

Abstract

Since John Dover Wilson's declaration that Prince Hal is a "prodigal prince", critics have read the *Henry IV* plays as adaptations of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32). Although the parable informs the plays, Hal is not "prodigal" in the predominant early modern understanding of prodigality. Prodigality is defined by wasteful excess, often financial in nature, and prodigal sons were defined as much by this excess as by association with the Lukan paradigm. The *Henry IVs* present one of the most complex and enduring formulations of the relationship between prodigality and the parable in early modern literature, which cannot be understood without an appropriate understanding of prodigality in context. This article explicates early modern prodigality, accounting for its classical context, secular and religious usage, gendered dimension, and role in dramatic adaptations of the parable. It then situates the *Henry IVs* within this context and delineates how Hal enacts a prodigal son plot with Falstaff's prodigality functioning in place of his own prodigal dissolution. By providing a historicist understanding of prodigal sons, this article facilitates more accurate readings of prodigality and the parable in early modern culture.

The unprodigal prince?: Defining prodigality in the *Henry IVs*

1943 saw the publication of John Dover Wilson's *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, a landmark in Shakespeare scholarship that has long remained a staple of Henriad criticism. In this book, Wilson advances one of the earliest and most influential analyses of the *Henry IVs* as adaptations of the parable of the prodigal son, Luke 15.11-32. Here, Wilson casts Hal as a refashioning of "the traditional royal prodigal" in plays that dramatise "the growing-up of a madcap prince" (22), drawing his reading from the congruent narrative structures of the plays and the parable. This identification of Hal as "the prodigal prince" (17) has endured and he has become the most well-known gadabout youth of early modern prodigal son drama. However, despite the popularity of this reading, claims of "notoriously prodigal" Hal's prodigality (Kastan 13) are not wholly accurate to the early modern understanding of the concept. Wilson's use of "prodigal" (and that of subsequent commenters) functions in the modern sense of a signifier of the Lukan arc, denoting a "wildness in youth" followed by the "sudden change" of reformation (20). Prominent scholars of early modern prodigal sons such as Richard Helgerson, Ervin Beck, Alan Young, and Alexander Leggatt have defined prodigal sons and their prodigality by this arc, but prodigality in the early modern sense more readily designates wasteful expenditure and excess than filial rebellion and reform. The essentially excessive element of early modern prodigality has been overlooked, an omission that this article aims to rectify with a historicist reading of prodigality and the parable in the *Henry IVs*. It focuses especially on the role of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in constructing early modern notions of financial excess. Though the influence of this text on the early modern period is often noted, its economic theories are rarely considered. By situating the *Henry IVs* in relation to the classical context informing early modern prodigality, this article investigates Hal's engagement with prodigality and the extent to which he does and does not

exhibit various prodigal behaviours, as well as explicating how the plays adapt the prodigal son narrative for a son whose prodigality proves atypical among early modern prodigal son figures. It discusses Falstaff's role as scapegoat within Hal's enactment of the parable's narrative, and demonstrates how Falstaff's prodigality enables Hal's fulfilment of a redemptive arc without Hal prodigally trespassing. It also addresses Hal's engagement with more unusual forms of prodigality and assesses the extent to which Hal can and should be considered a prodigal son. By historicising prodigality, we gain a more accurate and nuanced perspective on not just the *Henry IVs*, but on financial ethics more generally in early modern England.

Prodigality defines the morality of excessive expenditure. In early modern England, to spend on luxuries, immoral pursuits, or simply to fail to moderately govern one's finances was not just indicative of poor economic knowledge but was itself a moral failing. Some work has been done in recent years on the gendered context of financial excess, such as that by Maria Prendergast, Jennifer Panek, Alexandra Shepard, Michelle Dowd, and Ina Habermann. Joshua Scodel has worked extensively on early modern excess, but he only engages with prodigality cursorily (133, 200). Beyond this, research on prodigality has primarily conceptualised it as a pattern of stray and return derived from the parable of the prodigal son. The most influential text in this regard is Richard Helgerson's *The Elizabethan Prodigals*, a study of writers who identified with the Lukan prodigal. Helgerson focuses on a type of figurative prodigality in which Elizabethan writers figure romantic writing as a form of prodigal rebellion of which they must ultimately repent in favour of civic humanism. Although there are many strengths to this reading, some of which I will later address, Helgerson's comparison is, like Wilson's, derived from the structural congruence between the parable and patterns of stray and return. Thus, while his use of "prodigal son" as signifying the parable is perfectly accurate, his refiguring of prodigality as a "pattern" of

rebellion (3) and defiance of an older generation (35) is not wholly accurate to its dominant early modern meaning as denoting excess. And the structure of this excess is vital to understanding Hal, Falstaff, and the parabolic structure in the *Henry IVs*.

Prodigality governs many fields: it emerges in relation to forms of (un)acceptable luxuries, the role and use of inheritances, attitudes to one's employer (and in relation to one's family), changing fashions (fabrics, items, styles), debts and the repayment thereof, dowries, marital economics (especially marrying for wealth), and commodity exchange. The term prodigality dates from at least the fourteenth century, designating excessive spending that is likely to lead to poverty ("prodigal, adj., n., and adv", OED). The definitions of prodigality offered by late sixteenth and early seventeenth century lexicons emphasise waste and financial excess: the prodigal is "He that hath wasted goodes" (Cooper sig. li2 r), the Latin 'prodigus' is defined first as 'prodigal' and elaborated as designating a "wastefull" and "riotous" "outragious spender" (Thomas sig. Aaa6r), one who is "vnthriftie, lauish, wastfull, riotous, excessiue, or outragious in expence" (Cotgrave sig. Sss vi r), one who shows "wastefulness, riot, unthriftiness" (Blount sig. li4 v), who is "too riotous in spending" (Cawdrey sig. G8v). There is no mention in these lexicons of the arc of stray and return that is usually attributed to prodigality. This is supported by the term's usage in contemporary texts: "The tongue of a prodigall man is bragging of his riotous excesse, and of his ouermuch lauishnesse and spending" (Martyn 97), "how do men commit iniustice by ouer-slauish and prodigall mis-spending of their owne goods?" (Allen 214), "so prodigal in superfluous expences" (Barne sig. C1r), "Needy niggardy causeth many to profes such a needeles necessity, that that is kept from the poore, that profuse prodigality wilfully doth waste" (Bedel C1v), "*A spend-thrift sworne to prodigalitie*" (Bodenham 212). In addition to the familiar stresses on excess and waste, these texts frequently censure the social ills that prodigality is seen to feed. Most commonly these attacks are levelled against gambling,

accumulating debt, and spending on luxuries, alcohol, and smoking, though prodigal expense could be applied to any economic transaction the writer wished to condemn. Such activities are less characteristic of Hal than Falstaff, who is guilty of endless prodigal extravagance: he accumulates debt, he spends on sack and sugar rather than bread, he promises gifts to the sex worker Doll Tearsheet, he thieves, he swindles the crown out of money, and he spends excessively on carnal pleasures. Hal lacks such transgressive excess, and the absence of prodigal excess in the straying son is highly atypical of early modern prodigal son drama.

In order to understand the *Henry IVs*' treatment of prodigality, as well as early modern prodigality more generally, it is necessary to address its classical context. During and after the Reformation, Aristotle enjoyed a resurgence in popularity and his *Nicomachean Ethics* emerged as the leading text on the structure and effects of prodigality. This text crucially defines prodigality as excess, as trespass beyond moderation into the extreme. The deficient quality of financial behaviour, what Aristotle calls *ἀνελευθερία*, is variably rendered as meanness, niggardliness, avarice, illiberality, miserliness, or tenacity. Aristotle is often cited in early modern treatments of prodigality, but the theories were so widely disseminated that it can be difficult to ascertain if a writer is drawing directly from Aristotle or merely his presence in the cultural atmosphere. Concerning Shakespeare, the prevailing critical consensus is that he must have either personally read or been extremely familiar with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as has been argued by many critics including Isabella Wheeler, Carson Holloway, Lisa Marciano, and Unhae Langis. David Beauregard has specifically written on the influence of the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the *Henry IVs*, but his focus is limited to the "triadic representation of cowardice, daring, and courage", whereas he does address the representation of prodigality, liberality, and avarice in *The Merchant of Venice* (923).

Aristotle's theories were primarily influential in situating prodigality within a schema of moderation, excess, and deficiency, but the *Nicomachean Ethics* nuances the subject

further. Aristotle defines two sub-types of prodigal, what might be called social and antisocial prodigals. The former is usually characterised by youth and the tendency to spend on enjoyable (though not necessarily ignoble) excesses, and as Aristotle writes is “easily cured both by age and by poverty” (63, 1121a20-1); the second is marked rather by the propensity to acquire wealth by immoral means, such as theft or gambling, and to spend on immoral self-indulgence. The prodigals of early modern prodigal son drama tend to the latter category, with much of the action generated by the prodigal’s participation in entertaining criminality: gambling, debting, stealing, scheming, and otherwise delving into an immorality from which he will inevitably make an ostensibly redemptive rise. Falstaff, naturally, exemplifies the latter type, though he never reforms. Aristotle also distinguishes prodigality from the similar behaviour of magnificence, in which one spends beyond moderation for selfless reasons yet remains within one’s means. This idea is usually applied to displays of wealth that emphasise grand generosity rather than selfish waste. By contrast, the prodigal must be marked by the possibility of exhausting their means, or by spending their wealth on immoral pursuits. In practice, the distinction is highly subjective and defined more by social class than behaviour. While Falstaff proves unambiguously prodigal, Hal’s support of that prodigality makes his own behaviour difficult to categorise. This reveals the uneasy subjectivity of distinctions between excess, moderation, and deficiency, a subjectivity often acknowledged in the early modern period (Scodel 3-4; Reeser throughout). As this article will demonstrate, the *Henry IVs* do not only present a uniquely rigorous engagement with prodigality, the parable, and their interrelation, but also demonstrate the instability of early modern conceptions of financial excess. Since it cannot be determined to what extent Shakespeare may have actively drawn on the text, I will use the *Nicomachean Ethics* as an informative tool to probe the more obscure representations of prodigality found in the *Henry IVs* rather than asserting a definitive pattern of influence.

It is worth noting that prodigality was not an exclusively financial concept and had increasingly figurative applications into the seventeenth century; however, these uses remain defined by excess, not rebellion or straying. This use is common in Shakespeare: “The chariest maid is prodigal enough / If she unmask her beauty to the moon” (*Hamlet* 1.3.36-7), wherein the showing of a maid’s beauty is an excessive act. In *Richard II*, Bolingbroke bids farewell to his father with “too few [words] to take my leave of you, / When the tongue’s office should be prodigal | To breathe the abundant dolour of the heart” (1.3.244-6); this use denotes verbal excess, with no sense of immorality but simply abundance. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Rosaline figures Berowne’s wits as “prodigal”, spent “in bootless rhymes” (5.2.64). Excess remains the prevailing definition.

Although prodigals are not exclusive to prodigal son drama, this is the subgenre in which they most frequently appear and in which prodigality is most thoroughly treated. The parable was extremely popular and its many adaptations allowed for increasingly complex treatments of the theme. It was a continual subject for sermons and provided limitless inspiration for plays, poems, prose, broadsides, and pamphlets. The dramatic theme developed from a European tradition begun by Gnapheus and Macropedius and was then adapted for several English morality plays in the sixteenth century, including *Nice Wanton* (c. 1550) and *The Disobedient Child* (1560). These were not long after followed by the precursor to the *Henry IVs*, *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (c. 1570 – c. 1590). By the 1620s, adaptations of the parable were characterised not just by the plot of the Lukan parable and the youth’s prodigality but a variety of tropes, character types, subplots, expectations, and subversions. While the parable was effectively used to depict many themes during its vogue, its lasting appeal lay in its redemptive arc. The parable allowed writers, especially playwrights, to define what repentance ought to constitute and how it would appear, as well as how false repentance might appear. The prodigal repentant became a potent image of the

Reformation, with the prodigal's salvation *sola fide* emblematic of Protestant theology. The *Henry IVs* explore this notion with particular perspicuity; as Michael Davies writes, "The language of Elizabethan Calvinism is intrinsic to the characterization of Falstaff and his relationship with Hal, and to the prince's eventual rejection of him. Hal's transformation likewise dramatizes Calvinist 'conversion'" (351). The parable was one of, if not the, most productive vehicles for Protestant theology, and its dramatic adaptations provided an apt mode to express these ideas. Leonard Tennenhouse goes so far as to assert, "Simply by tracing the change in this theme from [*The Interlude of*] *Youth* (1513-14) to *Lusty Juventus* (1547-53) one can discern the transition from a Catholic to a Protestant theology and from an older, more medieval concept of power to a newer, Renaissance one" (7). Drama proved a uniquely fruitful medium to depict both the parable and prodigality; while many religious and didactic texts warned against the ills of prodigality – such as John Carr's *The ruinous fal of prodigalitie* and John Rainolds' *Th' overthrow of stage-playes* – the theatre could ostentatiously depict the colourful excesses of prodigality and the prodigal's hare-brained schemes to acquire wealth for the audience's enjoyment, and then justify such displays by having the poverty-stricken prodigal repent his wrong-doings. Immoral excess can thus be both enjoyed and condemned. The theatre was also uniquely suited to explore epistemological questions raised by the parable: how can one tell if a prodigal is truly repentant, especially if he has spent most of the play lying and scheming? As every prodigal's repentance was, by nature of the medium, inauthentic and performative, theatrical repentance scenes exposed the uneasy potential in the parable for deceit and manipulation.

The *Henry IVs* are relatively early examples of "prodigal son plays" and predate most of what are generally considered the most complex treatments of the theme. Critics Beck and Young each created influential timelines of what they considered prodigal son plays and both place the *Henry IVs* about a third into a chronology stretching from 1513 to 1635 (Beck 121-

2; Young 318-21). The *Henry IVs* are exceptionally progressive in the complexity of their treatment of the parable, with most of their predecessors being morality plays. The prodigal son plot is most lucid in Part I: Hal has strayed from his father and the court, travelling to Eastcheap to engage in dissolution in order to “imitate the sun, / Who doth permit the base contagious clouds / To smother up his beauty” in order to cultivate a poor reputation so his rise may shine all the brighter (1.2.194-6). Part II sees Hal back in Eastcheap, having relapsed or not yet reformed depending on the reading, and he must reconcile again with his father and renounce Falstaff. Hal explicitly casts himself in a familiar arc of dissolution and resurgence, deliberately enacting a prodigal son plot for personal gain, but he is not the only one to do so. There is another who casts himself in this arc, one who is far more traditionally prodigal than Hal. This is “that reverend Vice, that grey Iniquity, that father Ruffian, that Vanity in Years” Sir John Falstaff (2.5.458-9).

Falstaff casts himself in a narrative that bears much in common with the theatrical interpretations of the prodigal son plot. The similarities between Falstaff and the prodigal son are stressed by his resemblance to another character type popular in these plays, that of the father-as-reformed-prodigal. This type is the prodigal son grown up, with his prodigality having been “cured” (as Aristotle predicts). He has prodigally rioted, fallen into despair, reformed, and thus learned the virtues of the prodigal son arc and that all riotous youths may reform as he did. He demonstrates to the audience and his son that youthful prodigality can be tempered and overcome to reach a position of moderate adulthood. The unnamed Father of Thomas Middleton’s *Michaelmas Term’s* (c. 1604) Country Wench is such a type. In search of his runaway daughter, he laments the “man-devouring” qualities of London in which he spent his “unshapen youth [...] And surfeited away my name and state / In swinish riots” (2.2.22-4), in reference to Luke 15.15-6. In *The London Prodigal* (c. 1604), Old Flowerdale defends his son’s prodigality by telling how he himself “ranne an unbrideled course till

thirtie, nay, almost till fortie” (1.1.24-5) and actually exhorts the moral benefits of a little youthful prodigality to help a child to moderation in later age, for “they that dye most vertuous hath in their youth lived most vicious” (37-8). This understanding of youthful prodigality as the path to moderation is treated more critically in Thomas Randolph’s *The Muse’s Looking-Glass*, wherein the parasite Colax speaks against “purchas[ing] with the losse of their estate / The name of one poore vertue liberalitie”, which had become an increasingly common theme in these plays (35). It is a popular sentiment in early modern England that prodigal sons grow to be moderate fathers (and age into avaricious elders). This relates to the belief that moderate and excessive (or deficient) behaviours emerge complimentarily between fathers and sons. Similar is the concept that financially deficient fathers will beget financially excessive sons; as the proverb goes, “A saving father, a spending son” (Tilley 204). Falstaff, as Hal’s alternative paternal figure, recalls the possibility of the reformed paternal prodigal through his insistent, though futile, intentions to reform his prodigal ways. Unlike naive prodigal youths, Falstaff recognises the importance of repenting and that a life of dissolution cannot be lived to the grave and onward into paradise. Yet he is doomed to never repent. Rather than the ameliorative path suggested by the father-as-reformed-prodigal, Falstaff presents a nihilistic warning. He contains not the promise of reformation but an omen of those who fail to reform.

Like Hal, Falstaff apparently intends to repent his dissolute ways; or, at least, he understands the importance of doing so:

I’ll repent, and that suddenly, while I am in some liking. I shall be out of heart shortly, and then I shall have no strength to repent. An I have not forgotten what the inside of a church is made of [...] Company, villanous company, hath been the spoil of me.

(*1 Henry IV* 3.3.4-10)

This reference to “villanous company” recalls the trope of false friends that originated in the early morality plays and continental drama. There is also a suggestion of the concept in Aristotle’s talk of those who flatter the prodigal while his money flows and then abandon him once poverty strikes (63, 1121b5-7). Falstaff will, in different circumstances, find himself abandoned by his friends and left to poverty come the end of Part II. Falstaff’s laughable attack on “villanous company” is yet another instance of Falstaff’s self-aggrandising and externalising blame. He will later charge Hal as having made him “little better than one of the wicked” (1.2.94), a sentiment echoed and inverted by Hal who denounces the knight for being a “villanous abominable misleader of youth” (3.5.467-8). Falstaff and Hal may superficially resemble the familiar pairing of iniquitous Vice with corruptible Youth that has roots in the morality plays, an idea expounded by Wilson (20), but neither significantly corrupts the other. Hal discards the ruffians of Eastcheap without ever coming to the poverty or corruption that the Vice figures usually elicit, and Falstaff did not reach his state of prodigal indulgence by Hal’s encouragement. Falstaff’s apparently pathological self-aggrandising clarifies the advantage of his utilising these tropes to externalise his ill-doings onto Hal. Like his invented “Eleven buckram men”, this externalisation is a form of self-flattery (2.5.223-4). The sinner who can blame his fall on another is less to blame than he who falls of his own volition. It is useful for both characters to externalise their trespasses onto other characters, as then reformation requires only casting off one’s companions rather than any spiritual transformation. While Falstaff’s jibes at Hal’s wickedness play an obvious role in Falstaff’s parodic performance of victimhood, Hal’s use of Falstaff in a similar role is more complex and insidious.

Falstaff’s failed reformation is not incidental to Hal’s successful one; on the contrary, Hal’s friendship with Falstaff permits him to purpose the knight’s prodigality for his own

reformation arc. Whatever Hal's moral trespasses, he is never corrupted into antisocial prodigality or debauchery. This is a great departure from the character's previous incarnation in *The Famous Victories*, wherein the young prince enjoys prodigal riot until a miraculous conversion. There, the incident that inspired the Gadshill heist is entirely enacted by Hal and his companions, and Hal partakes freely in spending money on alehouses and the company of women. Shakespeare's iteration of Hal engages in theft only to return stolen funds, and he spends his father's money only to pay the debts of others. The thefts and drunken excesses of *The Famous Victories* are redistributed to Falstaff, allowing these scenes of riot to remain in the story and occupy the prodigality of the prodigal son plot while keeping Hal free of such immoral transgressions. Falstaff embarks on a series of thefts and scams – the Gadshill heist, his claims of possessing bonds and a valuable seal-ring, his exchange of good soldiers for coin, falsely promising marriages – while Hal's adventures barely stray beyond legality. The Gadshill heist serves the excellent dramatic function of having Hal plan and execute a robbery without impeaching his character or violating the law; instead, Hal's cloak-and-dagger routine demonstrates his martial prowess, virtue, and law-abiding nature in his acquisition and return of the stolen coin. Falstaff provides unlawful riot that enables Hal to restore order. Hal is retroactively attributed lawless misdeeds at the end of Part II with the Lord Chief Justice's suggestion that Hal may have a son that acted as he did and who would “set your decrees at naught – / To pluck down justice from your awe-full bench, / To trip the course of law, and blunt the sword / That guards the peace and safety of your person” (2 *Henry IV* 5.2.84-7); however, as with Hal's reference to “barbarous license” and the ill-defined “use” he made of his “wilder days” that he plans to put to use against France in *Henry V*, it is unclear to what this refers (1.2.267-271). Hal is lawfully scrupulous in Parts I and II, his trespasses restrained to antics at Falstaff's expense. Hal's few quasi-offenses against the law include encouraging Falstaff to “take a purse”, yet given Falstaff's habitual

thievery Hal's encouragement serves rather to mock Falstaff's changeability than encourage criminality, and his knowledge of this theft allows him to return the stolen goods (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.98). Rather than tempting Hal to dissolution, Falstaff allows Hal to demonstrate his impeccable resistance to that dissolution. The retroactive references to Hal's illegality are not corroborated by his time in Eastcheap, but the actualities of Hal's license are not relevant to this perception of it. It is Falstaff, not Hal, whom we see guilty of such illegality and Hal's transgressive friendship allows those misdeeds to be absorbed into his own reputation, the dynamics of which I will address later in this article. In Hal's formulation of the prodigal son plot, prodigality exists so that the maturing son might denounce it: Falstaff's extravagant drunkenness allows Hal to condemn the "intolerable deal of sack" he purchases (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.544), his greed and obesity allows Hal to attack such gluttonous excess, and his solicitation of Doll Tearsheet allows Hal and Poin to mock his lechery (*2 Henry IV* 2.4.260-6). Falstaff's sins illustrate Hal's impeachability, allow for the colourful portrait of entertaining prodigality expected of these plays, as well as fulfilling the prodigality necessary for Hal's prodigal son plot without compromising the political savvy or royal reputation of the prince. By this displacement of prodigal dissolution onto Falstaff, Hal has little prodigality to reform; he must only abandon his "white-bearded Satan" (*1 Henry IV* 2.4.468). This is how the prodigality of one character – Falstaff – is integrated into the prodigal son plot of another – Hal – and purposed for his reformation. It is Falstaff's prodigality that supplies the necessary dissolution to Hal's pattern of straying and return. Although the sins for which Falstaff suffers are entirely his own (his cowardice, his greed, his compulsive frivolity), their excision from the narrative serves Hal's reformation, not Falstaff's. Falstaff's role is that of the scapegoat, in the biblical sense, one upon whom the sins of the people are figuratively projected and who is exiled from society, symbolically exorcising those sins.

As well as the scapegoat, there is an echo of the fatted calf in the animalistic comparisons prompted by Falstaff's fatness – the fat roaring “bull-calf”, dehumanised as a “bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly” (*Henry IV*, 2.4.196, 3.1.455-458). The fatted calf, sacrificed to celebrate the prodigal son's return, ties fatness with consumption and sacrifice. This logic is perhaps best illustrated with Falstaff's appearance in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, wherein he plays a similar sacrificial role. In that play, Falstaff's ludicrous fatness removes him from the sexual market and reintegrates him as a consumable rather than sexual prospect. Falstaff notes Mistress Page's “greedy intention” and “the appetite of her eye”, how she “examined my parts” and “portly belly” (1.3.53-60); then, later, Falstaff invites the wives not to participate in sexual practices but to “Divide me like a bribe buck, each a haunch” (5.5.23). Falstaff's ludicrous fatness disqualifies him from sexual congress; he is fit only for eating. He is sacrificially excised, too, in this play: his final humiliation recalls the ritualistic exorcism of “carrying out death” (Bryant 297-8; Frye 183).

Not only does Falstaff's fatness render him ludicrous, his ludicrousness renders him expendable: after two plays of being othered for his fatness by the prince, Falstaff is finally thrown off at the end of *2 Henry IV*. This rejection also casts him as analogous to the “old man” of Ephesians. As scholars have noted, the play is embedded with references to Ephesians (Davies 366; Bryant; Saccio 66-7; McAlindon 164-5), with the company of Eastcheap aligned with the Ephesians themselves (*2 Henry IV* 2.2.141) and Falstaff with the old man that must be cast off: “to laye from you that olde man, which is corrupte, accordyng to the deceable lustes. To be renued also in the swete of youre mynde, and to put on that newe man, which after God is shape[d] in ryghte welnes and true holynes” (*Geneva Bible*, Eph. 4.22-4). This is famously articulated in the final act of Part II: “I know thee not, old

man. Fall to thy prayers. [...] I have long dreamt of such a kind of man [...] But being awake, I do despise my dream” (5.4.47-51). To literalise this casting off the old man does not make soteriological sense, as Hal is not rejecting prodigal sin in rejecting Falstaff; narratively, however, Hal’s pattern of stray, prodigality, and return is complete, and thus a salvific arc appears to have transpired – and arguably successfully so, given the predominance of identifying Hal’s narrative as a reformatory prodigal son story. Hal successfully enacts his projected scheme for his reformation to rise “glitt’ring o’er [his] fault” by appropriating the faults of Falstaff and then making of him a scapegoat he can publicly reject (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.210). And so the son returns, his prodigality left behind.

Is Hal, therefore, not prodigal at all? He does not commit prodigality of the classic Falstaffian type so common to early modern prodigal sons, but to call him unprodigal is not entirely accurate either. As discussed, among the more nuanced forms of Aristotelian prodigality is the concept of supporting flatterers. This is where assessing the ethicality of Hal’s friendship with Falstaff becomes more complex. I have mentioned Hal’s tendencies to settle Falstaff’s debts and his unwillingness to engage in financial excesses for his own needs; for Fred Tromly, writing on Hal’s performance of the prodigal son plot, this makes Hal almost an “anti-prodigal” in his compulsive tendency to avoid and settle debts, both his own (financial and filial) and those of Falstaff (97). Yet according to an Aristotelian metric this is inaccurate: such debt-settling is itself a form of prodigality. Prodigality does not solely denote financial waste, but also its unethical distribution (or how its distribution may incur unethical consequences). There is what may be described as a wrong-giving prodigality, wherein the prodigal exceeds moderation not by spending on themselves but by spending on those who ought not to receive such financial support. These prodigals, Aristotle writes, frequently “make rich those who should be poor, and will give nothing to people of respectable character, and much to flatterers or those who provide them with some other pleasure” (63,

1121b5-7). Most examples of these prodigals in early modern drama are those who give to flatterers, such as Richard II's caterpillars or Timon of Athens's lords, and wrong-giving is more common among noble or royal prodigals than their smaller-coffered middle- and working-class counterparts. Whether such spending should be considered prodigality or magnificence is a source of dramatic tension in these plays: in *Richard II*, the (im)morality of Richard's prodigality depends on his infallibility (or lack thereof) as divine royal being, while in *Timon of Athens*, one may either read Timon as foolishly prodigal or the lords as hypocrites who reject a credit-based economy when it no longer suits them.

This wrong-giving prodigality is more ambiguous than the selfish indulgences of excessive drinking or thieving and it remains debatable to what extent Hal's own wrong-giving should be considered unethical. Hal has given Falstaff extensive financial support, as becomes apparent after Falstaff's bawdy remarks about his calling the Hostess to a reckoning:

PRINCE HARRY. Did I ever call for thee to pay thy part?
SIR JOHN. No, I'll give thee thy due, thou hast paid all there.
PRINCE HARRY. Yea, and elsewhere so far as my coin would
 stretch; and where it would not, I have used
 my credit.

(*1 Henry IV* 1.2.51-5)

This support enables Falstaff's immoral behaviours. It might be argued that Falstaff, being incapable of either legitimate work or saving money gained illegitimately – “a purse of gold most resolutely snatched on Monday night and most dissolutely spent on Tuesday morning” (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.33-5) – could not survive without the financial support of his companions.

One argument, then, is whether or not Falstaff is worth the price of admission, and thus to what extent such a price should be considered prodigally immoral. This question is complicated by the fact that Hal's repayment of Falstaff's debts not only serves Falstaff but those he owes – and those from whom he has stolen. It remains ambiguous to what extent Hal enables social disruption and to what extent he ameliorates it, an ambiguity that is only exacerbated by Hal's inability to justify engaging in such behaviour. He could capably achieve his ends of “permit[ting] the base contagious clouds / To smother up his beauty” (1.2.195-6) without spending a penny on Falstaff, and it is unclear to what Hal specifically refers in *Henry V* when he speaks of the Dauphin's poor estimation of “our wilder days, / Not measuring what use we made of them” (1.2.267-8). We cannot estimate how much Falstaff's exuberances might have drained Hal's accounts, but since Hal's coin has failed to “stretch” to cover Falstaff's various debts the expense must not be insignificant. It does not, however, appear to impact the royal accounts to the extent that Henry IV has any need to pass comment: Bolingbroke's only comment on Hal's unthriftiness appears in *Richard II*, where it has no implied connection to Falstaff. To what extent Hal's support of Falstaff ought to be read as immoral depends largely on the reasoning one attributes to Hal for maintaining this friendship; at one extreme, the sympathetic support of an ailing friend, and at the other, a Machiavellian plot to ensure one's rise by enabling another's fall. The plays remain reticent about Hal's motivations.

There are other aspects of prodigality to which Hal conforms. Although Helgerson's pattern of prodigality overemphasises the role of stray and return, prodigality always carries a rejection of existing values. Financial excess must be defined against an established moderation, one usually constructed by an older generation. As George Rowe observes, “prodigality is a denial of heritage, a denial of the advice and models provided by parents” (65). This idea has particular relevance to the relationship between Hal and Falstaff, as Hal's

lingering in Eastcheap constitutes a rejection of his father's court as well as his father's displacement by Falstaff as an alternative, prodigal father figure. Dowd argues that "prodigality is not only a behavioral flaw but a spatial one, physically and symbolically displacing Hal from the court and the centralized authority it represents," which links the inherent rejection of heritage in prodigality to Hal's physical departure (118). It is important to stress that prodigality, in the early modern sense, is not used to designate these more figurative concepts, but such concepts are often intimately linked with its representation. In the *Henry IVs*, this logic also entails the establishment of Falstaff as a rival paternal figure. The structure of displacement here is particularly clear given the logic of prodigality: Hal rejects a heritage of certain social and financial practices in favour of straying to a distant land, Eastcheap, and engaging in prodigal wrong-giving to enable a friendship with a different paternal figure.

Should such displacement continue, the Lancastrian line itself is compromised. The friendship of Hal and Falstaff is a threat to family, futurity, and appropriate rank-based social bonds. As Bolingbroke tells Hal,

Thou [...] art like enough, through vassal fear,
Base inclination, and the start of spleen,
To fight against me under Percy's pay,
To dog his heels, and curtsy at his frowns,
To show how much thou art degenerate.

(*1 Henry IV* 3.2.122-8)

"Degenerate" designates a rejection of one's ancestors, a turning away from rightful paternity. This fantasy has been wrought by the impression of prodigal and "loose behaviour"

given by Hal's transgressive relationships at Eastcheap (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.205). Falstaff and Henry IV remain almost entirely separate for the duration of the *Henry IVs*, appearing together only briefly at Shrewsbury (*2 Henry IV* 5.1). In their only interaction, Falstaff interrupts the king's address of Worcester with a poor joke – "Rebellion lay in his way, and he found it" – only to be immediately silenced by Hal, "Peace, chewet, peace!" (5.1.28-9). Falstaff's bawdy register feeds on the dominant language and actions of royalty and honour and translates them into ridiculous parody. He mimics war-wounded soldiers, grossly exaggerates Hal and Poin's assault on his own person at Gadshill, and parodies Hal's own noble defeat of Hotspur with the ghastly desecration of Hotspur's remains. Isabel Karremann describes this last as a parody of Hal's epitaph for Hotspur, in which Falstaff's "reinterpretation of the immediate past and his willingness to appropriate a corpse for his manipulation of memory mimics prince Hal's previous act of manipulative commemoration. In so doing, he asserts the efficacy of Lancastrian memory politics and simultaneously repudiates it through parody" (88). In this way, Falstaffian parody exposes and threatens the weaknesses of its subjects.

Falstaffian parody shares a complicated relationship with the parable. When Falstaff claims to lead "fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping, from eating draff and husks" to the wars, it is difficult to detect what degree of self-conscious irony ought to be read into Falstaff positioning himself as the prodigals' misleader (*1 Henry IV* 4.2.34-5). These prodigals are defined by the poverty wreaked by their excesses, but rather than forsaking starvation and seeking repentance they have fed on the husks and followed Falstaff into greater woes. He finds them "as ragged as Lazarus", passing over the moral of another parable to focus only on the detail useful to him; here, again, the image of poverty (4.2.25). Falstaff's imagistic appropriation of Lazarus' poverty is decontextualized of narrative and moral, emptying it of spiritual value. Both he and Hal appropriate scripture for their own

ends, and it is debatable to what extent such ironic appropriation undermines the salvific content of the scripture cited. Similarly, when Falstaff inappropriately suggests that Mistress Quickly dress the tavern with “the story of the Prodigal” (2.1.146-7), what kind of joke is being made? One might speculate that Falstaff is unaware of his misappropriation of scripture, but these comments are not anomalous; they are instead characteristic of the ironic mode in which the parable was increasingly cited. In *A Mad World My Masters*, curtains are “wrought in Venice with the story of the prodigal child in silk and gold” but the swine have been omitted “for spoiling the curtains” (2.2.5-7). Celestina in *The Lady of Pleasure* absurdly suggests having her sedan embroidered with “all the story of the prodigal” in “pearl” (1.2.59-60). The usurer Hornet in *The Constant Maid* warns that a picture of the prodigal might scare off spend-thrifty young suitors whose prodigality ought to be encouraged (B1r), while Sir Nicholas in *The Witty Fair One* speaks of having so many weapons excessively crowding his house that “the story of the Prodigal can hardly be seen for’t” (5.1.[13]). Falstaff’s ironic appropriation of the parable anticipates its status as empty cliché by the mid-seventeenth century. But the parabolic narrative retains utility despite the irony with which it is viewed and the manipulative uses to which Hal puts it. Falstaff’s irony, his role as scapegoat, Hal’s wrong sort of prodigality, and Hal’s manipulation of the parable should not be taken as evidence of the disintegration of the parable’s currency, which some critics have identified (Young 230-1; MacFaul 141-5; Tromly 37). Indeed, since the *Henry IVs* appear not even halfway through the fifty plus list of prodigal son plays, we could conclude that such difficulty and parodic potential were contributors, not detractors, to the parable’s popularity in early modern drama. Even in this misshapen, ironic mode, the parabolic arc prevails and Hal rises, redeemed in his father’s eyes – even if such redemption happens multiple times.

Perhaps the most charged Falstaffian parody is his burlesque of Hal’s conversation with his father. The scene both recalls and anticipates Hal and Henry IV’s interactions.

Falstaff embarks on a carnivalesque parody of the language of kingship and patrifilial authority, wherein he brings to the fore genealogical anxieties, translating Hal's abandonment of the court and, perhaps, discomfort with his father's usurpal of the crown into bawdy implications of maternal infidelity: "That thou art my son I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly a villainous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip" (406-9). This suggestion of potential bastardy recalls via vulgar parody Henry IV's desire for his son to have been exchanged with Hostpur by a "night-tripping fairy" (1.1.86), changing the shame of Hal's degeneration into the shame of cuckoldry. The absurd parody reacts to the very real anxiety about the instability of the royal encoding of their patrifiliality. Both Hal's capability as heir and the validity of the Lancastrian throne are in doubt, and Falstaff's parodies and comic energy feed upon this. As Louis Montrose writes, "The legitimacy of King Henry IV [...] is tainted by deposition and regicide. Under these dangerously unstable circumstances, the action of the two parts of *Henry IV* is virtually defined by the contest to control the personation of the King, and its counterpointing Falstaffian parody" (97-8). Falstaffian parody exposes and heightens the threats to Hal's relationship with his father and the legitimacy of the crown itself. Such parodic destabilisation makes Falstaff almost as much of a threat to the king as the northern rebellion, not in spite of his incompetence and frivolity but because of it. As a "misleader of youth", he is less a Vice figure corrupting the as-yet-unreformed prodigal than a threat to the royal line by his ludic deconstruction of the king's power in conjunction with his co-opting of Hal for disorderly homosociality, playing the parody of a father that ludically undoes the role of legal father. This is the threat that informs many of the narrative contexts for prodigality in early modern drama: the destruction of an established heritage by the excesses of a younger generation.

Hal's time at Eastcheap may be construed as prodigal according to a further metric. In Henry IV's view his son's behaviour is unquestionably excessive, not explicitly for its financial implications but due to another form of economic excess: the depreciation of Hal's royal value by too much time spent among the common people. Henry IV's speech in 3.2 on moderating presence shares much with Hal's on his plan to "imitate the sun" in 1.2: both understand the value of restricting one's physical presence, although Henry IV does not know that Hal has long since learned these lessons and is purposing them to quite different ends. However, Hal's intended political use of the "base, contagious clouds" has far less nuance than his father's understanding of the dynamics of the value of presence. In Hal's sun-and-clouds metaphor, he remains a self-contained figure discrete from the clouds that obscure him; in Henry IV's speech (3.2), one's value is infected and depreciated by the company one keeps. Hal's "long-grown wounds of [...] intemperance" refer to his social intemperance – his time wastefully spent in Eastcheap as opposed to in his father's court (3.2.156). Hal's "vile participation", his being seen in "common sight", is this intemperate spending of time in Eastcheap (87-8). Henry IV speaks against being "lavish" with his "presence", of being "common-hackneyed" to "vulgar company", because being looked on by common eyes devalues royal worth (39-41). He recurrently stresses the similarities between his son and Richard II, whose monarchical failures partly stem from his misspending of love and money. Henry IV denounces Richard II as the "skipping king", the "cuckoo" in June who "grew a companion to the common streets"; he was looked on with eyes "sick and blunted with community" (3.2.60-77). He denounces Richard II's overspending of his presence among the common people for cloying the populace with love to the extent that they grow "to loathe the taste of sweetness", unable to value or love their king's authority (3.3.72). In *1 Henry IV*, to simply be looked on is to be somatically consumed: to be "swallowed by men's eyes" until they "surfeit" and are "glutted, gorged, and full" (3.2.70-84). Bearing in mind the

cannibalistic imagery Falstaff's fatness prompts in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Bolingbroke's aversion to the common people's supposedly phagocytic intentions may cast Falstaff with a ludicrous spectre of cannibalistic intentions towards Hal. Devaluation of royalty makes one "stale and cheap" rather than "fresh and new" (41-84). Henry IV's imagery emphasises the excessiveness of exposure to the common people, and the ensuing deficit of Hal's presence at his own court, for "not an eye / But is a-weary of thy common sight, / Save mine" (3.3.87-8). Henry IV conceives of being looked at as a devaluing activity that, in excess, erodes "princely privilege" (86) altogether. The common people's presence and amity depreciate selfhood and royal value.

Hal believes he retains a true, discrete self unaffected by his company in Eastcheap and that the quality of that self will outshine his poor reputation. He does not consider that this poor reputation may prove inseparable from the cloudless sun he believes himself to be. To Henry IV, no such inner self can remain sanctified and discrete from the influence of vulgar company. He is arguably proven right, although the prophecy is rather self-fulfilling: Henry IV asserts that Hal is lessened by time spent among the common people, and he consistently underestimates his son as a result of that company kept. Despite the flaws in Henry IV's understanding of Hal's viciousness and Hal's broad abstinence from Falstaff's riots, Hal's identity in his father's eyes is nonetheless degraded. Reputation is constituted by company kept as much as, if not more so than, personal action, and Hal's inward qualities are judged by his exterior reputation. When Henry IV laments how "riot and dishonour stain the brow / Of my young Harry", he fails to realise the literality of the statement (1.1.84-5): by figuring this "riot and dishonour" as a "stain", Henry IV assumes an interruption between Hal's self as constituted by action and some other inner self designated by "young Harry". This image assumes that Hal's supposedly dissolute behaviour is separate from his authentic self, and literally speaking he is correct, as that external "stain" is Falstaff whose prodigality

stains Hal by association. Nonetheless, Henry IV still perceives his son as devalued due to his time wasted in Eastcheap. This argument as to Hal's degradation is bolstered by the fact that Hal's reputation has not fully recovered by *Henry V*, where the Dauphin "comes o'er us with our wilder days" (1.2.267). Reputation is not empirically measured, however, and Henry IV is not representative of all assessments of Hal's credit. Hal's word is never questioned, not by his companions or law enforcement, and his credit has stood for those of Falstaff's debts he could not immediately repay. And for the most part, Hal does succeed in rising "glitt'ring o'er [his] fault" and his father dies at relative peace with his son.

Katharine Eisaman Maus presents one of the most informed and astute readings of Hal's prodigality. She differentiates between Hal's gift-giving prodigality and the more selfish excesses of Richard II's ilk: "Prince Hal shows his future kingliness by not merely paying back what he owes, but, in a royally magnanimous gesture, paying back *more* than he owes" (49-50). This reading is what, in the Aristotelian context, would be called magnificence. As mentioned, there is no empirical metric for making such distinctions and they may be functionally identical. Maus also posits the interesting argument that "Prince Hal makes prodigality, or what looks like it, a form of prudence: so offending, as he says, to make offense a skill" (49). This points to a trend in drama: the employment of prodigality to engineer the salvific arc of the parable. As the parable becomes exhaustively familiar to early modern playwrights and audiences, theatrical prodigals increasingly purpose the parable to selfish ends. Hal is one of the earliest prodigal types to do so and one of the most explicit in his intentions, but we see similar attitudes in Quicksilver of *Eastward Ho*, Jack Gresham of *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, Young Lionel of *The English Traveller*, and Bassanio of *The Merchant of Venice*. A prodigal may spend their inheritance prodigally, then reframe this expenditure as a moral lesson learned and exchange that waste (via repentance and reconciliation with their father, employer, etc.) for reintegration into the community. As

mentioned, *The Muse's Looking-Glass* frames this explicitly: prodigals “purchase with the losse of their estate / The name of one poore vertue liberalitie” (35). In this way, prodigality itself becomes a valid road to liberal grace, or even a precondition for it. As Maus writes, “the Prince describes his prodigality as a strategy designed to produce an apparently miraculous *peripeteia*, creating the new king as an unprecedented object of wonder” (40). Thus, Hal is able to reappropriate his time at Eastcheap and its excesses (for Maus, magnanimity; what I suggest is only another variation of prodigality) to engineer his rise to wondrous kingship. Maus does not address, however, how this strategizing might undercut the validity of the salvation implicit in the prodigal’s redemption. While Hal achieves reconciliation with his father and successfully rises “glitt’ring o’er [his] fault”, he is not “found” the way the biblical prodigal is: he does not undergo mortification and reform. As Montrose observes, Hal “performs the performance of a parable” (97). For Hal, prodigality (wrong-giving or no) cannot lead to that salvation because of his very strategizing. For Maus, “What the Prince calls ‘redeeming time’ is not, therefore, merely a matter of using time wisely, but of revealing, after the fact, that an unsuspected profit has accrued: an educational benefit, a propaganda coup. ‘Redemption’ here is both a religious and a fiscal concept, linking spiritual renewal with a surprising, because belated, financial return” (52). But the plays do not address whether or not Hal undergoes a “spiritual renewal” – he has appropriated a salvific narrative for economic, reputational, and familial ends, but we cannot know if Hal’s throwing off of Eastcheap has a spiritual corollary. The *Henry IVs* deny any answer to the difficult question the parable increasingly poses to prodigals and audiences who are familiar with its structure: is one truly redeemed if that redemption was expected, or even engineered?

If we agree with Henry IV, Hal is certifiably guilty of a figurative prodigality with an economic dimension – wasting value by overspending physical presence. Although not wholly financial, the economic aspect of royal value makes this wasting of presence a valid

contender to be considered prodigality in its stricter sense. Regardless of whether we ought to rate this wasting of presence a form of prodigality, the behaviours it enables are unquestionably prodigal: Hal's financial support of Falstaff, no matter how we read his intentions, is prodigal. At best, it is a social prodigality purposed to amend Falstaff's offenses; at worst, it only serves to enable Hal's Machiavellian pretence at reformation, depending on the interpretation. Either way, Hal remains guilty of a form of prodigality, though it is not the kind of which his fellow prodigals are guilty. The irony is that Hal's appropriation of Falstaffian prodigality for his own (un)prodigal son arc only makes him only a different kind of prodigal.

Hal's role as "prodigal prince", in both Henriad scholarship and the eyes of his father, is constituted far more by association with Falstaff's behaviour than his own actions, and though that association does function as a form of prodigality, the descriptor of "prodigal" cannot be applied to Hal without qualification. His prodigality is not the sort displayed by the overwhelming majority of prodigal sons during this period and it is at best misleading, if not wholly inaccurate, to collapse him into the same category. Understanding the distinctions between prodigalities is not only significant for engaging with Hal's character but also for those of other early modern prodigals. For example, there has been much critical debate over the extent to which these plays adapt the parable didactically or satirically. Such debates rest on how these plays contextualise prodigality within a parabolic structure: do these works present prodigality as antisocial immorality or a necessary, even healthy, part of a proto-capitalist society? There is also the question of how such representations of prodigality contribute to its understanding in the broader culture. Theatrical prodigality necessarily depicted excess, expense, and debauchery as attractive and thrilling, and this prodigality (or the schemes to enable it) always occupied a good deal more stage time than scenes of repentance and humility. Furthermore, the creative energies of the prodigal inevitably drive

these plays' plots, linking prodigality, scheming, and immorality with creativity; this not only makes prodigality attractive and dramatically necessary, but also links socially productive acts (marriage, defeating usurers, repaying debts) with prodigal drives. Hutson asserts, "The notion of masculinity that is negotiated in sixteenth-century prose fiction focuses on a 'husbandry' of plotting rather than a commemoration of skill at arms" (12). In a similar way, masculinity and social production become inextricable with prodigal excess in these plays. This has particular implications for authorial studies that explore the anxious relations between creative energy and moral trespass, especially fuelling art with immoral behaviour and potentially encouraging such immorality with its depiction. These topics have further relevance to biographical angles on these works, such as the possible relationship between the questionable financial practices of John Shakespeare and the virulent strain of financial excess and moderation in Shakespeare's other plays. There are also implications to consider for the effects of the parable itself. If Luke 15.11-32 was the most popular parable for dramatic adaptation, it is not unlikely that the satire and cynicism with which it was eventually portrayed on stage had repercussions for its didactic capabilities in exhorting repentance and discouraging excess. To investigate such repercussions, full knowledge of what that excess constitutes is imperative.

Finally, then, what does it mean to have an adaptation of the parable of the prodigal son that features a different sort of prodigality – wrong-giving – than that of the biblical prodigal who wastes his patrimony on "riotous living" (Luke 15.13)? It allows a full representation of the parabolic structure without compromising the prince's integrity, while Falstaff, as scapegoat, facilitates representation of the usual bawdy rigmarole that has become a necessary aspect of theatrical prodigality. Hal may be guilty of prodigality, but his claims of "loose behaviour" belie his conspicuously absent "riotous living". This shows how, during the heyday of prodigal son drama, the parabolic structure of fall and repentance was more

appealing than the moral content of that fall and repentance. Hal need not be prodigal in the same way as his fellow prodigals or biblical antecedent; the parabolic structure contextualises his practices in the same frame regardless. The narrative of the parable plays out in both the *Henry IVs* despite Hal's repeated reformations, despite Falstaff bearing the sins which prodigals customarily reform, despite Hal's prodigality being exclusive of the type of the biblical prodigal on which he is based. If a parable is, as the OED defines it, a "story or narrative told to convey a moral or spiritual lesson or insight", early modern prodigal son drama has succeeded in retaining the narrative structure while emptying it of its moral lesson ("parable, n. 2a"). It remains debatable what lesson, if any, Hal learns, but it is certainly not the lesson of Luke 15.11-32.

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