



كلية: الآداب

القسم او الفرع: قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

المرحلة: الثالثة

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اسم المادة باللغة العربية: المسرحية

اسم المادة باللغة الإنكليزية: Drama

اسم المحاضرة الأولى باللغة العربية: مسرحية فولبون بوصفها مسرحية اخلاقية

اسم المحاضرة الأولى باللغة الإنكليزية: Volpone as a Morality Play

Volpone as a Morality Play

Another possible source of inspiration for Jonson's *Volpone* could have been the tradition of late morality plays, which were highly popular in medieval and early Renaissance theatre. These plays were typically **dramatized allegories** in which abstract concepts such as virtues, vices, diseases, and temptations were personified, and they struggled for dominance over the soul of a central, allegorical figure, often representing "Everyman," as he traveled through the various stages of life, from birth to death. Morality plays were moralistic and didactic, aiming to teach their audiences lessons about sin, redemption, and the importance of living a virtuous life. They emphasized the eternal battle between good and evil, with the ultimate goal of salvation for humankind.

While Jonson's *Volpone* is not explicitly a morality play in the traditional sense—it does not follow a single allegorical figure representing mankind through the stages of life—there are clear parallels between *Volpone* and the morality play tradition. One of the most obvious connections lies in Jonson's use of characters that resemble the personifications of **vices and virtues**. In morality plays, vice characters are often mischievous and manipulative, driven by self-interest, much like Volpone and his accomplice Mosca. The world of Jonson's Venice is similarly saturated with corruption and deceit, a place where characters embody particular moral failings, making the morality play tradition a useful lens through which to view the play.

Volpone and Mosca, who victimize both the 'estates' (representing wealth, power, and social standing) and the virtues (embodied in characters such as Celia and Bonario), can be seen as Jonson's Venetian equivalents of the vices that traditionally dominate morality plays. In these earlier plays, vices like Greed, Envy, and Deception imposed their will upon the world, gaining power through human weakness, complicity, and acquiescence. The same can be said of *Volpone*, where the central character's insatiable greed and cunning manipulations are empowered by a society that is all too willing to play along with his schemes, provided they think they stand to benefit. Volpone, with his love of trickery and disguise, and Mosca, with his parasitic, opportunistic nature, resemble these vices not only in their actions but also in their symbolic function. Their behaviors are not driven by any deep or noble motivations, but rather by a love of mischief, manipulation, and personal gain for its own sake.

Indeed, Volpone and his parasite, Mosca, revel in their ability to deceive and manipulate others, showing a level of ingenuity that aligns them with the traditional vice characters in morality plays. In their use of disguise, subterfuge, and mischief, they echo the characteristics of those allegorical vices that thrive on chaos and moral corruption. Their schemes are not just about financial gain; they take delight in the sheer art of manipulation. Mosca, as the parasite, is particularly adept at turning the weaknesses and desires of others to his advantage, much like the vices in morality plays who exploited human frailties to lead people astray.

On the opposite end of the moral spectrum, we find Celia and Bonario, who serve as the innocent victims in the play. If Volpone and Mosca are the modern equivalents of the allegorical vices, then Celia and Bonario, by contrast, embody the virtues. Both characters are steadfast in their morality and unyielding

in their values, even when faced with severe punishment or societal pressure. Celia's purity and innocence stand in stark contrast to the rampant corruption around her, and Bonario's loyalty and sense of duty to his father, despite the perversions of familial bonds presented in the play, further solidify his role as the embodiment of virtue.

Bonario's behavior in court highlights his virtue. His refusal to betray his principles, even under duress, aligns him with the idealized figures of morality plays who remain unswervingly virtuous in the face of evil. As he declares in the courtroom, "Sir, I will sit down, /And rather wish my innocence should suffer, /Than I resist the authority of a father," Bonario demonstrates his commitment to virtue, even when it results in personal suffering. His stoic acceptance of injustice, due to his moral convictions, reflects the role of the virtuous in morality plays, where the good often suffer at the hands of vices before redemption or justice is eventually served.

The dynamic between the vice-like figures of Volpone and Mosca and the virtuous figures of Celia and Bonario deepens the play's connection to the morality play tradition. Jonson, while not writing a direct allegory, is clearly influenced by the moral binaries and conflicts characteristic of these earlier works. Volpone's manipulation of those around him—including witnesses, lawyers, and judges—further cements his connection to the vice figures of morality plays. In these earlier works, it was common for vices to target figures of authority or justice, often leading them astray through bribes or deception. Jonson mirrors this motif in *Volpone* by having his protagonist manipulate the legal system and those who operate within it, all in the pursuit of personal gain.

This connection to the morality play tradition is particularly evident when we compare *Volpone* to **Lucrece plays**, in which corrupt figures use bribery to subvert justice. In the same way, Volpone exploits the greed and gullibility of those around him, manipulating them with the false promise of his fortune. He corrupts the very institutions meant to uphold justice, turning the courts into yet another venue for his deceptions. By doing so, Jonson highlights the moral decay present not only in individual characters but in society as a whole—a key theme in morality plays.