

Ben jonson



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In Ben Jonson's *Volpone* many of the characters disguise themselves literally and philosophically. The lead character, Volpone, plays the role of an old sickly man. He then actually does physically wear a disguise as Scoto the Mountebank and as a guard towards the end. The characters of Volpone, Mosca, Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino all use the disguise of pretending to achieve a goal. In the end, all of the disguises used are stripped away. All of the disguises portrayed in *Volpone* reflect the inner personality of the characters.

The first disguise was Volpone's fake illnesses to fool Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino into believing they have a chance to inherit his wealth. Volpone used gowns, furs, night-caps to fool the men into thinking he was bedridden.

Volpone ordered Mosca to:

Fetch me my gown,

My furs and night-caps; say, my couch is changing, (Greenblatt et al 2006)

This disguise was perpetrated for Volpone's sheer amusement. He never intended to give anyone his wealth. When he did turn over his wealth to Mosca, Volpone never really meant for his wealth to truly belong to another. Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino jumping through hoops seemed to amuse Volpone.

Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino all come to convince Volpone to make them his heir. Volpone thought they were all fools. He said:

Begin their visitation! Vulture, kite,

Raven, and gorcrow, all my birds of prey,

That think me turning carcase, now they come;

I am not for them yet (Greenblatt et al 2006)

Still they came bearing gifts as they are encouraged by Mosca. The disguises

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these three men use are that of concerning men. They are so concerned with Volpone's wellbeing. All three men try to make Volpone's last days more bearable. Corvino is even willing to let a sick man be in the company of his wife. Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino would do anything to be Volpone's heir. These disguises show these men are greedy corrupt men.

Volpone next disguises himself as Scoto the Mountebank. Scoto the Mountebank is a famous wanderer that performs cheap sideshow stunts to earn money. Volpone shouts:

Most noble gentlemen, and my worthy patrons! It may seem strange, that I, your Scoto Mantuano, who was ever wont to fix my bank in face of the public Piazza, near the shelter of the Portico to the Procuratia, should now, after eight months' absence from this illustrious city of Venice, humbly retire myself into an obscure nook of the Piazza.

Volpone knew that the real Scoto had not been seen in for eight months. This allowed him the freedom to become this barker in order to meet Corvino's wife.

The last disguise is as a guard in Venice. Volpone fakes his death and allegedly leaves Mosca his money. In turn Mosca dons the disguise of a rich man. The guard disguise is so Volpone can flaunt his ingenious plan to Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino without their recognition. Voltore upon being taunted goes to court and tells the whole story of Volpone's treachery. Volpone reveals himself after Mosca refuses to relinquish any of Volpone's original wealth. Volpone and Voltore are arrested. Mosca is sent to a slave gallery. The other two were punished as well. In the end, Volpone was shown to be as much as a fraud as Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino.

All of the disguises were taken up for ulterior motives. These ulterior

eventually led to ruin for each character. Volpone never found love, happiness, or even revenge. Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino never gained any wealth. Mosco ended up in jail for disguising himself as Volpone's heir. In the end, the disguises revealed the inner workings of these men.

#### Bibliography

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