"A MANLY SOUL"
CELIA AS THE VOICE OF REASON
IN
BEN JONSON'S *VOLPONE*

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: JONSON AND CELIA

The many contradictions between what we know of Ben Jonson's life and the Horatian persona he expresses in his writings are well documented and have been discussed, albeit without resolution, for decades. Arthur Marotti in 1972 called Jonson "an artistic schizophrenic, with both a Dionysian and an Apollonian side" (209). Later in the 1970s, E. Pearlman defined Jonson's two sides as "assertive" and "submissive." More recently, Tom Hayes sees not two but three conflicting elements expressed in Jonson's work, "his Catholicism, his Horatianism, and his Dionysianism" (15), and he discusses Jonson in the changing social context of his time, which Hayes sees as equally fragmented. Peter Stallybrass, too, associates the instability of Jonson's identity with the conflicts inherent in Jacobean society's increasingly unstable stratification. Where earlier critics could not resolve the contradictions between Jonson's public writings and his private life, modern critics extend these contradictions, and their analysis, to the society in which he lived, caught between the stable tradition of Elizabeth's reign and the inevitable difference of James's. This polarity of tradition and change captures the opposites seen in

Jonson, the idealistic poet working and living within the system of court patronage.

Postmodern critics, including deconstructors and feminists, have begun to see an opportunity in (or between) the conflicting elements of both Jonson and his society. Hayes, for example, suggests that the poet's innovative supervision of the printing of his own texts was one of Jonson's "self-conscious attempts to restore a sense of wholeness for his shattered, scattered, decentered self" (52). By assuming the new role of authorship, Jonson to some extent marginalizes or alienates his persona, but (more important) he also manages to create a space for himself in the gap between tradition and difference.

The risk Jonson took in this project was in fact small, since within the patronage system his position was inherently self-contradictory, caught as he was "between self-effacement and self-assertion, between private and public life, between individual personality and social role." These words, which so well describe the dilemma of the patronage poet, come from Mary Beth Rose, writing about seventeenth century *women* (247). Many women sought to resolve the tension of their socially prescribed roles by the self-creation of autobiography; Jonson created an identity for himself as "author." Ironically, this writer generally viewed as an unregenerate misogynist survived and flourished by using much the same survival technique used by

women; just as many women created a gap for themselves by writing between the subject position as daughter or wife and their own authority as mistress, mother, and, often, patroness, Jonson created a space for himself in the gap between patron and patronized.

Here, in the parallels between the restrictions of patronage and those of patriarchy, I found the inspiration to take a new look at one of Jonson's best known female characters. Many feminist critics have, of course, begun to examine the women who so often stand silently at the side of the Renaissance stage. Dympna Callaghan suggests that they "embody the unconscious of the text" (74); rather than being passive victims (Callaghan argues), such female characters often become transgressors as they quietly create themselves at the margins of stage society. Most feminist critics have, however, accepted Katherine Rogers's early presumption that "in Ben Jonson . . . there are no attractive female figures to counterbalance many unattractive ones" (xv). I will argue, however, that Jonson *is* available to the same feminist critical reading as his contemporaries. As Carolyn Heilbrun wrote about reading Shakespeare, "the economy of male domination, when deconstructed, when submitted to poststructuralist decodings by the most dazzling practitioners, reveals woman as the vital key" (190). Woman is also, I contend, a vital key to understanding Jonson.

One of the "dazzling practitioners" of current theory

is Peter Stallybrass. He sees Othello, for instance, as a "class aspirant" who lives in the slippery space between the two main class positions, one maintaining social closure and the other "subverting [the] class reinforcing gender hierarchy" (134). Like Othello, Jonson required such closure in order to achieve his aspirations, but his society, like Othello's, had to be "sufficiently flexible to incorporate *him*." As Stallybrass defines him, the class aspirant is always in an unstable position. His conceptualization of woman must, then, constantly shift in order to correspond to his own instability. We should not, given this view, simply dismiss Jonson's women as fixed caricatures, either dull and virtuous or amusing but negligible.

Celia, the "heavenly" representative of virtue in Volpone, has almost universally been seen as good but colorless. As the representative of constancy and virtue in the play, she seems obliged to remain static herself. She is further fixed as we see her objectified, treated as a pawn in the patriarchal male society of the play. As Corvino vociferously reminds us, however, Celia is always already a woman: idealized on the one hand but identified with threatening sexuality and denigrated as a whore on the other. Close examination of Celia's very small but dramatically vital role in Volpone[1] shows that she personifies the conflicts inherent in Jonson's personality. Further, she mediates these oppositions as only a female character can:

only a marginal and shifting subject, i.e. a woman, can offer Jonson the opportunity to resolve the oppositions that arise in his own life from his own marginal and shifting positions.

Jonson's depiction of Celia is itself contradictory: she reverses traditional notions of gender division in drama. Dympna Callaghan has found that in Renaissance drama, female characters often "tended to be identified with emotion and male characters with control" (37). However, except for two lapses (when she faints and when she dissolves in tears during the trial scenes), Celia is the epitome of self-control, while the male characters rant and rave self-indulgently. Callaghan also found that Renaissance comedy tended to be feminine and tragedy masculine, but in Volpone the humor is directed at the male fortune-seekers while Celia is presented with respect throughout the play. Finally, Celia is neither a "roaring girl," a bright young thing (as in Shakespeare's comedies), nor a self-destructive and passive heroine (like Lucrece). She does not accede to Corvino's demands; she does not submit to Volpone's seduction; she does not alter her personal style of discourse in any way. Celia remains both a visible symbol of ideal morality against which the venality of Venice should be measured, and also a catalyst of plot development. She emerges at the end of Volpone as the representative of Christian values victorious over amoral materialism.

This apparent stability is, however, achieved through transgressing the cultural norms she seems to uphold. Celia begins the play as an ambiguous figure accused of the sexual licence asociated with women: we first see her, significantly, at an open window. Paradoxically, our opinion of Celia is redeemed as she violates the sexual hierarchy by defying first her husband and then the wealthy and powerful Volpone. Despite the many patriarchal strategies employed against her, Celia ultimately prevails, both morally and materially.

Thus a close reading of Celia's role in Volpone offers many surprises—she is neither as colorless nor as passive as she appears at first glance, and she embodies virtues generally associated with the Renaissance patriarchy. In fact, however, we should not be surprised. Jonson himself embodies a series of apparent contradictions, personal and social, and Celia simply (or not so simply) reconciles those elements of her author's life. Both Jonson and Celia are marginalized members of their society, he as a patronage poet and she as a woman, and as such they are always potentially subversive. Drama itself is, as Carol Thomas Neely has said, a potentially subversive form (8). Stephen Greenblatt has identified the source of this subversion in instability in the genre's "acts of recording, that is the moments in which we hear voices that seem to dwell in realms apart from that ruled by the potentates of the land" ("Invisible Bullets" 54). In this case, it may also derive from

Jonson's own instability. At any rate, Celia says and does more than she has been given credit for to date. I have found reading Volpone by looking carefully at the role Celia plays a very rewarding new approach to Ben Jonson and his work.

CHAPTER II

ACT I: SIGNIOR CORVINO'S WIFE

Jonson introduces Celia into the bizarre world of Volpone's household only in the final scene of Act I. Until scene 5, women are mentioned only disparagingly and in passing, as Volpone focuses on the vastly more important topic of gold. For instance, in Volpone's famous opening encomium to gold (I.1), he notices Venus only because she was flattered by the epithet "golden." In addition, although Mosca claims that Volpone "lothe[s], the widdowes, or the orphans teares" (I.1.49), this is not to say that Volpone feels any personal concern for them; Volpone himself comments that he has "no wife," and he does not discriminate between "Women, and men, of euery sexe, and age" as victims for his deathbed masquerade (I.1.77). This masquerade requires that he spend most of his time in bed, contradicting his claim to "liue free / To all delights," so Volpone's self-indulgences do not, it seems, include the joys of womankind.

Not surprisingly perhaps, Volpone's grotesque "children," Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone, express an even lower regard for women than their master's. In their entertainment (I.2), Nano describes how Pythagoras's soul passes

through a courtesan and a whore, but through no admirable women, *en route* to Androgyno (18-20). Androgyno, speaking as Pythagoras, prefers a fool's existence to his own commingled "delight of each sexe," which he calls "stale, and forsaken" (54-5). In his song (66-81) he says that the fool is "ladies sport, and pleasure," but despite the sexual implications of his reference to a fool's "tongue, and bable" (73-4), Androgyno seems to be more impressed by a fool's wit: women are not even physically important to Androgyno.

There are thus no women on stage throughout the first four scenes of the play, and the only women mentioned are the cupidinous pagan goddess Venus and a few mortals of ill repute. These minor but telling allusions all occur in the first two scenes. Later, in scene 5, Mosca inadvertently reminds us that this is a misogynistic world of men as he alleges to Corvino that Volpone's only children are "Bastards, / . . . begot on beggers, / *Gipseys*, and *Iewes*, and black-*moores*, when he was drunke" (I.5.43-5). Volpone's children have supposedly been borne by anonymous members of despised minorities; his paramours, whether real or figments of Mosca's creative mind, are not even recognized as mothers or women.

When Celia finally enters the play, she, too, is anonymous; far from being despised, however, she is esteemed by Mosca as Corvino's "gallant wife" (I.5.82). However, Mosca thinks of her less as a fully human woman than as one of

Corvino's "fortunes," one he suggests in the following interchange that Corvino will probably not share:

> CORV. Thou art my friend, my fellow, my companion,
> My partner, and shalt share in all my fortunes.
> MOS. Excepting one. CORV. What's that? MOS.
> Your gallant wife, sir. (I.5.80-2)

Corvino's hurried exit suggests that Mosca is correct; reminded of his prized possession, the jealous husband dashes off to check on her security.

After a brief derogatory mention of Lady Wouldbe, whose own husband permits her "all encounters," Mosca brings the conversation back to "signior Corvino's wiues face" (I.5.106ff). In her literary biography of Jonson, Anne Barton convincingly suggests that Mosca suddenly introduces Corvino's wife, whom Volpone does not know, into this conversation in an attempt to gain power over his master.[2] At the moment, however, as Barton observes, "Jonson leaves the audience to draw its own conclusions as to just why Mosca chooses to tell Volpone about Corvino's wife" (116). But Mosca's description is so dazzling that the audience, like Volpone, may forget to question Mosca's motives.

Whatever his intent, Mosca echoes Volpone's opening paean to gold in his praise of Celia:

> . . . O, sir, the wonder,
> The blazing starre of *Italie*! a wench
> O' the first yeere! a beautie, ripe, as haruest!
> Whose skin is whiter than a swan, all over!
> Then siluer, snow, or lillies! a soft lip,
> Would tempt you to eternitie of kissing!
> And flesh, that melteth, in the touch, to bloud!
> Bright as your gold! and louely as your gold!
> (I.5.107-14)

Heavenly as Volpone's "son of Sol" (I.1.10), Celia is a "blazing star." Where Volpone's gold is "the best of things" (I.1.16), Celia is "a wench / O' the first yeere": both are paragons. Volpone's praise of his gold mentions "The teeming earth" (I.1.4), foreshadowing the fertility and plenty Mosca evokes in calling Celia "a beautie, ripe, as harvest!" Volpone's gold acquires a timeless erotic appeal when Volpone connects it with Venus in his adoration of "thy beauties and our loues" (I.1.21); the more conventional eroticism of Celia's white skin and "soft lip" become timeless, too, in Mosca's tempting "eternitie of kissing." In his discussion of Jonson's uses of Lucianic irony, Douglas Duncan notes the frank "sex appeal" of Mosca's sensuous description (156). At this point, Celia certainly sounds like a voluptuous beauty both to Volpone and to the audience.

Finally, Mosca's strange description of "flesh that melteth, in the touch, to bloud" not only makes Celia seem mutable, in contrast to gold, but may also subtly remind Volpone (and the audience) of the title character's own mortality. Mosca quickly goes on, however, to link Celia with Volpone's sublimating fixation on the permanance of gold by concluding that she is "Bright as your gold! and louely as your gold!"

The effect of this speech on Volpone is immediate: he wants to see Celia for himself and instantly decides to

leave his feigned sickbed to do so. For the audience, Mosca has painted a complex portrait of this still nameless woman, combining tempting femininity with symbols of purity. "Whiter than a swan," Celia could be as amorous as Leda's lover or as pure as the Virgin Mary, whose grace and purity the swan often symbolizes (Cooper 164); at this point Mosca seems to delight in tantalizing Volpone with ambiguous imagery. If Celia is like silver (as Mosca claims), she could either be the perfect match for Volpone's masculine gold, or as chaste, pure and incorruptible as the silvery moon or the frigid snow Mosca slyly adds to his list of similes. Finally, though, Mosca compares Celia to the unambiguous lily, the symbolically pure and chaste Easter flower. Mosca almost seems to echo Chaucer's Second Nun's explication of St. Cecilia's name and apply it to Celia: "heaven's lily." Regardless of Volpone's response, Jonson clearly expects the audience to interpret Mosca's praise of Celia in Christian terms and to imagine her as both beautiful and admirably virtuous.

In the light of these Christian symbols of purity, Celia's beauty and ripeness can be seen as God-given gifts like proper married love, which leads to procreation. Here potential fertility is a second contrast with Volpone's adored but sterile gold, which he considers above "All stile of ioy in children, parents, friends" (I.1.17). Celia's virtuous mortal beauty reminds us of the perversion of Vol-

pone's fixation on a dead but immutable metal. In case we miss the point, Jonson reminds us in the next line (with the ironic phrase "an eternitie of kissing") of the inevitable divine judgment facing Volpone, his fellow idolators, and every member of the audience.

Paradoxically, while Mosca's next image, of flesh melting into blood, may appeal to Volpone's perversity, it is another reminder for Jonson's audience of human frailty or mortality. This is a recurring image in Volpone, and one that is actually an appealing human characteristic to be contrasted with the cold, sterile permanence of gold. Mortality was only too painfully close to Jonson's and his audience's consciousness in this period of recurring plague. Just two years before Volpone's first production, Jonson had dreamed of his own son's flesh melting into blood in a premonition he had of the boy "with the mark of a bloody cross on his forehead" shortly before learning of the child's death (Conv. 264-5). Not incidentally, the words themselves also recall the words of the Anglican Communion service that Jonson had been attending in 1605 and early 1606 with his wife, whether or not he partook himself of "the flesh of Christ, and . . . his blood" (Booty 258). Just as Jonson emphasizes the sacrilege of Volpone's adoration of gold in his opening speech only obliquely (by including words and phrases that recall Christian worship), here, too, he leads the audience by the same indirect method

to draw personally relevant moral conclusions.

In a final ironic echo of Volpone's opening speech, Mosca further tantalizes his master by again comparing Celia to his gold, adding that "All her lookes are sweet, / As the first grapes, or cherries" (I.5.120-1). Mosca's catachresis here appeals to Volpone's perverse nature; tasting Celia's beauty is one of many cannibalistic images in the play discussed by Harold Skulsky.[3] Inflamed by Mosca's description, Volpone unwisely determines to go see Celia, forgetting his own boast in scene 1 about his plan to tease his would-be heirs by "Letting the cherry knock against their lips, / And, [by drawing] it, by their mouths, and back again" (I.1.89-90). Surely such teasing is exactly what Mosca is doing to Volpone through the tantalizing hyperbole of his praise of Celia. More alert than the unwary Fox, the audience should also notice the foreshadowing of failure in Mosca's reference to grapes, which the fox of fable bitterly failed to reach.

Act I, then, begins in a misogynistic homosocial world in which Volpone has been happily tricking legacy hunters for three years, but it ends with Volpone thinking of a way to venture out to see Corvino's wife. Hidden in Mosca's tempting and extravagant descriptions of her beauty are many hints that she is unattainable, not because her husband keeps her locked up but because of her own Christian virtues. Jonson seems to expect his audience to understand

these hints and realize by the end of Act I that the scene is already set for Volpone's downfall, and that Celia will probably play a central role in his self-destruction.

CHAPTER III

ACT II: CELIA AT THE WINDOW

Mosca's evocative descriptions of Celia have, according to Howard Marchitell, lured Volpone out of his own privately constructed male homosocial world into the dangerous public arena of heterosexuality (295). Celia at this point remains in the private sector appropriate to women in a male-controlled world; simply becoming visible to the public is danger enough for her, since it exposes her to the speculation of strangers. Jonson exploits this speculation in the audience to maintain Celia's ambiguity, requiring the audience to discover its own truth about her. This moral testing extends the hazards of public intercourse by threatening the audience (along with Volpone, Celia, and the other characters in the play) with divine judgement.

Celia, then, "enters the play quietly 'above' the action rather than as immediately part of it," as Nathaniel Strout says of Annabella in John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore (170). The parallel is useful, since Celia's pose, sitting in the window, is a common motif in Renaissance art. Linda Woodbridge describes two interpretations of this motif. Often this pose provided the only way a gallant could catch sight of his beloved, but sitting in a window

also identified a woman with prostitution in popular thought. According to Strout, "Italian prostitutes" in particular "were popularly believed to solicit mainly from their windows" (176). Our first view of Celia thus continues to challenge any easy assumptions about her essential female nature.

This is, of course, part of the teasing and demanding satire Jonson adapted from Lucian. Duncan comments on the same deliberate ambiguity in the image of Celia's handkerchief: although a normal way to pay a street vendor, it is also a powerful symbol of sexual favor, the basis of the plot in Othello (Duncan 157). Although Celia is actually as heavenly and innocent as her name implies, Jonson does not let us forget her voluptuous sexuality and physical beauty—God-given blessings subject to human misuse.

Volpone's reaction to Celia's appearance in the window is typically solipsistic, reflecting his own vanity: the "little remembrance" he offers her for being "the first heroique spirit" (II.2.214-5) to buy his oil is of no use to her, since she is already young and beautiful, as the audience can now finally see, contrasting her appearance with Volpone's own. Volpone nevertheless enjoys the sound of his own words rambling in hyperbolic praise of the "poulder" that can preserve or restore youth. Jonson is giving the audience yet another chance to look past Volpone's kinetic verbiage, to see that he is using verbal excess to impress

Celia with images associated with immoral female vanity, from the pre-Christian Venus and the adulterous Helen of Troy to the contemporary cosmetics used by Frenchwomen.

Since Celia does not reply, Jonson still maintains the dual possibilities of her character; Corvino's lovely young wife may yet turn out to be as lascivious as the ladies of the French court were reputed to be, rather than a virtuous Christian. For all we know at this point in the play, Corvino may be correct in calling Celia "my shame" (II.4.1). Like Volpone's florid speech, however, the very excessiveness of Corvino's outburst is a hint that it has no valid basis.[4] Even Peregrine is puzzled by Corvino's fear that after this apparently innocent episode he will be called "the Pantolone di Besogniosi," or cuckolded husband (II.3.8). However, alert members of the audience would notice in his accompanying phrase ("new christened") a clear implication that Celia has in fact not hitherto been unfaithful to her husband.

We are finally able to see and hear Celia for ourselves after two brief scenes of male conversations: Peregrine determines to have his fun with Sir Politic, and Mosca tightens his new control over Volpone by promising him, in effect, Celia. Celia's very presence has strengthened both Peregrine's and Mosca's control over their victims. In the comic subplot, Sir Politic easily believes that the Montebank scene was directed at him (II.3.10), while Volpone is

driven by his quasi-Petrarchan lust to offer "Gold, plate, and iewells" to Mosca (II.4.22), who seems to have shed his parasite role as he tells Volpone brusquely, "I haue not time to flatter you, now" (II.4.37). Whatever her real nature, this woman is obviously a catalyst for Jonson's plot.[5]

Celia, still nameless and wordless, effectively joins the audience in II.5 as she listens silently to Corvino's diatribe about her dropping the handkerchief to "Scoto." Although Peter Stallybrass has discussed the sexual and class implications of Desdemona's handkerchief at length, especially its function as a symbol of honor and chastity utilized by the promiscuous elite (137-9), Jonson has not given us (or Corvino) any hints that Celia's handkerchief carries such meanings. In fact, as a merchant, Corvino himself may have conducted business via window and handkerchief at some time (Duncan 157). Thus Corvino's long outburst seems ridiculously unfounded.

More seriously, the erratic meter and excessive imagery of Corvino's speech condemn him here in Act II as thoroughly as the avocatori will in the final act. Numerous critics have noted that in Jonson's work, diction is often more important than the content of a speech.[6] Jonson discussed speech and language at length in his notebooks, Discoveries, because he regarded speech (perhaps heretically) as "the only benefit man hath to express his excellency of mind

above other creatures" (Disc. 1881-2), and thus as morally significant. Translating Juan Luis Vives, as he often did, Jonson wrote that "Language most shows a man" (2031), meaning specifically the words a man used, as differentiated from their sense or meaning. "High and great" language is "grave, sinewy and strong" (2041), while "vicious language is vast, and gaping, swelling, and irregular" (2047-8). Corvino's 29-line speech berating his wife for making a purchase from a street vendor certainly matches the latter description.

Corvino begins by calling Celia's action the "Death of mine honour" (II.5.1) with wild hyperbole that Jonson would have called "wantonness of language," indicating a "sick mind" (Disc. 957-8). In the next line, Corvino indulges in a series of three epithets for Volpone, calling him "A iuggling, tooth-drawing, prating mountebanke." Similarly, he uses another triune series to describe the crowd: "A crue of old, vn-marri'd, noted lechers" (6). Jonson called such a redundant style at best unnecessary and (more fundamentally) "faulty and vicious" (Disc. 2079). Metaphor, which Jonson said can "hinder to be understood" (1905-6), runs through Corvino's speech, from his reference to the crowd "leering vp, like *Satyres*" (7) to his calling himself "a *Dutchman*" (24). In Jonson's words, the cumulative effect of all this "negligent speech" should "discredit the person of the speaker" as "it discrediteth the opinion of his reason

and judgement" (Disc. 2151-3).

Celia's concise response, her first speech of the play ("Good sir, haue patience!" [II.5.30]) contrasts with Corvino's ranting both in length and in simplicity of diction. Amazingly, however, even after exposing Corvino as unreliable, Jonson manages to prolong the dual possibilities of Celia's nature. "Patience" could mean calmness or forbearance in 1605, but an even older meaning is "The suffering or enduring (of pain, trouble, or evil) with calmness and composure" (OED). Thus there is still a chance that Celia is asking Corvino to tolerate a real indignity, and that she really is as lascivious as he claims.

The next few speeches finally resolve this question. L. A. Beaurline has called Corvino "as ludicrous as he is savage" in the just-concluded speech (Beaurline 164), and he notes that repetition and intensification only increase the humor of Corvino's absurd threats as we later see him waving his sword at his quiet and innocent-looking wife (II.5.33). Celia's conciliatory and logical response, in contrast, finally identifies her as a virtuous and moral character. "How much better is it to be silent, or at least to speak sparingly!" in a Jonson play (Disc. 1603-4). Speaking sparingly indeed, Celia reminds Corvino that she has appeared "at the windore . . . at other times" (36-7) without arousing his rage. After he calls Volpone-Scoto "a knowne knaue" (39), when he really does *not* know the mountebank's

true identity, we realize that Corvino should be dismissed as a fool. Celia again responds with succinct calm, observing that she goes out only to church (46). As scene 5 ends, the audience should laugh at Corvino's threats and admire Celia's stoic silence.

At this point in the play, Jonson has established Celia as a thoroughly admirable character both in Renaissance Christian terms and according to the classical values he adopted from Seneca. Even the didactic Vives would have approved of her wifely virtues. It is, then, a further indictment of Corvino when we see him offer Celia for Volpone, "lustie and full of iuice, to sleepe by him" (II.6.35). This description is exactly the alternative female stereotype that Jonson finally had eliminated in the previous scene. Because Jonson has allowed the audience to see Celia as the embodiment of fully human Christian virtue, we are shocked to see Mosca and Corvino discuss her as an object, first as a medical prescription comparable to "a flayd ape" or "a dogge," or even "an oyle / With wild cats' skinnes" (30-2), and then as a more trustworthy replacement for "some common curtezan" (51). To Mosca and Corvino, women are interchangeable: "The cases are all one, of wife, and daughter" (73), and Celia is once again a nameless possession as Corvino finally offers "mine owne wife" (81). To seal the impression, Jonson has Mosca echo the word "possession" in his congratulation: "you haue cut all their

throtes. / Why! 'tis directly taking a possession!" (84-5).

Act II ends with the ironic contrast between the audience's knowledge of Celia and Corvino's execrable treatment of her, which reflects as poorly on his character as does his own dishonest language. Simply looking at scene 7 on the page reveals Jonson's intent: to Corvino's seventeen misleading lines Celia answers one tearful word, "No?" (II.7.6). We recall again Jonson's notebook entry, "How much better is it to be silent." In this case, of course, the meaning (as much as the quantity) of Corvino's words indicts him; after his first line finally gives Celia the dignity of a name, which she answers by entering the scene, he continues in uninterrupted duplicity. Claiming that he was only pretending to be jealous in jest, Corvino first insults women in general as inevitably unfaithful (8-9) and then tells Celia he and she are going to "a solemne feast / At old Volpone's" (16-7). Typically, Jonson simply leaves this lie on the page (or stage) for the audience to evaluate as Celia exits silently.

Celia's very silence discredits the other characters. As Dympna Callaghan has observed, "Dramatic discourse is constructed around certain silences and unrevealed episodes" (84). Celia's silent presence at this point is a reminder not to be taken in by the humor of the play; Volpone continues to require the audience's serious moral consideration.

CHAPTER IV

ACT III: VOICE OF CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE

Jonson continues to develop Celia's characterization in Act III through ironic contrasts even before she returns to the stage in scene 7. Conversely, Celia's nature simultaneously illuminates the depravity of the other characters. Having been exposed to Celia's virtue in Acts I and II, now the audience has no excuse for failing to recognize what Robert Wiltenburg calls the "demonic ideal" Mosca celebrates in his opening soliloquy (28). Mosca adds the sin of pride to Volpone's idolatrous paean to gold in Act I, scene 1, by transferring the adulation to himself. His self-love is explicit in the first words out of his mouth:

> I feare, I shall begin to grow in loue
> With my deare selfe, and my most prosp'rous parts,
> They doe so spring, and burgeon; I can feele
> A whimsey i' my bloud: (I know not how)
> Success hath made me wanton. I could skip
> Out of my skin, now, like a subtill snake,
> I am so limber. (1-7)

Several themes in Mosca's exultation here will continue through Act III and the entire play, particularly the sexual *double entendre* of his "prosp'rous parts" that "spring and burgeon" and the appeal of metamorphosis implicit in his wish to "skip out of my skin." Within the religious context Celia's presence imposes on the play, Mosca is indeed very

like the "subtle snake" whose manipulations led to Adam and Eve's eviction from Eden. Mosca's machinations have already induced Volpone to leave his own house and will eventually deprive him of his adored gold. In contrast with the heavenly Celia, the snake simile should warn the audience that deadly serious issues underlie Jonson's satiric humor.

Act III opens with Mosca diametrically opposed in every way, especially in his prolixity, to Celia's closing scene of Act II, where "No?" was the only word to break her self-effacing silence. The insight we gain through Mosca to Jonson's self-image is also quite different from the one Celia provides. The remainder of Mosca's soliloquy is an apology for his role as a parasite, a defense that could well support Jonson's own role at court. After observing that "All the wise world is little else, in nature / But Parasites, or Sub-parasites" (12-13), Mosca differentiates himself from

> . . . those, that haue your bare towne-arte,
> To know, who's fit to feede 'em; haue no house,
> No family, no care, and therefore mould
> Tales for mens eares, to bait that sense . . .
> . . . . . .
> . . . nor those,
> With their court-dog-tricks, that can fawne and fleere,
> Make their reuennue out of legs and faces,
> Eccho my-Lord, and lick away a moath. (14-17, 20-22)

We do not know about Mosca's personal life, but Jonson at this point in his life did have both a house and a family to divert him from his role as a court retainer creating "tales for men's ears" or poems that could well be said to "bait

that sense." A poet dependent on patronage might fear that his art was being sacrificed for "court-dog-tricks," but Mosca is quick to describe his own, and presumably Jonson's, unique ability to maintain self-respect while bowing for favors, with perhaps excessive bravado, calling himself a

> . . . fine, elegant rascall, that can rise,
> And stoope (almost together) like an arrow;
> Shoot through the aire as nimbly as a starre;
> Turne short as doth a swallow; and be here,
> And there, and here, and yonder, all at once;
> Present to any humour, all occasion;
> And change a visor, swifter, then a thought!
> This is the creature, had the art borne with him;
> Toiles not to learne it, but doth practise it
> Out of most excellent nature . . . (23-32)

Jonson, of course, had only limited opportunity to "toil" at school, so the bricklayer's stepson may have felt pressed to ascribe his literary talent to "most excellent nature."

If Mosca's grandiloquence expresses a defensive side of Jonson's personality, Celia's silence may express another. Perhaps, in fact, Celia's few words and controlled actions may provide a more genuine, because inadvertently revealed, view of Jonson's mind. She is, at any rate, equally a product of that mind.

Before we see any more of Celia, however, Bonario meets Mosca in the street. Their conversation in scene 2 offers dual contrasts: Bonario's nature as "the good" (Barton 186) is obviously played against Mosca's blasphemous evil; beyond this, however, the privileges accorded Bonario's masculine status ironically undercut the effect of his assertively male goodness: these privileges identify him with the other

men in the play while also providing an instructive contrast with Celia's idealized yet vulnerable virtue. This scene offers the audience its first hint that Jonson views Celia as a paragon of universal human virtue rather than as simply an unusually admirable female character.

In keeping with Renaissance gender roles, Bonario strides boldly into the street scene, is immediately greeted by name, and responds with vocal aggression toward Mosca. This may at first seem an appropriately patriarchal contrast with Celia's silent and nameless appearance at the window in Act II, scene 2; the openly acknowledged "good man" recognizes and rejects vice. But Bonario is soon taken in by Mosca's tears. The thoughtful audience, whether reading at home or watching in the theater, will suspect that Bonario's readiness to judge Mosca's "sloth" and "flattery" (9,10) might have derived from pride, itself a sin equal to sloth. Indeed, during this short scene, Bonario falls quickly from an astute judge of Mosca's character to a bewildered follower. Although Bonario's confident appropriation of language is fitting in his phallocentric world, "how much better is it to be silent," as Jonson might well say again, reminding us of Celia. Although she does embody typical feminine qualities, these qualities also typify Jonson's personal ideals derived from Senecan Stoicism. As the action of the play continues, Jonson increasingly clarifies this conjunction.

After an interlude with Nano, Castrone, and Androgyno that parallels their appearance in Act I, scene 2, Jonson prepares us for another edifying contrast. Volpone hopes that the knock at the door announces Mosca delivering Celia to him, but instead Nano reports that this visitor is Lady Wouldbe. Metaphorically, Volpone identifies her with "torment" (25) persisting "forever" (26) and goes on, lest Jonson's audience miss the point, to make even more explicit (albeit ironic) allusion to Christian judgement in his fear of "A second hell" (28) in impotence caused by Lady Wouldbe's very presence. Not only should Volpone be fearful of the real hell's eternal damnation, but he should be receptive to Celia's heavenly influence. Instead, he simply worries about the viability of his sexual "appetite" for the objectified "other" (29), failing completely to appreciate Celia by failing even to notice her name. For the audience, Volpone's speech closes the scene with a clear reminder that Lady Wouldbe should be compared with Celia, who is definitely "other" in a moral sense.[7]

Lady Wouldbe enters scene 4 in a rush of words and vanity. She is one of many abrasive and ridiculous women in Jonson's plays, characters who do in fact far outnumber admirable women like Celia, giving feminist critics strong support for their view of Jonson as an unregenerate misogynist. Significantly, at our first view of Lady Wouldbe, she enters Volpone's house from the street. According to Linda

Woodbridge, simply venturing beyond her house "was an aggressive and probably immoral act" for a woman in the conservative Renaissance view (176). In this, as in her volubility, another perceived aggression (Woodbridge 207), Lady Wouldbe provides an instructive contrast with Celia. Up to this point Celia has not been seen outside of her own house, and of course her four short speeches (a total of seven lines) are admirably succinct. Heretofore, Jonson has simply presented Celia as the epitome of Renaissance feminine virtue, illuminated by contrasting *exempla* of vices.

Leah Marcus has said, however, that "plays like Volpone and Epicene . . . move past the simple materialism of vice to consider the greater complexities of virtue" (134). By the same token, after exposing Lady Wouldbe's materialism to the audience's laughter in scenes 4 and 5, Jonson finally moves on to explore Celia's multiple virtues in Act III, scene 7. Bonario has been hidden in scene 6, leaving Mosca to admit Corvino and Celia to Volpone's house. Immediately, Celia's own words let us know that she has not ventured out aggressively; rather, she has come at Corvino's direction, since she does not even know why she is there "except you told me" (III.7.9). Celia remains, and will remain, admirable according to the social norms of seventeenth-century England. Her virtue is, in addition, simultaneously the virtue of Jonson's Stoic philosophy.

Jonson explores Celia's virtue in two distinct sections

of scene 7. In the first, from line 1 to line 132, Celia quietly defies her husband, Corvino, while personifying both Stoic and Christian virtues appropriate for a Renaissance woman. In the second part of scene 7, she actually matches wits with Volpone, an unrelated male figure, in her only long speeches of the play. Hallett assumes (correctly, I think) that the "first part of III.vii was intended to establish Celia's strength in the minds of the audience" (60), setting up the second part of the scene as a clash between good and evil.[8] Further, Hallett sees that "Because their basic assumptions about life are diametrically opposed, there is no possibility of communication" between Volpone and Celia (61), as Volpone "twists and distorts traditional Christian concepts" (62) to further alienate Celia from himself. Celia, however, maintains control of her own discourse in both sections of the scene and thus successfully defies the patriarchy by exploiting two different aspects of its subordination of women.

First, she refuses to cooperate with Corvino's plan, couching her refusal in traditional terms, but steadfastly withholding both words and actions (rather as Cordelia enrages Lear by saying, "Nothing"). Callaghan appreciates the feminist impulse behind such passive behavior: "such disobedience is one of the only modes of subversion possible for upper class women in this culture" (71, n.59). Indeed, in her analysis of contemporary gender relations, Gender

Trouble, Judith Butler contends that the structure of male autonomy is so dependent on women's cooperation that even passive resistance can undercut the whole construction: "that process of meaning-constitution requires that women reflect that masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy" (45). Celia's defiance of Corvino is only the beginning of the end for Mosca's and Volpone's autonomous, homosocial world.

The second part of scene 7 completes the demolition by attacking masculine control of language and meaning, the very signifiers that determine this phallocentric world. In her dialogue with Volpone, Celia changes tactics. She exploits Volpone's obtuseness (just as she has exploited Corvino's insistence on wifely duty), for her own purpose. By defining and maintaining control of her own language, Celia not only remains impervious to Volpone's verbal sorties, but finally exposes the illusory nature of his control when he gives up his attempt at verbal seduction and abandons language for physical action.

CHAPTER V

SUBVERSIVE/SUBSERVIENT WIFE

As soon as she learns of the plan to present her to Volpone, Celia resists. The notion of Stoic self-sacrifice allows her to resist this male domination without violating the social strictures placed on women. Mary Ellen Lamb has explored the appeal of Senecan Stoicism for women of the Elizabethan period, noting that its emphasis on "passive endurance rather than heroic action" honors behavioral ideals "expected of women anyway" (212). Thus, ironically, Celia defies Corvino by offering to give up freedom she does not have, when she tells him to "locke me vp, for euer" (III.7.25). Although he orders her to "shew your selfe / Obedient, and a wife" (30-1), that is just what she is doing, taking subservience to the extreme in order to avoid his immoral pandering to Volpone.

Celia's dialogue with Corvino now reverts to the pattern of their scenes in Act II, with Celia making eloquent but succinct comments or asking equally terse questions as interruptions in Corvino's glib and deceptive speeches. Philip Mirabelli has recalled, writing about Epicene, "the classical association of silence with eloquence and truth" (314). Celia's reticence is thus far more than simply a

desirable feminine trait or a sign of weakness; Mirabelli adds that eloquence and reticence were often associated in both classical and Renaissance thought, and "the reconciling of these opposites in a single figure was actually a classical and Renaissance ideal" (314). Jonson further augments his complex depiction of Celia's virtue by imbuing her Stoic-style comments with a thoroughly Christian content.

As Alan Dessen has suggested in light of Elizabethan morality plays, Celia acts as "the spokesman for Christian virtues with her pointed yet unsuccessful questions" early in the scene (85). As Dessen observes, Celia's lament to "god, and his good angels" when Corvino finally leaves her alone with Volpone (133-8), which defines the action and theme of the play, could be spoken by any morality play's voice of goodness (85). This stylized expression is undeniably part of Celia's role, but it is only one element in a neglected and complex characterization. Celia continues throughout the play to express Jonson's own fascinating combination of classical and Christian philosophy, at once submissive to and subversive of authority.

We have already seen Celia's simultaneous submission and subversion in her ironic plea to Corvino. Jonson's poetic control of words adds Christian overtones to this same speech in the lines ". . . locke me vp for euer: / Make me the heyre of darkenesse" (25-6), lines that remind us of the inevitable and eternal judgement every character will

face. Eventually Corvino, Volpone, and Mosca will be "locked up forever" by the Prince of Darkness as punishment for their sins. Jonson's twist on the phrase "Prince of Darkness," by substituting "heir," is an obvious allusion to Corvino's materialistic aspirations to be Volpone's heir. Corvino's response urging Celia to be at once "Obedient, and a wife" (31) actually forces her into a subversive position: she cannot obey his order to sleep with Volpone without transgressing her role as a wife, so she has no choice but to subvert his intentions.

Despite the effective subversiveness of her position, Celia's next two speeches eliminate any possiblity that she is intentionally challenging patriarchy; Jonson is not, of course, socially insubordinate, despite his own marginal position at court, nor would he consciously advocate insubordination. Celia's cry "O heauen!" (31) reinforces the Christian values by which Jonson intends the audience to judge his characters, and it also reiterates the meaning of Celia's name. Then her question "Was this the traine?" (32) clarifies her helpless position in the trap of Mosca and Corvino's plan. In another sense of the word, "train" recalls the social hierarchy, like attendants or retainers at the Jacobean court, that Celia must inadvertantly threaten by her Stoic adherence to Christian values.

The effect of Celia's "passive endurance" is to invert conventional sources of social power, making her action (or

inaction) the turning point of the play. Her words continually remind the audience of the values underlying that action: after Corvino again asks Celia to "bee / Loyall, and mine, be wonen, respect my venture" (36-7) she simply asks, with what can only be called eloquent reticence, "Before your honour?" (38). Celia perceives and questions the inversion of values in Corvino's plan, but he does not understand her reference to honor. As the villains often do in Volpone, Corvino utters the truth unawares with his statement "There's no such thing, in nature" (39). If we think of nature as the physical world as differentiated from human civilization, Corvino is correct; honor, along with reason, is a virtue that distinguishes man from beast. Honor was also, for Jonson and his contemporaries, a real value "worth fighting for, and even dying to protect," according to Lawrence Stone (90). The notion of proper love as opposed to brute sexuality is, of course, vital to virtuous humanity, so in this context the word "honor" should capture the audience's attention. Kathleen McLuskie has written that in early seventeenth century church courts, "the issue of chastity was most central to the popular sense of personal honor" for men and women alike (31); Celia evokes this connection accurately in her three-word rebuttal of Corvino's argument. Corvino's lack of concern for his own honor contributes to his personal degeneration into bestiality, the ultimate inversion of values central to the play.

Celia charitably assumes that Corvino must be possessed, asking, "Lord! what spirit / Is this hath entred him?" (46-7). In the context of the play, this comment recognizes Mosca's manipulation of Corvino and the other legacy-seekers.[9] Celia's comparison of Mosca's machinations with demonic possession serves to remind the audience of the serious spiritual themes behind Jonson's comedy.

For once, Jonson helps rather than tests his audience's understanding after Corvino assures Celia that no one will know about her sleeping with Volpone; Celia reminds us as she tries to remind Corvino that divine judgement is inescapable with her next speech, "Are heauen, and saints then nothing? / Will they be blinde, or stupide?" (53-4). Saints are, of course, neither "blind" nor "stupid," terms which should remind the audience of the spiritual perception and intelligent reason that characterize good Christians. Corvino does not understand, responding with a dullard's monosyllable, "How?" Jonson expects his audience, however, to recognize the truth in Celia's "eloquent reticence." We should recognize as well the reminder of eternal damnation in Celia's use in line 56 of the word "burn" for celestial indignation at "every sin," such as Corvino's self-serving obtuseness.

Corvino persists in his verbose confusion of sin with virtue, calling his plan to pander Celia "A pious work, mere charity, for physic / And an honest policy to assure mine

own" (65-6), ironically using the term for Christian love for what is actually not an "honest policy" at all. Significantly, Jonson gives Celia the last word in this dialogue, making her invoke heaven again and lament "such a change" in her husband (67). The "change," ostensibly Corvino's quick switch from insane jealousy to pandering his own wife, is on a deeper level the "spectacle of men turning into beasts," in the words of Alvin Kernan's introduction to the Yale edition of Volpone, as they "move themselves downward on the scale of being" (19). As Celia and perceptive members of the audience know, "heaven" will not ultimately "suffer such a change" in Jonson's Christian moral world.

Temporarily, though, brute force seems to prevail. Celia's language may have moral force, but the male characters have superior physical strength. Corvino drags his wife toward Volpone's bed in a perverse parody of the arranged marriages prevalent at the time, while Celia lapses into her characteristic silence of stoic resistance.

Simon Shepherd calls such arranged matches "property marriage," discussing the objectification of woman and "the fetishing of her chastity" in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and Tamburlaine the Great (187). One is perhaps not too surprised to find the tempestuous young Marlowe exposing such patriarchal exploitation of individuals or even subverting social norms; yet feminist readers have been less ready to find similar traits in Jonson's work. Jonson was, however,

nothing if not tempestuous himself in the years before writing Volpone, having been imprisoned in 1605 and brought up before the Consistory Court in 1606, and having killed fellow actor Gabriel Spencer in 1598,[10] so an element of social criticism in his work should not come as a great shock. In this case, Jonson simply criticizes personal motivations rather than indicting gender relations in his culture at large. Obviously Celia did not resist her parents when they arranged her marriage, since she did marry Corvino; that act of patriarchal control was in keeping with the tenets of the Christian faith (although the moral mismatch of Celia and her husband may be Jonson's ironic comment on arranged marriages). In contrast, Corvino's perverted exploitation of his patriarchal power over Celia violates the very faith that establishes the hierarchy. Neither Celia nor Jonson is, thus, intentionally subverting their contemporary culture. It seems, rather, that for Jonson sexual power, like sexual love, is a God-given benefit which humans are obliged to use correctly. Corvino's objectification of Celia may not in itself be seen as wrong in Jonson's eyes or in Jacobean society, but Jonson savagely condemns his *purpose* in using Celia as "object."

Celia's silence as Corvino drags her toward Volpone's bed, like her reticence in their dialogue, offers an edifying contrast to the glib chatter of the other characters. Her silent presence also directs our attention to the action

continuing around her, just as it did at the end of Act II. Shepherd saw the same thing happening in 1 Tamburlaine, where the presence of the silent Zenocrate forces the audience to confront the effect on women of men's preoccupation with power and money. In Jonson's play as in Marlowe's, we see a "woman not so much as passive and silent (which would fit with the recommendations of the dominant religious and social ideology) as captured and silenced; treated as a treasure in a world where men fight and negotiate" (178).

In this episode, the sight of Celia silently standing beside her husband as Mosca presents them to Volpone must remind the audience of the ironic truth in Volpone's words "'Tis a vaine labour, eene to fight, 'gainst heauen" (83). From a philosophical and theological view, Corvino's, Volpone's and Mosca's amoral efforts will inevitably prove vain when they face judgment in heaven. Within the play's plot, Volpone's line assuages our worries about Celia's safety; "Celia" is, after all, identified with "heaven," and all the men's efforts to corrupt her or even to "fight 'gainst" her moral standards will indeed prove vain. Volpone's lust cannot affect Celia, as he unwittingly acknowledges in his line about "Applying fire to a stone" (84). Finally, the audience along with Celia herself can see that it is Volpone's spiritual "state" that "is hopeless" (87), as he misuses the vocabulary of religion, begging Corvino "to pray for me; and t'vse his fortune, / With reuerence" (88-9).

Volpone's reverence is (mis)directed toward gold rather than properly toward the heaven represented by Celia.

When Celia breaks her silence, it is to invite death rather than submit to dishonor, saying, "Sir, kill me rather; I will take downe poyson, / Eate burning coales, doe anything—" (94-5). This willingness to die to protect her chastity can be seen as the ultimate male control of female sexuality, the view taken by Lisa Jardine, who sees Shakespeare's Lucrece as representative of a number of contemporary female literary rape victims. Lucrece's submission, tearful confession, and suicide are "what the patriarchy expects of a female hero under such circumstances" (191). Suzanne Gosset, however, sees some ironic truth in this element of the patriarchal value system, since it "at least implied that women have a personal integrity which cannot survive violation" (187). Indeed, in the seventeenth century context suicide, like Celia's silence and the self-mutilation she invokes later in this scene, was one of very few assertive acts available to women. Celia's willingness to die is a measure of her determination not to submit to her husband's will, but Jonson avoids even the potential moral conflict of suicide, which is viewed by the church as murder and a mortal sin, by making it clear that Celia would only "take down poison" or "Eat burning coals" as a form of martyrdom to her husband's sinful wishes. Jonson thus maintains Celia's position as the unequivocal voice of

virtue.

Corvino's next speech seems to be a direct allusion to The Rape of Lucrece, which was widely and popularly circulated as Jonson was writing Volpone, and as such this speech would remind the seventeenth-century audience of Celia's options as a rape victim. After four lines of inane raving that contributes to the disreputable impression created by Corvino's excessively jealous oratory in Act II, Corvino threatens to "buy some slaue, / Whom I will kill, and binde thee to him, aliue; / And at my windore, hang you forth" (100-3). Tarquin similarly threatens to kill a slave if Lucrece refuses to submit to his rape, promising "To kill thine honor with thy life's decay" (516) by leaving them in bed together. Of course, the contrast between Corvino's motivation and Tarquin's is darkly humorous: Corvino will impose the punishment if Celia refuses to violate the marriage vows, while Tarquin will punish Lucrece for remaining faithful to those vows. This distinction naturally differentiates Celia's position from Lucrece's.

In Shakespeare's poem, Lucrece's personal honor is closely associated with that of her husband and her family; Tarquin goes on to warn her that if she resists his rape,

> So thy surviving husband shall remain
> The scornful mark of every open eye.
> Thy kinsmen hang their heads at this disdain,
> Thy issued blurred with nameless bastardy. (519-22)

The possibility of rape does not seem to threaten Lucrece's honor any more directly than that of her husband. In fact,

Lucrece herself seems more concerned about the effect of her rape on Collatine's reputation than about her own victimization, lamenting, "Collatine, thine honor lay in me" (1.834) and "I am guilty of thine honor's wrack" (841). Her personal integrity has been violated, but she responds within the context of her role as a wife.

Celia's situation is much more complex and demanding than Lucrece's. Initially Celia responds to Corvino's threats with conventional submission; like Patient Griselda, Celia seems to acknowledge Corvino's sovereignty over her in the line "Sir, what you please, you may; I am your martyr" (107). Corvino's response seems irrational, as indeed it would be for a husband who loved his wife in a proper Christian context: "Be not thus obstinate" (108); but for once Corvino is quite accurate, since Celia's absolute submission deconstructs itself. In becoming her husband's "martyr," she passively obstructs his plan to give her to Volpone. Jonson has changed the issue here from male supremacy in marriage to a woman's honor quite independent of her status as a husband's property. By her Christian faith, represented in this passage by the synecdoche "martyr," Celia is morally compelled to act as an autonomous individual, defying her husband in her own exceedingly quiet way in order to protect her honor because he has no regard for his own. By preserving her own honor, she seeks to honor God's commandments.

Celia's subversion here is, of course, a limited one, her transgression involving only one of the three major areas of female virtue. According to Dympna Callaghan, "Chastity, silence and obedience were the three cardinal and synonymous feminine virtues" (79); paradoxically, Celia's disobedience to Corvino reinforces her chastity and gives resonant meaning to her general silence.

At the same time, however, Celia's refusal to cooperate is a serious transgression, a much more dangerous challenge to Renaissance marriage theory than, say, Anne Frankford's adultery in Thomas Heywood's play A Woman Killed with Kindness, which had first been acted only three years before Volpone appeared on the stage. As Jean Howard points out, Anne "potentially . . . represents a challenge to patriarchy and to the whole idea of a man's ownership of his wife's sexuality," but Anne's active sexuality is controlled and "recuperated by a Christian ideology in the service of patriarchy which interprets a woman's sexual independence as a sin and a violation of natural order" (30). Jonson takes the principle of patriarchal control to its logical and absurd conclusion: if Corvino owns his wife's sexuality, he can sell it. Celia successfully and thoroughly subverts this premise. Thus Jonson seems to use Christian ideology to expose the fallacy implicit in the human patriarchy.

Not surprisingly, Corvino responds to Celia's passive resistance with escalating emotion and violence. This

"emotionality," along with "indecisiveness, and narcissistic focus on the body" are "aberrant qualities" that a patriarchal society associates with the feminine, according to Tom Hayes, as opposed to the "masculine" qualities of "reason, decisiveness, profoundity" (27). We have already seen Corvino's startlingly "indecisive" nature in his quick switch from murderous jealousy to pandering his wife. Now he switches again, turning abruptly from threats of torture— "I, in capitall letters, / Will eate into thy flesh, with *aqua-fortis*, / And burning cor'siues" (103-5)—to wheedling and bribes: "Pray thee, sweet; / (Good'faith) thou shalt have iewells, gownes, attires" (109-10). Both emotions are couched in physical terms addressing (or dressing) the body. Celia's concise responses are profound in their Christian reason and consistent "decisiveness," clearly expressing traditionally masculine virtues. Despite Mosca's reminder that she is a "gentle lady" (114), Celia begins to appear at this point in the play as the paragon of Renaissance virtues, virtues often thought to distinguish men from women.

Lest this paradox become too evident to Jonson's audience, Mosca continues to direct our attention back to Celia's female body, as he seems to defend her physically from Corvino with the lines "Nay, good sir" and "Nay, 'pray you, sir" (117, 120). Celia remains steadfastly philosophical, choosing death before dishonor in her wish that "my life

would serue / To satisfie" (121-2), and Corvino ironically reiterates this Christian theme, alluding to the crucifixion with his oath "'Sdeath" (122). In these few lines, the Lucianic Jonson resurrects the sensuous image of Celia we first encountered in Mosca's initial description of her to Volpone (I.5.107-13). Duncan has observed that many critics miss the "sex appeal" that makes Celia appear to fit the physical stereotype of a voluptuous beauty whose emotions are directed toward religion, a stock character arousing "lewd incredulity in the Anglo-Saxon Protestant male" (157). We see this in Mosca's cynical suggestions to Corvino that Celia is just waiting for her chance to cuckold him: "If you were absent, she would be more coming"; and "What woman can before her husband?" (127, 129). Duncan adds that Corvino's abusive cruelty to Celia, along with Mosca's suggestive remarks and the long, suspenseful build-up to Volpone's rape, appeal to prurient and sadistic interests (158). Jonson, well aware that sex is as potentially corrupting as gold, tempts his audience to see the outer Celia as Volpone does, as a "sensual bait," set to distract us from her moral message. After thus reminding us of the male view of Celia, Mosca and Corvino leave the stage, leaving Jonson's audience again morally challenged to evaluate correctly both the character of Corvino's "Sweet Celia" and her proper role in society.

CHAPTER VI

DISCOURSE vs. INTERCOURSE

Significantly, the next section of scene 7 begins with Celia's longest speech to this point, six lines that redefine the action and theme of the play:

> O god, and his good angels! whether, whether,
> Is shame fled humane brests? that with such ease,
> Men dare put off your honours, and their owne?
> Is that, which euer was a cause of life,
> Now plac'd beneath the basest circumstance?
> And modestie an exile made, for money? (133-8)

Although Celia has previously addressed short questions to God (asking whether Corvino has been possessed [46-7]) and to heaven (asking whether it can "suffer such a change" in his attitude [67]), this is the first time she has initiated speech without reacting to something a man has said or done. Celia, like Cordelia, has so far controlled her discourse by withholding it, her terseness adding emphasis to her comments. Thus her unusual effusion here seems, in contrast to her hitherto passive resistance, highly significant.

After the stylized first line, which could be spoken by any heroine of domestic tragedy, Celia's long speech is rich with meanings derived from classical writers, Christian ethics, and Jonson's own philosophy. "Whether, / Is shame fled humane brests?" parallels one of Jonson's many comments in Discoveries about controlling language: "A *wise tongue*

should not be licentious, and wandring; but mov'd, and (as it were) govern'd with certaine raines from the heart, and bottome of the brest" (330-2). Just as the wise man's tongue should control his words (the Classical adage we see so often in Jonson's work), so his morals, or "shame," should restrain his heart, or "breast." Celia, like Jonson, seems to see the heart as the source of Christian virtue, perhaps even the seat of reason that distinguishes man from beast.

In the next line, Celia quite properly gives precedence to God's "honours" over those of men ("their owne"). Personal human honor is, however, closely related to respect for God; debasing one's own honor is tantamount to dishonoring God, just as dishonoring God inevitably means dishonoring oneself. Here again Celia seems to speak for Jonson who, according to William Drummond, "loved most to be named honest" (Conv. 631) or accorded honor (OED). Honesty and honor should identify the admirable man and in turn demonstrate his adherence to God's law, but the most honorable person in Volpone is a woman.

As noted in the discussion of Act II, the value of personal honor and integrity was closely identified with chastity in the early seventeenth century. Celia's next line continues her use of language that is significant in both secular and religious terms. "That, which euer was a cause of life" initially would seem to be God himself, whom

Celia is addressing, and whom Corvino defies by violating his laws. On the earthly level, however, the "cause of life" is sexual intercourse, which Corvino violates by defying God's laws. Proper married sex should serve God's purpose, creating life, in a context of *caritas*, or Christian love. Instead, of course, Corvino intends to use sex for financial gain, "the basest circumstance," by exploiting *cupiditas* (carnal lust) for the sake of cupidity (or greed).

In the final line of Celia's speech, she laments Corvino's exploitation of "modestie . . . for money."[11] Here again Celia's words have both spiritual and physical meaning. Clearly, her own sexual modesty is at stake. More important, Corvino's defiance of religious precept seems to express the sin of pride, or lack of spiritual modesty. Celia has succinctly defined the real theme of the play in this six-line speech, neatly putting the male characters' venal plotting into a wider context of Christian morality.

In the ensuing dialogue Celia maintains control of her discourse and language style by refusing to argue with Volpone in his own terms. McLuskie contrasts Celia's language, reminiscent of domestic tragedy, with Volpone's seductive lyricism, noting that "as a result the issue of control and the relative theatrical power of different languages of sexuality comes into play" (174). McLuskie points out quite correctly that "both Volpone's language of seduction and Celia's of penance show the importance of male

power" (174), but I suggest that Celia succeeds in turning male power to her own ends, just as she manipulated Corvino's patriarchal control over her as his wife by carrying subservience to its logical end.[12]

Volpone opens the rape scene in a confident, assertive mood, answering Celia's last question with a bold declaration that "modestie" is sold for cash "in Corvino, and such earth-fed mindes, / That neuer tasted the true heau'n of loue" (139-40). Of course, this statement is undercut immediately by the irony of Volpone's referring to his own perverse "heau'n of loue" while he is addressing Celia, whose name and speech both invoke the Christian heaven, as Dessen and others have noted (88). Jonson continues to use this ironic device, putting Christian allusions or even direct statements of Christian faith into Volpone's mouth, giving the audience every opportunity to see that Volpone's confident statements and lyrical words are either falsehoods or misunderstood truths. Although, as L. A. Beaurline has said, "the better poetry and passion is on the side of the ravisher, not the maiden" (187), this ironic interjection of the Christian motif maintains the audience's awareness of Volpone's amoral nature, just as Celia's brief interjections serve to remind the audience of her innocence even while we are tempted to admire Volpone.

One such interjection is Celia's exclamation "Sir!" as she recoils from his touch (154). By using this convention-

al term of respect to reprimand Volpone, Celia maintains her own dignity as a lady in this compromising situation: she is, after all, alone with a man in his chamber. Just as she utilized extreme wifely submission to expose how inappropriate Corvino's behavior was for a husband, Celia manages with a single word, "Sir," to highlight the social and moral values Volpone violates. In essence, the term of respect as Celia uses it becomes a term of rebuke, since Volpone is not behaving as a gentleman, nor even as a man created in God's image, should behave.

Celia's next reaction to Volpone's verbal seduction is to blame her own beauty for exciting Volpone's interest: "Some *serene* blast me, or dire lightning strike / This my offending face" (184-5). This variant on the modern "she asked for it" rape defense serves two major dramatic purposes. First, it establishes Celia as a traditionally virtuous female before she begins to argue with Volpone. Like Lucrece's suicide, to which Jonson seemed to refer earlier in the scene in Celia's confrontation with Corvino, the idea of "cutting off your nose to spite your face" when that face incites lustful attack was well established by the twelfth century. According to Jane Tibbets Schulenberg, mutilating the face to avoid being raped was not uncommon among medieval nuns desperate to preserve their virginity. In this traditional and religious context, there is no chance that the audience will see Celia as an excessively talkative or

verbally promiscuous woman when she answers Volpone in longer speeches later in this scene.

We have already seen that Celia has greater control over her tongue than the men in Volpone. In this passage, her willingness to suffer physical pain and injury also shows a greater mental discipline and control over the body than Volpone demonstrates. As a man he would be expected, stereotypically, to be in greater control of the flesh than a daughter of Eve, but this scene will show him losing all control as he finally attacks Celia.

In addition to emphasizing Celia's virtue, this short speech continues to develop the play's continuing imagery of human frailty, which Barton calls "the ephemeral, yielding nature of actual human flesh" (112). In "a monstrous joke," Jonson continually reminds us of human weakness to set up the bitterly ironic contrast with man's common fixation on "cold, hard metals which cannot sicken or fade" (Barton 112). This joke, of course, reinforces the Christian references to death and life-after-death in heaven, and in turn reflects positively on Celia, the only character concerned with ultimate divine judgment. Perhaps the last joke is on Volpone himself, who is more likely at this point to suffer the punishment Celia seeks than she is.

More seriously, Celia's rejection of her beauty in ascetic self-abuse speaks for another aspect of Jonson's personality. Duncan feels that in Volpone we see Jonson

convinced that he is dealing with a degenerate humanity unable to deal with Celia's ideal goodness, which combines both spiritual virtue with physical beauty (158-9). Her willingness to sacrifice that beauty, then, reflects Jonson's fundamental despair. Despite his Christian faith and Stoic philosophy, this dark view of life is an element of his personality along with his murderous rages and heavy drinking.

When she finally makes a verbal response to Volpone's temptations, Celia differentiates herself from other people:

> Good sir, these things might moue a minde affected
> With such delights; but I, whose innocence
> Is all I can thinke wealthy, or worth th' enioying,
> And which once lost, I haue nought to loose beyond it,
> Cannot be taken with these sensuall baites:
> If you haue conscience——. (204-11)

Celia is definite about her own resistance, telling Volpone that she "cannot be taken with these sensuall baites." [13] While she herself is incorruptible, however, she maintains a conditional or subjunctive mood regarding others. Celia recognizes that Volpone's temporal lures "might moue a minde affected / With such delights," and she ends this speech with another conditional clause ("If you haue conscience——") that is interrupted by Volpone.

Celia's speech is carefully crafted by Jonson to build our sense of correct moral values, so the final word "conscience" carries its full spiritual weight. She opens with a reference to the very mind that distinguishes man from beast; it is clear that Celia understands the Renaissance

notion of sin as a failure of reason to control the physical passions. Her own concern for "innocence" demonstrates that she has her passions well under control. Celia's trapping or fishing metaphor makes the distinction between man and animals more graphic: she "cannot be taken with . . . baites" like an animal because she is a reasoning human being, with the further implication that Volpone, the metaphorical hunter or fisherman, is himself enmeshed in the animal attractions of the physical world. His fixations on the physical and sensuous, of course, make her final conditional clause almost meaningless, while we have been reminded of the importance of the conscience he lacks.

Volpone appears to regain control of the argument by abruptly interrupting Celia and dismissing conscience as "the beggers vertue" (211), a remark that ironically reveals Volpone's own spiritual and intellectual poverty, since he cannot appreciate the Christian importance of this human characteristic. Celia finally wins the verbal contest, though, when Volpone changes his own mood to conditional. He seems to be begging himself as he asks her, "If thou hast wisdome, heare me, Celia" (212). Given the meaning of her name, this plea becomes almost another of Volpone's parodic prayers.

The rest of Volpone's long and lyrical reverie is dependent on this conditional opening: if Celia has what he calls wisdom (by which he means worldy pragmatism, diamet-

rically opposed to the sound judgment that characterizes both the Christian Celia and her God), she will share with Volpone a myriad of sensual pleasures. If Celia shares Volpone's corrupt values, in other words, "Then will I haue thee" (226). To an audience sensitized to moral implications by Celia's speeches, this apparently simple phrase reveals the depth of Volpone's depravity. Although he began his seduction with promises of wealth and luxury to Celia, he continues with fantasies of acting out "Ovids tales" (221); not only do the metamorphoses lower gods, men and women on the Chain of Being by transforming them into animals, but they often involve rapes. At this point, Volpone abandons all pretense of mutual pleasure and focuses on himself. The verb "have," with its lewd sexual connotation, typifies Volpone's objectification of Celia (and, indeed, all people) into something to possess, both in mind and body.

In response, Celia's longest speech of the play uses repeated conditional appeals to the very wisdom Volpone lacks, and her implacable resistance eventually drives him to attempt outright rape. First, she enrages him with a list of virtues he lacks:

> If you haue eares that will be pierc'd; or eyes,
> That can be open'd; a heart, may be touch'd;
> Or any part, that yet sounds man, about you:
> If you haue touch of holy saints, or heauen.
> (240-43)

Celia makes it clear that these are also conditions that

define rational humanity in her progression from the ears to the eyes (traditionally viewed as a gateway to the heart) and finally to the heart itself, or "any part that yet sounds man about you" (242). The audience would no doubt laugh at the insulting *double entendre* of the reference to male "parts," a joke worthy of the Collegiate Ladies or Ursula the Pig Woman, demonstrating Celia's wit as well as her self-control even in this critical situation. The real joke lies in the irony of Celia's sensually physical language, with its references to eyes, ears, and heart, and the repetition of the verb "touch," used in the defense of spiritual virtue; just so, our physical bodies should be considered gifts from God to be used in the cause of Christian love.

But Celia is no collegiate chatterbox nor an earthy bawd, as Jonson immediately reminds us with her next lines:

> Do me the grace, to let me scape. If not,
> Be bountifull, and kill me. You doe know,
> I am a creature, hither ill betrayd,
> By one, whose shame I would forget it were. (244-7)

Here is another allusion to Lucrece and the virtuous woman's preference for death to dishonor. The spritually loaded terms "grace" and "bountiful" continue to keep us aware of Celia's reliance on God, whose grace and bounty will eventually deliver her from Volpone's clutches.

Herford and Simpson choose in general to follow what they call "the authoritative Folio of 1616" (xv) for their edition of the play, including this speech. In their intro-

duction to the text, however, they seem dismayed at the "cold, logical punctuation" (8) Jonson added to this speech in his editing for the Folio. Although aware that "he worked minutely over the punctuation, recasting it systematically, especially in the longer speeches," Herford and Simpson seem to prefer the Quarto's suggestion of "hurried delivery" punctuated mainly by dashes for what they call "Celia's cry of agony when she flings herself at Volpone's feet and implores him to spare her" (8), and they reprint the Quarto version admiringly:

> If you haue ears, that will be pierc'd—or eyes,
> That can be open'd—a heart, may be touch'd—
> Or any part, that yet sounds *man*, about you—
> If you haue touch of holy *Saints*—or *Heauen*—
> Do mee the grace, to let me scape—if not,
> Be bountifull, and kill mee—you do knowe,
> I am a creature, hether ill betrayed. (*Q* 240-6)

Jonson's Folio of 1616 does not suggest that Celia "fling" herself at all; pauses where Jonson added semicolons, commas, and a colon do, indeed, change the effect of this speech, as Celia pauses to think before she speaks. This textual "cold logic" is exactly the element of Celia's character Jonson intended us to see and hear. Such care in her speech gives added resonance to the religious terms, as well as added reasoning to Celia's character.[14]

The remainder of this long (20 lines) speech goes even further to reconfirm Celia's role as the spokes(wo)man for ideal virtue, first by expressing overt moral instruction, then by making her sound very much like a nun. After refer-

ring to her degenerate husband ("whose shame I would forget it were"), Celia suggests to Volpone, in another of her conditional clauses

> If you will daigne me neither of these graces,
> Yet feed your wrath, sir, rather then your lust;
> (It is a vice, comes neerer manlinesse)
> And punish that vnhappy crime of nature,
> Which you miscal my beauty . . . (248-52)

Jonson's parentheses, retained by the Norton edition (edited by Robert M. Adams) but omitted from the Yale (edited by Alvin Kernan) and Oxford (edited by Ian Donaldson) editions, suggest that the sly allusion to virility in the word "manliness" might be staged as an aside to the audience, reinforcing the impression of a witty mind controlled enough to make jokes while in danger. The literal meaning of Celia's words conveys another Renaissance moral lesson: anger (or wrath) is a sin of the mind, more fully human than the physical sin of lust committed by Volpone. Celia, of course, is the only character who understands this spiritually vital distinction.

More specifically, Celia, like the medieval nuns discussed by Schulenberg, invites Volpone to

> . . . flay my face,
> Or poison it, with oyntments, for seducing
> Your bloud to this rebellion. Rub these hands,
> With what may cause an eating leprosie,
> E'ene to my bones, and marrow: any thing,
> That may disfauour me, saue in my honour. (252-7)

Regardless of whether or not the audience is aware that mutilation was a defense against rape utilized by nuns, Celia's offer of prayers in gratitude for such treatment

certainly sounds like the services offered by cloistered nuns:

> And I will kneele to you, pray for you, pay downe
> A thousand hourely vowes, sir, for your health,
> Report, and thinke you vertuous— (258-60)

This final parallel between Celia and nuns eliminates the normal Renaissance suspicion of a talkative woman's chastity. Jonson has been able to allow a female character to voice his own moral standard without compromising her in light of the repressive social standards of his day.

Like all Celia's utterances, these lines serve two purposes: loaded words and phrases remind the audience of the religious standards Volpone lacks, and Celia's adherence to those standards functions as a tacit rebuke or warning to Volpone, an admonition that he ignores at his own peril. Having heard Celia's apparent jokes about Volpone's "manliness," we might suspect a bit of sarcasm in her image of her face "seducing" Volpone's "bloud to this rebellion"; we know full well that Volpone is the real seducer, despite Celia's apparently submissive assumption of guilt. The word "rebellion" contains another implicit reminder of Christianity, as the implied opponent is God. Just as she did with Corvino, Celia maintains control of this dialogue by carrying submission to its extreme. When she invites Volpone to "Rub these hands," it is the only physical contact she can countenance from him, one that will destroy the beauty he lusts for. In addition, Celia's descriptions of various mutilations—

poison, leprosy of bones and marrow—graphically remind us of the frailty of the flesh Volpone celebrates. Ironically, of course, poisoning or leprosy would preserve Celia's spiritual health by making her body less attractive. This would also prevent Volpone from committing the sin of lust, but he resists Celia's efforts to save him along with herself.

Indeed, Celia becomes increasingly charitable and submissive, but not in the way Volpone wants; her true charity highlights by contrast the sinful nature of Volpone's cupidity. Once again, Celia is using submission to frustrate the intentions of a socially superior male. She offers to "kneele to you, pray for you . . . for your health," presumably his spiritual health, since his physical health needs no prayers; in another irony, Celia's reference to Volpone's health reminds us that his feigning illness endangers his eternal life. In a final submissive strike, Celia promises to "Report, and thinke you vertuous." Not only does this assurance remind us that there is no disparity between Celia's words and actions (as there is for all the other characters in the play), but both the report and the congruent action are directly opposed to Volpone's goal. Her apparently submissive promise is in effect a threat to Volpone's identity.

Volpone responds with violent anger to what any Christian would consider a compliment and attacks Celia for

threatening to call him virtuous, revealing the uncontrolled lust beneath his lyrical language and the lack of emotional discipline in Volpone's nature. His diatribe reveals injured pride (yet another sin), as if his manhood, which he identifies with sexual potency rather than with spiritual strength, has been threatened:

> Thinke me cold,
> Frosen, and impotent, and so report me?
> That I had Nestor's *hernia*, thou wouldst thinke.
> I doe degenerate, and abuse my nation,
> To play with oportunity, thus long:
> I should haue done the act, and then haue parlee'd.
> Yeeld, or Ile force thee. (260-6)

The spiritual effeminism of Volpone's outburst ironically underlies his irate fear of being thought less than masculine, "frosen, and impotent." Just as Mosca's description of Celia's face in Act I lured Volpone from his feigned sickbed, now Celia herself has induced him to abandon his linguistic disguise, throwing off lyricism and forgetting about songs.

Volpone's tirade reveals the weakness of his position in the Renaissance patriarchy in contrast to Celia's adamant subserviance. Not only does he lack the self-control attributed by Renaissance patriarchy to men, he seems motivated by what others might think rather than by his own inner strength, as he reacts to Celia's resistance. When Volpone fears that he might "abuse my nation" by failing to rape Celia, Jonson seems to suggest that Volpone's false concept of manhood may be held by other men as well. Conflating

personal and national potency, he seems to consider raping Celia his patriotic duty, a duty owed to *patria* or *patriarchy*. Whether Jonson intended this effect or not, Volpone's concern for his "nation" of men impugns that nation along with him.

Celia calls upon God, and her prayer-like cry is answered by Bonario, leaping out of the gallery where Mosca has hidden him. Modern audiences find this rescue hilariously melodramatic and assume that Jonson intended Bonario's alliterative lines as comic relief from the tension of Volpone's cat-and-mouse game.[15] Dessen points out, however, that Jonson's audience had not seen nineteenth-century melodrama; instead, Bonario's character and action emphasize the serious nature of Jonson's satire by recalling the conventions of Elizabethan morality plays (88). This allusion to the overtly religious moralities contributes to what Hallett calls "the moral indignation that must accompany [Bonario's] angry judgment of Volpone's temple" (63). Jonson's careful development of Celia's character, making her the articulate voice of reason and virtue without compromising the audience's high opinion of her as a woman, is vital to maintaining our sense of "moral indignation."[16]

Celia's cry for help, "O! iust God" (266) certainly invokes the divine presence her other speeches have implied throughout scene 7. Like all her other speeches, this three-word exclamation is open to a complex variety of

interpretations. The one interpretation Jonson precludes is the naked "cry of agony"; by ending the speech with a period rather than an exclamation mark, Jonson has once again minimized the emotional content of Celia's words. Celia could be consciously addressing the deity, as if offering a prayer for deliverance or a final expression of hope, although the line could also be heard as a final expression of hopelessness or despair. With a certain intonation in delivery, the line could indicate disgusted resignation, a kind of judgmental submission to what now appears inevitable. Finally, calling on God in extremity is Celia's final expression of her value system, which should remind us along with Volpone of the ultimate divine power he is really violating in his attack on Celia.

Interestingly, Volpone's rape attempt itself finally establishes Celia as truly virtuous and chaste. For the first two acts of the play Jonson teases his audience with ambiguous imagery so that we have no way to know whether Corvino's wild accusations of infidelity are based on truth. Even in Act III, we have only Celia's words, albeit augmented with morally impressive allusions and images, to affirm her chastity. Volpone's attack provides what McLuskie calls "ocular proof" of Celia's virtue, establishing "a stable connection between chaste appearance and true chastity" (154).

In addition to authenticating Celia's goodness, the

attempted rape alters Volpone's moral appearance: from an appealing rogue fleecing greedy victims he becomes a real villain. Rape and abduction had only recently been criminalized, according to Roy Porter, in the sixteenth century (217). On the continent, Norman Bryson says, "the rape of a woman of the nobility has been reckoned the most serious crime it was possible for a Venetian nobleman to commit" (168). Porter makes a convincing argument that rape may have been relatively uncommon in early modern England, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, since in a well-entrenched patriarchy sexual intimidation was not necessary to maintain male dominance (222-3). Thus Volpone's staged rape attempt would be particularly shocking, violating social as well as dramatic norms.

As a result of Jonson's skillful use of both language and action in III.7 to establish Celia's position as reliable moral spokesman, Volpone is exposed to the audience as an amoral villain. Volpone's final lines also expose his weaknesses:

> I am vn-masqu'd, vn-spirited, vn-done,
> Betray'd to beggary, to infamy— (277-8)

Deprived of his disguise(s) and having divested himself of his spiritual powers, Volpone is, indeed, "vn-done." The word "beggary" in his last line ironically recalls his earlier contemptuous dismissal of conscience as "the beggers vertue"; Volpone would not be so debased at this point if he had a conscience earlier in the play. His ultimate word,

"infamy," betrays his obsession with reputation, or what others think of him; this is the source of his true weakness, a frailty viewed in the Renaissance as effeminate, the very trait Volpone dreads. He is not only a villain, but ultimately an ineffective one at that.

Marchitell calls this scene "the fundamental turning point in the play, the moment from which Volpone never fully recovers his theatrical power since, from this moment forward, he cannot be said to inhabit the private world of his own desires any longer" (301). In Act II we saw Volpone physically drawn out of his private house into public view by the power of Celia's name and Mosca's description of her. In the third act, the power of Celia's language has demonstrated that the world of Volpone's "own desires" is not a private one at all, but always already circumscribed by the larger world of Christian values. Just as Celia's submission to Corvino deconstructed itself when taken to its logical end, thus exposing the fallacy implicit in patriarchy, so Volpone's self-indulgence deconstructs itself within Jonson's religious ideology.

Bonario reassures Celia, and the audience, as he leads her out of Volpone's house,

> Lady, let's quit the place, it is the den
> Of villainy; feare nought, you have a guard:
> And he, ere long, shall meet his iust reward. (273-5)

Addressing Celia as "Lady" reinforces her status, which Volpone was about to transgress, as Bonario leads her to

safety. He, in turn, is following the values she has exemplified and subtly expressed; rather than promote himself as Celia's rescuer, he almost effaces himself in the pun "you have a guard [god]." The "iust reward," of course, will emanate from that god's judgment.

Bonario's apparent passivity to the modern eye, then, actually demonstrates his adherence to the Christian values of reason and self-control in submission to divine will. Here is a male character embodying Celia's own traditionally "masculine" values while in her service: it may be too much to imagine that Jonson appreciated the essentially androgynous nature of Christian precepts, but the inference is there to be drawn. This completes what Woodbridge calls the "real turning point in the action" and "the ultimate cause of the catastrophe" of this climactic scene (71). Of course, the Lucianic author Jonson has returned at this point, for the denoument leading to Volpone's "iust reward" will not be a simple one.

Two short scenes complete Act III. In III.8, Volpone despairs, but Mosca sees that he may be able to continue fooling the legacy hunters, because "Guilty men / Suspect what they deserve still" (20-1), regardless of evidence to the contrary. In scene 9 Mosca proves his cynicism well-founded by easily convincing Corbaccio and Voltore that Bonario and Celia are liars out to "Defame my patron, defeat you" (53), thus exploiting Voltore's self-interest to gain

his cooperation against the two innocents. The closing couplet ends Act III with an ironic contrast with Celia's sincere piety:

> *MOS*. Patron, go in, and pray for our successe.
> *VOLP*. Neede makes deuotion: heauen your labor blesse. (62-3)

Volpone's cynical "neede makes deuotion" should assure the audience that heaven will not bless their labor. Significantly, Jonson ends this pivotal act with a reference to heaven, a final reminder of the heavenly Celia.

CHAPTER VII

ACT IV: "THESE STRANGE TRIALS"

Act IV begins with a three-scene digression into the subplot, in which the voluble Lady Wouldbe provides an instructive contrast to Celia. Dympna Callaghan says that in Renaissance drama, any speech exposes a woman to the public, and she is "therefore guilty of having public sex, like that of a prostitute" (76-7). Not only does Lady Wouldbe speak at length, but she does so literally in public, outdoors in a street. Her husband, in a comic parallel with Corvino, praises her to Peregrine, who responds to this verbal promiscuity with the comment, "It seemes, you are not iealous, / That dare commend her" (IV.2.14-5). Indeed, Sir Politic introduces Peregrine to his wife with the added injunction "pray you, vse him, fairely" (17), and the pun on sexual employment functions as another echo of Corvino's attempt to prostitute his own wife in Act III. The moral implication of Lady Wouldbe's talkative nature is made even clearer in scene 3, when she appears to offer herself to Peregrine with the words "please you to vse me, sir" (IV.3.-16), an offer repeated in the next line, "Pray you, sir, vse mee" (17). Lest we miss the *double entendre*, Jonson emphasizes the sexual innuendo of Lady Wouldbe's next comment by

placing the pun at the end of the line:

> The more you see me, the more I shall conceiue,
> You haue forgot our quarrell. (18-9)

The risk (to a man) of a woman's promiscuity is that she might conceive a child by another man; this risk is the basis for patriarchal limitations on women. Clearly, Lady Wouldbe personifies the hazards of public speech by a woman in seventeenth century England.

This unequivocal reminder of the strictures placed upon female speech immediately precedes the opening of court in the Venetian Senate. In court, the legal requirement or opportunity for Celia to plead her case contradicts the cultural ban on any verbal assertion by women. Caught in this double bind, Celia acquiesces to cultural values and remains silent. Although she was able to defeat Volpone in private by controlling her discourse, in this public arena, as Hallet observes, "the battle is fought on Volpone's terms" (67). Evil will conquer good in this confrontation because evil has set the rules for combat.

It is too much to suggest that Jonson saw the logical problems inherent in patriarchal limitations on women's speech, but he certainly seems to see that earthly justice is temporal and will inevitably be overruled by divine justice. Interestingly, though, the fallacies of patriarchy are related to the hypocrisy of the court. In an article about Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale, David Schalkwyk, concerned with "the political import of patriarchy's anxiety

concerning women as bearers of both words and heirs" (257), reminds us that limitations on women's movements and conversations were prompted by the male need to be certain of the paternity of their children. As Schalkwyk observes, this need is the paradox of patriarchy: "its greatest need is at the same time the source of its deepest fears and insecurity. Nothing but a woman's word can justify the legitimacy of its bloodline" (269). The first trial in Volpone is similarly dependent on "a woman's word" to determine the truth, but by denying her right to express that "word," the social context of the court becomes an empty construct devoid of validity. Jonson's satire exposes this fallacy regardless of whether he consciously recognized its source. As Schalkwyk points out, woman's word in The Winter's Tale is finally verified by the king, her power reinvested "into the word of the monarch" (269). Like Hermione, Celia behaves with quiet dignity until she faints in court, but her "word" does not derive justification from any patriarchal institution or hierarchy. Instead, Celia's virtue is upheld by the tenets of Christianity.

Initially, Celia and Bonario appear in this trial scene as simply innocent; they seem virtually helpless against their society's contradictory rules of behavior and the lies of Volpone's unscrupulous allies. Alexander Leggatt interprets this "virtue adrift in a hostile world" as a source of serious thought which undercuts the play's brutal comedy, "a

comic effect, but a subtle and provocative one" (140). Hallett goes further in his evaluation of Celia's effect on the trial scenes: "Unless we see that her trusting to divine justice rather than to worldly justice is an act of wisdom, we are missing one of the most important points of the play" (67).

Jonson provided another suggestion in his Epistle preceding the play that we should watch Celia's innocent behavior carefully. Writing about the accusations of treason that had recently been made against him, he comments that

> . . . it is not rumour can make men guilty, much lesse entitle me, to other mens crimes. I know, that nothing can bee so innocently writ, or carryed, but may be made obnoxious to construction; mary, whils't I beare mine innocence about mee, I feare it not. (60-4)

Like Jonson himself, Celia and Bonario must face rumour protected only by their innocence. The poet claims, however, that this is enough, and he goes on to warn readers not to be too concerned with "their fames" (69), or reputations. The opinions of our fellow men are unimportant, according to Jonson, implying that the justice a comic poet should imitate (121-2) is divine, not earthly. In the play itself, Celia's behavior conveys this important message.

Celia enters Act IV in scene 5 as the trial begins. The gullible avocatori seem to have heard of her before the trial, agreeing among themselves that "The gentlewoman has beene euer held / Of vn-reproued name" (3-4). This good

reputation is unfortunately as ephemeral as any, however, as the cynical Voltore knows. Before launching into the cover story concocted by Mosca, he comments that "the sight" of Volpone "will rather mooue your pitties, / Then indignation" (23-4); in other words, appearances rather than truth will decide the outcome of this trial.

Voltore begins the easy task of reversing Celia's good reputation by referring to her appearance:

> This lewd woman
> (That wants no artificiall lookes, or teares,
> To helpe the visor, she has now put on)
> Hath long beene knowne a close adulteresse,
> To that lasciuious youth there; (34-8)

As Callaghan says of Desdemona, "woman is constructed as a liar even when her utterance is without words" (82). Here, as Celia sits silently in court, Voltore simply says that her facial expression is unreliable. The avocatori seem to accept this interpretation of appearance, since they do not even reply when Celia can no longer listen to Voltore's lies in silence; her exasperated wish to leave the human race—"I would I could forget, I were a creature" (102)—is simply ignored. As usual, of course, Celia's words carry a reminder for the audience of the values they should be using to judge her along with the other characters in the play: the word "creature" implies the creator, the ultimate judge unswayed by appearances.

Celia's inner strength is derived from her faith in God, but Jonson does not exaggerate that strength to make

her a martyr (or "unnatural" female, in Renaissance terms). The paradox inherent in her role is that Jonson puts traditionally "masculine" reason and virtue in an unimpeachably "feminine" character. Linda Woodbridge explains that in the Renaissance view, woman was thought naturally "timid, passive, and tender of heart" even though specific individuals exhibited great strength (214). Celia's moral endurance is acceptable to Jonson's contemporary audience in a weak female body: thus she faints (or "swownes") after hearing Corvino's graphic description of her alleged adultery. According to Woodbridge, fainting is one of "certain stock devices [that] enabled authors to reassert the weak nature of Woman in the face of steel-backboned female behavior" (215), so this silent commentary on Corvino's tale re-commends Celia as a traditionally virtuous Renaissance woman, even as she exhibits the moral stamina expected in a man.

Celia's physical weakness does not detract from her moral strength, however. The male court officials are also shocked by Corvino's verbal excess:

> CORV. This woman (please your father-hoods) is a whore,
> Of most hot exercise, more then a partrich,
> Vpon record— *AVO 1. No more.* CORV. Neighes,
> like a iennet.
> *NOT. Preserue the honour of the court.* (117-20)
> [my emphasis]

After listening to ten more lines of Corvino's near-pornographic diatribe, the avocatori decide that "His griefe hath made him frantique" (131) and they order Corvino removed from the court. As we see that even these worldly men are

disgusted by Corvino's speeches, Celia's fainting seems less an expression of frailty than a silent exclamation of universal revulsion. In what seems almost an expression of solidarity with her, the avocatori are solicitous toward the unconscious Celia, unlike her husband, who again calls her a liar even when she lies unable to speak. In a sense, Celia has refused to listen to "rumor," removing herself from the court by fainting.

The avocatori, despite their evident sympathy for Celia, continue to listen to Mosca and Voltore build their false case. The conspirators play upon men's fear of both woman's word and her sexuality. First Mosca claims that Celia, "that well-taught dame" (137), has falsely accused Volpone of rape. Mosca's word "taught" quietly alludes to the contemporary controversy, fueled by the prolific Juan Luis Vives, over the proper education and social roles for women, as well as reminding the avocatori that any man is vulnerable to such an accusation if a woman says the word. When Voltore returns to the issue of Celia's alleged "lewdnesse" (144), Corvino's word "Vnsatisfied" appeals to male fears of female sexuality. These appeals to their sexual insecurity quickly convince the avocatori that Celia is not innocent after all. Their final comments, "These things, / They strike, with wonder!" and "I am turn'd a stone!" (153-4), remind the audience that only a few minutes earlier they had been convinced that she was an innocent victim.

One effect of this curious scene, in which Celia remains silent except for a single line, is to demonstrate the tragic results of women's social limitations and the male fears on which these limitations are based. As Peter Stallybrass defines Desdemona's similar plight, "woman's body could be imagined as the passive terrain on which the inequalities of masculine power were fought out" (141). In Celia's case, the male characters are competing for Volpone's fortune over her body, since money conveys power in the economy of Venice. As Corvino's efforts demonstrated, the female body can also be literally exchanged for money, or power. As we see her in court, Celia has thwarted such an exchange; now she must be silenced for Volpone's power (and his fortune) to be maintained.

As Stallybrass points out, however, the female body had its own voice, "however much the historical records have effaced it" (141). Stallybrass considers how Desdemona's voice is fictionally constructed by her male author, and observes that she begins Othello as an active agent with "the freedom we tend to associate generally with the comic heroine." As the play progresses, Desdemona is increasingly controlled and limited by Othello's suspicious observations until finally "she is reformed within the problematic of the enclosed body" (141). In other words, Desdemona gains virtue within the Renaissance gender hierarchy as she accepts subservience. When this subservience, according to

Stallybrass, is "enforced by her death, [it] has already been enforced by the play's structure" (141). Desdemona, like Lucrece, can ultimately retain her position as an honorable woman only by being permanently silenced.

Celia, unlike Desdemona, maintains her ability to voice rational, Christian oppostion to the corruption of her society without violating that society's fundamental structure. Could this means that for Jonson "the enclosed body" is not "problematic"? Jonson himself, after all, was "enclosed" by the rigid structure of the Jacobean court's "body politic" as thoroughly as Celia is enclosed by her female body. Stallybrass, discussing Othello, describes the "class aspirant" like Jonson, and what kind of woman we might expect him to create:

> Like members of the male elite, the class aspirant has an interest in preserving social closure, since without it there would be nothing to aspire *to*. But, at the same time, that closure must be sufficiently flexible to incorporate *him*. His conceptualization of woman will as a result be radically unstable: she will be perceived as oscillating between the enclosed body (the purity of the elite to which he aspires) and the open body (or else how could he attain her?), between being "too coy" and "too common." (134)

Celia is neither unstable, nor coy, nor common. More to the point, when she was still contained and silenced within Corvino's walls, her status was ambiguous; Jonson reveals her virtue only when she emerges from the privacy of her own house, and she maintains that virtue even when she speaks in public, normally an unequivocal sign of immorality for a female.

This evident paradox is explained by David Riggs in his biography of Jonson. Just months before writing Volpone, "Jonson had successfully resolved two major crises in his personal life" (140). He had returned to his wife after a two- or three-year separation, and he had negotiated a compromise settlement with the Consistory Court over his absence from Communion. Riggs sees these actions as symbolic of an inner resolution between Jonson's "chronic rebelliousness" (141) and his philosophical idealism. Personally at peace with himself, at the same time "Jonson had moved into the mainstream of Jacobean court life" (143). Many critics have noticed the psychological parallels between Volpone and Jonson's violent, impulsive side. It is Celia, however, who represents Ben Jonson comfortably inhabiting his social and cultural roles in 1605 without sacrificing his self-respect.

Celia's self-respect, of course, derives from her faith in God. She has progressed during the play from the total enclosure of Corvino's house to the open window, then to Volpone's house, and now to the public arena of the Venetian court. From near silence, her discourse has expanded to resist Volpone and the gender hierarchy he represents, and now she must defend herself against the corruption of the legal system. As Leggatt notes, Celia and Bonario represent virtue which is not merely passive, since they do not simply submit to the socially sanctioned authorities personified by

Volpone and the avocatori. Equally important, he adds, "They remain uncorrupted in a world where evil is contagious," preventing the evil figures of Mosca and Volpone from prevailing (143).

Of course, in Act IV, Mosca and Volpone do prevail in court, despite Celia's one line of self-defense.

> AVO.1. . . . What witnesses haue you,
> To make good your report? BON. Our consciences.
> CEL. And heauen, that neuer failes the innocent.
> (IV.6.15-17)

With eloquent reticence, she simultaneously invokes God, "heaven," and reminds the audience that her name associates her with that God, thus reinforcing her assertion of her own innocence. Her word is justified here by the highest power. Nevertheless, in Bonario's prophetic words, "multitude, and clamour ouercomes" (19). Stephen Greenblatt recognizes this false ending as yet another of Jonson's Lucianic tests of his audience. Celia's single line offers a final chance to prefer goodness over Volpone's amusing, appealing amorality. When the court rules against her and Bonario, Greenblatt says, "The audience must now ask itself, 'What would a world be like in which Volpone has triumphed?' In reply, it wills Volpone's ultimate downfall" (1976, 31). Celia has prevailed in the theater, if not in the court: no longer dazzled by Volpone's brilliance, we earnestly desire that heaven protect the innocent.

CHAPTER VIII

"HOME, TO HER FATHER"

The opening of Act V, the spiritual low point of the play, is Jonson's ultimate test of his audience. Having seen "bad things happen to good people," we are sorely tempted to lose faith in the power of goodness to triumph over evil, even to lose faith in God altogether. Volpone's first dull, monosyllabic line, indeed, seems intended to shatter our faith in the poet-creator himself. Greenblatt calls this "one of the rare instances in the history of the drama in which the author's genius is manifested in the collapse of his verse" (1976, 32), as Jonson abandons his earlier colorful, hypnotic language to convey the dark emptiness of Volpone's life. The depressed Volpone announces, "Well, I am here; and all this brunt is past" (V.1.1), but rather than exult in his escape, he is beset by sickening fears. He has found that exposure to the public gaze holds hazards for men as well as women. Celia, it is true, has been punished for exposing herself to the public view, but Volpone also finds it painful. He found of his role-playing

> . . . 'twas good, in priuate,
> But, in your publike, *Cave*, whil'st I breathe.
> 'Fore god, my left legge 'gan to haue the crampe;
> And I apprehended, straight, some power had strooke me
> With a dead palsy. (3-7)

Alone on the stage, he turns to "wine to fright / This humor from my heart" (11-12), and calls for Mosca to cheer him up.

Before Mosca, Volpone resumes his mask of false bravado; like the fox in fable scoffing at the "sour grapes" he could not reach, Volpone now says that his original aspiration for Celia was misplaced. He claims to have enjoyed winning in court "more then if I had enioy'd the wench: / The pleasure of all woman-kind's not like it" (V.2.10-11). The specific individual for whom he left his feigned sickbed and risked all is simply another "wench," an anonymous unit in the generic "woman-kind," now that he has tried and failed to seduce her. This is particularly interesting since of the seven times Celia's name has been used in the play,[17] four were spoken by Volpone. She is also an anonymous member of the other group Volpone mentions, "the innocent" (17) whom the court has convicted; this, of course, includes Bonario with Celia, but Volpone has reverted to his original persona, interested only in winning (either gold or legal victory) without concern for individuals either male or female. In Act I, scene 1, he preferred gold to "All stile of ioy, in children, parents, friends, / Or any other waking dreame on earth" (17-18); here he exults in success won over a variety of human beings whom he sees as profitable in the way "Of land, that yeelds well" (30). For Volpone at this point, Celia seems to be nothing more than potentially fruitful soil.

Significantly, Volpone's human sensitivity seems to be temporarily restored by a reminder of Celia later in this scene, when he and Mosca are exulting over Lady Wouldbe's seduction by gold. Despite Volpone's oily sweating in court, she had kissed him ostentatiously before the avocatori. Mosca observes that Volpone's gold

> . . . dries vp
> All those offensiue sauors! It transformes
> The most deformed, and restores 'hem lovely,
> . . . . . .
> . . . It is the thing
> Makes all the world her grace, her youth, her beauty.
> (99-101,104-5)

Volpone replies to this cynical but realistic comment about Lady Wouldbe with the distracted statement, "I thinke, she loues me." Mosca is as confused as the audience, asking, "Who? the lady, sir?" (106). When Mosca adds, "Shee's iealous of you," Volpone asks vaguely, "Do'st thou say so?" (107). Since Lady Wouldbe embodies neither grace, youth, nor beauty, and Volpone would not welcome her attention even were she capable of loving anyone but herself, this strange two-line interchange does not seem to refer to her. Rather, Volpone seems to have been reminded of Celia. Mosca's words, "her grace, her youth, her beauty," interrupt Volpone's brash celebration; his brief reverie here suggests a nostalgia for the real philosophical values Celia represents.

The arrival of legacy hunters rudely interrupts these thoughts of Celia, the only person in the play who success-

fully resisted the temptations of Volpone's wealth. Scene 3 is dominated by Mosca's inventory of Volpone's possessions, an *ostinato* of objects that accompanies visits by Corbaccio, Corvino, Lady Wouldbe, and Voltore, who all voluntarily offered to exchange their own human dignity for these very objects. Mosca dismisses Wouldbe with a threat to reveal her efforts to prostitute herself:

> Remember, what your ladiship offred me,
> To put you in, an heire; . . .
> . . . . . .
> Goe home, and vse the poore sir Pol, your knight, well;
> For feare I tell some riddles: go, be melancholique.
> (40-1, 44-5)

In other words, Mosca urges Lady Wouldbe to be a better wife to her husband.

Mosca is more abrupt and insulting to Corvino, whose effort to prostitute his wife make him, in Mosca's eyes, the worst offender of all:

> Lord! will you not take your dispatch hence, yet?
> Me thinkes (of all) you should haue beene th'example.
> Why should you stay, here? with what thought? what promise?
> Heare you, doe not you know, I know you an asse?
> And, that you would, most faine, haue beene a wittoll,
> If fortune would haue let you? that you are
> A declar'd cuckold, on good termes? this pearle,
> You'll say was yours? right: this diamant?
> I'le not deny't, but thanke you. Much here, else?
> It may be so. Why, thinke that these good works
> May helpe to hide your bad: I'le not betray you,
> Although you be but extraordinary,
> And haue it onely in title, it sufficeth.
> Go home, be melancholique too, or mad. (47-60)

Mosca has, of course, been aware of the truth behind everyone's actions throughout the play; he used the word "prostitute" when he first introduced Corvino and Celia to Volpone

(III.7.75). Now he speaks directly to Corvino himself, describing Corvino's sin in literal and symbolic terms. He is correct when he tells Corvino that "this pearle" and "this diamant" were his: they may be the same jewels Volpone offered Celia in III.7, but they also represent Celia herself, who was Corvino's in every sense. The pearl symbolizes her feminine chastity and purity; the diamond, her incorruptible constancy and innocence. These qualities in Celia ensured that Mosca would retain the material pearl and diamond, thus his thanks. Although Jonson was still a professed Catholic in 1607 when he wrote Volpone, Mosca reminds Corvino that "good works" will not preserve his salvation without faith, and Corvino is "bad." His attempt to prostitute his wife has damned him more thoroughly than if he had succeeded, since she proved herself such a jewel.

We meet Corvino again in scene 6, when the disguised Volpone teases him by referring to the fortune he never had and the wife who "has shew'ne / Her selfe a very woman" (20-1). Jonson's irony works nicely here, since Volpone knows better than anyone that Celia proved herself a "true" woman and faithful wife, even while he professes to think that she fits every negative stereotype of Renaissance misogyny. Corvino, too, knows that Celia is really a strong-willed woman who is nevertheless virtuous and admirable, and thus the joke is aimed at him for having foolishly tried to exploit all the false Renaissance notions about women.

We next see Celia when she and Bonario appear in court for sentencing (V.10). She responds with a prayerful exclamation to Voltore's confession of conscience: "O heau'n, how iust thou art!" Like many of her comments, this one appears to be addressed to "heaven," while using the word to remind us once again of her own identification with the religious good. Celia herself seems to indulge in irony here, for if heaven is "just," then earthly courts by implication are not just. More seriously, her line suggests that God is the only source of true justice (or judgement). Bonario adopts Celia's irony in his sarcastic remarks to Corvino later in the scene, almost seeming to speak for her, or at least on her behalf against her husband, since he does not comment on anything said by Corbaccio, Voltore, or the Avocatori. When Corvino tells the Avocatori that Volpone is dead, Bonario comments, "O, sure vengeance!" (24). To Corvino's claim that "The deuill ha's entred" Voltore, Bonario quickly replies, "Or bides in you" (24). Finally, when Corvino tries to base his stand on his reputation—"My state, / My life, my fame—" Bonario inquires pointedly, "Where is't?" (43-4) To a careful reader, neither Celia nor Bonario seems to be as passive or as insipid as they appear to a reader focused on the dynamic Volpone himself.

After an interlude with Volpone and his three bizarre "children," court resumes. Volpone's soliloquy and conversation with Nano and Androgyno present the tempting view

that justice will eventually prevail only because of Volpone's overreaching, his "mere wantonnesse" (V.11.4) and "fine conceipts" (13). This is, of course, one interpretation of the play's outcome, appealing to humanists who want to believe man is in control of his own destiny, but Celia's presence and frequent invocations of heaven suggest that divine intervention does affect human lives. Jonson represents this view very early in scene 11 in Celia's line "How ready is heau'n to those, that pray" (5), to remind the audience of the Christian orthodoxy he wants us to accept.

Even Celia's Christian charity is criticized by the corrupt Avocatori. After Corvino and Voltore "beg fauor" of the judges (105), Celia adds to (or corrects) their plea with just two words: "and mercy." The first Avocatore chides her, "You hurt your innocence, suing for the guilty" (106). This failure to appreciate the Christian commandment to love thy neighbor is a final clue that justice is merely dispensed by these human agents: they are not the real source of punishment for the venal characters, nor of the freedom Celia and Bonario eventually enjoy.

The last words of the play concerning Celia are addressed to Corvino:

> . . . Avoc. 1. And to expiate
> Thy wrongs done to thy wife, thou art to send her
> Home, to her father, with her dowrie trebled. (142-4)

The traditional view of Celia's fate is that she is once again, in Howard Marchitell's words, "shuffled between men"

(303). Anne Barton is somewhat more sanguine, observing that "only Celia and Bonario escape" punishments at the play's end as their "lives remain open and, to a large extent, undetermined" (118). This is as close as Jonson can come to a happy ending in Volpone, since the impossibility of death in a comedy rules out what Katherine Eisaman Maus calls the "ordinary comic rewards" of marriage between the virtuous young couple (43).

Maus feels that Jonson's cynical humor derives from a sense that all goods and pleasures exist in a finite and set amount, making inheritance one of the few means of reallocating wealth. For Jonson, as we see in Volpone, rather than being an orderly and conservative process, inheritance is a source of alienation and discord that Volpone and Mosca exploit (45-9). Maus adds, however, that Jonson's poem "To Penshurst" (along with other poems and his masques) depicts an ideal economy in which the distinction between the "non-material ideal" and "material abundance" is blurred (58). This ideal economy "does not redeem material relations but transcends them" (69). Maus does not consider the implications of her analysis on our view of Celia, but in Jonson's idealistic view, Celia's return home with the dowry she received from her family restored for future heritability resolves the bourgeois economic conflicts of the play.

The word "home" has special resonance for Jonson, informed by his strongest personal values. Don Wayne,

writing about Jonson's use of the word in Bartholomew Fair, "To Penshurst," and "To the World," sees "a habitual association of integrity and plenitude with the idea of home" (25). This was not unusual, of course, in Renaissance society; Lawrence Stone has carefully documented the close association of the extended family, which provided "the mutual economic, social and psychological advancement" of its members (86), with the court patronage system symbolized by "the great house with its open hospitality" (89). Jonson, raised by a working-class stepfather, lacked such a dependable kinship structure and seems to have substituted patronage for its support in his own life. In this light, Celia's return home to her father gains special poignance as a happy ending unattainable by Jonson. Callaghan observes bitterly that "it is fathers who count in a world dominated by the class hierarchy—not mothers" (135), an undeniable truth. But for Jonson the father "counts" as more than a phallocentric power symbol: he is also the nostalgic dream of a lost family of origin, or "home." In Jonson's personal context, Celia is very richly rewarded at the end of the play.

Act V of Volpone encapsulates the treatment of Celia in the play as a whole. There is a great deal of action independent of Celia. At other times, characters discuss Celia without naming her. When she is present, she is most often silent, and is mistrusted even in her silence. Her few

words, totalling less than two lines in Act V and only 51 complete lines (plus 19 partial lines or single words) in the whole play, however maligned by the disreputable characters of the play, exemplify the Renaissance ideal of "eloquent reticence" as well as Jonson's own Stoic and Christian philosophy. Finally, after acting as the voice of reason throughout the play, Celia prevails in a way personally meaningful to Jonson.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

When I embarked on this analysis of Jonson's characterization of Celia in Volpone, I did so inspired by feminist criticism of Renaissance literature. Nevertheless, I attempted to examine Celia's role independent of gender assumptions, including either my own attitudes or Jonson's apparent intentions. Consciously rejecting the preconception that Jonson simply mirrors patriarchal misogyny, and suspending the impression of "sexual philistinism" that Jonas Barish dislikes in Jonson's anecdotes about himself (1967, 298), I looked at Celia as a construct of Jonson's psyche like any of his other characters, male or female. Surprisingly, I found that she seems to be the single unequivocal voice for his religious and philosophical beliefs. Rather than gender distinctions, the shifting class distinctions of seventeenth century society seem be the inspiration for Jonson's satiric characters. It is true that he gives us vicious examples of stupid, vain, and hypocritical women, but his pen attacks the same vices in men with equal fervor. In Volpone, the one figure who conspicuously lacks those vices is a female, and she speaks for her male author.

A related project growing out of this examination of

Celia's role is to speculate on what she tells us about Jonson himself. This is undeniably a risky endeavor, but I think a valid one. In a 1991 interview, David Riggs (the noted biographer) said that the one question he would like to ask Jonson is, "So what gives with your mother and your wife? You don't talk about either of them very much." Riggs is, of course, right; beyond Jonson's comments to Drummond that his wife was "a shrew yet honest" (Conv. 254) and his mother "no churl" (Conv. 282), we know only the barest facts about these two vital figures in the poet's life. We do, however, have free access to the many wives and mothers Jonson created in his work.

Looking to Jonson's fictional women for signs of his attitudes towards the real women in his life seems to be a project validated by the author himself. By having his work published, Jonson seems to have intended it for scrutiny by future readers, as Richard Newton has pointed out. Newton suggests further that "Ben Jonson clearly wishes to be known through his texts" (36). This is neither a novel nor an outdated idea; in the 1960's Jonas Barish noticed that in the plays, "Jonson always conveys a sense of his own combative presence," forcing us "to react to him as a man" (1963, 8), and in 1992 Tom Hayes said the same thing in a different critical context. In Hayes's words, Jonson "*continually* writes about himself; he *repeatedly* and *insistently* calls attention to himself . . . and repeatedly inserts a version

of himself into his plays" (75). That Jonson speaks to us through his plays seems a safe presumption.

Although this awareness of Jonson's presence in his work has not changed in thirty years, new interpretations of what he is saying have begun to emerge from modern critical approaches. In particular, postmodern critics like Hayes try to find meanings between or beyond binary divisions like gender, looking for inversion, ambivalence, and subversion in Renaissance writings. Biographers like David Riggs go further, using perceptions derived from Jonson's works to make inferences about their author.

I hope this close reading of Celia's role has demonstrated that shifting our critical focus from Jonson's male characters, including his own author-persona, toward the women in Jonson's work can create a new reading of both author and work. Ben Jonson worked closely and apparently amicably with many of the most interesting women of his time, women with social and political as well as intellectual ability. The poetry and masques he wrote for his royal and titled patronesses required research into female roles in history and literature, and he featured women in all his work. A clear-eyed look at Jonson's women seems likely to be fascinating and rewarding.

NOTES

1. Celia's role comprises a total of 51 lines plus 19 single words or partial lines. References to Volpone and other of Jonson's works are to the text in Ben Jonson, edited by C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson, abbreviated as H&S in citations and text.

2. Howard Marchitell, in a 1991 SEL article, states this idea even more emphatically: "Mosca sees Celia as the device by which he hopes to invert his subordinate position. His introduction of Celia constitutes the seduction of Volpone" (294). In addition, Marchitell notes that the introduction of Celia opens the horizons of the play beyond Volpone's house and interrupts what could become a monotonous pattern of visits by hopeful legatees.

3. Skulsky interprets Mosca's "flesh melteth into blood" image as Celia's blush, and sees in it "the suggestion of a preternaturally rare and tender steak" (294).

4. Numerous critics, including both Richard Flantz and Suzanne Woods, have commented on the moral implications of Jonson's own spare poetic style and his disapproval of the kind of sensuous imagery used by Volpone, Mosca, and Corvino.

5. This catalytic role for Celia in Volpone is more commonly found in tragedy of the Renaissance. Dympna Callaghan

discusses good women who "are frequently constructed as catalysts of tragic action, throwing moral order into confusion." At the same time, however, these virtuous heroines are also like Celia in that they serve as "moral touchstones" or "the measures of morality in drama" (63).

6. I owe this idea to three essays collected by Claude Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth in their book Classic and Cavalier. Richard Flantz, Susanne Woods, and Martin Elsky all discuss the moral significance of Jonson's diction. David Riggs also notes that in Jonson's plays "sloppiness in a character's speech is an infallible sign of moral and intellectual weakness" (13).

7. Charles Hallett made this point about Volpone in a 1971 article in which he explored the contrasts in structure and detail between Lady Wouldbe's visit to Volpone's room and Celia's encounter with him. Hallett contends that "the main function of Lady Wouldbe's visit in III.iv is to foreshadow Celia's in III.vii" (64), and he makes a convincing case for his conclusion: "The painstaking way these two scenes are constructed to contrast with one another clearly indicates that Jonson meant to call attention to Celia's opposition to the fallen world ruled by Volpone" (66).

8. Hallett divides the scene at a different point, viewing Celia's lament to "God and his good angels" (ll. 133-8) as a "summary of the whole situation" that concludes the Corvino section.

9. Harold Skulsky noticed the equation of Mosca's manipulation with demonic possession (302) and traced the theme of possession in Acts IV and V (303).

10. E. Pearlman emphasized this violence, along with Jonson's boast to Drummond that he killed a man in the Low Countries, in a 1979 article about Jonson's personality: "It is a challenge to think of another English poet with two notches on his pen. An account of Jonson's personality that ignores or suppresses the fact that he killed two men and boasted of it can hardly be on target" (368). Pearlman sees in Jonson's conversion to Catholicism a strong "need of external control" (369), leading to "the coexistence of conflicting, irreconcilable tendencies toward both assertion and dependent submission" (369). I think we see in Celia Jonson's ideal reconciliation of these two tendencies into a socially acceptable self.

11. Jonson's disdain for "the basest circumstances" involved in Corvino's willingness to sacrifice honor "for money" invites a Marxist interpretation beyond the scope of this thesis.

12. McCluskie focuses her analysis on the contrast between Volpone's slick style and Corvino's grotesque violence, concluding that "the issue is Corvino's and Volpone's different attempts to control Celia rather than the morality of her behavior: a question of power, not a question of chastity" (174). In fact, however, neither succeeds in control-

ling Celia. Her "chastity," or Christian morality, prevails over the power of their positions in the patriarchal hierarchy.

13. Celia is equally definite about her chastity, or "innocence," which "Is all I can thinke wealthy, or worth th'enjoying, / And which once lost, I haue nought to loose beyond it" (207-9). This seems to suggest that her marriage has never been consummated and she does, indeed, still have her virginity to protect. This might explain Corvino's worries about his public image.

14. Modern editions seem to compromise somewhat, omitting some of Jonson's Folio punctuation. The Yale edition omits many of Jonson's commas, replacing semicolons with commas and the colon with a semicolon:

> If you have ears that will be pierced, or eyes
> That can be opened, a heart may be touched,
> Or any part that yet sounds man about you;
> If you have touch of holy saints, or heaven,
> Do me the grace to let me 'scape. (Yale,240-4)

The Norton version retains Jonson's semicolons, but leaves out commas and changes the colon ending line 242:

> If you have ears that will be pierced; or eyes
> That can be opened; a heart may be touched;
> Or any part that yet sounds man about you;
> If you have touch of holy saints or heaven,
> Do me the grace to let me 'scape. (Norton,240-4)

The Oxford Authors edition of *Volpone* comes closest to Jonson's Folio, omitting only two of his commas:

> If you have ears that will be pierced; or eyes
> That can be opened; a heart, may be touched;
> Or any part, that yet sounds man, about you:
> If you have touch of holy saints, or heaven,

Do me the grace to let me 'scape. (Oxford, 240-4)

Male editors evidently agree with Herford and Simpson to varying extents, that Celia is not as "cold" and "logical" as Jonson wanted her to be.

15. Hallett agrees that "the comic exaggeration of Bonario's lines" breaks the tension of the rape scene (63). Duncan sees in Bonario's style and tone a parody of Spenser's Arthurian heroes (159). Callaghan's discussion of Bakhtin's writing about Rabelais also casts a suggestive light on this scene. Callaghan suggests that "the very process of inverting conventional order, even if only temporarily" in carnival and comedy "serves to destabilize it" (59). Bonario's interruption is humorous in its startling inversion or reversal of the action, but of course the "order" it disrupts is the amoral construct of Volpone's and Mosca's artificial social hierarchy of legacy-hunters. Hallett describeds this "inversion" and "destabilizing" succinctly: "Bonario is hardly insipid -- in fact, his effect on Volpone is rather overpowering" (63).

16. A variant stage direction earlier in this scene raises interesting questions about Bonario's rescue at this particular moment. Modern editions of Volpone, including those published by Norton, Yale, and Oxford, include the direction "[Exit]" or "[Exit Bonario]" after III.7.16, when Mosca has directed Bonario "Into that gallery -- at the upper end" (13). Bonario replies, "Yes, I will stay there," with the

additional comment, "I do doubt this fellow" (16). An exit at this point would suggest that Bonario is completely off stage, unseen by the audience during the entire rape scene. In this case, his sudden appearance would indeed be startling, if not "melodramatic" in the modern sense. According to Herford and Simpson's notes, however, this stage direction is not found in any of the known editions of the play edited by Jonson himself, but comes from Gifford's edition of 1816. If Bonario remains on stage, perhaps in an alcove or to the side, visible to the audience, the effect of his rescue on our views of both Celia and himself would be quite different. Howard Marchitell has considered this possibility, and notes that Bonario's "unsanctioned status as audience" undermines Volpone's authority over the scene, which he imagines is private and subject to his total autonomy (300-1).

The sight of Bonario listening as first Corvino and then Volpone tries to corrupt Celia would complicate and deepen Jonson's characterization of virtue in both "innocents." Rather than the innocent and passive victim, as Barton calls Bonario along with Celia (106), he would appear on stage as a thoughtful and decisive champion of virtue, evaluating the other characters' behavior before reacting to it. His comment about doubting Mosca shows that he is no fool, and his eavesdropping shows that Mosca has underestimated him (or simply made a fatal error) when Mosca says,

"he can hear nothing" (17). His rescue so late in the scene would be a calculated invervention rather than an automatic response to Celia's outcry. Simultaneously, Bonario's hesitation to interrupt, if visible on stage, implies great confidence in Celia's ability to defend her own virtue. Regardless of whether we see Bonario, the delay provides ample time for her to demonstrate the strength of her personal integrity before Bonario comes in to provide the physical force to repel Volpone's attack, but seeing Bonario's confidence in Celia would add to our own. This example suggests that Jonson's work would be fertile ground for modern textual criticism, particularly since he made such an effort to assert authority over his own texts in their printed versions.

17. Corvino addresses Celia by name at II.7.1, III.7.7, and III.7. 92. Volpone uses her name four times in III.7, at lines 141, 165, 185, and 212.

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