CITY TALK: WOMEN AND COMMODIFICATION IN JONSON'S *EPICOENE*

BY KAREN NEWMAN

> In the liveliest London streets, the shops press one against the other, shops which flaunt behind their hollow eyes of glass all the riches of the world, Indian cashmeres, American revolvers, Chinese porcelains, French corsets, Russian furs and tropical spices; but all these things promising the pleasures of the world bear those deadly white labels on their fronts on which are engraved arabic numerals with laconic characters—£, s, d (pound sterling, shilling, pence). This is the image of commodities as they appear in circulation.
>
> —Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

Against his great house in the Strand, the enterprising Earl of Salisbury opened "Britain's Burse" in 1609; within the year Jonson's *Epicoene* was first produced. With its galleries and arcades lined with shops licensed to carry luxury goods, and its upper rooms available for meeting and conversation, the New Exchange, as it came to be called, was immediately a place of both erotic and economic exchange. Already in 1619, a contemporary observer remarked that "thy shops with prettie wenches swarm, / Which for thy custome are a kind of charme / To idle gallants."[1] There, and in the nascent West End, as John Stow's great *Survey of London* reminds us,

> Their shops made a very gay Shew, by the various foreign Commodities they were furnished with; and, by the Purchasing of them, the People of *London*, and of other Parts of *England*, began to spend extravagantly; whereof great Complaints were made among the graver Sort. There were but a few of these Milliners Shops in the Reign of King *Edward the Sixth*, not above a Dozen in all *London*; but, within forty Years after, about the Year 1580, from the City of *Westminster* along to *London*, every Street became full of them. Some of the Wares sold by these Shop-keepers were, Gloves made in *France* or *Spain*, Kersies of *Flanders* Dye, *French* cloth or Frizado, Owches, Brooches, Agglets made in *Venice* or *Milan*, Daggers, Swords, Knives, Girdles of the *Spanish* Make, Spurs made at *Milan*, *French* or *Milan* Caps, Glasses, painted Cruses, Dials, Tables,

> Cards, Balls, Puppets, Penners, Inkhorns, Toothpicks, Silk-Bottoms and Silver-Bottoms, fine earthen Pots, Pins and Points, Hawks-Bells, Saltcellars, Spoons, Dishes of Tin. Which made such a Shew in the Passengers Eyes, that they could not but gaze on them, and buy some of these knicknacks, though to no Purpose necessary.[2]

Stow's sketch of mercantile London in the early seventeenth century bears an uncanny resemblance to Karl Marx's description of the British metropolis almost two hundred fifty years later. Immediately striking is the sheer proliferation of goods, their variety in kind and provenance, and their mode of presentation as spectacle. Commodities offer the buyer access to a larger world, from the far-flung cities of Europe that were early modern England's access to the east, to the American cowboys and Russian winters of Marx's sketch of nineteenth-century London. Both suggest prodigious excess and the demise of the rare; in short, commodification. And for both, the series—the list of substantives with their respective qualifiers, cosmopolitan or colonial—offers the reader-*cum*-buyer the consumer pleasures Stow and Marx describe.

But there are also, of course, striking differences. Whereas the Stow account bears witness to England's expanding maritime power after 1588 and to growing mercantile relations with Europe, Marx's list of goods testifies to Britain's imperial conquests and world power in the mid-nineteenth century and alludes, at least, to mass production and the development of manufacturing. The *Survey* is characteristically conservative in its solidarity with the "graver Sort" and its critique of London's growth as a center of "conspicuous consumption" where shoppers buy "knicknacks, though to no purpose necessary." The enumeration of Stow's series tends to trivialize the goods named whereas Marx aggrandizes what he describes—they promise all "the pleasures of the world"—but his cosmic tribute is deflated by his ironic periphrasis on "deadly" price tickets that reduce variety to identity—from Russia, to America, to the Orient, these goods are all for sale. Consumption in Marx is revealed to be a function of production rather than access to cosmic expanse and pleasure. Abundance and desire are revealed as scarcity and lack.[3]

Work in political economy has sometimes idealized preindustrial cultures, posing them as versions of economic pastoral, golden ages of household production and self-sufficiency before commodification. Recently that nostalgic cliché has been challenged as scholars

have begun to study the changing world of goods in early modern Europe: not only the quantity and ownership of objects, but their character, how they were acquired and displayed—objects as representations of a culture and its codes, and ownership not merely as a material fact, but fashioned by conventions. Historians have recognized increasingly the role taste and cultural innovation have played in the development of international trade and patterns of economic growth. Such changes in the early modern material environment were both produced by and had enormous impact on social relations.[4]

Women's relation to the processes of commodification has been situated in a variety of ways. In the modern period, we have been targeted as the primary consumers of proliferating goods, and advertising directed at creating markets has been frequently addressed at us. Women have been represented not only as consumers, but as goods themselves, and inversely, goods are often feminized. Baudrillard writes of what he terms the feminization of objects, the object-as-woman as the privileged myth of consumer persuasion: "*Tous les objets se fonts femmes pour être achetés.*"[5] Marx often conceptualized commodity exchange in terms of the object-as-woman in *Capital*, where he uses imagery first of seduction, then rape, to define commodity relations:

> Commodities cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right. We must, therefore, have recourse to their guardians, who are the possessors of commodities. Commodities are things, and therefore lack the power to resist man. If they are unwilling, he can use force; in other words, he can take possession of them.

Marx glosses this analysis of commodities with a note that reveals the intersection of commodification, women, and, interestingly, literary representation:

> In the twelfth-century, so renowned for its piety, very delicate things often appear among these commodities. Thus a French poet of the period enumerates among the commodities to be found in the fair at Lendit, alongside clothing, shoes, leather, implements of cultivation, skins, etc., also "*femmes folles de leurs corps.*"[6]

In equating women and things, Marx betrays a certain anxiety, evinced in his choice of a poetic authority, his euphemism for describing prostitutes, and his lapse into French. Women's relation to

commodities is multiple, even extravagant—we are at once goods, sellers of goods, and consumers of goods, and significantly, in Marx's formulation, the object-as-woman is defined in terms of lack. Goods "lack the power to resist man."

The proliferation of goods described in the *Survey* and their availability for sale in the London exchanges and growing West End represent an early episode in the process of commodification under capitalism. Goods from the continent and from more exotic lands were for the first time available in numbers in England: tobacco, porcelain, imported textiles, metalwork.[7] In the early seventeenth century, woman became the target for contemporary ambivalence toward that process. She is represented in the discourses of Jacobean London as at once consumer and consumed—her supposed desire for goods is linked to her sexual availability.

Marriage sermons, conduct books, popular forms such as plays, ballads and jest books—the discourses which managed and produced femininity in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—all conflate the sexual and the economic when representing feminine desire. Bullinger's popular handbook, *The Christian State of Matrimony*, translated into English by Myles Coverdale, includes a lively dramatic dialogue in which the whore ridicules her client: "No more money, no more love." Thomas Becon complained that women were moved to every kind of sexual dishonesty for as little as a "morsel of bread or a potte of bear." Though examples of this conflation could be considerably multiplied, more important for my purpose is the synecdochic representation of feminine desire—sexual or acquisitive—as an open mouth. Becon inveighs against the whore who is never satisfied "but is like as one that goeth by the way and is thirsty; even so does she open her mouth and drink of everye next water, that she may get. By every hedge she sits down, and opes her quiver against every arow."[8] The slippage from the whore's thirsty mouth to her insatiable genitals is a commonplace. The talking woman is everywhere equated with a voracious sexuality that in turn abets her avid consumerism: scolds were regularly accused of both extravagance and adultery.

Talk in women, then, is dangerous because it is perceived as a usurpation of multiple forms of authority, a threat to order and male sovereignty, to masculine control of commodity exchange, to a desired hegemonic male sexuality. The extent of this perceived threat may be gauged by the strict delegation of the talking woman to the carefully defined and delimited spheres of private and domestic

life in which the husband was exhorted to rule. In the Renaissance, as many commentators have pointed out, even those humanists most progressive in their advocacy of women's worth insisted vehemently that rhetoric and public speaking were anathema to women.[9] Whenever women's talk removed to public spaces, it became a threat; when it burst out of the house and into the streets or village, town or city, or when it took place in the church or alehouse, it became dangerous, even seditious. Traditionally excluded from public life, from government affairs, law courts, the pulpit, women enter the public sphere of early seventeenth-century London by going to market, both to buy and to sell.[10]

Jonson's *Epicoene* is peopled with talkative women whom he portrays as monstrous precisely because they gallivant about the city streets spending breath as well as money.[11] His talking women are not merely the butts of satire, but are represented as monstrously unnatural because they threaten masculine authority. Not domestic gossips who meet at home, the women of Jonson's play are

> ladies that call themselves the Collegiates, an order between courtiers and country-madams, that live from their husbands and give entertainment to all the Wits and Braveries o' the time, as they call'em, cry down or up what they like or dislike in a brain or a fashion with most masculine or rather hermaphroditical authority, and every day gain to their college some new probationer. (1.1.68–74).[12]

Their college apes contemporary educational institutions and associations for men, and they perform the activities of their "foundation" before an audience—the Wits and Braveries; significantly, it is the voicing of their critical opinions abroad ("down and up") that makes them monstrous.[13]

In the main plot when the silent woman begins at last to speak, Morose wails "O immodesty! A manifest woman" (3.4.37). Speech makes her sex immediately, if ironically, apparent to Morose and witnesses her usurpation of masculine authority within the family, that seventeenth-century "little commonwealth": "I'll have none of this coacted, unnatural dumbness in my house, in a family where I govern," she explains, and Morose responds, "She is my regent already! I have married a Penthesilea, A Semiramis, sold my liberty to a distaff" (47–51). Morose figures the talking woman as Amazonian, as a warrior queen, and Epicoene bears out his fears in the next scene when she commands that the door be left open to her

friends and promises to "see him that dares move his eyes toward it" (3.5.31). Morose also immediately assumes that her speech indicates sexual transgression: "I have married his [Cutbeard's] cittern, that's common to all men" (54–55).

Morose's fear of noise, which is presented as generalized at the outset of the play, becomes increasingly gender specific. In the first act we learn that he hates hawking fishwives and orange women, chimney sweeps and broom men, metal workers, braziers, armorers, pewterers, and the "waits" or wind instrumentalists maintained at public expense to play on holidays or other special occasions in the city streets. His house lies on a street "so narrow at both ends that it will receive no coaches" (1.1.150–51), a status symbol Epicoene promises to buy instantly on her marriage. The "perpetuity of ringing"—the bells that marked the hours and tasks of daily life and also knelled deaths in plague time—drive him to a padded cell: "a room with double walls and treble ceilings, the windows close shut and calked" (1.1.167–69). But as the plot unfolds, Morose's early universal fear of noise is identified specifically with women. Woman becomes the overdetermined locus of noise, the screen on which Morose's agoraphobia is projected: "he has employed a fellow this half year all over England to harken him out a dumb woman. . . . Her silence is dowry enough" (21–23). The city woman tropes urban vices—the noise, the crowd, sexuality, and consumerism. Even her oneiric life is bound up with the city: Mrs. Otter, when she recounts her dream to Clerimont, says, "anything I do but dream o' the city" (3.2.57).

Jonson presents in luxuriant detail the attractions of London for ladies. In Truewit's attempt to dissuade Morose from marriage, he details the pastimes of city women's lives, their infinite consuming desires: "she must have that rich gown for such a great day, a new one for the next, a richer for the third; be served in silver; have the chamber filled with a succession of grooms, footmen, ushers and other messengers, besides embroiderers, jewelers, tire-women, sempsters, feathermen, perfumers" (2.2.87–92). She comes to the city seeking to "be a stateswoman" (95–96), a satiric coinage, as the Yale editor notes. Truewit's modern city woman enjoys public affairs, must "know all the news," and evidently reads widely "so she may censure poets and authors and styles and compare 'em, Daniel with Spenser, Jonson with t'other youth" (97–99). The ladies complain that Morose's "nuptials want all marks of solemnity. . . . No gloves? No garters? No scarves? No epithalamium? No masque?"

(3.6.74–75, 80). These women are consummate consumers, of poems and plays in the same breath as gloves and garters. They frequent the court, tiltings, public shows and feasts, playhouses, even church, to show off their clothes, "to see and to be seen" (6.1.54).

Favorite haunts of the collegiates are the Strand, which teemed with shops, the china houses, and the New Exchange, a Renaissance shopping mall. Truewit admonishes Morose against marriage by inveighing against woman as consumer in a conventional metaphor often repeated in the early seventeenth century: "she feels not how the land drops away, nor the acres melt, nor forsees the change when the mercer has your woods for her velvets" (2.2.92–94). Men and the traditional landed values of the elite are pitted against a burgeoning consumer culture Jonson and his contemporaries identify as feminine. In 1632, Donald Lupton complained of the exchanges:

> Here are usually more Coaches attendent, then at church doores: The Merchantes should keepe their Wives from visiting the Upper Roomes too often, least they tire their purses, by attyring themselves. . . . There's many Gentle-women come hither, that to help their faces and Complexions, breakes their husbands backs, who play foule in the Country with their Land, to be faire; and play false in the City.[14]

Epicoene promises to join the ladies in their shopping sprees and promenades "three or four days hence . . . when I have got me a coach and horses" (4.6.15–16), a powerful emblem of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century urban life and status. Consumption is presented as a female preoccupation and pastime in the discourses of Jacobean England, and women are both consumers and commodities:[15] Otter slanders his wife by exclaiming in a parodic blazon that her "teeth were made i' the Blackfriars, both her eyebrows i' the Strand, and her hair in Silver Street. Every part o' the town owns a piece of her" (4.2.88–90). Women's "pieced beauty" (1.1.77) is demystified, revealed as goods that are bought and sold in the shopping streets of the city.[16]

In *Epicoene*, the talking woman represents the city *and* what in large part motivated the growth of the city—mercantilism and colonial expansion. Consumption, like female talk, is presented as at once stereotypical (women all do it) and unnatural (women who do it are masculine, hermaphroditical, monstrous). Critics of *Epicoene* typically discuss its female characters in terms of the opposition between the hermaphroditical, monstrous epicene women and the

cultural norm—women who were chaste, silent, and obedient. The play's satire depends on shared, if unrepresented, assumptions about behavior appropriate to women that position the audience to perceive the collegiates' activities as reprehensible. Such readings join Jonson in his censure by assuming the implicit norm as positive and "natural" rather than culturally produced. In Jonson, woman is the focus of cultural ambivalence toward social mobility, urbanization, and colonialism; she is the site of systems of exchange that constituted capitalism, the absolutist state, and English colonial power; Mrs. Otter, after all, owes to the China trade the fortune that enables her both to rule Captain Otter as his "Princess" (3.1.), and to aspire to a more prestigious class position.[17]

Epicoene dramatizes the discursive slippage between women's talk, women's wealth, and a perceived threat to male authority. But this intersection of woman, the city, and consumerism was not only a literary phenomenon—contemporary observers of early Stuart London from the king himself to men like John Chamberlain witness it as well. Whereas Elizabeth issued proclamations and statutes against building, dividing houses, and an excess of apprentices to curb the growth of London, James directed his anxiety about the growth of London against women as consumers.[18] In June 1608, perhaps six months to a year before *Epicoene* was first performed, the king railed at "those swarms of gentry who, through the instigation of their wives and to new model and fashion their daughters (who, if they were unmarried, marred their reputations, and if married, lost them) did neglect their country hospitality, and cumber the city, a general nuisance to the kingdom."[19] The pursuit of London fashion in James's formulation leads not only to overpopulation, but apparently to sexual transgression, since gentry daughters lose their reputations in their eager migration to the metropolis. The king often reiterated such proclamations: in a major speech before the Star Chamber in 1616, James opined that "one of the greatest causes of all Gentlemens desire, that haue no calling or errand, to dwell in London, is apparently the pride of the women. For if they bee wiues, then their husbands; and if they be maydes, then their fathers must bring them up to *London*; because the new fashion is to bee had no where but in *London*."[20] John Chamberlain reports that "even upon Christmas eve came foorth another proclamation, for their wives and families and widowes to be gon likewise, and that hence-forward gentlemen should remain here during termes only or other busines, without bringing their wives and

families, which is *durus sermo* to the women."[21] In Jacobean London, women were held accountable for urban ills.

But I want to look not only at historical and cultural formations, but at the linguistic economies Jonson deploys to represent the relation of women and consumption, that is, at his *means* of representing women and goods. Jonson's comedies might be characterized generally by a fondness for *copia* enacted through the grammatical series. In the reverse *blazon* quoted earlier, or Truewit's enumeration of the evils of marriage, Jonson betrays a penchant for the list. In a study of Shaw's style, Richard Ohmann analyzes Shavian modes of order, particularly in the series. In a series, equivalences are set up that typically end with a summation—an "in short" or other phrase that subsumes and extends what precedes it. Even without such summative devices, the grammatical construction of a series implies an equivalence relationship, and particularly "when the series ends with 'and so forth' 'and the like,' or 'etc.' " Such phrases invite the reader to continue, "to extrapolate the class in the direction pointed by the given portion of the extension. . . . [The reader] must have grasped the rubric under which members are alike." The series, Ohmann claims, typically "does not exhaust the class it defines," but stops short, demanding "that the reader infer similarity."[22] Though his concern is similarity, more important to my argument is the productive power of the series, its demand on the reader or audience. The series, seemingly excessive and extravagant, paradoxically produces lack or scarcity and the desire for more.

In *Epicoene*, the series is most often used to describe women, to set up invidious equivalences that stop short but position the audience to produce more. After marriage is defined by a long series detailing increasingly perverse ways of committing suicide, Jonson sums them up with "any way rather than to follow this goblin Matrimony" (2.2.27). After marrying, Truewit threatens, a man's wife may run away "with a vaulter, or the Frenchman that walks upon ropes, or him that dances the jig, or a fencer for his skill at his weapon" (50–52), a short series that does a great deal of cultural work with its bawdy innuendo and its class prejudice. Women's behavior as consumers is then represented in the torrential series quoted from above, which equates female consumption and sexual misconduct. It ends with Truewit's summative "one thing more, which I had almost forget," in which Jonson links sexual transgression and economic power: the woman "whom you are to marry, may

have made a conveyance of her virginity aforehand, as your wise widows do of their states, before they marry, in trust of some friend" (119–20). Typically in *Epicoene*, the Jonsonian series enumerates a list of female activities or behaviors but stops short, leaving the audience not with a feeling of completion or abundance, but of lack.

In Jonson's series, or the list of goods from Stow's *Survey* with which I began, the series suggests abundance, profusion, availability. But as Marx's description reminds us, the proliferation of goods and serial multiplicity systematically produce want, a dialectic of scarcity. Commodity pleasures—the more you have, the more you want. On a psychoanalytic axis, consumption figures not possession, but lack, the woman's part. The series seems to democratize things—separated only by commas or the semicolon, the items of a series hurtle along pell-mell seemingly without distinctions, enacting a sort of grammatical commodification; but instead of erasing differences, the grammatical series, like commodification itself, systematizes privilege and difference. In Jonson, sexual difference is the axis along which commodification is plotted, with privilege or class as a destabilizing variant: the aspiring Mrs. Otter is of a decidedly lower status than the collegiates, but the relations of all the women to commodification are represented as the same, which tends to level class differences; in Marx, class is the constant, but sexual difference is the variable that problematizes his class analysis of commodification.

I would like to end with an episode in what I would term cultural politics rather than cultural poetics, a look at the earliest stage history of *Epicoene*, which takes me back as well to the establishment of the New Exchange with which I began. The historian Thomas Wilson, Salisbury's agent, tells the story, recorded in the State Papers Domestic, that the Earl had first proposed to call his new mercantile enterprise "Armabell" as a compliment to a lady.[23] That lady is said to have been Arbella Stuart, whose complaint about a supposed allusion to her person led to the play's suppression after its first or an early performance. Daughter of James's uncle Charles Stewart, great granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister Margaret Tudor, related as well to Bess of Hardwick, learned lady and dedicatee of Aemilia Lanier, Arbella Stuart was next in line to the English throne after James and believed by some, because of her English upbringing, better qualified than he. Had she been, in Portia's words, "accomplished / With that we lack" she might well have

succeeded.[24] Elizabeth kept her under house arrest for years fearing her marriage and plots against the throne; James's first diplomatic instructions to the Scottish ambassador in London after his mother's execution were to secure a declaration from Elizabeth that James was the rightful heir and to engage "that the Lady Arbella be not given in marriage without the King's special advice and consent (H, 75). The Venetian ambassador Nicolo Molino sent the following account of Arbella Stuart to his government in 1607:

> The nearest relative the King has is Madame Arabella, descended from Margaret, daughter of Henry VII, which makes her cousin to the King. She is twenty-eight; not very beautiful, but highly accomplished, for besides being of most refined manners she speaks fluently Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, reads Greek and Hebrew, and is always studying. She is not very rich, for the late Queen was jealous of everyone, and especially of those who had a claim on the throne, and so she took from her the larger part of her income, and the poor lady cannot live as magnificently nor reward her attendants as liberally as she would. The King professes to love her and hold her in high esteem. She is allowed to come to Court, and the King promised when he ascended the throne, that he would restore her property, but he has not done so yet, saying that she shall have it all and more on her marriage, but so far the husband has not been found, and she remains without mate and without estate.[25]

Deprived of her ancestral estates and income, Arbella Stuart nevertheless spent lavishly in accordance with her position at court and was continually in debt; Chamberlain describes her as rivaling the queen in dress and jewels (1.253). In the months preceding the production of *Epicoene*, Arbella Stuart was the subject of rumor at Court. Called to account before the Council, she disputed claims that she had been converted to Catholicism or planned to marry without the king's consent; she complained forcefully of the failed restoration of her patrimony and of her poverty, and succeeded in winning some relief from James. But throughout this period she was surreptitiously engaged in a courtship that issued in her clandestine marriage to William Seymour in 1611. When the king learned of their marriage, Arbella Stuart was again arrested and given into the custody of the Bishop of York. In a daring escape reminiscent of the plots of countless Renaissance comedies and romances, Arbella herself played an epicene part. Disguised as a boy, she managed to elude her jailor and fled, chased by the king's authorities, across the channel to meet her husband of seventeen

days in Ostend, where she was finally apprehended. The solicitor general who presided at the subsequent trial figured her transgression as childish disobedience, chiding her for having

> transacted the most weighty and binding part and action of her life, which is her marriage, without acquainting his Majesty, which had been a neglect even to a mean parent.[26]

Imprisoned in the Tower, she died in 1615. According to modern commentators, she died insane, but contemporaries were more skeptical of the reports that she was mad. In 1613, Chamberlain wrote twice to friends that "the Lady Arbella is saide to be distracted which (yf yt be so) comes well to passe for somebody whom they say she hath neerly touched" (1.434, 437). Chamberlain realized the threat she posed the king.

The relation of Arbella Stuart to Jonson's *Epicoene* is more than an episode in stage history. The play attacks "hermaphroditical" talking women, women who transgress the culturally constructed codes of behavior believed appropriate to them in early modern England. Arbella Stuart, "a regular termagant," often refused to stay at court, preferring to live independently and often writing to friends of her wish for time with her books.[27] Contemporaries always mention her propensity for study and claimed it made her melancholic, a common result, according to Renaissance humors theory, of too much study and learning. The melancholic, of course, was said to favor solitude and to be prone to distraction. The frequently repeated claims that Arbella Stuart died mad figures her political transgression in private terms, within the medical discourse of female hysteria. The judgment "died insane" safely categorizes women who transgress their culture's sex/gender codes by studying, marrying without their "parent's" consent, spending extravagantly, in bed or in shops. Arbella Stuart suffered for transgressing cultural norms, and for a brief moment she made Jonson's *Epicoene* suffer with her.

The discourses around Arbella Stuart in *State Papers, Foreign and Domestic,* are remarkably consistent with the major themes and preoccupations of Jacobean city comedy, and particularly *Epicoene*—the topoi of the shrew and the learned lady, the problems of marriage and inheritance, the political aspirations of women, the position of women as consumers. But as with the comparison of Marx and Stow with which I began, there are also important differences. Arbella Stuart's marriage, her spending and debt, are part

of an aristocratic ethos of status and degree foreign to the aspirations of Stuart London's "middling sort." To ally the story of Arbella Stuart to city comedy occludes the status-differentiated histories of seventeenth-century women even as it recognizes a shared position in the Jacobean sex/gender system.

But my telling of Arbella Stuart's story cannot stand unremarked at the end of my argument: the historical anecdote has become notorious, impugned by opposing camps in literary studies. Insofar as it has been used to ground literary interpretation in the "facts" of history, the critique of the New Historicist anecdote is justified; but insofar as that critique, mounted either by the literary critic deferential to an imagined "science" of history, or by the historian claiming for history an archival high ground of "Truth," that critique represents a refusal of the challenges posed by theories of reading and poststructuralism. Stories are fields of struggle, as Lynn Hunt has recently phrased it, hermeneutic arenas in which we contend not for a material ground that is not language, but for meaning and its effects.[28] How we read Arbella Stuart's story determines a whole series of categories and critical questions: how we understand elite and bourgeois women's lives and the management of femininity in early modern England; how we understand Elizabethan and Jacobean political history; how we analyze the relation of playwright to contemporary culture; how we conceive and represent female subjectivity.

In *Reading Capital*, Louis Althusser theorizes a practice of reading by analyzing Marx's commentary on nineteenth-century political economy. In what Althusser calls a *first reading*, Marx reads his predecessors' discourse through his own, showing what they discovered and what they missed: he redresses the balance by seeing their oversights or *bévues*.[29] But Althusser argues that this stage of reading remains locked in "the mirror myth of knowledge" since it depends on vision, on sight and oversight, presences and absences. He goes on to demonstrate that in Marx's reading of political economy there is a "*second quite different reading*" not limited to "objects that can be seen so long as one's eyes are clear":

> What political economy does not see is not a pre-existing object which it could have seen but did not see—but an object which it produced itself in its operation of knowledge. . . . Through the lacunary terms of its new answer political economy produced a new question, but "*unwittingly.*" It made '*a complete change in the terms of the* original *problem,*' and thereby produced a new

> problem, but without knowing it. . . . Far from knowing it, it remained convinced that it was still on the terrain of the old problem, whereas it has *'unwittingly changed terrain'*.[30]

My reading of *Epicoene* willfully shifts its focus away from Morose and the gallants, away from Jonsonian satire and classical allusion, away from the exclusively literary, and gestures toward, in Althusser's terms, the production of a different theoretical problematic. On such a terrain of reading, it is not simply a question of *seeing* the woman, of putting "woman" into discursive circulation, but of changing the terms of reading by mobilizing stories from Marx, Stow, Baudrillard, Jonson, James I, and the Venetians, to name only a few. Such intercourse threatens both the customarily literary and the traditionally historical by insisting on shifting relations rather than fixed categories.

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NOTES

The epigraph is from "Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1961), vol. 13, 69; thanks to William Crossgrove for advice in translating.

[1] Pasquin's *Palinodia* (1619), quoted in Lawrence Stone, "Inigo Jones and the New Exchange," *Archeological Journal* 114 (1957): 120.

[2] John Stow, "The Temporal Government of London, The Haberdashers," *A Survey of the cities of London and Westminster* (London, 1755), 11, $4A^{V}$. Stow's *Survey* appeared in a number of editions in the early seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, each editor adding material from local archives and records. This passage does not appear in the earliest edition, but dates the description directly ("within forty years after, about the Year 1580") and by lexical evidence: the *OED* cites late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century uses of *agglet*, points or tags for threading eyelets, but by late in the century the word required definition in glossaries as archaic; similarly, *Frizado*, silk plush, was by the eighteenth century a clear indication of the outdated and old fashioned.

[3] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), and Stewart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976) develop most forcefully lack or scarcity as a consequence of consumption.

[4] For a discussion of consumption as a symbolic activity, see Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (New York: Basic Books, 1979). On the world of goods in early modern Europe, see, among others, Stone (note 1); Joan Thirsk, *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of Consumer Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978); Chandra Mukerji, *From Graven Images: Patterns of Modern Materialism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983); and most recently, Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987).

[5] Jean Baudrillard, *Le système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 98.

[6] Karl Marx, *Capital*, 1:2, quoted in Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Drieser, Gissing and Zola* (London: Methuen, 1985), 27.

[7] For discussion of consumption in early modern London, see F. J. Fisher, "The Development of London as a Centre of Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth

and Seventeenth Centuries," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4th series, 30 (1948): 37–40; and Joan Thirsk and Chandra Mukerji (note 4).

[8] Heinrich Bullinger, *The Christian State of Matrimony*, trans. Myles Coverdale, (London, 1575), 34^{V}; Thomas Becon, "Catechisme," *Workes* (London, 1564), xxii^{V}, xii^{V}.

[9] See, for example, Constance Jordan, "Feminism and the Humanists: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot's *Defence of Good Women*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 36 (1983): 181–201.

[10] Though I am looking at the woman primarily as consumer, there are numerous examples of women as sellers in the period, from Heywood's *Faire Maide of the Exchange*, (New York: Garland, 1980) in which the middle-class heroine withstands the blandishments of a higher-ranking seducer, to *Tell-Trothes New Yeares Gift* (1593) in which merchants are chastised for marrying "suche matchlesse paragons as are for neatnesse not to be mated in a countrey" to set them "in their shoppes to tole in customers" with only the proviso that "they keepe them out of their mony boxes and closecubberds" (18).

[11] For a general discussion of Jonson's metropolitan topicality that does not address issues of gender, see Leo Salingar, "Farce and Fashion in *The Silent Woman*," *Essays and Studies* 20 (1967): 29–46; Susan Wells argues that Jonson represents a transitional moment when the marketplace is no longer a communal gathering place, but simply a location of exchange and profit, in "Jacobean City Comedy and the Ideology of the City," *ELH* 48 (1981): 38.

[12] Ben Jonson, *Epicoene*, ed. Edward Partridge (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1971). All references are to this edition.

[13] Margaret Ezell shows that in the early seventeenth century, women began to participate in such educational associations in *The Patriarch's Wife* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1986).

[14] Donald Lupton, *London and the Countrey Carbanadoed*, 25–26, quoted by Fran C. Chalfant, *Ben Jonson's London* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1978), 72.

[15] Fops like Amourous La Foole do not, in my view, argue against the claim for the feminization of consumption since they are notoriously feminized in Jacobean comedy—identified with women in their pursuits, rarely successful in their seductions, and the object of similar satire. A related male character type, the prodigal, is deployed in plots of repentance and salvation not available to female characters.

[16] Jonas Barish observes that though Jonson's presentation of cosmetics is based on Ovid's *Ars amatoria*, Ovid emphasizes the factitious rather than the natural in "Ovid, Juvenal, and *The Silent Woman*," *PMLA* 71 (1956): 213–24. Whereas in Ovid cosmetics are represented as concoctions of natural ingredients—milk and honey—Jonson's metaphors are taken from metalwork: women are gilders whose finished products are likened to statues and canvases all painted and burnished. On the economics of the *blazon*, see Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies* (London: Methuen, 1987), 126 ff.

[17] By the Restoration, Mrs. Otter is no longer remembered for her fortune or her social aspirations, but merely as a type of the domineering wife and "Tom Otter" as the henpecked husband. Pepys reports that Charles II said of his brother James that "he would go no more abroad with this Tom Otter (meaning the Duke of York) and his wife. Tom Killigrew, being by, answered, 'Sir, says he, pray which is the best for a man, to be a Tom Otter to his wife or to his mistress?' meaning the King's being so to my Lady Castlemayne," J. F. Bradley and J. A. Adams, *The Jonson Allusion Book* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1922), 336.

[18] See Norman Brett-James, *The Growth of Stuart London* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935) and F. J. Fisher (note 8). For a discussion of James's urban policy and Jonson's middle masques, see Leah Marcus, " 'Present Occasions' and the Shaping of Ben Jonson's Masques," *ELH* 45 (1978): 201–25.

[19] Quoted by Fisher (note 7), 45.
[20] Quoted in C. H. McIlwain, *The Political Works of James I* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1918), 343–44.
[21] John Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. Norman E. McClure (Philadelphia: American Philological Society, 1939), 2:475. Further references will appear in the text.
[22] Richard Ohmann, "Modes of Order," *Linguistics and Literary Style*, ed. Donald C. Freeman (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 213, 215.
[23] P. M. Handover, *Arbella Stuart* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957), 243. Further references will appear in the text under the sign "H."
[24] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Methuen, 1955), 3.4.61–62.
[25] Horatio F. Brown, ed., *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Venice* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1900), 10:514.
[26] Elizabeth Cooper, *The Life and Letters of Lady Arabella Stuart* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1866) 2:296–97.
[27] *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Venice*, 10. 42.
[28] Lynn Hunt, "History as Gesture," a lecture presented at the English Institute, 1988.
[29] Louis Althusser, et. al., *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), 19. I am grateful to Ellen Rooney whose recent presentation on Althusser at the Pembroke Seminar provoked this discussion.
[30] Althusser, 24.