It Grows as It Goes: Becoming Gold-Apple in Mandeville, Dekker ... Beyond

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What is so uncertain as something that rolls away? It is appropriate that money is round, because it never stays in one place.

Augustine, Enarratio in Psalmo

This statue used to hold in its hand a round apple of gold; but it is long since fallen out of the hand. And it is said there that the fall of the apple is a token that the Emperor [Justinian] lost a great part of his lordship... Men wanted many a time to put the apple back in the statue’s hand, but it will not remain there.

The Travels of Sir John Mandeville

Spendthrifts can certainly relate to Augustine’s observation about money’s most baffling property: its (endless) circulation and the relative ease by which it can be spent. Money, in other words, is motion. The mobile Mandeville begins his Travels with the rigid statue of Justinian that cannot clasp the golden apple of lost dominion; like the slippery roundness of money, the globular (and Globe-ular) golden apple represents something that “rolls away” from the emperor’s control: pieces of the Globe once part of the vast eastern empire. Apples, too, are motion. And the apple’s roundness, like the roundness of gold, is something that could gather literary mobility. Apple metaphors—be they biblical, secular, or mythological—are as circulatory as...
money. Nearly two and a half centuries later than the *Travels* (c. 1356), golden apples reappear in Thomas Dekker’s *Old Fortunatus* (1600). Symbolic of Vice and her avaricious minions, these golden apples of discord escape analysis in a discordant play left critically unexamined. Why would Dekker include apples—and golden ones at that? Is it enough to cite biblical and/or classical precedent?

To help me “inhabit” this question, and to paraphrase Bruno Latour, I will “drift” with, or “inhabit,” the golden apples plucked from Vice’s garden and dropped from Justinian’s hand. The golden apple tree of Vice is explicitly associated with the prime “movement” philosopher, Lucretius, bearing his motto “It grows as it goes.” Dynamic progress, mobility, and change are thus intriguingly encapsulated in these gold-apples. By tracing the various networks of gold and apples in the play, I reveal what metaphors and interpretations that “becoming” the gold-apple either enables or occludes. An investigation into the symbiosis of gold, mobility, and apple is more than mere pomophilia, then, or a paean to the fruit’s phenomenological traits. Rather, such an exploration takes as its object of analysis the idea of motion/mobility itself.

What would this kind of gold-apple “travel” entail, or even look like? I have developed a rough itinerary as an aid. “Drifting” with the golden apple in Mandeville and Dekker does the following: (1) The mobility of gold in Dekker’s play enters the liquid phase, pointing up the more exigent liquidity of bodies and identity the play so fascinatingly details. At the same time, the play points in a strong direction toward solidification and offers impediments to this liquidity. (2) This dramatic mobility/liquidity of gold is rooted in historical, socio-economic concerns about the increasing and developing functions of gold and the “faith” in the Elizabethan Golden Age. (3) Like *Old Fortunatus*, the *Travels* use the idea of mobility—not just to mobilize its eponymous wanderer, but also to address monetary circulation and representation within a rapidly monetizing medieval economy. (Mandeville, in other words, is not the only thing to travel). (4) While both texts are certainly significant in their shared attention to monetary mobility, I will examine other, more “fruitful” networks of gold-apples these texts trace. Apples and their attendant metaphors offer some particularly useful tropes for travel writers: the apple as a symbol of the world, and the more “seedy” connotations of colonization. Both apples and gold thus fit into an upwardly
mobile schematic. (5) In “drifting” with the gold-apple, I follow the tenets of Latour’s Actor Network Theory and his reconception of agency throughout this paper: to see the process rather than the end point; to investigate what the turn to the object tells, not simply to valorize the priority of the object; to conceive of the apple as a “quasi-object” which escapes discursively neat subject/object divides; and to examine the movement inherent in the word “metaphor” itself. As a conclusion, but far from a “closing,” I will re-open the imaginative possibilities of “It grows as it goes” and the “seediness” of the apple by turning to a brief pomological moment in *The Tempest* (1611).

If golden fortune is the central focus of *Old Fortunatus*, so is mobility. The play opens in movement with Fortunatus’s perambulations in an unknown wood and ends abruptly with Queen Elizabeth finally called upon to restore order and provide a suitable conclusion, a pretty moral spoken by Fortune: “England shall ne’er be poor, if England strive, / Rather by virtue, than by wealth to thrive” (5.2.259-260).² It is assumed that virtue needs to be spent, or put into circulation, just as much as money. Yet the character most associated with said virtue, Ampedo, dies destitute in prison, lamenting that “sin should make men’s hearts so bold, / To kill their souls for the base thirst of gold” (5.2.80-81). Rather than (impossibly) explaining this ethical dilemma of virtue punished, I want to magnify Ampedo’s statement about the “thirst” for gold. It illustrates the very liquidity of the play’s primary object (gold). The “thirst” implies liquidity, certainly, and it is this inherently mobile liquidity of gold and its destabilizing effects that the play effectively explores. From the beginning of the play, the materiality of gold itself is something mutable. Fortune does not just give Fortunatus a bottomless purse of gold ingots but also, amusingly, introduces the early modern equivalent of the ATM: “Still when thou thrusts thy hand into the same, / Thou shalt draw forth ten pieces of bright gold, / Current in any realm where then thou breathest” (1.1.300-302). Indeed, Andelocia (a Cypriot) travels to the English court of Athelstane where he is marveled at for his ability to distribute “fair English angels” (3.1.227). Fortunatus liberates his starving sons and their servant from impoverishment early on; their savior compares himself to the liquid shower of gold in which Jove appeared to Danae: “[F]or Fortunatus hand / can now power golden showers into their laps, / That sometimes scorned him for his want of gold. / Boys, I am rich, and you shall never be poor; / Wear gold, spend gold, we all in gold will feed, / Now is your father fortunate indeed” (1.2.145-150).
The liquid copulation myth appears elsewhere in the play, and it is clear from the material convertibility of gold into accepted currency, along with its liquid phrases of “thirst” and “showers,” that the metal has more importance than simply underscoring the mobility of gold in a play with mobility as its overarching trope. True, the mobility of gold stresses the physical mobility of travel. Like Augustine’s quip, gold rolls like a globe and will send you around the globe in this play—have gold will travel is Fortunatus’s unofficial motto. He visits the Turkish emperor, Prester John, and the Sultan of Babylon. Others, newly wealthy, will travel to multiple destinations as well. Truer to the liquidity of gold in the play (and truer to Dekker’s dramatic sensibilities), however, gold has the power to transform social status as well. Fortunatus’s advice to his family smacks of class revenge: “Shine in the streets of Cyprus like two stars, / And make them bow their knees that once did spurn you; / For to effect such wonders gold can turn you” (1.2.193-195). By configuring gold as mobile, Old Fortunatus describes the physical mobility that gold permits those who hold purse strings. By configuring gold as a more liquid phase, the play simultaneously holds up the possibility of social transformation.

It is difficult, I believe, to understand Old Fortunatus’s conception of gold as simply arbitrary or done out of dramatic convention —why would Fortune add the “bonus” of currency convertibility? Instead, the mobility and liquidity of gold in the play reflects the transformation of gold during the period in which Dekker was writing. William Sherman, in the only article (to my knowledge) written about Dekker’s play, rightly takes as its subject the functions of gold during the Golden Age of Elizabeth. Sherman explicates a typology of the varieties of gold an early modern audience of Old Fortunatus would have been aware of: “[G]old had not yet become a straightforward commodity and an abstracted standard of exchange. In their transnational market mechanism, gold was playing a new and complex role, bringing drastic changes to forces of production, exchange transactions, and social relations” (87). Even by 1600, gold was gaining momentum to be the ultimate symbol of full market capitalism centuries later, but its liquidity—the fluidic and unsystematic use of credit—was something that caused much socio-economic concern and “complicated both economic and ethical relations between parties” (Sherman 87). Dwindling monetary stock gave rise to a remarkable expansion in credit techniques.
Dekker’s play, according to Sherman, encompasses the challenges a more liquid form of gold presents, spearheading a challenge to the unqualified golden age of prosperity:

Gold was a fantasy which could be seen as the solution to a great many Elizabethan economic and political concerns. But it was not a fantasy which allowed for closure: lurking just behind it was the reality that golden solutions left social problems unresolved. In Elizabethan England, golden power sustained differences more than it dissolved boundaries ...

[W]e must see Dekker’s ambivalence about the faith that his society put in gold. (96)

Not only are the play’s covetous characters transformed, Midas-like, into beasts with horns rather than asses’ ears, but they are also strangled, starved, and exiled. “O what treachery / Cannot this serpent gold entice us to?” the forlorn Chorus utters (4.0.14-15). If Fortunatus would like to see the purse of gold as a panacea to his and his family’s problems, Sherman helps reveal the faith behind his choice—a faith desacralized and rendered ambiguous by the tragic outcome of this golden “comedy.”

Sherman’s article helps expose the simultaneous dissolution and maintenance of “boundaries” which define gold’s ambivalence. Yet while Sherman remains partial to the latter effect, the liquidity of gold in the play yields other transformations beyond the purely social sphere. As it gathers mobility/liquidity, gold precipitates a social change in the possessor. In addition, gold destabilizes identity on the most bodily level; it (re)configures bodily, as well as social, properties. Most travel narratives demonstrate at least a mental, if not physical transformation, in the observer. Old Fortunatus provocatively includes both. The purse of gold is identifiable with Fortunatus’s body. At one point he resembles an alchemist: “For I must spend some time in framing it, / And then some time to breath that virtuous spirit / into the heart thereof, / all which done / by a most sacred inspiration” (2.1.29-32).

Fortunatus’s bodily breath, or spirit, is necessary to fashion another purse for the Sultan (which he does not do, of course). Transformation is at the heart of alchemy; like the liquid metals used to create gold, and the liquid knowledge supposedly transferable from one alchemist to another, Fortunatus undergoes his own transformation. Or he thinks he does. After stealing the hat with
powers of teleportation from the Sultan and returning to Cyprus, Fortunatus’s first words to his bewildered kin are “Touch me not, boys, I am nothing but air” (2.2.104). Almost unsure of his own bodily presence, Fortunatus’s supernatural *noli me tangere* changes into one of exigent self-investigation: “[V]iew me, / am I as you are, or am I transformed?” (2.2.109-110).

The hat represents the infinite possibility of travel and also the risk of physical transformation travel presents. Fortunatus expects that the travel knowledge he has accrued should be written upon his body. Interestingly, while the two magical objects in the play—the purse and hat—tend to represent the unbeatable duo of wealth (gold) and knowledge (the world), and are hence separable, the hat’s placement in the Sultan’s golden chest wrapped in golden chains and a golden lock blurs the distinctions between the two objects. Andelocia makes this connection clearer when he decides to give the hat to his brother. As if highlighting the insurmountable power of the gold alone, Andelocia boasts, “[F]or having this mint / about me, I shall want no wishing cap: gold is an eagle, that can / fly to any place, and like death, that dares enter all places” (2.2.388-390). Gold permeates all places; it arrogates the power of the hat; it encapsulates the potential of travel itself. The hat’s bizarre ability to challenge bodily perception through travel joins with gold’s liquid ability to transform social station. After all, Fortunatus’s blandishment to gold “Gold is the strength, the sinews of the world” baldly projects the play’s obsession with bodies (“sinews”) and the endless hunger, or “famine of base gold” (1.1.289; 5.2.213).

It is hardly surprising then, that Andelocia represents the most “transformed” character in the play. With him, the truly destabilizing effects of the liquid phase are fully felt. The first provocative connection between gold and bodily transformation in the play involves Andelocia’s arrival to the English court. Lincoln introduces him as a veritable El Dorado, a “golden lord” (3.1.230). Like a “golden man” made of pure gold, he quickly befriends members of the court. His magical profligacy arouses suspicion in King Athelstane, however, who, like the Sultan, is desirous to know (or steal) his secret. The mischievous king’s soliloquy portrays Andelocia as an even more liquid character than his father, while illustrating the destabilizing effects gold has upon its bearer’s identity:

> He hung the marble bosom of our court,  
> As thick with glittering spangles of gold,
As ere the spring has stuck the earth with flowers.
Unless he melt himself to liquid gold,
Or be some God, some devil, or can transport
A mint about him, (by enchanted power)
He cannot rain such showers… (3.1.340-346)

Athelstane’s brief inquiry into his guest’s golden ability notes several fluidic properties of gold: melting, raining, and showering. Like his father, and like Jove, Andelocia too can rain showers of gold, festooning the court in branches (“spangles”) of gold that resemble first-flowering plants of spring. His “enchanted power,” notably reminiscent of the magical power of usury, illustrates the inexplicable “transport,” or mobility, of his gold/mint. He is awash in liquid gold; the king later ponders Andelocia’s irreversible good fortune to “[a]lways…swim up to the chin in gold” (51). And to heighten the liquid theme further: torture, the king admits, might be needed to procure the purse from his “sweating hands” (56).

While Andelocia’s perspiring hands might be fluid like the gold, Athelstane’s sarcastic remark about “melt[ing] himself to liquid gold” equates the liquidity of gold with a physical transformation. This fluidity, in turn, denotes a destabilization of Andelocia’s identity. Even Athelstane’s spies, arguably the most liquid profession imaginable, cannot discover the secret of his wealth. But they cannot discover his identity, either. Is he “some God” or “some devil”? Is he a specie magician? The question becomes not just who he is but what he is. If Andelocia can become El Dorado, he can just as easily “melt” away into someone or someplace else—and he repeatedly does exactly that. He epitomizes shape-shifting and getting “lost” in the play. While in England he disguises himself as a Genoese jewel-seller, Irish apple-monger, and French physician (all roles replete with risible accent). In fact, Andelocia is never himself; he is always performing. These constant costume-changes put pressure on the idea of self and orientation. When Ampedo chides Andelocia in his Irish guise, it is apparent that getting lost in this play is more than just geographical: “My greatest grief is, that thou art not lost: / Yet lost thou art” (4.2.117-118). Where is “home” or the “self” in this play which amplifies, perhaps even valorizes, the liquidity of gold and its corollaries of relentless (re)turning, dissembling, and transformation?
The second significant example of gold’s destabilizing effects is the most obvious one: the golden apples of Vice. Almost expectedly, Andelocia is the first character transformed by Vice’s apples. I reiterate the question with which I began: Why apples? Why are apples the most potent symbol of transformation, but also one of the most “solid” forms of gold in this liquid play? A compelling approach to this question lies in the travel-log Dekker provides for Fortunatus’s travels. Dekker possibly had another “mobile” text in his mind when he wrote his play: *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. Before Fortunatus sets off with his purse he exclaims, “And then I’ll revel it with Prester John” (1.2.198). Again at the Sultan’s court he recalls his repast with Mandeville’s legendary Christian king of the East Indies (2.2.11). I believe these Mandeville coincidences might provide a way to explore my pomological question. Both texts share some surprising affinities. The travels of Fortunatus are almost automatically disbelieved, for instance: “Ha, ha, I see travellers must lie,” chides Andelocia (2.2.126). Like Fortunatus, Mandeville comes under the greatest scrutiny for his alleged “mendacity.”

More importantly, the *Travels* provide an appealing symbol of mobility. Similar to Dekker’s disclosure of gold’s liquidity, Mandeville’s keen eye for the circulation of money, goods, and convertibility has mobility as its essence. Mandeville has a merchant’s mind. The closer he approaches the Great Khan of Cathay the more merchantable the descriptions become: “The land of Cathay is a great country, beautiful, rich, fertile, full of good merchandise. Every year merchants come there to get spices and other sorts of merchandise—they go there more frequently than they do elsewhere” (*Travels* 141). He is astutely aware of domestic and foreign market matters: the acceptable use of usury amongst Greek Orthodox Christians (*Travels* 51); the liquidity of the Sultan’s men as they disguise themselves like merchants to infiltrate Christian courts (*Travels* 108); the test necessary to differentiate pure diamonds from false ones and avoid deceitful craftsmen who sell pale crystals and other sorts of gems (*Travels* 119); the difference between the Khan’s and Europe’s valuation of gold and his own (*Travels* 150). While he describes a constant circulation of goods and gold in his *Travels*, put into motion by his own worldly circulation, Mandeville’s ambivalence about the transactions is marked. The gruesome devil-head of the Vale Perilous strangles avaricious travelers—none of which happen to be English (*Travels* 173); two chapters later he will talk almost objectively about the local population of Ceylon who ingeniously “steal” the
mountains of gold guarded by ants. Was Dekker influenced, maybe inspired, by the merchandisable mobility of one of the most popular works of the medieval and early modern period?

What is certain is that Mandeville’s economic fascinations can definitely be read, like Dekker’s above, as responding to changes in the contemporary economic environment. Joel Kaye relates how the medieval concept of the natural world developed coextensively with monetized society, noting an interchange “between economic and scientific perceptions” (12). More pressingly, the greatest changes in terms of monetary circulation and mobility in the medieval period developed during the fourteenth century in which the Travels were composed. Diana Wood tracks the development of money in medieval thought—how, as money began shedding its designation as “ghost money,” or money of account, it gradually began to take on multiple functions: as a medium of exchange, an equalizer in transactions, a store of value, and a commodity with a value of its own (88). Inevitably, the rapidization of the monetary system and an increase in the quantitative amount of money stimulated debates over the properties of money, authentication, the rights of rulers to the standards of weights and measures, currency manipulation, and other issues later inherited by economic theory (Wood 89-109). Over time the late medieval period also witnessed the emergence of something akin to proto-mercantilism, as trade and merchants slowly began to be seen as essential to economic nationalism (Wood 131).

With this greater mobilization came an additional amount of skepticism concerning representation—the Sultan’s slippery merchants are a good example in the Travels. Mandeville’s notice of the Khan’s treasury shows an observer keenly interested in the nature of authentication and symbolization: “The Emperor can spend as much as he wishes to, for he coins no money except from leather, or paper, or the bark of trees. When this money gets old, and the printing on it is defaced by heavy use, it is brought to the King’s treasury and his treasurer gives new for old” (Travels 153). What is important to glean from this (brief) critical discussion is the more mobile type of late medieval commercialism in which Mandeville wrote and how this mobility reveals itself in the travel inherent in the Travels. Also of significance is that Mandeville puts genre and language into motion as well. To view the Travels as a “tropic interaction between economic and linguistic symbolization and production” (Shell 4), where words become as liquid and circulatory as the
goods they trace, opens up the text as a source of meaning-production, of meaning constantly in motion that refuses foreclosure, like the traveler who almost makes it home by circumnavigating the globe but is unable to close the gap (Travels 129). And the best image to symbolize that kind of travel is the one Mandeville literally begins with in the first chapter: the apple of Justinian.

Justinian’s golden apple bears fruit in endless ways. What other interpretations are opened or obstructed when apples and their attendant metaphors are conjoined with gold in these two texts? I have addressed so far the reactions Dekker and the author of the Travels have toward contemporary economic developments and argued for their appearance in, and relevance to, works invested in mobile/liquid gold or an inherently circulatory text. A tracing of gold and its liquid effects, of mobility and motion, might stop here. There remains, however, a unifying and “fruitful” link between Old Fortunatus and the Travels that is more than the specter of Prester John. What new meanings are created when the texts are read pomologically? As actors, gold and apples exist in a network of multiple meanings endlessly multiplied. There are some recognizable patterns, however. The apple has been a symbol of mobility since classical mythology. Hippomenes, for example, eventually wins the race against Atalanta by throwing in front of her the golden apples given to him by Aphrodite. For early modern viewers of Dekker’s play, the classical significance of the apple might have borne nationalistic fruit as well. Eris’s apple of discord—tossed in between Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena but awarded only to one—precipitates the judgment of Paris, the fall of Troy, and therefore Brutus’s fateful founding of Britain. Indeed, apples are already rolling. In thinking about various interpretive openings golden apples may provide, I will focus on two aspects of Justinian’s apple I find particularly appealing. The first is the apple’s ability to symbolize the world (whether lost or not). As such, the apple is an apt image for the rotational and mobile aspect of gold as it moves around the play, and for the mobile traveler as he/she moves around the world.

In Old Fortunatus, apples attain the triple association of gold, mobility, and the world. The golden globe is revealed in the first scene; Fortune kicks it around like her toy: “Behold you not this Globe, this golden bowl, / This toy called world at our Imperial feet? / This world is Fortunes ball wherewith she sports” (1.1.99-102). Similar to the golden apple globe in Justinian’s hand,
the globe-shaped “toy” representative of the Globe achieves its apple-ness by means of the duped Frenchman Longaville. Originally able to resist the allure of the Irish apple-sellers (Andelocia and Shadow in disguise), he rejects their overpriced fruit: “I buy? not I: / Hang them, they are toyes” (4.2.70-71). “Toys,” apples, globe-shapes, and Globes are here intricately linked by Longaville. Before the apple-tree of Vice is revealed onstage, the impecunious and emaciated family of Fortunatus compares their wasted state to that of an apple tree out of harvest; Andelocia mocks those like his virtuous brother Ampedo for despising Fortune’s golden gifts, even in desperate times: “Her gifts toys: well brother virtue, we have let slip the / ripe plucking of those toys so long, that we flourish like apple trees in September, (which having the falling sickness) bear neither fruit nor leaves” (1.2.62-67). Their withered state of starvation is like the withered state of the apple tree. This scene anticipates a moment of “becoming” the apple that the play will later explore as the characters eat the apples of vice and are physically transformed. Its reference to “falling sickness” has a strong parallel, too, in Justinian’s “falling” apple. What is more, the “fall” of the Greek Empire that the statue memorializes invokes the biblical Fall involving the “apple” tree in the garden of Eden.

In all these instances, moreover, apples are curiously linked with mobility. Vice’s tree consolidates the idea of golden apple mobility. In a dumb show preceding the garden scene, “she [with] others wearing gilded visards, and attired like devils, bring out a fair tree of gold with apples on it.” Admittedly, the apples might not be made of material gold, but this point is inconsequential in a play that conflates the metaphorical famine of gold with financial impoverishment. Andelocia clarifies the metaphor when he picks the golden apples later in the play, beckoning to Agripyna, “Come hither, here are apples like gold” (4.1.72). References to the Garden of the Hesperides elsewhere in the play (3.1.365)—the place where Hercules plucked the golden apples to fulfill one of his labors—strengthen the gold-apple conjunction. Moreover, Vice’s motto mobilizes these golden apples. Emblazoned on her clothes—a robe depicting silver half moons increasing until they become full—is a Latin motto: Crescit Eundo, generally translated as “It grows as it goes.” The source of this motto, Lucretius’s De Rerum Natura (The Nature of Things), is especially illuminating in the context of the play. Lucretius’s comment comes at the point in Book Six when he describes the dynamic progress a thunderbolt makes across the sky—an apt image for one
interested in describing matter in constant movement, of atomistic lines of flight. For a playwright interested in gold’s mobility and its liquid effects, “growing and going” is a powerful expression for the mobilized golden apples as well.

The opportunity to read the golden apples moralistically, which is nonetheless tempting in the play, in fact immobilizes the interpretive growth Lucretius’s motto affords. Andelocia’s taste-test of Vice’s apples is an unequivocal assessment of avarice’s bitter aftertaste: “Tis a most sugared delicious taste in ones mouth / but when tis downe, tis as bitter as gall” (4.1.79-80). Ostensibly, the growing of horns is the most significant “growing” of the play, demonstrating the supposed virtue the horny characters require—Virtue’s antidote is a potent apple concoction—which allows them to retransform and “go” the right way. Likewise, if the apples represent the world, they also represent the various people who inhabit it. These groups, however risible, are required to be unambiguously distinct in their differences. Though remarkable for its fluidity and mobility, the play butts up against stable categorizations that counteract the destabilizing impulse of gold, apples, and mobility.5 “Enter Andelocia and Shadow, like Irish Coster-mongers” (4.2). The Spanish (Insultado), Irish, Scottish, and French are ridiculed throughout the play. While the greedy English are certainly not excluded from Fortune’s reprimand, Elizabeth literally reigns supreme at the end. Even the uni-horned Welshwoman of Cyprus, relegated to one peremptory line, is not excluded (5.2.17). Interestingly, most of these groups are nations either foes to the English or incorrigible peoples of archipelago colonization.6 The princess of England cautions against the Irish propensity for lying: “These Irishmen, / Some say, are great dissemblers, and I fear, / These two the badge of their own country wear” (4.2.56-58).

Even as the play makes remarkable leaps to illustrate the perforativity of identity and nationhood—Shadow: “Did I not clap on a good Irish face?” (4.2.98)—it also points toward a mythic insularism, as if separable apple pieces fit into one whole but remain paradoxically disconnected. Ironically, it is Shadow, a figure who always “shadows” or moves with others, who is the most vociferous about halting mobility. Why travel? “Leave us gold enough, and we’ll make all countries come to us” (2.2.136-137). Cyprus stands for the world in microcosm:
Shad. [B]ut what shall we learn by travel?  
Andel. Fashions.  
Shad. That’s a beastly disease: me thinks its better staying in your own country.  
Andel. How? In mine own country? Like a cage-bird and see nothing?  
Shad. Nothing? yes you may see things enough, for what can you see abroad that is not at home?  
(2.2.395-402)

Is Shadow to be taken seriously? He is the typical “wise fool” of the early modern stage. While he puns on the “no-thing” (female genitalia) and the “beastly disease” (venereal disease) one might find there, his comment also looks forward to the beastly physical transformations the characters will undergo by dismissing his advice and going abroad.

There is something plaintive in Shadow’s line about staying “home.” Still, his emphasis on “seeing” and on making other countries “come to us” is not an inherently xenophobic attitude. Shadow’s witticisms do not completely halt the motion to travel, but they do check the automatic desire to roam abroad. Just as the faith in gold of the Golden Age is challenged by Dekker’s ambivalence towards gold in the play—Sherman’s contention—the aspiration to travel is rendered ambivalent as well. Gold, apples, and travel can transform, for better or for worse—just make sure to choose the unostentatious apple of Virtue.

Even though the desire for mobility might be checked in the play, the apples still resist immobility. The apples are put into circulation by the “Irish” apple-sellers: “Buy any apples, feene Apples of Tamasco, feene Tamasco peepins: peeps feene, buy Tamosco peepins.” (4.2.29-30). These Damascus apples (possibly with a pun on damask-colored), like their name entails, have come a long way to England. Andelocia describes his preferred shipping method; the apples and their carrier are in motion together: “I wear out my naked legs and my foots, and my tods, and run hidder and didder to Tamasco for dem” (4.2.63-65). Running to the apples, and running with the apples, grants apples a greater agency than before. It introduces a power of objects more commonly known as addiction. The apples “speak” to Andelocia before he picks them: “Oh here be rare apples, rare red-cheeked apples, that cry come / kiss me: apples, hold your peace, ill teach you to cry” (4.1.76-77). Andelocia
feels compelled to pick them; the allure is overbearing. This pomophilic moment prefigures the apple selling (to “cry” apples) in the following scene, and perhaps even alludes to fruit vendors in the audience. Still, conferring upon “crying” apples more agency has its fecund possibilities. Observing Andelocia’s turn to the apples underscores the disjunction between gold and bodies, liquidity and indissoluble identity, subject and object—in short, the themes the play fascinatingly explores.

What else might apples “cry”? What happens when we afford them this agency? I now want to address the second appealing aspect of Justinian’s statue—and one more creatively mine—in a gesture towards the end of this paper. The “lost” apple typically indicates the lost lands of the Greek Empire. It also explains Mandeville’s occasional upbraid directed towards Christians who refuse to reform their ways and win back the lost dominions. In thinking about conquest and loss, I find that apple-seeds offer a fertile image of planting (colonization) and growth (empire). Geraldine Heng’s reading of the apple similarly notes a crusading spirit. The apple “evocatively registers the hollow absence of military-political power in fourteenth-century Constantinople, the third problem place in Christianity” (Heng 264). Mobility, for Heng, engages in a form of pleasure, but a pleasure with domination at its heart “that makes distant places and peoples mobile—mobilizes them—and conveys them home, so that ‘home’ becomes a center that can dominate at a distance the world’s far-flung ports” (250). Her reading of the apple is certainly a viable one. The apple and its mobility represent a form of pleasurable control, its endless movement harnessed into domination. To continue the metaphor, this apple of conquest might then harbor seeds meant to disseminate this domination in “far-flung ports,” to bear Christian fruit and inculcate others in retrieved lands, and to anxiously branch out a line of defense against the encroaching Turk.

As I hope to have shown throughout this paper, the question of mobility is never just one of how it restricts meaning, but rather what meanings it frees up as well. Must mobility always include a desire to possess, occupy, seize, or control? Other critics have noted the Travels’ capacity for imaginative openings. About ten years after Dekker wrote his play, William Shakespeare wrote a similar “travel play” vulnerable to (post)colonialist readings, The Tempest (1611). As a kind of open-ended coda, I wish to ruminate on a few
lines usually neglected in an effort to introduce a more generative, or fruitful, reading of an apple’s “seediness.” Antonio and Sebastian chastise Gonzalo for his foolish imagination. What will he not think of?

Sebastian: I think he will carry this island home in his pocket and give it his son for an apple.
Antonio: And sowing the kernels of it in the sea, bring forth more islands!” (2.1.91-94)

Though they mock him, Gonzalo’s ability to drop seeds (“kernels”) in the sea would have been one appealing to Antonio and Sebastian—two figures whose more politic minds might utilize the “seediness” of colonization to conquer one of the islands or at least island-hop home to Italy. But in the mind of Gonzalo, the same person who envisions Tunis as Carthage and the island as a Utopic experiment, the seeds of the apple represent the seeds of a different nature. Gonzalo’s seeds engender islands and ideas in a liquid form (the sea) symbolic of the most fluidic medium of all—the imagination.

Here, the infinite opportunity to sprinkle apple-seed islands in the mind and “bring forth more islands” meets the infinite possibilities and trajectories imparted by the apple’s mobility. Imaginative seeds like these are undeniably at odds with the former, more controlled kind of “seediness” appropriate to colonialism. For a writer like Dekker, and especially one like the author of the *Travels*, seeds in and of the imagination seem indispensable. But is it truly possible to allow endless sea changes to proliferate in the imagination without the threat of interpretive or metaphorical foreclosure? Gonzalo offers his own unique thought experiment. My analysis of golden apples with mobility at their core(s) honors his approach: to inhabit the object, not to control it; to sow seeds in order to “drift” with them and see where they take us; and to seize the motto of Vice from Dekker’s inglorious garden in the name of Imagination instead—“it grows as it goes.”
NOTES

1. While not explicitly citing Latour throughout my paper, two of his works influence my reading: *We Have Never Been Modern* and *Aramis or the Love of Technology*. I am also indebted to Julian Yates’s two excellent readings of Latour: “What are ‘Things’ Saying in Renaissance Studies?” and “Accidental Shakespeare.” [back]

2. All citations are from *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker* edited by Fredson Bowers. I have modernized spelling at points. [back]

3. All citations are from *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* translated by C.W.R.D. Moseley. [back]

4. My references to apples are taken from Robert Palter’s veritable encyclopedia of pomology, *The Duchess of Malfi’s Apricots, and Other Literary Fruits*. [back]

5. It is interesting to compare the kind of liquid early modernity I am tracking with Zygmunt Bauman’s idea of liquidity as power in *Liquid Modernity*. Solidification and empire building, rather than dissolution, tend to typify power in early modernity. [back]

6. Reading the Spanish Black Legend as a way for the English to elaborate their own set of imperial desires, Edmund Valentine Campos describes possible English anxieties behind the Spanish insult, especially when considering the play’s references to the New World: “The first is that England might become a vassal of Spain...The second is that such vassalage would obscure the difference between the laboring other and the English body (politic)” (260). See “West of Eden: American Gold, Spanish Greed, and the Discourses of English Imperialism” in *Rereading the Black Legend*. [back]

7. I am thinking specifically of Mary B. Campbell’s comment about the Prologue in *The Witness and the Other World*: “[Mandeville] has taken the doubt with to which the reader may greet the figural encoding of the alien and exotic and transformed it into the potential experience of free imaginative contemplation” (148). I also like Iain Higgins’s meaningful view of the apple in *Writing East*: “Yet if we look again at the exemplum of Justinian, we can see that the story is told not so much to deceive as to mean: to prompt reflection” (75). [back]

8. From the Arden Shakespeare edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan. [back]

WORKS CITED


