

Volpone key Facts

Writer: Ben Jonson | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Full Title: Volpone, or The Fox

Playwright: Ben Jonson (1572–1637)

Title of the Playwright: Leading English Renaissance Dramatist and Poet

Source: Medieval beast fables (Reynard the Fox), Aesop's Fables, works of Lucian, Roman comedy, Italian commedia dell'arte

Written Time: 1606

First Performed: 1606

Published Date: 1607 (quarto), 1616 (in Works)

Total Acts & Scenes: 5 Acts (exact number of scenes varies by edition)

Genre: Comedy, Satire

Point of View: Third-Person Objective (mostly through dramatic action and dialogue)

Climax: Volpone's trick is revealed in the Venetian court

Setting:

Time Setting: Early 17th century (Jacobean period)

Place Setting: Venice, Italy

Key Note

Comedy of Humour: The Comedy of Humour is a type of play. It was popular in the English Renaissance. Ben Jonson employed this style in his plays, such as "Every Man in His Humour" and "Volpone," among others. In these comedies, each character has one strong personality trait or "humour." This trait controls their actions and thoughts. For example, one person may be very greedy, while another is very proud. These plays illustrate how these traits lead to humorous problems. The characters often behave in extreme and silly ways. Through this, the plays teach lessons about human nature and faults. It mixes humour with moral messages.

Background of Volpone: Volpone was written by Ben Jonson in 1606, during the early reign of King James I. At this time, England was changing, and new ideas about money and trade were emerging. People viewed Italy, especially Venice, as a place marked by greed and dishonesty. Jonson chose Venice as the setting to show these problems.

The play tells the story of a wealthy, elderly man named Volpone, who pretends to be gravely ill. He tricks several greedy men into thinking they will inherit his fortune. These men give him gifts to stay in his favor. The story is based on old animal fables and Roman comedy. Jonson also drew on Italian comedy ideas, such as actors wearing masks to portray character traits. These create a strong satire on greed and human nature.

Jonson also wrote the play while competing with other writers, such as Thomas Dekker and John Marston. In the play's prologue, Jonson even makes fun of them.

LxNotes