Masthead Logo

Brigham Young University
BYU ScholarsArchive

All Theses and Dissertations

2017-11-01

The Fox and the Goose: The Pamphlet Wars and *Volpone's* Animal Metaphors

Julie Anne Anderson
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Anderson, Julie Anne, "The Fox and the Goose: The Pamphlet Wars and *Volpone's* Animal Metaphors" (2017). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 7222.
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/7222

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

The Fox and the Goose: The Pamphlet Wars and *Volpone*'s Animal Metaphors

Julie Anne Helmandollar Anderson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Brandie Siegfried, Chair
Richard Duerden
Bruce Young

Department of English

Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2017 Julie Anne Helmandollar Anderson

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

The Fox and the Goose: The Pamphlet Wars and *Volpone*'s Animal Metaphors

Julie Anne Helmandollar Anderson
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

Ben Jonson wrote *Volpone* when England's pamphlet wars and the rule of Queen Elizabeth I contributed to an environment in which the "woman question" was forefront in many minds. These social concerns echo in *Volpone*, resulting in a play that not only deals with vices and greed, but that also, to a limited degree, contributes to the *querelle des femmes*. The play's numerous animal metaphors create distinctions between characters; among other things, animalistic surnames represent the vices and complexities of humanity, and, more specifically, reverberate with judgments that seem to underscore the injustices of misogynistic pamphleteers. Moreover, Jonson's characters Bonario and Celia represent the ideal images of manhood and womanhood and are armed with various virtues that allow them to overcome trials. Ultimately, when read in the context of the Early Modern pamphlet wars, *Volpone*'s animal metaphors form a conservative defense of women that condemns misogyny and advocates a partnership between virtuous men and women for the sake of a moral social order.

Keywords: Ben Jonson, *querelle des femmes*, *Volpone*, pamphlet wars, women's issues, animal metaphor, virtue

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first and foremost like to thank my brilliant thesis committee: Brandie Siegfried, Rick Duerden, and Bruce Young. Their patience and feedback through this very lengthy process were invaluable. I would also like to thank my parents, Tim and Zina, for being a constant source of motivation and for being the best sounding boards a writer could ask for. Finally, a special thank you to my husband, Todd, who sacrificed time, energy, and much more to get me through each drafting stage.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Fox And The Goose: The Pamphlet Wars And *Volpone*'s Animal Metaphors......................... i

Abstract.. ii

Acknowledgments... iii

Table of Contents.. iv

Part 1: Introduction 1

Part 2: Gender Conversations in Early Modern England 3

Part 3: Breaking Down *Volpone* 9

Part 4: The Function of Animal Metaphors and Authority...22

Part 5: Animal Metaphor in Action 26

Part 6: Celia, Bonario, and The Argument for Women 31

Part 7: Conclusions and Jonson's Contribution to the "Woman Question".................................35

Works Cited 38

Part 1: Introduction

Animal metaphors have been used for millennia to teach lessons, describe cultural values, and craft history. The trickster Coyote from Indigenous American lore operates as a reflection of tribal values and issues. The New Testament often employs sheep and wolf metaphors to warn believers about the dangers of apostates and false prophets. In fact, animal metaphors have become so prevalent in modern society that we rely on them to describe those around us; a person we find repulsive might be labeled a "pig," a strong person might be labeled an "ox," or a scoundrel might be labeled a "dog."

Early Modern England had its own set of common animal metaphors used to describe people and teach social mores. In Ben Jonson's dramatic works, for example, animal metaphors are among his most commonly employed literary devices. We see examples in Ursula the "pig woman" and Nightingale from *Bartholomew Fair*, Brainworm from *Every Man in His Humor*, Kestrel in *The Alchemist*, and, most notably, multiple characters in *Volpone*. In this last play, Volpone, Mosca, Voltore, Corvino, Corbaccio, and Peregrine are all characters who are named after animals. At first glance, *Volpone*'s animal metaphors may seem as casual as those metaphors employed in Jonson's other plays and other popular Early Modern works. However, Malcolm South noted in 1965 that the animal metaphors in *Volpone* were deeper and more meaningful than those in Jonson's other work. South does not offer us much insight into *why* this Jonsonian comedy is unique, but it is a starting place for further conversations about *Volpone*.

Indeed, scholars after South have advanced a number of theories as to what, if anything, makes *Volpone*'s metaphors unique. Robert Shaughnessy's 2002 article "Twentieth-Century Fox: Volpone's Metamorphosis" analyzes the treatment and evolution of *Volpone*'s central fox metaphor in film. Shaughnessy writes that "the iconography of foxes is a particular case, but it is

generally agreed that the anthropomorphism of Jonson's play serves a clear satirical and ethical project. . . . Jonson's bestiary[1] articulates a fierce denunciation of creatures whose greed has transformed them into something no longer fully or legitimately human" (39). Conversely, Richard Dutton's more recent reading of *Volpone* glosses over the play's more popular moral themes of "human greed, deceit, and corruption" (349) that Shaughnessy was interested in and instead focuses on how the animal metaphors, predominantly the fox metaphor, can be interpreted through an Early Modern political lens. Dutton argues that these metaphors allowed Jonson to ridicule key political figures who had animalistic nicknames. A few years after Dutton, Bruce Boehrer suggests that the use of animal metaphors in the works of Shakespeare, Jonson, and others comes from a societal need to categorically distinguish the human from the animalistic. Finally and most recently, in 2013, Elizabeth Harvey takes *Volpone*'s animal metaphors in an even more fascinating direction in her article "Beastly Physic," wherein she examines the metaphors in relation to the medicinal uses of animal body parts.

I return to South who observes that "in general, Jonson's use of animal reference has only an incidental rather than an intrinsic bearing on the main movements of his plays. It has an illustrative or satirical function in a somewhat limited way. . . . In *Volpone*, however, Jonson has integrated the animal imagery into a much more consistent whole, so that it reinforces the characterization, tone, and action" (142). These characteristics, as South suggests, mean that the animal metaphors in *Volpone* are distinct from other Early Modern dramatic and social usages, something which the arguments of Shaughnessy, Dutton, Boehrer, and Harvey do not fully

[1] Edward Partridge would likely take issue with describing *Volpone* as a bestiary. In discussing the relationship between Volpone and the heirs, he states, "Similarity to such a medieval bestiary does not make *Volpone,* as it is sometimes claimed, a beast fable cast in the form of classical comedy. For beast fables are stories in which lower animals associate with each other as reasonable beings endowed with the virtues and vices of humanity. Do lower animals appear so in *Volpone*? Quite the contrary is true: reasonable beings appear as lower animals with the instincts of lower animals" (82).

support. South's point is quite the opposite of Shaughnessy's statement—Jonson is not simply comparing greedy, disagreeable men to animals. Nor does Jonson seem, as Dutton suggests, to be taking his animal metaphors from the nicknames of Early Modern political figures for the simple pleasure of having a jab at them. After all, Dutton's main reading centers on the fox metaphor but fails to account for the other animal metaphors in the play. Boehrer's reading, while interesting, applies to numerous Early Modern works (no uniqueness to *Volpone* here), leaving Harvey's interpretation as the most distinctive to date. Yet, Harvey's argument is only one possible interpretation. Here, I offer another interpretation: when read in the context of the Early Modern pamphlet wars, *Volpone*'s animal metaphors form a conservative defense of women that condemns misogyny and advocates a partnership between virtuous individuals of both sexes.

Part 2: Gender Conversations in Early Modern England

To better understand how Jonson's moral fable fits the mold of Early Modern women's defenses, we can look to the defense pamphlets themselves. One such pamphlet, which also uses animal metaphors to make its argument, is Jane Anger's 1589 *Her Protection of Women* in which Anger addresses male mistreatment and misrepresentation of women. Throughout her essay, Anger refers to both men and women in animal metaphors: men become scorpions, lions, snakes, and asses, to name only a few, while women become hens, cattle, and mice. Generally, these uses of animal metaphors within Anger's pamphlet help illustrate her experiences with each sex. Men writing pamphlets against women are portrayed as treacherous, ferocious, stubborn, or are associated with other negative traits. Women, on the other hand, are mostly portrayed as animals that are gentle, useful, and harmless. And yet, Anger's pamphlet is also more complex than this simple binary. In other places, she associates women with more dangerous animals: "The Tyger

is robbed of her young ones, when she is ranging abroad, but men rob women of their honour undeservedlye under their noses. The Viper stormeth when his taile is trodden on, & may not we fret when al our bodie is a footstoole to their vild lust." While this may make women seem fearsome, Anger is actually showing how mild women are when compared to what is instinctual: they have to bear assaults on their honor and bodies without reacting in natural anger as do tigers and snakes. Meanwhile, men demonstrate the opposite tendency. Anger writes, "The Lion rageth when he is hungrie, but man raileth when his is glutted." Whereas the natural thing to do is express dissatisfaction when something is not right (as the hungry lion), Anger argues that men express dissatisfaction even when they have nothing to be upset about (glutted). Anger's use of animal metaphors here is complex. Although animal imagery is most often used to show a person as Other or in a negative light, Anger is also using these animal metaphors to show what is *natural* versus what is *human* and, in some sense, corrupted from nature. It will be important, going forward, to look beyond the immediate negative or positive connotations of animal metaphors and examine what they tell us about human nature as well.

In addition to being an example of defense pamphlets that use animal metaphors, *Her Protection of Women* is also conceptually similar to *Volpone* in suggestive ways, and it is possible that Anger's work, or other similar pamphleteers, influenced Jonson's thematic trajectory on the moral status of women in the play. Similarities between Anger's and Jonson's themes of mistreatment, sexual predation, and unfaithfulness are notable. More importantly, Anger writes, "Have not they reasons who affirme that a goose standing before a ravenous Fox, is in as good case, as the woman that trusteth to a mans fidelitie." This passage holds an overt similarity between *Her Protection of Women* and *Volpone* in the shared metaphor of the fox. It is intriguing that "Fox" is capitalized in Anger's pamphlet as though it were a proper name (as

Volpone's), while "goose," in contrast, remains uncapitalized. But this is only one of several similarities between the two works.

Another example comes directly after the above quote about the fox and the goose. The passage continues: "For as the one is sure to loose his head, so the other is most certaine to be bereaved of her good name, if there be any small cause of suspition" (Anger). This line adds a new level of similarity between the pamphlet and Jonson's play *Volpone*, as it outlines the basic storyline concerning Volpone's attempted seduction of Celia. Celia, the goose, is left in the company of Volpone by her husband. But when Volpone's seduction fails and he, Mosca, Voltore, Corvino, and Corbaccio are brought before the judges, they accuse Celia of being a "lewd woman" (4.5.34) and a "close adulteress" (l. 37) of Bonario's. Two of the judges note, prior to this accusation, that Celia and Bonario have "been ever held / Of unreproved name" (4.5.3–4), suggesting that the court would have no reason to believe the accusations against the two. Regardless of this, the odds were not in Celia's favor. Henderson and McManus note that "while men and women convicted of fornication or adultery were officially punished equally by the law, the feminist pamphlets claim that the women suffered more emotional shame and community disapproval" (59). Ina Habermann's book *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England* observes that women were particularly prone to be associated with sexual slander (2–3). So, because many women were already at a disadvantage when it came to accusations of adultery and because none of the other persons involved, with the exception of Bonario, would speak to her innocence, Celia is much like the "goose" that is left with a tarnished reputation at the slightest suggestion of sexual proclivity. Of course, when the plot against Celia and Bonario is discovered, Volpone is given a harsh sentence, much like the fox who was "sure to loose his head."

Anger also outlines a situation similar to how Volpone organizes his seduction attempt. She comments of men, "They wil straight affirm that we love, and if then Lust pricketh them, they will sweare that Love stingeth us: which imagination onely is sufficient to make them assay the scaling of halfe a dozen of us in one night, when they will not stick to sweare that if they should be denied of their requestes, death must needes follow." This is precisely the manner in which Volpone woos Celia. First, Volpone tries to flatter Celia with polite descriptions of his "love," calling her "beauty's miracle" and telling her, "'Tis thy great work: that hath, not now alone, / But sundry times, raised me" (3.7.146–48). Of course, these "sundry times" are a severe exaggeration as Mosca had only brought Celia to Volpone's attention earlier that same day. Nonetheless, Volpone makes it sound like he has been falling in love with Celia for quite some time. This knowledge of his exaggeration, added to the fact that Volpone tricked Corvino into trading sex with Celia for riches, shows us that Volpone's "love" is clearly lust, as that which "pricketh" the men Anger describes. After his declaration, Volpone sings to Celia and insinuates that they are in love with each other. But as soon as Celia rejects his advances and shatters his belief in their mutual attraction, Volpone's warm offerings change, and he threatens Celia to "yield, or I'll force thee," (l. 265). Much like the men in Anger's description who attempt to "scale"—or "attack," "ascend," and "mount" ("scale, v.3")— the women they woo, Volpone does not show signs of love but assaults Celia with his lustful desires even to the point of threatening rape.

Another less significant link between Anger and Jonson appears in their shared allusions to Italian prostitutes. Anger's pamphlet briefly rails against men who "hath had great experience of Italian Curtizans." Initially, this line seems to have little to do with Volpone's plot. However, it is possible that Jonson is referencing Anger or other pamphleteers when he writes about Lady

Would-be's "studies" in Italy. Peregrine, a traveler with a bird-inspired name of his own, inquires about Sir Pol's wife who "lies here in Venice for intelligence / Of tires, and fashions, and behaviour, / Among the courtesans" (2.1.27–29). Sir Pol replies that Lady Would-be indeed studies the ways of the courtesans as "the spider and the bee oft-times / Suck from one flower" (ll. 30–31), suggesting that his wife mingling with the courtesans is harmless and an excellent way for her to learn Italian customs. Lady Would-be is also alternatively referred to as "Madam Would-be" throughout the play. Since "madam" was a term occasionally used during the 17th century to refer to prostitutes, this could also be read as a hint that Lady Would-be is becoming like the courtesans she studies. Ultimately, Jonson's reference to Italian courtesans suggests that he may have picked up this theme from a pamphlet like Anger's or, if not hers, perhaps Edward More's *A Little and Brief Treatise Called the Defense of Women*.[2]

Regardless of which pamphlets Jonson may have read, he was certainly influenced by the same gender-related ideas and issues that provoked the pamphlet wars. This is not to argue that Jonson was a protofeminist, but rather that he was attentive to his culture generally, and to his audience specifically. After all, Jonson grew up in a time when writing about the "woman question" was in its heyday. Pamela Benson's introduction to *Texts from the Querelle* notes that "at least 36 texts exclusively devoted to attacking and/or defending women were published in the hundred years between 1540 and 1640" (ix). Henderson and McManus observe that the invention of the printing press and easier access to reading materials for the middle class made these conversations about women more popular. They conclude:

> The "pamphlet wars" of formal attacks and defenses . . . clearly reveal these trends, although elements of "the woman question" can be found in all levels of

[2] References to Italian courtesans do appear in more than one work of the time. Edward More's response to *The Schoolhouse of Women* is another place we see them referenced (see Henderson and McManus 13).

> literature at the time. In fact, these treatises provided a formal framework for the debate about women and a reservoir of examples and arguments upon which writers of ballads and other types of poetry, popular drama, conduct books and sermons could draw. (11–12)

In short, Jonson would have been exposed to a broad swath of pamphlets debating the woman question, and he may have used the arguments from the pamphlet wars to leverage popularity for his own work. Furthermore, many of Jonson's contemporaries and close friends were writing about the era's woman question. Most notably, Thomas Nashe, who co-wrote *Isle of Dogs* with Jonson, was the author of *The Anatomy of Absurdity*, a pamphlet wars contribution that was published the same year as Anger's pamphlet. Unlike Anger's pamphlet, however, Nashe's work criticized, rather than defended, women. With friends and acquaintances like Nashe, Donne, Shakespeare, and, later in life, Sir John Suckling and Robert Herrick all writing pamphlets, poetry, and plays that explored women's issues, it would have been nearly impossible for Jonson to not be similarly steeped in the same controversies.

In addition to writing in the midst of the highly influential *querelle des femmes* debates and regularly associating with known contributors to the pamphlet wars, Jonson was likely also very influenced by the monarchs of his time. In fact, Jonson spent much of his career writing during the reign of one of England's most powerful and influential women: Queen Elizabeth I. Despite her power, Queen Elizabeth's rule was not without scrutiny on the basis of her sex. Sir Thomas Smith wrote during Elizabeth's reign that "we do reject women, as those whom nature hath made to keep home and to nourish their family and children, and not to meddle with matters abroad, nor to bear office in a city or commonwealth," except in cases where "the blood is respected, not the age nor the sex" (qtd. in *Norton* 721). And while Elizabeth's blood was

certainly respected by most of her subjects and may have been an exception to the rule, Smith's point was clear: women belonged to the domestic sphere, not in the public realm. Nor was he the only person to think so. John Knox, for example, wrote a pamphlet shortly before the start of Elizabeth's rule, which "passionately argues that a female ruler is an affront to nature, revealed religion, justice, and reason" (Henderson and McManus 12). Although not directed at Elizabeth, it is easy to see the kind of controversial climate in which she had to reign. Conversely, Henderson and McManus assert that "the successful reign of Elizabeth I provided a highly visible symbol of women's potential, a symbol which remained efficacious even after her death" (21). Despite his own negative dealings with the crown,[3] growing up and writing in the midst of this powerful and polarizing female's rule must have increased Jonson's interest in debates about women and their societal roles.

Part 3: Breaking Down *Volpone*

Having established some of the social and political context leading up to the writing of *Volpone*, we can delve more confidently into the text's animal metaphors. Jonson highlights his use of animal metaphors through repetition and sheer numbers, using upwards of twenty unique animal metaphors and references throughout the play. While the use of animal imagery and characteristics is a popular satire and fable device (think: *Aesop's Fables*, Reynard the fox stories, Spenser's *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, etc.), what makes *Volpone*'s metaphors unique is how they illuminate the play's gender issues and how they come to form a women's defense argument similar to those of *querelle des femmes* pamphlets.

But how do Jonson's metaphors achieve this? Irene Lopez Rodriguez offers part of the answer in her 2009 article "Of Women, Bitches, Chickens and Vixens: Animal Metaphors for

---

[3] Jonson and Nashe both came under investigation for the content of *The Isle of Dogs*, and Jonson was even briefly imprisoned as a result.

Women in English and Spanish." In this article, Rodriguez suggests that cultures use animal metaphors to talk about the "Other," or, more specifically, how a dominant class, often composed of white, heterosexual males, speaks about those from whom they wish to distinguish themselves (women, racial minorities, etc.). Rodriguez observes that "metaphorical identifications of marginal groups with animals may help express and perpetuate collective evaluations about their role in society, reinforcing stereotypes and, ultimately, pigeonholing people into the normative binary set of 'the self' and 'the other'" (80). In other words, a group of people can describe a different group whom they see as strange or unpleasant as animalistic in some way. This allows the dominant group to justify the negative treatment of the Other group. Anger, for example, distinguished men from women by using *four times* as many animal metaphors to describe males as she did to describe females. This resulted in a pamphlet that justifies its harsh critique of the actions of *some* men by making *all* men appear less human and morally troubled. Now, on one hand, that may seem to contradict Rodriguez because men are typically a dominant rather than a marginalized group. But since Anger presents herself as a woman[4] addressing her remarks to other women, men would be the Other in the eyes of the author and her target audience. Therefore, using more animal metaphors to describe women would have been alienating and marginalizing to her audience and herself, whereas using more metaphors to describe men would be in keeping with Rodriguez's thesis.

When we look at *Volpone*, however, we see that, contrary to Rodriguez's theory, a completely different strategy is at play. We know that Jonson was a man writing to a largely male audience. While it is true that women did make up a portion of the Early Modern theatre

---

[4] There is some debate about this, as a few scholars believe that Anger may have been a man using a pseudonym. Alternative views about whether or not Anger was a woman can be found in Henderson and McManus's *Half Humankind* 21–23 and Benson's *Texts from the Querelle* XXI.

patrons, as Hugh Richmond notes, men would have still been the larger part of the audience (49). Therefore, Jonson should, if Rodriguez is to be believed, have used more animal metaphors to describe the women in the play than to describe the men. By doing so, he would have appealed to the majority of his audience and been reinforcing the numerous social and cultural beliefs that made women appear inferior to men. The fact that Jonson does *not* use more animal metaphors to describe women shows that he is writing in a mode more akin to the male-metaphor-heavy women's defense pamphlets.

Another concept which adds to how animal metaphors can be used to discriminate against a group is the Great Chain of Being. The Great Chain of Being, a hierarchy where God and celestial beings are ranked highest with men, animals, plants, and other life forms ranking lower, was a popularly employed pecking order in the Early Modern Era. Rodriguez remarks that animals are lower than man on the Great Chain of Being (79), so any person or group compared with animals is likewise seen as lower, or subhuman. Therefore, by Jonson's decision to compare the main male characters to animals, he is showing those characters as something less than those around them. For example, if Volpone and Corvino had been given traditional male names and Celia had been given a name such as "Lady Sheep" or "Waspish" (or any number of other animal-derived titles), we would likely attribute the characteristics of those animals to Celia and view the clearly human men's actions toward her as less horrific. Since she would be viewed as animalistic, Celia would rank lower on the Great Chain of Being than her male counterparts and the other more human characters. However, rather than making women the Other through animal metaphors, Jonson instead attributes more negative animal metaphors, references, and qualities to the men in the play. By doing so, he is marginalizing himself and his mostly male audience[5]

---

[5] It is possible that Jonson was using the animal metaphors to create distinctions based on something other than sex. In part, this must be true since there are male characters without animal names or major animal metaphors like

and instead appealing more to his minority of women patrons. Jonson seems to defy the dominant/Other metaphor tradition, suggesting at the very least that we should sympathize with the women in the play.

Of course, the Great Chain of Being is not without its complications. Indeed, something holding a position deemed "low" on the scale does not necessarily mean that it has only negative characteristics. The real issues come when a creation on the Great Chain of Being is acting in a way that is "below" their station as we see in *Volpone.* In that case, we see humans acting in animalistic ways that are not admirable. However, there are numerous litereary examples of lowly creations on the Great Chain of Being being praised for fulfilling their due roles, and many such examples can be found in one of the era's most widely-read text: The Bible. The Bible is full of animal metaphors and imagery that complicate Rodriguez's dominant/other theory and show us that not all animal imagery is negative or alienating. One such intricate example is found in Proverbs: "There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces" (The Holy Bible, Prov. 30.25–28). In this passage, seemingly insignificant animals, ones which would have been deemed "vermin"[6] in the Early Modern era, are praised for their intelligence and sophistication. It is especially important to note that ants are referred to as "a people," blurring

---

Castrone, Androgyno, Nano, and Bonario. However, there are also compelling reasons why these characters could be considered un-male. Castrone and Androgyno, for example, could be considered un-male based on their genitalia. Nano's status as a dwarf, meanwhile, would likewise alienate him from other men. Bonario is the major exception to the "men as animals" metaphor. But, as we see later with Lady Would-be, there must be those on both sides of the sex/gender divide that defy stereotypes.

[6] Vermin were animals such as "creeping or wingless insects (and other minute animals)" and were sometimes also referred to as "winged insects of a troublesome nature" ("vermin, n."). This definition would certainly apply, then, to the ant, spider, and locust, and likely the conies as well.

the Great Chain of Being distinction between humans and animals. Quite opposite to what we see in *Volpone*, then, these animals are praised for having some characteristics which elevate them above their animal station to a more advanced tier.

Another complicated example appears in Matthew when Jesus warns his apostles as they go forth to preach. Jesus says, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10.16). There is much to unpack in such a short verse with so many animal metaphors. The wolves are fairly straightforward: there will be people whom the apostles encounter in their travels who are exceedingly dangerous. But the animal metaphors used for the apostles are much more intricate. The apostles are all at once like sheep, serpents, and doves. Sheep makes sense because followers of Jesus were frequently referred to as "sheep" or his "flock" and because it correlates to unbelievers being wolves. Doves is not too unusual because doves are a gentle bird commonly associated with peace and spirits in the Bible. Serpents, however, is an odd choice due to the fact that Satan took the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden to deceive Eve. Nonetheless, here serpents are said to be wise, and in other parts of the scripture, like Numbers 21, serpents are associated both with posion and with healing. What these verses and examples show is that animal metaphors can be used to demonstrate both vices and virtues and that many complicate the Great Chain of Being distinctions rather than clarify them.

In order to see just how Jonson uses these complicated metaphors to form his characters and, ultimately, his women's defense argument, we need to look closely at *Volpone*'s metaphors and what those metaphors say about each character's personality. The first and most notable textual example of an animalistic metaphor is the naming of the play and its titular character. Volpone's name translates to "sly fox," and he is frequently referred to as a fox, both self-

referentially and by other characters throughout the play. For example, Volpone responds to a warning from Mosca stating that "the fox fares ever best when he is cursed" (5.3.119). This is particularly interesting for Volpone to say because he is not only alluding to his surname but also acknowledging himself as animalistic. The Aberdeen Bestiary says of the fox that "it is fleet-footed and never runs in a straight line but twists and turns. It is a clever, crafty animal" ("The Aberdeen Bestiary: Folio 16r"). Much like this bestiary fox, Volpone takes pride in his cunning and his ability to escape from dangerous situations as well as his cleverness. Complicating Rodriguez's ideas about animal metaphors, Volpone does not see his beastliness as negative, but rather something to be praised. However, this (at least partial) self-deception is a common theme in the play and can also be seen with Mosca and the heirs, which is examined later.

Another example of the central fox metaphor is when Mosca, already concocting his plan to obtain riches, says of Volpone, "Mr. Fox / Is out on his hole, and ere he shall re-enter / I'll make him languish in his borrowed case" (5.5.6–8). This quote tells us that while Volpone is under the impression that his animal nature is beneficial, Mosca, a master of exploitation, has observed it as a potential weakness. Mosca knows that when Volpone is "out of his hole" and performing his scams that he is at his most vulnerable. Like some of the metaphors found in the Bible, the fox metaphor is used to show both positive and negative traits: Volpone uses the metaphor to describe his strengths, and Mosca uses it to describe his weaknesses. Additionally, Mosca can leverage this vulnerability to his advantage, especially since Volpone trusts him so deeply. Mosca does just such leveraging later in the play when he has Volpone list him as the sole heir of his estate. Once Volpone fakes his own death, Mosca uses the will to force Volpone to either lose his fortune to Mosca or to foil Mosca's plan by confessing his trick and implicating himself in front of the heirs and judges. So, while Volpone thought he was cunning and crafty

like a fox, Mosca was able to undermine him. Indeed, Mosca's decision to call Volpone "Mr. Fox," instead of "the fox," suggests that the characters are aware of the animalistic nature of each other's names and their meanings.

Obviously, Volpone's name also points to a devious nature. As South notes, medieval bestiaries described foxes as cunning animals that often played dead in order to trick birds into coming close enough to catch (142–43). Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* describes the fox as "a deceitful animal, tricking others with its guile, for whenever it has no food it pretends to be dead, and so it snatches and devours the birds that descend to its apparent corpse" (Barney 253). Like the fox of the naturalist book, Volpone uses feigned sickness in order to elicit favors, gifts, and money from the potential heirs who hoped they would inherit Volpone's wealth. Volpone even directly alludes to this bestiary scene when he says,

> Now, now, my clients
> Begin their visitation! Vulture, kite,
> Raven, and gor-crow, all my birds of prey,
> That think me turning carcass, now they come:
> I am not for 'em yet. (1.2.87–91)

Here, as "birds of prey," his heirs are lured by the possibility of feeding on his fox carcass; but like the fox of lore, Volpone instead consumes the gifts and precious items they bring to grow his own fortune.

At risk of stating the obvious, reviewing the significance of the other characters' animal names sets us up to better appreciate the curious twist Jonson gives his divergent characters. Voltore's name derives from the Latin *vultur* and Italian *avvoltoio*, both meaning "vulture." Given that Voltore is an advocate and represents Corvino, Corbaccio, and Mosca during the

court scenes toward the end of the play, one can imagine Voltore as the vulture picking at the scraps of Bonario's and Celia's defenses in order to win the case for himself and the other "animals." Voltore weaves a story about Bonario's desire to kill his father and his attempted murder of Volpone as "he dragged forth / The aged gentleman, that had there lain, bed-rid, / Three years and more, out off his innocent couch" (4.5.80–82). He also claims that Celia has been unfaithful to her husband and is secretly Bonario's lover. Because Celia and Bonario have only themselves as defenders, it is easy for Voltore to take their actions and rework them in a way that aids Volpone and the heirs.

Similar in their bird-nature, both Corvino's and Corbaccio's names are derived from the Latin *corvus*[7] and Italian *corvo*, which mean "crow" and "raven." They too are scavengers attempting to feed off of Volpone's "carcass," but they lack some of the aggressiveness of Voltore. Voltore was the first heir to make his appearance during the course of the play and visit Volpone (1.3), while Corvino and Corbaccio, lesser scavengers, appear afterward.[8] Like Voltore, they also testify against Bonario and Celia during the trial, but again only after Voltore has set an example. Voltore delivers a long tale about the awfulness of Celia and Bonario, only after which Corbaccio steps up to call Bonario "an utter stranger to [his] loins" (4.5.109) and Corvino adds that Celia "is a whore, / Of most hot exercise, more than a partridge" (ll. 117–18). Without Voltore's boldness and storytelling, Corvino's and Corbaccio's testimonies would have been far less impactful. Nonetheless, Corvino and Corbaccio are equally evil in their own ways, willing to sacrifice their family members to inherit from Volpone.

[7] *Corvus* is also the scientific genus of crows and ravens.

[8] Edward Partridge observes that "the order of these visits is interesting: vulture, raven, crow. This probably is the order in which the circling birds would descend on the carrion. First, the vulture comes down, being the largest and the most voracious of the birds of prey" (85).

Volpone and the "birds of prey," of course, are not the only animalistically christened characters of the play. Volpone's servant Mosca is likewise named, his name meaning "fly." He is also commonly referred to as a "parasite" by other characters in the play and acknowledges this nickname himself. In one such acknowledgment, Mosca rejoices, "Oh! Your parasite / Is a most precious thing, dropped from above, / Not bred 'mongst clouds and clot-poles here on earth" (3.1.7–9). These lines are intriguing initially because, like Volpone in 5.3.119, Mosca is using an animal metaphor self-referentially, and the reference to "above" could be alluding to Mosca's surname—he's not simply a parasite, but also a fly, free to rise above the earth. These lines show Mosca reveling in his parasitism. Despite the other characters using "parasite" insultingly,[9] Mosca enjoys his nature. Moreover, Mosca's claims that he was "dropped from above" and not created "here on earth," are fascinating because Mosca is challenging his place in the Great Chain of Being.[10] He is not a simple, earthly creature. In his eyes, the parasite is something greater than animals and greater than even human; rather, the parasite is heavenly, dropped from the sky like a blessing. This metaphor is made more enticing as we look to examples of flies elsewhere. For example, the flies described in Exodus also hold a fascinating position (or lack thereof) on the Great Chain of Being. Moses threatens Pharoah that "if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies upon thee" and "there came a grievous

---

[9] See examples of the negative use of "parasite" from Voltore (3.4.16 and 5.7.1), Bonario (4.5.15), and Corbaccio (5.3.64).

[10] Flies were notably complex for Early Modern writers and scientists: they were simultaneously fascinating and disgusting. Karen Edwards' "Milton's Reformed Animals: An Early Modern Bestiary" summarizes this conversation best. Edwards notes that "the creature is insignificant, contemptible, and short-lived . . . Unlike the modern 'bug,' however, the early modern 'fly' can occasionally be found in rhetorically elevated contexts. Flies are among those creeping things included in a centuries-long religious and intellectual tradition of extolling the wonders of tiny creatures" (159). Edwards continues: "The period's divided attitude clearly manifests itself in Thomas Mouffets's chapters on flies in *Theatre of Insects*. Chapter 1 begins by comparing the fly's wings to the colors of the peacock (q.v.), the agility of its snout to the elephant's (q.v.) trunk, and its prowess and valor to that of human beings. The discussion then moves suddenly to a general denunciation: 'All of them are begotten of filth and nastinesse, to which they most willingly cleave, and resort especially to such places which are so unclean and filthy'" (Mouffet qtd in Edwards 160).

swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies" (Ex. 8. 21, 24). At first glance, these verses make flies out to be a severe, "grievous" plague that causes "corruption." This is much like how Mosca goes from heir to heir (or house to house, as in Exodus) and leaves nothing but corrupted relationships and people in his wake. Still, the flies in Exodus were not only a plague. For the people of Israel, those flies were a blessing sent directly from God that aided their release from captivity. As such, Biblical flies could be considered "dropped from above" like Mosca. In this way, Mosca's position on the Great Chain of Being is complicated. He is still animalistic, but not an earthly animal. He's still a plague, but also a possible blessing.

Mosca continues to praise parasites later in the passage, calling them "sparks" with an "excellent nature" (l. 32). Through these lines, Mosca continues to distinguish himself from the other "animals" in the play, though he too overestimates his cleverness in the end. In addition to these specific lines, Mosca's nickname of "parasite" comments on his very nature. Appropriately for a parasite, he lives by the meats of Volpone's table. Likewise, he is constantly observing the lives of Volpone's potential heirs (as a fly on the wall) and feeds off of their hopes for riches. The point of Mosca's name, and nickname, then, is to point out his pest-like nature as well as his seemingly small—but ultimately influential—presence.

One trait that all these characters have in common is arrogance. They each believe that they are successfully manipulating other characters. Volpone, for example, believes that he is tricking Voltore, Corvino, and Corbaccio into giving him riches. Those three, on the other hand, all believe they are successfully persuading Volpone to make heirs on them. Mosca, finally, is performing the most trickery: helping Volpone swindle the heirs while simultaneously plotting against Volpone. Like the birds drawn to the fox "carcass" in *Etymologies*, all these characters

foolishly let their guards down around foes they believe to be weaker and duller. Why is this? In Arthur Lovejoy's book *The Great Chain of Being*, the author discusses the principle of plentitude, explaining that "the limitations of each species of creature, which define its place in the scale, are indispensable to that infinite differentiation of things" (216). In other words, each tier on the Great Chain of Being contains different perfections and limitations. Humans have perfections not found in other creatures, yet lack other perfections. Volpone sees his foxish cleverness as a perfection but cannot see his vulnerability like Mosca can. The heirs are all excellent scavengers but lack the mental capacity of their smarter foes. Mosca is a skilled purveyor of information but is ultimately undermined by his untrustworthiness. In short, all these characters come to their downfalls because they believe that the unique gifts given to their positions on the Great Chain of Being make them better than those around them.

What about the characters with non-animal surnames, though? While the most obvious and most frequent animal metaphors are attributed to Volpone, Mosca, and the heirs, others in the play like Lady Would-be, Celia, and Bonario are not exempt from similar comparisons. Like the "birds of prey" circling Volpone for his money, his potential female heiress, Lady Would-be, is given a similarly predatory nickname. While preparing to finally ensnare the greedy heirs in his trap, Volpone elatedly imagines the soon-to-be-disappointed persons saying,

> I shall have, instantly, my vulture, crow,
> Raven, come flying hither, on the news
> To peck my carrion, my she-wolf, and all,
> Greedy, and full of expectation— (5.2.64–67)

Although by this point in the play the audience would be familiar with the metaphors used for the men (vulture, crow, and raven), the "she-wolf" metaphor is new, and it is thought-provoking

too. While birds of prey can be aggressive and frightening, they seem barely threatening compared to the image of a wolf. While the birds are vicious scavengers, the wolf is an apex predator. This image suggests not only that Lady Would-be is intimidating and ferocious, but also that she is the most dangerous of the heirs. While she seems harmless enough on the surface, it is easy to see how she earned this nickname from Volpone. One reason is that she is the hardest heir to control. Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore all operate more or less in the ways that Mosca and Volpone expect and ask them to (like going along with accusing Celia and Bonario). Lady Would-be, on the other hand, they have less control over. When she first converses with Volpone in the play, Volpone refers to her as a "storm" and a "disease" (3.4.39, 62) because she is so overwhelming and because he cannot get rid of her. Despite Volpone's obvious hints that he wants her to stop talking and leave (ll. 73, 57) Lady Would-be is simply unaware of them and only leaves when Mosca lies that he has seen her husband with a courtesan. Because of her excessive passion, overbearance, and thickness, Volpone and Mosca cannot control her actions as they can with the other heirs, which makes her a natural danger to their plots.

Celia, too, has animal metaphors attributed to her character, though overall less severe and obvious compared to those of the men and Lady Would-be. The most severe of Celia's metaphors comes while Corvino is trying to convince the weeping Celia to sleep with Volpone. Corvino calls her a "whore, / Crocodile, that hast [her] tears prepared" (3.7.118–119). As we see throughout the play, Corvino does not view his wife as honest. His reference to insincere "crocodile tears" in this line reminds the audience of this dynamic. Later in the play, Corvino reasserts before the judges that Celia is "a whore, / Of most hot exercise, more than a partridge" (4.5.117–118). While "partridge" may seem like a mild, and odd, comparison, Early Modern audiences would likely have connected this to the bird's descriptions in early bestiaries. For

example, Pliny's *Natural History* describes partridges, both males and females, as extraordinarily lustful birds. In describing the females specifically, Pliny notes that "hen partridges in fact deceive even their own mates," by repeatedly moving the position of their nests (355). He also suggests that "in no other creature is concupiscence so active. If the hens stand facing the cocks they become pregnant by the afflatus that passes out of them. . . . Even the draught of air from cocks flying over them, and often merely the sound of a cock crowing, makes them conceive" (357). In short, Corvino's choice to compare his wife to a partridge suggests that she has an extreme sexual thirst and that she is deceptive by nature. Such a statement from Celia's own husband would certainly have added credibility to Voltore's earlier accusation that she and Bonario were lovers, darkening the smear on her reputation in court, though we know that none of these accusations are true.

Like Celia, the metaphors tagged to Bonario throughout the play are relatively mild. Upon first appearing in the play, Bonario is confronted by Mosca who greets him warmly. Bonario, however, is clearly familiar with Mosca's duplicitous behavior and scorns the parasite. Mosca responds that it "'tis inhuman" that Bonario should judge him before knowing him (3.1.17). Being "inhuman," however, is hardly severe compared to the animal names that Corbaccio uses later. While Bonario and Celia are on trial, Corbaccio testifies against his son, calling him a "monster of men, swine, goat, wolf" (4.5.111). Because Corbaccio has been convinced by Mosca that Bonario intended to kill him, it is natural that he would think of his son as such an animal. Of particular interest is how Corbaccio demands that Bonario "speak not, thou viper" (l. 112). This hearkens back to the Genesis account of Satan taking a serpent's form to beguile Eve. Corbaccio seems to think that Bonario is as crafty with his words as the snake in Eden and, given his choice of "viper" over more benign serpentine names, that Bonario's words

are even poisonous. Though Bonario is ultimately vindicated in court, his father's declaration is so powerful that it stops even Bonario from defending himself for a while.

Part 4: The Function of Animal Metaphors and Authority

While the metaphoric language itself gives us a good preview of how these metaphors make audiences view and sympathize with different characters, the animal metaphors better illuminate the play's gender issues when we examine the authority behind each metaphor. Certainly, the reliability of a character or narrator and the function of a metaphor often changes how we analyze a passage. If, for example, a narrator is notoriously biased or has a skewed viewpoint, their words are not always meant to be taken at face value. Likewise, clues like frequency, punctuation, and context can affect how readers unravel repeating metaphors and themes. In this regard, note that the animal metaphors in *Volpone* fall into three main categories of function and authority: descriptors, nicknames, and proper names. Descriptors, here, are animal metaphors given when one character describes another. In line with Rodriguez's article, these descriptors most commonly take the form of insults. Celia being called a "partridge" (4.5.118), Lady Would-be being dubbed a "she-wolf" (5.2.66), Bonario being likened to a "viper" (4.5.112), and Corvino being called a "buffalo" (4.4.15) are prime examples of descriptor animal metaphors. There are also cases of descriptor metaphors being used as a compliment, as when Mosca praises himself for being a "subtle snake" [3.1.6], alluding to his smooth craftiness; but these compliments are frequently self-referential and are certainly the exceptions. Like most of the animal metaphors we use on a daily basis, this variety of metaphor is a subjective description given by one person about another: they may be biased and inaccurate depictions of a character. For example, we know that Celia is not the lustful, deceitful character that she is made out to be when she is called a partridge. Likewise, while Mosca's self-dubbing of "subtle snake"

is a compliment from his skewed perspective, viewers will likely see him as sneaky and venomous.[11] In short, descriptor metaphors must be carefully analyzed for accuracy and bias.

The nickname metaphors constitute the second type of animal metaphor. Like the descriptor metaphors, these are animal names used by one or more characters to describe another character. However, these metaphors are slightly different from descriptors in that they are more widely acknowledged or used by characters in the play. The best examples of metaphors like these are found when Volpone is referred to as a "fox," when Mosca is referred to as a "parasite," or when Volpone refers to his "bird of prey." Rather than being a simple insulting metaphor used during the heat of an argument, these nicknames are used multiple times throughout the play and seem to "stick" to characters more. The nicknamed character himself may even use this metaphor, as shown earlier with Volpone (5.3.119) and Mosca (3.1.7). While these metaphors are not proper names, their repeated use and wider acceptance by other characters make them distinguishable from the descriptor metaphors.

What is interesting about these first two metaphors is the authority by which they are assigned. Descriptor and nickname metaphors are almost always pronounced by one or more characters about another character in the play. With the exception of Mosca's "parasite" metaphor, which Jonson lists both in the cast of characters and in The Argument, descriptors and nicknames are supplied by the characters. As such, audiences have to question the authority and veracity of these metaphors. As with any line or argument given by a character, these metaphors are subject to that character's temperament and limited view. Despite Bonario being called "inhuman" and a "swine," we know that he is neither and that these terms are simply used to

[11] Like Corbaccio calling Bonario a "serpent" and demanding that he not speak, this may also remind us of Satan's serpent form in Genesis. However, as shown earlier, the Bible tells us that the twelve apostles were also admonished by Jesus to be wise like serpents, so this is another example of how these metaphors can show both positive and negative personality traits.

confuse and discredit him. In short, audiences must always take these descriptions and nicknames with a grain of salt.

The third type of metaphor, however, is quite different from the other two. These metaphors are proper name metaphors—where a character shares their surname with an animal. These are important because Jonson frequently named characters in a way that reflected their personalities. T. Meier notes that Jonson's "characters may be divided into roughly four groups, according to the particular way in which each was named. One group was given names which indicate outstanding physical characteristics or deformities. Others were named by profession or position, and by actions or manner; still another group was named metaphorically" (88). Obviously, the characters of Corvino, Corbaccio, Voltore, Volpone, and Mosca, who have animalistic surnames, fall into the last classification. The main difference between surname animal metaphors and the other types throughout the play is the authority of the person assigning the proper name metaphors. While the other types of metaphors were given by characters within the play, the proper name metaphors were assigned by Jonson. While this does not mean that the proper name metaphors are bias-free, it does mean that they are purposeful and meant to be taken seriously by the audience as Jonson is using these metaphors to craft how viewers react to those characters. Or, at least, these would be names and metaphors that viewers would accept more readily than descriptors and nicknames given Jonson's naming trends.

The most important aspect of these different types of metaphors and authority can be seen when comparing the metaphors used with men and those used with women. The male characters fall across all three spectrums of metaphor. Nonetheless, Jonson gave almost all of the significant male characters, Bonario being the exception, animalistic proper names. The women characters like Lady Would-be, Celia, and Lady Would-be's maids, however, are only given descriptor

metaphors by other characters. None of the female characters are fitted with animalistic proper names. Given that descriptor metaphors are commonly unreliable and biased, this suggests that viewers should make a stronger connection between the men and animals while questioning (if not wholly dismissing) most of the animalistic metaphors attributed to the women characters. Rodriguez's article adds another interesting layer to these findings if one reconsiders how animal metaphors could affect a person's place on the Great Chain of Being. Those characters to whom Jonson attributed the strongest animal metaphors (the proper name metaphors) are ranked lowly on the Great Chain of Being, as animals are lower than humans. In this way, Jonson is not only dehumanizing those characters and their negative actions, but he is also assigning them a level of worth. Volpone, Mosca, and the heirs are *not* meant to be our role models as they could be considered subhuman.[12] The other characters, however, are given more human characteristics, raising them above the animalistic characters. Lady Would-be is an example of this. As seen earlier, the animal metaphors associated with Lady Would-be are less severe than those given to many of the male characters. Despite being arguably "wolfish," as Volpone suggests, her name is also distinctly human. Throughout the play, she is referred to as "Lady" or "Madam," titles that are only given to humans. So, despite being a negative character, Jonson has given her a title that elevates her above characters like Volpone and Mosca on the Great Chain of Being.

---

[12] This ordering on the Great Chain of Being makes cultural sense for Jonson's audience too, according to observations by Robert Kiełtyka in his article about the linguistic development of animalistic terms. Kiełtyka notes that the Great Chain of Being (which he refers to as the GCB) dates back to the times of Plato and Aristotle (313), meaning that the concept had certainly been around long enough to be familiar to Jonson's Early Modern audience. But Kiełtyka also observes, when talking about terms and phrases used exclusively in reference to animals, that "the so-called GCB-level-conditioned animal terms are—generally speaking—exclusively European in nature, and, more to the point, their first attested use can be dated back to the 16th century." (317). In other words, the time during which Jonson was writing was right about the time that people were starting to use animal-specific terms, terms which, when applied to humans, were almost always negative in meaning (316).

Celia and Bonario are similar to Lady Would-be in that they, too, have been given less demeaning animal attributes than Volpone, Mosca, and the heirs. Unlike Lady Would-be, however, all of the negative animal metaphors assigned to Celia and Bonario are descriptors that are obviously inaccurate and slanderous. But even more captivating is how Jonson chose to name these two characters, for their names suggest that they are neither animalistic nor distinctly human. Celia's name comes from the Latin *celi*, meaning "heaven." Given her benevolent and gentle nature paired with her name, Celia could be classified as one of those "celestial creatures" (Rodriguez 81) ranked below God alone on the Great Chain of Being. Likewise, Bonario's name comes from the root *bon*, meaning "good." Like Celia's name, Bonario's name suggests that he comes from a higher tier of morality than the other characters. As such, Celia's and Bonario's names not only rank them above the animals on the Great Chain of Being but also above most, if not all, humans. In short, their names suggest that they hold the most elevated positions in the entire play.

Part 5: Animal Metaphor in Action

Names and insults are the most obvious animal metaphors in the play, but they are certainly not *Volpone*'s only animal references. We can also see animal metaphors play out in the actions of various characters, as noted by South. The most notable examples of animalistic actions are found in the play's predatory language, where one can see a character verbally "hunting" another character. As mentioned earlier, South and Dutton point out that Volpone's name is closely linked to bestiary and fable imagery, especially that of Aesop's fox inducing the crow to drop its hard-earned cheese. Like the crow that his surname suggests he is, Corvino was lured in by the appeal of Volpone's fortune, only to be tricked into dropping his most prized cheese: Celia. After Volpone hears Mosca's glowing admiration of Corvino's wife and her

beauty, the clever fox, eyeing the crow jealously, decides that he must have Celia and sends Mosca to win her from Corvino. He even alludes directly to his fable counterpart, saying:

> A witty merchant, the fine bird, Corvino,
>
> That have such moral emblems on your name,
>
> Should not have sung your shame; and dropped your cheese:
>
> To let the Fox laugh at your emptiness. (5.8.11–14)

Jonson's undisguised reference to Aesop's fox shows that Volpone is not only a hunter but a purposeful, self-aware one. Throughout the rest of the play, Volpone continues to "hunt" Corvino, the other heirs, and their possessions.

On top of the predation subtly playing out between her husband and Volpone, Celia's relationships with the characters in the play is very noticeably linked to predatory language as well. This is perhaps most obvious in her relationship with Corvino. By all appearances in the beginning of the play, Corvino is a kind, while gullible, man with a beautiful wife. In the play's second act, however, the true nature of Corvino and Celia's marriage is revealed. Like the crow with its beak clamped tightly around the cheese, Corvino guards Celia very carefully. Mosca notes of Corvino and Celia's home that

> There is a guard of spies ten thick upon her,
>
> All his whole household; each of which is set
>
> Upon his fellow, and have all their charge,
>
> When he goes out, when he comes in, examined. (1.5.123–26)

While this may look like Corvino is protecting his beloved wife, it is actually his jealous way of shutting Celia off from the rest of the world. Corvino is a domestic tyrant, and, as we can see when he compares Celia to a crocodile and a partridge, he mistrusts his wife. In one scene,

Corvino goes into a jealous rage and enters the stage "*With his sword in hand, dragging in Celia*" (2.5).[13] Corvino accuses Celia of dishonoring him by flirting with the men in the street, questions her virtue, and even calls her a whore. When Celia attempts to stave off his anger by begging patience, Corvino remarks to Celia that he "should strike / This steel into, with as many stabs, / As thou wert gaz'd upon with goatish eyes" (2.5.32–34). Corvino's unsettling treatment of his wife[14] shows the predatory nature of their relationship. The stage descriptions even seem predatory, with the frightening Corvino dragging his wife across the stage like a sort of wild beast dragging off its recent kill. Rather than elevating Celia to the celestial realm on the Great Chain of Being, as Jonson seems to do, Corvino's actions diminish Celia's position to that of a frightened animal.

This predatory storyline becomes even more defined later in Volpone's interactions with Celia. Left alone by Corvino with the supposedly unconscious Volpone, Celia laments that men are so eager to corrupt honor and sacred "cause of life" and to make sexual relations into "the basest of circumstances" (3.7.135–37). Hearing Celia's lament, Volpone "leaps off from his couch" (l. 139) and begins to woo Celia. First, he condemns Corvino's actions (even though he

[13] Some versions of the text, like the digitized Project Gutenberg version, do actually give this stage direction. Other versions, like the Oxford World's Classics *Five Plays* version, do not, or they give a different direction. In *Five Plays*, there is a direction later in the scene, "[Taking his sword]" (1.32), and the following dialogue line also mentions the sword (1.33). But this version does not direct Corvino to drag Celia across the stage.

[14] Modern playgoers might suppose that Corvino's treatment of his wife (both physically and emotionally) was the norm for the era. However, numerous primary sources and scholarly works suggest otherwise. In *Family Life in the Age of Shakespeare*, Bruce Young notes that "the idea that men were superior to women was certainly one view but was not the only one current in the period. Among other models was the view that men and women are complementary. . . . Another view, sometimes presented by men, was that women are actually superior to men." He also remarks that "some have even noted that the treatises and sermons about a wife's role and in particular the notion that women should be 'silent and obedient' reflect wishful thinking on the part of the writers." (42). Likewise, Robert Matz's introduction to *Two Early Modern Marriage Sermons* notes that the two sermon writers, Smith and Whately, both wrote about the practice of wife beating. However, they did not agree on whether or not it was appropriate (1). Furthermore, Matz notes that "these sermons cannot tell us what early modern marriage was—not only because we do not know how much married couples took their advice, but also because the advice they offered was frequently ambiguous or contradictory." (8). So, though Celia and Corvino's relationship was not entirely uncommon for the era, the level of physical abuse would have been polarizing at best for Jonson's audience.

caused those actions) as well as Corvino's financial motivations. Following this, he bribes Celia with the riches and glamorous lifestyle she could have with him. Celia, however, resists all of Volpone's alluring advances and his romantic facade cracks. When she has refused him one too many times, Volpone says,

> I do degenerate and abuse my nation,
> To play with opportunity thus long:
> I should have done the act, and then have parleyed.
> Yield, or I'll force thee. (3.7.262–65)

It is clear that Volpone will not take Celia's "no" for an answer. With the first two lines, Volpone suggests that he has, up to this point, been toying with Celia as a cat toys with a mouse. But now that his advances have been rejected, it is time to stop stalking and go for the kill. Luckily for Celia, however, Bonario fights off Volpone and saves Celia from the impending rape. What this scene shows is Volpone's slow stalk of his prey. He begins by trying to lure Celia in by showing her sympathy and attempts to sway her with glamour. Flattery and bribes, which fit with a fox's devious nature, have, after all, worked with all the other major characters. When Celia is unmoved, however, Volpone finally resorts to violence and force to get his way with her. He may have seemed generous and kind in the beginning, but his violent and predatory nature shows through in the end.

Where Celia was preyed upon, the opposite is true for Lady Would-be. In this case, she is the predator and the play's other characters become the prey. Shortly before Celia's visit to Volpone, Lady Would-be visits the supposedly ailing man. As the Lady is called in and she and Volpone begin their conversation, Volpone blatantly comments on Lady Would-be's aggressive nature. He notes, "The sun, the sea will sooner both stand still, / Than her eternal tongue!

Nothing can ’scape it!” (ll. 84–85). The last part of this line is particularly interesting because it is now Lady Would-be’s tongue that is acting as a sort of predator—it traps and holds Volpone hostage as Lady Would-be marches from one topic to the next. No matter how Volpone tries to hint to her that their visit must come to an end, Lady Would-be and her prowling tongue continue their hunt. Additionally, Lady Would-be is not above preying on other women. Before her visit with Volpone, Lady Would-be perceives a few errors in her appearance. She calls in her two maids and proceeds to harangue and mock the women. For example, when one of her maids remarks that only a single hair is out of place, Lady Would-be responds to both maids, “Does’t so forsooth? And where was your dear sight / When it did so, forsooth? What now? Bird-eyed? / And you, too? Pray you both approach, and mend it” (3.4.19–21). This insulting descriptor of “bird-eyed” associates the maids with the bird characteristics discussed in regards to Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore. And, like the birds described in early bestiaries, the maids are bidden to “approach” the waiting predator. Lady Would-be does not jump out to catch them, as Volpone does with his birds, but the anxiety felt by the maids as they approach Lady Would-be must parallel that of the scavenger birds approaching a carcass for the first time.

This bird metaphor also provokes the play’s auditors, which becomes clear if the line is read with the use of homonyms and altered punctuation. While modern readers of the play see “Pray you both approach, and mend it,” Early Modern audiences, who did not have the printed play, might have heard “prey, you both; approach, and mend it.” Heard this way, Lady Would-be’s reprimand could be seen as one of the most conspicuous predator metaphors in the play. Whatever the interpretation, Lady Would-be’s dealings with Volpone, her husband, and her maids show that she is at least as aggressive and predatory as Volpone is and underlines her role

as the “she-wolf.” Ultimately, her aggressive speech, public shaming, and quest after Volpone’s money put her on a predatory level almost as remarkable as that of the play’s men.

Part 6: Celia, Bonario, and the Argument for Women

How, in the end, do all these metaphors come together to form a women’s defense argument? For starters, we can see that the most obvious animal metaphors and the highest number of metaphors are given to the characters of Volpone, Mosca, and the heirs. Lady Would-be, Celia, and Bonario, on the other hand, have far fewer and far less severe metaphors attributed to them (except for where Lady Would-be is deemed a “she-wolf”). Secondly, how the characters are named and the characteristics given to them by Jonson allude to their place in the Great Chain of Being. Volpone, Mosca, Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore all have animalistic surnames and characteristics, which ranks them lowest on the Great Chain of Being. Lady Would-be is named in a distinctly human way, acts slightly better than the animals, and holds a slightly higher position. Finally, Bonario and Celia are both named in a way and act in ways that reflect their high morals and godliness, elevating them to the highest position on the Great Chain of Being.

Why make this distinction with Celia, Bonario, and Lady Would-be occupying higher positions than the other characters? Situated within the discursive parameters of the pamphlet debates, one clear possibility is that these three characters are meant to function as the essential building blocks for a women’s defense argument. Lady Would-be may stand out as an odd choice for a women’s defense. If Jonson was making a case for women in *Volpone*, the inclusion of such a dislikeable, cruel woman would appear counterproductive. But her role here is crucial. In fact, including the “bad” example of a woman was just as important for a defense as the “good” example. Benson argues,

> It was perfectly possible for a misogynist writer of this period to present his attack without reference to a positive notion of woman, but the reverse was not true; all defenses of women refute the opposing case. The *querelle des femmes* became a *querelle* when pro-woman writers responded to the case against women. Thus, an understanding of the negative case is the essential starting point for an understanding of the literature of the *querelle* as a whole. (xi)

In other words, *Volpone* could not act as a true defense without a negative foil against which to compare a good woman. By developing the character of Lady Would-be, Jonson was acknowledging the concerns of his society, rhetorically conceding that some women could be overbearing, monstrous, and tyrannical. Without such a character, Jonson would be ignoring the complexities of the female sex. Nonetheless, Jonson's treatment of Lady Would-be throughout the play makes a case against such brutish behavior and helps to rebuke this facet of womanhood.

Where Lady Would-be demonstrates what an Early Modern woman should *not* be, Celia's role is the opposite. She is the epitome of Early Modern womanhood: virtuous, kind, and beautiful. Thus, she is the kind of female character that a defense argument would need at the forefront of its story. She is the embodiment of chastity in *Volpone* even in the face of overwhelming pressure to forsake her virtue. When faced with adversity, Celia repeatedly calls on God and begs Corvino, "Sir, kill me, rather: I will take down poison, / Eat burning coals, do anything—" (3.7.94–95). Celia would rather die than give up her chastity and honor. In addition to representing chastity, Celia is also an excellent role model for mercy. Despite being used and falsely accused by Mosca, Corvino, Corbaccio, Voltore, and Volpone, Celia never once reacts in anger. Remarkably, she eventually attempts to soften the punishments doled out to her accusers.

After Volpone's ruse has been discovered, Corvino and Voltore reply to the judges, "we beg favor" to which Celia tacks on "and mercy" (5.12.105). Celia is no longer defending herself but is instead pleading on behalf of the husband who abused her and the others involved. In this way, she shows audiences that it is possible to be merciful and forgiving even after the worst offenses.

Jonson's defense argument, however, cannot end with just Celia and Lady Would-be. After all, many defense pamphlets not only uphold the image of good, virtuous women, but they also sue for better behavior from men. Clearly, Volpone, Mosca, Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore are not examples of idealized manhood, but Bonario is. In his first on-stage conversation with Mosca, Bonario is clear that he wants nothing to do with a man he sees as vile, citing Mosca's sloth, flattery, and "means of feeding" (3.2.9–11). Only when Mosca confesses his wrongdoings and his sorrow for them, though feigned, does Bonario agree to hear him out. Nonetheless, he remains suspicious of Mosca's intentions and truthfulness. Bonario is correct in his suspicions since it was Mosca who convinced Corbaccio to rewrite his will and name Volpone as his sole heir. Though Corbaccio did admit that gaining Volpone's fortune would eventually benefit his son, his selfish intent and lack of honesty are ultimately what cause Bonario's trials.

Despite this betrayal by his father, Bonario is nonetheless able to exhibit his own virtues of honesty and justice throughout his hardships. Meier notes that "Bonario, true to his name . . . remains a good man in *Volpone*. He is unwilling to believe ill of his father, and he saves Celia from being raped. He does not woo Volpone, and he is the only character besides Celia who distrusts Mosca" (90). Intervening during Volpone's attempted rape of Celia, Bonario demands,

> Free the forced lady, or thou diest, impostor.
>
> But that am loth to snatch thy punishment

> Out of the hand of justice, thou shouldst yet
>
> Be made the timely sacrifice of vengeance,
>
> Before this altar, and this dross, thy idol.
>
> Lady, let's quit this place, it is the den
>
> Of villainy; fear naught, you have a guard:
>
> And he, ere long, shall meet his just reward. (3.7.267–74)

A few notable words here show us that Bonario is demonstrating honesty and justice as his virtues. First, he calls Volpone an "impostor," which suggests his disgust with the man's dishonesty. He also refers to justice twice (ll. 269, 274) and vengeance once (l. 270). In particular, Bonario is reluctant to kill Volpone as he believes that justice will take care of Volpone in the end. Additionally, directly before Bonario intercedes on Celia's behalf, Celia cries out, "O! Just God!" (ll. 265), upon which Bonario enters the scene. This seems almost as though Celia's cry for justice summoned Bonario to her aid. Later in the play, we also see Bonario advocating for these same virtues in the court scenes. Before Celia and Bonario are even brought into the court, one of the judges notes that Bonario's reputation "was ever fair and honest" (4.5.60), which shows that Bonario was *known* to exhibit justice and truthfulness. Furthermore, Bonario continues his quest for truth and honesty when Volpone is brought to witness in court. Despite Volpone's falsely frail condition, Bonario insists that he "would have him proved" (4.6.30) and have Volpone testify for himself. Finally, when Volpone's deception is revealed to the court, Bonario rejoices that "heaven could not long let such gross crimes be hid" (5.12.99). In this, his last line in the play, Bonario reasserts his faith in justice and honesty as he glories in the revelation of crimes.

To summarize, then, the characters of Lady Would-be, Celia, and Bonario hold elevated positions on the Great Chain of Being not simply because they are greater than "animals." More importantly, they are each playing a distinctive role in *Volpone*'s defense of women. Lady Would-be's inclusion acknowledges the baseness of some women and the concerns of those who write misogynistic pamphlets. Bonario and Celia, on the other hand, were added "as contrasts to the wickedness and stupidity of the main characters and as tokens of hope for a better society after the Volpones, Moscas, and Corvinos of the world have been destroyed by their own ruthless greed and ambition" (Henderson and McManus 121). By associating Bonario and Celia with few truthful animal metaphors and naming them in a distinctly different way, Jonson was able to draw attention away from the chaos created by Volpone, Mosca, Corvino, Corbaccio, and Voltore in order to focus on the important argument for the moral status of women upheld by the actions of virtuous men.

Part 7: Conclusions and Jonson's Contribution to the "Woman Question"

Shaughnessy describes *Volpone* as "an anatomy of folly and vice in turn-of-the-seventeenth-century London" and "a depiction of the duplicity, viciousness and predatory greed that lurks at the heart of human nature" (38). This complements Edward Partridge's analysis that *Volpone* is a play in which "men capable of reason reduce themselves to an animal level of selfishness. The whole force of the animal imagery in the scenes with Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino comes from the certainty that we are dealing with men, not animals" (82–83). Indeed, Jonson's inordinate use of alienating animal metaphors and animalistic surnames for Volpone, Mosca, and the heirs tells us that these characters represent quite well the complexities of human nature and highlight the disturbing and unnatural actions of some men. Harking back to the use of animal metaphors in pamphlets like Anger's, these metaphors allude to the lies and deceptions

employed by misogynistic writers who were writing against women in the pamphlet wars. They show that to use such slander is to act below mankind's station and the intelligence afforded to mankind's tier on the Great Chain of Being.

Celia, then, stands as a testament to the many virtues of Early Modern women who patiently weathered the onslaught of slander and abuse. She also, however, serves as a warning of what can happen when women are as perfect or merciful as Celia. Celia was nearly raped by Volpone and also almost condemned by the judges. The ideal woman, Jonson appears to be saying, is at risk in a world that is so filled with vice, greed, and villainy. If this ideal of womanhood is at risk, should it then be discarded for a more realistic version like that of Lady Would-be? Certainly not. Instead, Jonson gives us Bonario, a character as chivalric, honest, and just as Celia is chaste and merciful. Bonario literally becomes Celia's "guard" (ll. 273) and stands with her against their accusers. This provides a model for Early Modern men and encourages them to fight against the hyprocrisy of male writers slandering women in the pamphlet wars, as well as in society more broadly. If these men and women choose to stand for moral order together, they will eventually be triumphant and see justice served, as Celia and Bonario did. Ultimately, *Volpone* provides a clearer picture of what Jonson believed society could be: a place where virtuous men and women worked in partnership to fight against the darker side of human nature and where both sexes worked in conjunction to the benefit of both.

A little more than a decade after *Volpone* was first performed, the pamphlet wars were still producing full-throated debate. In this new generation of pamphleteers, Ester Sowernam seems to pick up where Jonson left off when she wrote, "The woman was married to *Adam*, as with a most sure and inseparable band, so with a most affectionate and dutifull loue, *Adam* was enioyned to receaue his wife." Sowernam's depiction of Adam and Eve was a message about

mutual love and respect between men and women, much like the relationship between Celia and Bonario. Perhaps this was future Jonson envisioned—a future based on partnerships rather than divisions and a celebration of virtues despite human failings.

Works Cited

"The Aberdeen Bestiary: Folio 16r—Leucrota, continued. De vulpe; the fox." *The University of Aberdeen*. http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f16r. Accessed 16 October 2017.

Anger, Jane. *Her Protection of Women*. Richard Jones and Thomas Orwin, London, 1589.

Barney, Stephen A., et al. *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Benson, Pamela J. *Texts from the Querelle*, vol. 1 Ashgate, 2008.

Boehrer, Bruce. "Animal Studies and the Deconstruction of Character." *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 2, 2009, pp. 542–547., www.jstor.org/stable/25614296. Accessed 18 February 2017.

Burgess, G., Wymer, R., and Lawrence, J., editors. *The Accession of James I: Historical and Cultural Consequences*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

Dutton, Richard. "Volpone and Beast Fable: Early Modern Analogic Reading." *The Huntington Library Quarterly,* vol. 67, no. 3, 2004., pp. 347–370 *MLA International Bibliography*, https://search-proquest-com.erl.lib.byu.edu/docview/215265872?accountid=4488. Accessed 14 February 2017.

Edwards, Karen. "Fly." *Milton Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2006, pp. 159–164, doi: 10.1111/j.1094-348X.2006.00130_4.x. Accessed 17 October 2017.

Habermann, Ina. *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003.

Harvey, Elizabeth D. "Beastly Physic." *Shakespeare Studies*, vol. 41, 2013., pp. 114–124, *Research Library: Literature and Language*, https://search-proquest-com.erl.lib.byu.edu/docview/1447197880?accountid=4488. Accessed 14 February 2017.

Henderson, Katherine Usher, and Barabara F. McManus. *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540–1640*. University of Illinois Press, 1985.

The Holy Bible. Authorized King James Version, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000.

Jonson, Ben. *Volpone,* or *the Fox*. *Five Plays*, edited by G. A. Wilkes, Oxford University Press, 1981, 219–348.

---. *Volpone, Or, The Fox*, edited by Amy E. Zelmer, Robert Prince, Sue Asscheri, and David Widger, Project Gutenberg, 2013. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4039/4039-h/4039-h.htm. Accessed 25 January 2015.

Kiełtyka, Robert. "The Theory of the Great Chain of Being (GCB) Revisited: The Case of CGB-Level-Conditioned Animal Terms." *SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2015., pp. 313–330. content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?EbscoContent=dGJyMNXb4kSeqLQ4v%2BbwOLCmr0%2BeqLFSs6e4TbSWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGuskyurK5IuePfgeyx43zx1%2BqE&T=P&P=AN&S=R&D=ufh&K=110374460. Accessed 26 April 2017.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea.* Harper Torchbooks, 1960.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed., University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.

Meier, T. "The Naming of Characters in Jonson's Comedies." *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1964, pp. 88–95, *Periodicals Archive Online; Periodicals Index Online*, https://search-proquest-com.erl.lib.byu.edu/docview/1299728741?accountid=4488.

Nashe, Thomas. *The Anatomy of Absurdity*. I. Charlewood and Thomas Hackett, London, 1589.

Partridge, Edward B. *The Broken Compass: A Study of the Major Comedies of Ben Jonson*. Columbia University Press, 1958.

Pliny. *Natural History*. Translated by H. Rackham, vol. 3, Harvard University Press, 1961.

Richmond, Hugh M. "Audience." *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Dictionary of His Stage Context*. 2002.

Rodriguez, Irene Lopez. "Of Women, Bitches, Chickens and Vixens: Animal Metaphors for Women in English and Spanish." *Culture, Language, and Representation*, vol 7, 2009., pp. 77–100. *PDF file*.

"scale, v.3." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2017, www.oed.com/view/Entry/171744. Accessed 16 October 2017.

Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Signet Classic, 1998.

Shaughnessy, Robert. "Twentieth-Century Fox: Volpone's Metamorphosis." *Theatre Research International*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2002, pp. 37–48., doi:10.1017/S0307883302001049. Accessed 30 March 2017.

South, Malcolm H. "Animal Imagery in *Volpone*." *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, vol. 10, 1965., pp. 141–150 *MLA International Bibliography*, https://search-proquest-com.erl.lib.byu.edu/docview/54586846?accountid=4488. Accessed 5 October 2015.

Sowername, Ester. *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman*. Edited by Risa S Bear, University of Oregon Library, 1998.

"vermin, n. (and adj.)." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2017, www.oed.com/view/Entry/222579. Accessed 14 November 2017.