

**Kevin MUSE**

**The Topos of the Prodigal's House**

The spendthrift son is a well-known stock character of Greek and Roman comedy. Relatively little attention, however, has been given to the portrayals in comedy and oratory of the prodigal who is the head of his own household. The first task of this paper will be to establish the existence of a distinct comic and rhetorical motif associated with this figure, the topos of the "prodigal's house" (*asōtou oikia*). Passages employing this topos typically consist of brief, florid descriptions of the sights and sounds of debauchery emanating from a prodigal's residence. I will briefly summarize the evidence for this topos in the fragments of Athenian Old Comedy, in Roman comedy, in Ciceronian invective, and in stylized rhetorical passages of Greek literature from the Roman imperial period. My second task will be to show that a passage from Plutarch's *De cohibenda ira* and a fragment of Cicero's *Pro Gallio* both employ the topos of the *asōtou oikia*, and that both authors derive their imagery from a common source that articulated this theme in a particularly memorable and effective way.