
> Dryground: And you the mud
> That foster it.

Demoiselle. But both protagonists mostly help others in so far as it is compatible with their primary aims of improving their own lots. Erwin Beck therefore includes these plays in the tradition of satiric prodigal plays where the protagonist 'carries out the primary intrigue in the play for his own benefit' (see Beck, p. 119).

[21] I thus disagree with Julie Sanders's description of Dryground's project as a scheme to 'solve his bankruptcy' in *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 56.

[22] Michelle Dowd, *The Dynamics of Inheritance on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 152.

[23] In his study of prodigals on the Elizabethan stage, Richard Helgerson argues that one of the reasons for the motif's enduring popularity was that it allowed dramatists to reflect on their own 'youthful folly' in writing for a public stage under attack for its immoral sensuousness; see *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 4-5. Brome in a sense continues this tradition of prodigal self-reflection, but typically for Caroline playwrights he does this to reflect on his place in the dramatic tradition formed by the Elizabethans.

Vermin: It is an eel, I say,
In such sleek hands as yours, from whence it glides—
Dryground: Into the mud, oft-times, from whence it came.
Vermin: I know you do conceive me. Therefore, sir
(As I before was saying), hold it fast (1.1.7-11).

Vermin's reproach is initially clear enough. Gentlemen like Dryground, who have 'spent a fair estate, / A goodly, great estate' (1.1.5), do not know the value of money and waste it as if it were mud or dirt. Given that the occasion for this reproach is a mortgage, Vermin is also saying that in taking loans against his estate, Dryground liquidizes his ancestral land and turns it into infertile mud. Through its association with dirt, mud as metaphor also suggests a link to the scatological and, ultimately, death. This link between Dryground's prodigality and death reappears when Bumpsey discovers that Dryground's son, Valentine, has married Bumpsey's daughter and only heir to his considerable fortune. Bumpsey hints that Valentine might have been economically motivated because his father's wastefulness has left him without an inheritance, and he does not give much for the title that his daughter receives in return:

…your fair titles
Are but the shadows of your ancestry,
And you walk in 'em, when your land is gone,
Like the pale ghosts of dead nobility (1.2.116).

Other characters thus perceive Dryground's mortgage as part of a pattern of prodigal expenditure that leads to an exhaustion of his livelihood and a metaphorical death for him and his bloodline. As the play progresses, of course, it becomes clear that his project is to create new life for the young generation. If the mortgaging of his land threatens to bring death to Dryground, Vermin, who gets the land, makes a living out of the death of others. Dryground accordingly turns the mud-metaphor on Vermin to suggest that it is his opponent's usury as much as his own prodigality that destroys estates.[24] Vermin implicitly confirms this when he wrongly guesses that Dryground's project is

… to drain the Goodwins? To be lord
Of all the treasure buried in the sands there?
And have a million yearly from the merchants
To clear the passage? (1.1.21).

[24] Brome used the same association in one of his previous plays, *The English Moor* (1637), which features a usurer named Quicksands. See Sanders, pp. 55-6, for a more literal-historical reading of this passage.

Springing as it does entirely from Vermin's imagination, this guess says more about him than about Dryground. Vermin's fantasy again associates mud and money, and since the treasures are 'buried' in the sands because of shipwrecks, his dreams of wealth are predicated on the loss, perhaps even death, of others. Perhaps his earlier image of money as an eel also slips into this fantasy and marks his dream of hunting treasures in shallow waters as an act of scavenging, of feeding off the dead. The proposal of taxing merchants is a further sign of his unscrupulous business methods and willingness to obstruct commercial circulation for his private gain.[25] While the first scenes of the play thus portrays Dryground as a figuratively drowning man, who needs to gain a firm footing on dry ground, Vermin is figuratively a scavenger who needs to learn that he too is mortal.[26]

The portrayal of Vermin is in line with a Christian critique of usury in England dating back to the Middle Ages and renewed in Blaxton's *The English Usurer*, which collects 'testimonies' by a number of churchmen against usury. A common theme is that usury perverts the act of lending, which should be 'free and charitable, intending the good of the borrower, and not of the lender; usury hath made it illiberall and uncharitable… The usurers lending therefore is an act of selfelove'.[27] We find this accusation of egotism again in the notion that usurers are unproductive and parasitic because by living off interests they do not add wealth to the community by work or commerce, but 'live of the sweat of other mens brows'.[28] The usurer's selfishness thus damages the community and is particularly unethical because it preys on those in need of charity: 'thou robbest the poore, deceives the simple, and eatest up the Widows Houses'.[29] Many of the same ideas and formulations return in *The Demoiselle* in Brookall and Valentine's lengthy diatribes against Vermin, whose wealth is 'forced from the oppressed poor' (4.1.724), the cause of

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[25] Matthew Steggle points out that the passage might also contain a veiled reference to the controversial Ship Money, an unpopular tax on land levied by Charles I for the navy; see *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 132. A critical parallel between usurious extortion and royal taxation is hereby established, but this political implication of the play's critique of usury lies outside the scope of this article.

[26] Perhaps in writing this opening, Brome, a one-time servant of Ben Jonson, recalled the last lines of his former master's prodigal son comedy, *The Staple of News* (1626), whose purpose was to 'teach them all / The golden mean: the prodigal how to live, / The sordid and covetous how to die'; see Ben Jonson, *The Staple of News*, ed. by Anthony Parr (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988), 5.6.63-6.

[27] John Blaxton, *The English Usurer or, Usury Condemned* (Amsterdam: Teatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1974 [facsimile]), pp. 21-2.

[28] Ibid., p. 37.

[29] Ibid., pp. 17-18.

'widow's tears' (4.1.730) and the object of 'the curses / Of hunger-bitten labourers, whose very sweat / Thou robb'st them of' (4.1.730).

As I argued in the introduction with reference to R.J. Kaufmann, the fact that usury was thought of as 'an act of selfelove' does not mean that it is an expression of 'capitalist self-interest'. Indeed, the problem with usury was not only that it preyed on the most vulnerable like today's predatory high-interest loans, but that it disrupted the flow of money necessary for the economy to work. This threat is echoed in Vermin's fantasies of wealth that depend on failed business ventures and the taxation of merchants. Furthermore, as Craig Muldrew explains, usury was seen as 'anti-social in the sense that it kept scarce coins out of circulation, in the moneylender's chests, until someone could afford to borrow them'.[30] This perhaps explains why usury and avarice are often related in the period's drama, including *The Demoiselle*. This does not mean that interest on loans was uniformly considered immoral. Writers like Francis Bacon and Thomas Culpeper involved in the usury debates accepted the practice of loans on interest, but argued that the legal limit on interest rates had to be lowered from 10 to 5 or 6 %.[31] *The English Usurer* also permits some form of interest in cases where the lender share in the profit of a venture based on his loan, but simultaneously takes some of the loss if the project fails.[32] The problem with usury is that it does not assume such a risk:

> But the usurers whole endeavor is to settle himselfe, and his estate as it were out of the Gun-shot of Gods providence: he will not deale by Husbandry, or traffique, because of the hazards whereunto either of both is subject: that is to say, because of his diffidence in God, to whose providence he dare not trust his goods: and therefore will make sure work for himselfe, that he shall not need to stand to Gods curtesie.[33]

While work and commerce are always subject to risk, the usurer takes none, for as Bishop Downan, the author of the passage, explains, the usurer earns 'sometimes out of the borrowers losse, and sometimes also out of his gaine'.[34] The usurer is immune to the hazards of fortune, because he will profit both in the case of a forfeited bond (in which case he can lay hold on whatever was put up for security) and in the case that the loan is

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[30] Muldrew, p. 113.

[31] See Thomas Culpeper, *Tract Against Usury* (London: Henry Seile, 1641 [first pr. 1621, reprint. 1624]) and Francis Bacon's essay 'Of Usury' (1625).

[32] Blaxton, pp. 7-8.

[33] Ibid., pp. 23-4.

[34] Ibid., pp. 21-2.

repaid with interests. This idea is repeated several times throughout the book,[35] and is also found in the earlier prodigal son comedy, *Eastward Ho* (1605), co-written by Brome's former master, Ben Jonson.[36] The idea is that while God rewards the just with profit and punishes the wicked with economic loss, the usurer seeks to escape this binary of divine judgment, because he does not work and profits regardless of how God judges his debtors. The usurer thus emerges as a figure that not only distances himself from the social community, but from God.

The idea that commercial success depended on divine will and that wealth was a divine gift, a reward for industry and honest dealing, was a common one.[37] According to Craig Muldrew, this widespread notion indicates that people 'did not have a strong sense of control over the course of their own fortunes because they were so reliant on the processes determined by the wills of others'.[38] In a network economy before the advent of modern banking and insurance, individual economic affairs were always directly and indirectly tied to numerous other economic actors and depended on their ability to secure profits, meet their financial obligations, repay loans, and so on. Participants in this economy had a strong awareness of the risks and obligations involved in economic activity, a sense that each individual's wellbeing was at the mercy of other people and God's will. It is this dual involvement in the risky worlds of communal economic enterprise and divine justice that Vermin seeks to avoid. With his sure income, immunity to risk and miserly adversity to expenditure he psychologically aspires to immortality, a ghostly life that continuously defers a death that would bring divine judgment. Conversely, as we shall see, Dryground's project, his risky investment to regain Frances' fortune, embraces both risk and divine will.

However, if the usurer seems immune to the danger of loss, the punishment for the sins of the father will instead fall on his children. A warning that 'Ill gotten goods never descend to the third heire' is regularly repeated in *The English Usurer* and echoed in *The*

[35] See e.g.: 'Blow the Wind East, or West, plenty or Dearth, / Sicknesse or health, sit on the face of the Earth, / He cares not. Time will bring his money in' (p. 39).

[36] In a lengthy lecture on the benefits of usury, the aptly named usurer, Security, thus states: 'where I, and such other honest men as live by lending money, are content with moderate profit – thirty or forty i' th' hundred – so we may have it with quietness, and out of peril of wind and weather, rather than run those dangerous courses of trading as they do'. See Ben Jonson, George Chapman and John Marston*, Eastward Ho!*, ed. by C.G. Petter (London: A. & C. Black, The New Mermaids, 1994), 2.2.93-8.

[37] Muldrew, pp. 141-7. See also Joost Hengstmengel, *Divine Providence in Early Modern Economic Thought* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 171ff.

[38] Ibid., p. 144.

Demoiselle.[39] Valentine thus warns Vermin that the usurer's extortion will leave him 'cursed in his posterity' (4.1.710) and that his daughter will flee him 'To 'scape the curse might come with a child's part / Of thine ill-got estate' (4.1.718). When Valentine has finished, Brookall chimes in with 35 lines of enraged preaching to the same effect, starting with this opening salute:

> You said, and you said well, his tainted wealth
> Got by corruption, kept by niggardise,
> Must fly as ill through luxury and riot.
> I add, that they who get it so shall leave it,
> To run at the like waste, through their succession
> Even to the world's end. 'Tis not one age,
> Though spent in prayers, can expiate the wrong
> Such an estate was gotten by, though the estate
> Be, to a doit, spent with it, but it shall
> Fly like a fatal scourge through hand to hand,
> Through age to age, frighted by orphans' cries
> And widows' tears, the groans and lamentations
> Of oppressed prisoners, mingled with the curses
> Of hunger-bitten labourers, whose very sweat
> Thou robb'st them of (4.1.730).

Brookall proceeds to detail how Vermin's wealth will corrupt all who receive it, until at last no one will dare touch it, whereupon it will sink into the ground 'and run into a vein of ore shall reach / To hell' (4.1.733). One critic calls these 'mournful diatribes… tedious and excessive'.[40] True perhaps, but Brookall's obsession with the future of the usurer's gold serves to highlight the role of inheritance in the condemnation of usury to the point where its 'tainted wealth' emerges as the original sin of economic life. Vermin thus lives up to his name by acting as a source of contamination and corruption for future generations.[41] His children fulfil the dire prophesies. His son, Wat, who initially finds himself disinherited and in debtor's prison, is an unrepentant prodigal who seems intent to confirm that 'when the father is gone to hell for gathering, the sonne often followes for

[39] Blaxton, p. 19, see also, e.g., pp. 13, 18, 40 and 41.

[40] Catherine M. Shaw, *Richard Brome* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), p. 59.

[41] Hardly incidentally for Brome's choice of name, in seventeenth century cultural imagination vermin was also associated with cleverness and a damaging propensity to eat food designed for human consumption and in which people had invested time and work; see Mary Fissell, 'Imagining Vermin in Early Modern England', *History Workshop Journal* 47 (1999), 1-29.

scattering'.[42] While Wat's expenditure does serve to punish his father, this does not make his prodigality laudable. Rather, it is depicted as a perpetuation of a vicious circle set in motion by his father. By spending money on idle pleasures and failing to pay his creditors, Wat thus reproduces one of his father's characteristics; his self-centeredness and disregard for the moral obligations of a credit economy. These traits are also evident in Wat's later proposal to marry the disguised Frances, but still allow the gamesters to lie with her if they allow her 'breathing-whiles' (3.1.481) and he gets their payment.

The equation between self-love and prodigality was widespread in economic pamphlets from the late sixteenth century and into the late seventeenth century.[43] In *The Usurer's Daughter*, Lorna Hutson explains the logic behind this equation and its topicality for the English credit economy:

> In a gift economy, prodigality may be understood as the abuse, by anticipation, of the reciprocal flow of gifts and credit from benefactor to recipient and back. For within the gift economy, the act of giving, or the extension of credit, is a sign of trust in the other's ability and worthiness. The recipient knows this, and understands his honour to be at stake in the obligation to reciprocate.[44]

Like his usurious father, the prodigal Wat perverts the functioning of the credit economy. While the first charges for the credit that makes this economy work, the latter refuses to repay his debts. Both thus deny the reciprocity and break the trust that underpins the informal credit system. Furthermore, they also disrupt a flow of inheritance; Vermin by extorting Brookall out of his ancestral lands and intending to do the same with Dryground, Wat by wasting his own inheritance. It is not coincidental that their misuse of the credit economy also involves a disruption of inheritance, for as we shall see, the play's ideal of inheritance is a form of gift giving in Lorna Hudson's sense, that is, one that involves an 'obligation to reciprocate'. In this way, familial inheritance becomes the play's model for a credit economy as an idealized 'brotherhood'. In contrast to this ideal, Wat and Vermin install a sinful and disruptive inheritance cycle based not on reciprocity and giving but selfish spending and hoarding.

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[42] Blaxton, p. 39.

[43] Muldrew, p. 126. The idea can be traced back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* which was often quoted in English debates about prodigality (see Horbury, 314-15).

[44] Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 118.

However, while miserly usury is a principle of death-like withdrawal, prodigality at least expresses a *joie de vivre* by indulging in sensual and communal pleasures.[45] Earlier prodigal son plays often celebrate the wit and youthful vitality of their protagonists and downplay the negative effects of their actions. Recent critics have argued that such plays link prodigality to the mastery of the urban commercial credit economy. Katharine Eisaman Maus thus argues that Prince Hal in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays (1597) manages credit and property 'in keeping with the newly flexible and varied economic realities of his environment'.[46] Michelle Dowd likewise sees in plays like John Fletcher's *Monsieur Thomas* (1615) and Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, part II* (1605) a positive recuperation of prodigality that reconfigures the heirs' wasteful expenditure as risky investments with a profitable outcome that could be used 'to develop and secure the family's wealth and landed property'.[47]

In a recent study of 20 prodigal plays co-written with Ross Deans Kristensen-McLachlan, I argue that the celebration of the cynical, witty prodigal in early plays of the period tends to give way in prodigal son plays of the 1620's and 1630's to a much more critical stance on prodigality as wasteful and destructive. The prodigal protagonists of bleak Caroline comedies like Welborne in Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* or Careless in Brome's *A Mad Couple Well Matched* (1639) have few redeeming qualities and in particular the passive Careless relies much more heavily on the help of others to regain his fortunes than his crafty predecessors in the prodigal play tradition.[48] In *The Demoiselle*, too, Brome avoids the celebration of prodigality of earlier city comedies (and some of his own earlier plays like *The Weeding of Covent Garden*). Wat does not get to play the traditional part of the resourceful comic revenger. Instead, after Dryground uses part of his mortgage to buy him out of prison, he enrols him as a mere assistant in his scheme to help Alice and Frances. It is not his own good will, but Dryground's re-educative effort that finally makes the usurer's son promise to reform. In a side plot, Dryground's son, Valentine, who has his father's prodigal tendencies, is also ingeniously re-educated by his father-in-law, Bumpsey, who gives Valentine half of his fortune as

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[45] Accordingly, in Aristotle's view prodigality was a slightly better vice than avarice, because prodigal expenditure at least indirectly benefitted others, a view often repeated in early modern household manuals (see Muldrew, p. 159).

[46] Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Being and Having in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 49.

[47] Michelle M. Dowd, *The Dynamics of Inheritance on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 159.

[48] Jakob Ladegaard and Ross Deans Kristensen-McLachlan, 'Prodigal Heirs and Their Social Networks in Early Modern English Drama, 1590–1640', *Law and Literature* (2021) (https://doi.org/10.1080/1535685X.2021.1902635) [Accessed 14 April 2021].

dowry, but with the clause that he will spend the other half in exactly the same way that Valentine does. In this way, any expenditure on Valentine's part is doubled because the equivalent amount will be subtracted from the fortune he can eventually inherit at Bumpsey's demise. The young man thereby learns the value of saving.

Michelle Dowd convincingly argues that one of the appeals of the prodigal son parable for early modern playwrights was its motif of foreign travel. International trade tied the domestic English economy to foreign markets, and indebted landowners became increasingly engaged in risky, potentially lucrative investments in the rising foreign trade to fund their expensive lifestyles.[49] While the Biblical prodigal's travel was a sign of transgression, Dowd finds in several dramas that celebrate prodigality an attempt to vindicate landed nobility's involvement in foreign trade. In line with its critical stance on prodigality and the dramatic tradition that celebrated it, *The Demoiselle* associates the influence of foreign trade with prodigal consumption and moral transgression. In particular, Brome's play, like many other Caroline comedies, satirizes the import of French culture. Dressed as a *demoiselle*, Frances poses as an imported object of sexual desire and economic bargaining for the prodigal Wat and the male gamesters in the raffle, while 'she' also tickles some of the citizen womens' vanity by teaching them refined French manners.[50] Brome's comedy thus departs from the tendency Dowd describes by portraying prodigality and investment in foreign luxury goods as morally and economically damaging. As we shall see, Dryground's project is precisely to exploit this prodigal desire in other characters (likely drawing on his own experience) and turn it to more morally and economically profitable ends.

2. Inheritance as gift

Dryground's project might initially appear to be a form of investment, but probably one that most financial advisors would warn against. He obtains a thousand pounds from his mortgage. He spends the first £100 buying the unreliable Wat out of prison (3.2.587) and gives Brookall £40. He then rents an inn and serves 'fashionable guests and curious stomachs, / The daintiest palates, with rich wine and cheer, / And all for nothing' (2.1.179) for three full days. A seeming display of lavish prodigality that secretly and successfully

[49] Dowd, pp. 122-3.

[50] For more on Caroline comedy's satire of the rising mercantile elites and their aspirations to appropriate the cultural sophistication of the economically declining aristocracy, see Jean E. Howard, *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598-1642* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), esp. pp. 162-8.

intends to attract reckless prodigal gamblers. One hundred of his fashionable guests thus pay £20 for a stake in the raffle. We know that this brings in £500 for Frances' portion. This means that when Dryground reveals his trick and tries to convince the gamesters to recant with 'an oration / Well charged with virtuous sentences', a quarter of them agree to do so while 'The rest / Pursed theirs again' (5.1.974). The immediate total profit of Dryground's investment is perhaps not overwhelming considering the risk involved. To gain £500, he spends at least £140 in addition to what must be a considerable sum on wine, food and entertainment. Furthermore, not only does his plan depend on Wat's co-operation and the charity of men who like to raffle for young women, Dryground also admits to his son Valentine that 'the best Occurrents in this project have been thine; / Thy accidents exceeded my design' (5.1.1043).

To say the least, Dryground's investment strategy exposes him to considerable risk, and perhaps that is the whole point. We are not meant to see his success as a result of business savvy, but as the reward of a moral investment – and an investment in morality. As I remarked in the introduction, Dryground invents the project on behalf of Brookall to atone for the seduction of his sister. The whole project hinges on the risky proposition that other prodigals like Wat and the gamesters can and will also reform and make restitution. Further adding to his risk, Dryground relies on chance in the form of Valentine's improvisations. In taking these chances, Dryground opens himself to God's reward or punishment of his affairs contrary to the usurer's attempt at withdrawal. The success of his scheme, which is not so much its perhaps limited economic profit as the redistribution of wealth and the communal bonds it creates, surpasses every expectation. Like the son in the biblical parable, the heavenly father forgives the old prodigal Dryground and showers him with plentiful gifts.

Dryground's scheme itself relies on gift giving. His plan is to give Frances a marriage portion; he gives money to Brookall and Wat, provides the gamesters with free food and wine, and the money he finally presents to Frances are the gamesters' free gifts. This results in a further series of gifts between the reconciled families. Vermin, who, contrary to Valentine, previously refused to give alms to the young beggar, Phillis, now gives Brookall's land to Frances and restores Dryground's land to its former owner. These gifts symbolically establish the 'brotherhood' with which the play ends and thus function in Marcel Mauss' sense of the gift as a reciprocal exchange that binds people together in prolonged social relations.[51] A gift in this sense is not a one-off transfer, but a social

[51] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen, 1969). For a study of inheritance in English literature that draws extensively on Mauss, see Vincent P. Pecora, 'Inheritance, Gifts and Expectations', *Law and Literature*, 20.2 (2002), 177-96.

practice that creates an indefinite cycle of reciprocation. Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos has shown that formal and informal gift relationships were ubiquitous in early modern England, and that '…elements of gift relations were conspicuous in credit relations and obligations'.[52] Gift relations and the credit economy described by Muldrew partly overlapped because both were forms of exchange that relied on moral values like trustworthiness and mutual obligation. By relying on the reciprocity of gift giving (rather than the one-way expenditure of prodigality), Dryground's project in *The Demoiselle* presents an idealized moral economy founded not on self-interest, but on social obligations whose core and model is the relationship between family members, but which extends to the wider community since Dryground's project is not designed to help his own family, but the son of his former enemy. It also has a theological foundation in that the covenant between God and man was often conceived in similar terms as a reciprocal relation where the free gift of Christ's sacrifice gave man the hope of redemption from his inherent sinfulness.[53]

In this idealized economy modelled on the family and particularly concerned with passing on wealth from the older generation to the younger, inheritance is an essential form of gift giving. Ben-Amos, too, considers inheritance as a gift relationship because it was commonly thought to involve an obligation in heirs to reciprocate for the provisions they received during their parents' lifetime (in the form of marriage portions, gifts, annuities, etc.) or would receive when they died. A common way to repay such gifts was for at least one of the offspring to take care of the parents in their old age.[54] But for heirs of the established and aspiring social elites in the first half of the seventeenth century, the obligations extended beyond their parents and back towards a longer line of ancestors. In this period, ancestry thus increasingly became a source of cultural prestige and honour, which both acted as a spur to pursue glory and created 'a sense of duty to protect and conserve familial achievements'.[55] But the obligation also extended into the future. Estates were passed on with the expectation that the heir would provide for his offspring by preserving or enlarging the family estate. This, after all, was the idea behind male primogeniture: To preserve estates and titles in the male bloodline instead of dividing them between heirs. The obligation of an heir of landed wealth to reciprocate, then, does not only concern the immediate task of caring for his parents in old age, it involves a role as mediator between past generations who have built the estate and its future possessors.

[52] Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving. Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 12.

[53] Muldrew, pp. 140-6.

[54] Ben-Amos, p. 151.

[55] Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500-1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 83.

Dryground and Wat, like so many other heirs in the dramatic prodigal son tradition, struggle to fulfil this role. To do so would require them to manage their economic affairs and produce a legitimate (male) heir of their own. Dryground has a son, but he has neglected his estate, which means that he and Valentine walk in the shadows of their ancestry 'like the pale ghosts of dead nobility'. Wat too has squandered his father's money and freely admits that he has never asked for a paternal blessing (3.1.441).[56] It is therefore not entirely without reason that Vermin disinherits his only son, although the play does not explicitly sympathize with it. Even so, the threat of disinheritance is to some degree necessary for the play's idea of inheritance as a gift with reciprocal moral obligations to function logically, since an inflexible principle of primogeniture would mean that the oldest son inherits regardless of his behaviour. The possibility of disinheritance introduces the elements of risk and paternal judgment that we have seen to be integral parts of the plays' ideal moral economy. English common law in fact provided absolute testamentary freedom, so disinheritance for any reason was legal, and in the debates about inheritance in the first half of the seventeenth century, commentators often pointed to this legal right as a way for fathers to force their heirs to meet their moral and dynastic obligations.[57] One of the period's most popular pamphlets on inheritance, John Ap Roberts's *An Apology for a Younger Brother* (1618; reprinted in 1624, 1634 and 1641), thus argues that fathers have every right to disinherit the first-born male if he proves a 'desperate Vnthrift'[58] and instead choose a younger brother to 'giue his Lands and Goods, or other his Fortunes… for the preseruation of his Name, and comfort of his Posterity'.[59] Roberts's complaint about the injustices of primogeniture was echoed in other pamphlets and early modern dramas and seems to have met with a responsive audience.[60] But in practice, disinheritance remained a rare occurrence.[61]

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[56] For the increasing importance of paternal blessings in this period's theology and drama, see Tom MacFaul, *Problem Fathers in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 6-7.

[57] Susan Staves, 'Resentment or Resignation?: Dividing the Spoils among Daughters and Younger Sons', in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* ed. by John Brewer and Susan Staves (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 194-218 (p. 200).

[58] John Ap Roberts, *An Apology for a younger Brother or A Discourse proving that Parents may dispose of their Estates to which of their Children they please* (Oxford: Leonard Lichfield, 1641), pp. 43-44.

[59] Ibid., p. 4.

[60] See Joan Thirsk, 'Younger Sons in the Seventeenth Century', *History*, 54.182 (1969), 358-77; and Ira Clark, 'The Plight of Younger Brothers', in *Comedy, Youth, Manhood in Early Modern England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), pp. 55-85.

[61] Ben-Amos, p. 20.

However, disinheritance is a common motif in prodigal son comedies and occurs frequently in Brome's comedies, although as a rule the parties are reconciled in the end.[62] Brome, probably like most of his contemporaries, seems to have regarded disinheritance as occasionally a sad necessity, but generally unproductive and unnatural.[63] In *The Demoiselle*, disinheritance is tellingly part of the destructive usurer-prodigal inheritance relation between Vermin and Wat. But this does not mean that inheritance is a gift without obligations to reciprocate. Thus, Vermin conditions his restoration of Dryground's land on Wat's ability to 'stand firm' and avoid the slipperiness of debt (5.1.1043). This binds Dryground's destiny lastingly to his bet on Wat's ability to reform, and not unlike the deal between Valentine and Bumpsey, it ensures that Wat will only have an inheritance from Dryground (through the marriage with Dryground's daughter, Phillis) and possibly from Vermin if he lives up to their expectations. The marriages of the young generation in *The Demoiselle* thus restore a social order of binding economic and sexual circulation that builds on the reciprocity of gift-giving and kinship networks.

This 'brotherhood' clearly has a hierarchical, paternalistic dimension. As Jennifer Panek argues, the credit economy not only built on trust, it also fostered a culture of distrust, mutual surveillance and moral control in the process of determining who was trustworthy and who was not. Similarly, as we have seen, testamentary freedom and the threat of disinheritance could strengthen paternal authority. Panek discusses this aspect of the credit economy in a study of the sub-genre of prodigal husband plays, in which young husbands often articulate a paradoxical sense of powerlessness and anxiety in their roles as heads of their new households, because this position entails constant scrutiny from family and the community.[64] As young husbands with prodigal tendencies, Wat and Valentine submit to such control in *The Demoiselle* from members of the older

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[62] Apart from *The Demoiselle*, we see it in *The Weeding of Covent Garden* (1633), *The New Academy* (1636) and *A Madd Couple Well Match'd* (1639). The latter features a remarkably unrepentant prodigal, who although profitably married is not reinstated as his uncle's heir. In the earlier plays, sons and fathers are ultimately reconciled. It is worth noting that we find the only example of disinheritance in an uncle-nephew relationship. This illustrates why it was common for prodigal son comedies to deal with such relationships: Firstly, they are less morally binding than filial relationships; secondly, an uncle might produce an heir of his own and thereby 'disinherit' the nephew by natural means, an option not available for a father in a primogenital system (and one invoked throughout in *A Madd Couple Well Match'd*). Both traits serve to increase the risk that a nephew might not inherit. This enhances a play's dramatic tension and allows the author more critical manoeuvring space in dealing with inheritance.

[63] Tellingly for Brome's measured stance, his only play to deal substantially with the rivalry between younger and older brothers, the tragicomedy *The Queen's Exchange* (1634), features a villainous *younger* brother who tries to have his virtuous older brother killed to gain his inheritance.

[64] Jennifer Panek,'Community, Credit, and the Prodigal Husband on the Early Modern Stage', *ELH* 80.1 (2013), 61-92 (p. 68).

generation, who have a moral and an economic stake in their behaviour. In not representing this as problematic, the play to some degree buys into a paternalistic ideology. But this is countered by an acute sense that the fathers of the play, particularly Vermin and Dryground, are far from ideal. They are 'problem fathers' in Tom MacFaul's sense; that is, father figures split between their quasi-sacred ideological function and their individual flaws.[65] Therefore, these characters must learn to assume responsibility for the well-being of their offspring and trust their capacities to control their own lives.

3. Prodigal fathers and redemptive bastards

Dryground is conscious about his need for redemption, particularly for his sin against Brookall's sister, Eleanor. Like Vermin's miserliness, this original sin is visited upon Dryground's children, especially his illegitimate daughter, Phillis, who resorts to the dubious economic practice of begging to survive. Phillis thus links sexual and economic unruliness.[66] The link between bastardy and illicit economic activities (especially counterfeiting) was exploited by earlier dramatists like Shakespeare and Middleton.[67] This reflects the period's widespread view of bastards as passionate, duplicitous and even rebellious heirs to the secret sinfulness with which they were begotten, a view reflected in the legal limitations on their rights of inheritance.[68] In influential tragedies like *King Lear* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the two bastards (Edmund and Spurio) see themselves in this way as heirs to their parent's sin and – true to their 'nature' – they rebel against their fathers and legitimate brothers. In *The Demoiselle*, Brome rejects this dramatic tradition of villainous bastards in his portrayal of Phillis, one of the only substantial, recognized female bastard characters in English pre-1642 drama. Firstly, contrary to tragic bastard characters, who are often particularly obsessed with the stain of their

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[65] MacFaul, pp. 2-6. MacFaul does not deal with post-1625 drama in his book because of 'Caroline and Restoration drama's increasing indifference to fathers' (p. 3). He does not provide evidence for this claim, and *The Demoiselle* and many other Brome comedies (not to speak of the many tragedies and tragicomedies during Charles' paternalistic rule that deal with problems of succession) seem to contradict it.

[66] Importantly, as Matthew Steggle points out, begging was not illegal in the Temple Walks, where Phillis 'works'. Brome uses this setting to link her legal but morally flawed occupation to those of more affluent members of society such as lawyers (who pass by on stage in the background) and money-lenders like Vermin (pp. 130-7). Incidentally, as Craig Muldrew notes, lawyers in fact often functioned as money-lenders (p. 259). Brome's last play, *A Jovial Crew*, deals substantially with begging.

[67] See Neill, '"In Everything Illegitimate"', pp. 136-7 and 'Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny in *The Revenger's Tragedy*', in *Putting History to the Question*, pp. 149-65.

[68] For more on the legal standing of bastards in the period, see Findlay, pp. 23-8.

mothers' sin, Brome presents the sin that brought Phillis to life as her father's. [69] Secondly, Phillis is not a rebel but a virtuous victim, whose genteel blood and good-naturedness shines through her rags and makes her an object of pity and admiration. She reveals her virtue when, having learned how Vermin got his fortune, she refuses the idea of accepting money from him, since she fears that one of his 'ill-got pence, here mingled, would / Corrupt and overthrow my righteous Fortune' (4.1.2208-9) made up of the alms given by other characters. Valentine and Brookall approve of Phillis' moral distinction between her livelihood, born out of necessity, and Vermin's extortion, born out of greed. Their approval is the first step in their growing intimacy, which leads to the discovery of Phillis' identity.

Instead of earlier plays' rhetorical equivalence between 'tainted' bastards and economic fraudulence, Brome thus presents us with an idea of the illegitimate child as a key to sentimental reconciliation – and the act of giving as the way out of the economic 'sins' of usury and prodigality. Phillis' re-inscription in the legitimate social order and kinship network through marriage and forgiveness atones for the original sin of her parent's illegitimate affair and creates hope for a future of ordered succession in families and friendship between them. As I mentioned in the introduction, Brome does not reserve this role for the female bastard. Illegitimate males have a similar positive function in *The Sparagus Garden* and *A Jovial Crew*.[70] In all of these plays, the original sin that produces the bastards is primarily paternal, while the mothers are victims of scrupulous young heirs – the plays' prodigal fathers. The mothers of *The Sparagus Garden* and *A Jovial Crew* die shortly after giving birth, while Eleanor lives in poverty. These prehistories let us see the prodigal behaviour of the younger generation of males as a form of inheritance from their fathers, a vicious circle of male transgression that ruins their female lovers and threatens the family's patrilineal bloodline. As the corporeal manifestation in the young generation of the sinful past, as mediators between past and present, the social re-integration of the illegitimate child signals the end of that circle.

In her illuminating comments on *The Demoiselle*, Alison Findlay stresses the parallels between Phillis and Frances.[71] In his role as the disguised Dryground's French daughter,

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[69] As Michael Neill points out in 'Bastardy, Counterfeiting, and Misogyny in *The Revenger's Tragedy*', it is no coincidence that a common synonym for bastard was a 'whore's son' (p. 150). Similarly, a law from 1609 threatened with imprisonment any 'lewd woman' that gave birth to illegitimate children 'chargeable to the parish'; see Alan Macfarlane, 'Illegitimacy and illegitimates in English History', in *Bastardy and its Comparative History*, ed. by Peter Laslett et al. (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), pp. 71-85 (p. 73).

[70] For more on bastardy in early modern comedy with particular emphasis on genre differences and Brome's comedies in particular, see Ladegaard and Kristensen-McLachlan, 'Selfish Bastards?'

[71] Findlay, pp. 209-12.

the latter acts as a symbolic stand-in for Dryground's real, but absent daughter, Phillis. The economic practices they are involved in also have similarities, which as Findlay notes, Brome is careful to stress by making Valentine and Bumpsey compete in giving alms to Phillis in 'an obvious parallel to the raffle for her counterpart's maidenhead'.[72] Both in the end also bring the money they receive as dowries into their respective marriages to Vermin's children. Findlay argues that even if Phillis displays a degree of moral control over her situation by refusing Vermin's polluted money, her and Frances' stories illustrate that women financially depended on men and were in danger of becoming commodities on a patriarchal market place. Findlay is right that 'The play does not present Phillis as a radical who will re-fashion woman's position in society',[73] but Brome is clearly critical of the paternal sins that expose young women to the market in the first place. Thus, the play denounces as equally problematic Vermin's attempt to use Alice as a financial resource by forcing her to marry a rich knight (echoing the raffling for the demoiselle's virginity) and Dryground's prodigal abandonment of Phillis. Instead, the daughters are in the end allowed to marry for love. Although this conventional ending can be read as merely substituting the fathers' control for the husbands', the future husbands have all learned a lesson about the dangers of prodigality (Frances as an intended object of consumption, Valentine by Bumpsey's intervention, and Wat through experience). They have also witnessed their future wives' ability to let moral judgment trump economic gain (Alice's escape from her father's house and engagement with the destitute Frances; Phillis' rejection of Vermin's money). Although the play does not directly challenge husbands' legal rights over the household economy, the ending suggests that the promise of an improved economic morality in the young generation depends not only on paternalistic control but on the moral influence of women on the household economy.

In general, the young generation in the play embody a principle of self-determination that poses a risk for their fathers, but also leads to their moral transformation. They symbolize the limits of paternal control; they are signs both of their parents' ability to create life and of their mortality. Dryground, who relies on Valentine's inventions to succeed and who is immediately reconciled with Phillis, recognizes and embraces this principle. Vermin does not; he accepts neither limits to his control over his children nor mortality as the condition of his life. This makes him vulnerable, and Dryground takes advantage of this by helping the children turn their resistance against their father in a more productive direction than Wat's prodigality. When the reformed Wat begs forgiveness of Vermin and Alice implores him to bless her wedding with Frances, Vermin is finally 'awaked out of

[72] Ibid., p. 210.

[73] Ibid., p.211.

the lethargy / Of avarice' (5.1039). The breach in Vermin's defences, the relationship to his children that delivers him over to the social and divine world of risk and vulnerability, thus proves to be his only path towards redemption. This entails a recognition of the ultimate contingency, mortality, and the act of bestowing his wealth on his uncontrollable children in a gesture of mutual forgiveness means awakening from the dream that he can live forever and avoid divine judgment. Through this gesture, inheritance turns from the curse of eternal waste into a symbolic renewal of the act of giving life to his children. One is reminded here of another meaning of the money as mud metaphor, with which the play started, namely Francis Bacon's famous quip that 'money is like muck, not good except it be spread'. The passage continues: 'This is done chiefly by suppressing, or at least keeping a straight hand upon the devouring trades of usury, engrossing, great pasturages, and the like'.[74] In Brome, too, usury is suppressed, not by force of law, but through a recognition of the obligations and contingencies involved in social life. As a free gift, the usurer's hoarded wealth is spread and ancestral lands return to their former owners; dirty money turns into a fertilizer for new growth.[75]

Conclusion

The resolution of *The Demoiselle* might look conservative. The marriages of the young couples seem to restore a social order based on paternalism and the legitimacy of inherited land and titles. But the play shows that this order is far from a natural state that is only temporarily threatened by 'unnatural' outsiders like usurers or bastards, who are then purged to restore order. Instead, these threats from the outside are shown to be in large part a result of the vices of those like Dryground, who were supposed to be the pillars of the social order. Restoration thus requires restitution and inclusion of those outsiders that are in reality the externalised manifestations of internal transgressions. This process in turn rests on a recognition of the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of members of society, a recognition which entails a sense of moral if not social equality. *The Demoiselle* deals with members of the social elite, whose positions are threatened by poverty but ultimately secured and passed on to their children through inheritance, and the play is unconcerned with the socio-economic and political inequality this practice

[74] Francis Bacon, 'Of Sedition and Troubles' [1625], *The Essays*, ed. by John Pitcher (London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 105.

[75] Bacon's lines are from a passage where he warns that great economic inequality can lead to popular rebellions and therefore 'good policy is to be used, that the treasure and monies in a state be not gathered into few hands'. (Ibid.) Given that Vermin's initial fantasies of wealth could be seen to evoke Charles' vastly unpopular tax, ship money, the final spread of the usurer's wealth in *The Demoiselle* perhaps have political overtones in line with Bacon's admonition.

perpetuates on a social macro-level. What it does convey, however, is a strong sense that inherited wealth and privileges are not justified by the assumption of an inherent personal superiority of certain families or the blind power of tradition. Wealth is not justified *because* it is inherited; an inheritance is not always a blessing, the usurer's gold can equally well become a curse. Only as the reward of moral behaviour, as the outcome of acts motivated by the good of others rather than personal gain, is wealth justified in the play. This ideal of a moral economy has a strong temporal dimension; it is upheld by a sense of obligation towards the past and future: The prodigal Dryground who has devoted his life to present pleasures, is haunted by the wrong he did to a woman presumably at least fifteen years ago and plans a project to redeem his fault; the usurer Vermin imagines himself to live outside time, but awakens to his own mortality. The play's ideal economic embrace of this existential and moral temporality, which also delivers the subject over from a state of self-immersion to the contingencies of the social world, is inheritance as a form of gift. So wealth is not justified because it is inherited in *The Demoiselle*; it is because wealth is inherited that it is in need of a justification that can only consist in receiving and passing it on as a gift.

In his study of *A Jovial Crew*, Denys Van Renen argues that 'Brome repeatedly questions patrilineal succession,' adding that for Brome it was instead the tradition of English theatre that 'provide a coherent sense of national identity'.[76] This article reaches a less unequivocal conclusion. The critical questioning of patrilineal succession in *The Demoiselle* does not amount to a rejection of the principle, but instead a sort of moral reformation of inheritance as a social practice. Likewise, although Brome's comedy is clearly and self-consciously inscribed in a long tradition of English theatre, the play does not accept this tradition uncritically. This is visible in its reworking of the conventions of prodigal son comedies and the portrayal of illegitimate children. The critical stance towards its theatrical heritage is also evident in the play's relationship to its perhaps most immediate predecessor, Ben Jonson's failed comedy, *The New Inn* (1629).

Brome probably wrote *The Demoiselle* in the last part of 1637 after the death of his one-time master and theatrical father figure, Ben Jonson, in August that year.[77] Brome alludes to this event and the ensuing speculation about who would become the next *poet laureate* in the prologue of the play, where he states that he 'won't be called / Author, or poet, nor beg to be installed / Sir Laureate'. Despite his protestations, Brome does implicitly position himself as Jonson's artistic heir by borrowing the main motif (and name) of the

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[76] Denys Van Renen, *The Other Exchange: Women, Servants, and the Urban Underclass in Early Modern English Literature* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), p. 78.

[77] Munro, p. 9.

disguised Frances from Jonson's *The New Inn*. But in borrowing it he also repurposes it. In Jonson's play, the final revelation that Frances is not a beggar disguised as a gentlewoman, but is in fact a gentlewoman initially disguised as a beggar, serves to reunite her with her wealthy aristocratic parents, who were also disguised as lowly characters, and to seal her marriage to Beaufort, who would not have considered her otherwise: 'Let beggers match with beggers' (5.4.45).[78] The resolution in Jonson's play is as unlikely as it is unplanned. It is not a motivated by any intentional action or moral merit. In Brome, the motif of the disguised Frances is a sign of moral reformation in Dryground and an impetus for the same in the mortified gamblers. Tellingly for the rather cynical atmosphere in Jonson's play, Frances is disguised as gentlewoman to entertain a bored heiress; but in Brome the disguise is a risky act of other-oriented gift giving. Brome's moral reorientation of Jonson's motif is in line with the way *The Demoiselle* reshapes the individualistic tendency in the tradition of prodigal son plots. Theatrically, then, Brome as one of the 'sons of Ben' and an heir of an abundant dramatic legacy sought to at once continue a dramatic bloodline and redeem the 'sins' of his ancestors' creations in *The Demoiselle* much as the children in the play with respect to their selfish fathers. As such, it treats the dramatic tradition as a gift to be freely appropriated and passed on as an act of inheritance that preserves the past by giving it new life.

[78] Ben Jonson, *The New Inn*, in *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols., ed. by C.H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1938 [repr. 2005]), VI, p. 486.