VOLPONE
OR
THE FOX
BY
BEN JONSON

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1946
Ben Jonson (1572-1637) dedicated Volpone "to the most noble and most equal sisters, the Two Famous Universities." It was produced successfully at the Globe and at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in 1606.

The comedy, as written, cannot be performed under three and a half hours. The sub-plot (Sir Politick Would-be, Peregrine and the Merchants) has been cut from the present production to bring it within a playing time of two and a half hours.

The characters of Shakespeare are such as might exist in different circumstances than those in which Shakespeare sets them. The latter appear to be those which extract from the characters the most intense and interesting realization; but that realization has not exhausted their possibilities. Volpone's life, on the other hand, is bounded by the scene in which it is played; in fact, the life is the life of the scene and is derivatively the life of Volpone; the life of the characters is inseparable from the life of the drama. This is not dependence upon a background, or upon a substratum of fact. The emotional effect is single and simple. Whereas in Shakespeare the effect is due to the way in which the characters act upon one another, in Jonson it is given by the way in which the characters fit in with each other. The artistic result of Volpone is not due to any effect that Volpone, Mosca, Corvino, Corbaccio, or Voltore have upon each other, but simply their combination into a whole.

... Of all the dramatists of his time, Jonson is probably the one whom the present age would find the most sympathetic if it knew him. There is a brutality, a lack of sentiment, a polished surface, a handling of large bold designs in brilliant colours, which ought to attract about three thousand people in London and elsewhere. At least, if we had a contemporary Shakespeare and a contemporary Jonson, it might be the Jonson who would arouse the enthusiasm of the intelligentsia. Though he is saturated in literature he never sacrifices the theatrical qualities — theatrical in the most favourable sense — to literature or to the study of character. His work is a titanic show.

—T. S. Eliot,
CAST

VOLPONE, a magnifico ..... JOHN WARD
MOSCA, his parasite ..... TOM BROWN
VOLTORE, an advocate ..... OSCAR COX
CORBACCIO, an old gentleman ..... SAM DAY
CORVINO, a merchant ..... FRANK BAILEY
BONARIO, son to Corbaccio ..... ROBERT MOORE
NANO, a hunchback ..... HUGH MURRAY
LADY POLITICK WOULD-BE ..... PATRICIA SCHUMAN
CELIA, Corvino’s wife ..... GWENNETH BALLANTYNE
AVOCATORI, three magistrates ..... LEO MOLONEY
FRANK GARGRO
VICTOR CASTELLO
PAUL MORISSET
SAFFI, officers of justice ..... JACK MANUEL
BRIAN PEARSON
SERVANT ..... MALCOLM HUGHES

Scene ..... Venice

The play under the direction of
COLIN BALLANTYNE

Decor designed and executed by JACQUELINE HICK
Costumes designed and made by - - PAUL MORISSET
Assistant direction and stage management by ENID BROWN
Lighting by - - - - BRUCE WALTON

THE ARGUMENT

V olpone, childless, rich, feigns sick, despairs,
O ffers his state to hopes of several heirs,
L ies languishing: his parasite receives
P resents of all, assures, deludes; then weaves
O ther cross plots, which ope themselves, are told.
N ew tricks for safety are sought; they thrive: when bold,
E ach tempts the other again, and all are sold.

Ben Jonson.
UNIVERSITY THEATRE GUILD

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