

Volpone – The Cast

Volpone ('The Fox'), a gentleman of Venice	Verena Mertz
Mosca ('The Fly'), his parasite	Katalina Kopka
Nano ('The Dwarf'), a musical fool, member of Volpone's household	Lemya Demirkapi
Voltore ('The Vulture'), an advocate	Anja Taudte
Corbaccio ('The Raven'), an old gentleman	Alexandra Kind
Corvino ('The Crow'), a merchant	Laura Varnhorn
Celia ('The Heavenly One'), Corvino's wife	Marlena Melzian
Sir Politic ('The Parrot') Would-be, an English knight	Charles Noirot
Lady Would-be, Sir Politic's wife	Franziska Ptok
Peregrine ('The Falcon'), a gentleman-traveller	Amelie Mara Chrispeels
Bonario ('The Good-natured One'), a young gentleman, Corbaccio's son	Charles Noirot
four <i>Avocatori</i> or judges	Amelie Mara Chrispeels, Helena Gaubiz, Maren Göttke, Saskia Wieland
Commendatore, sergeant of the court	Michael Claridge
three seafaring merchants	Helena Gaubiz, Maren Göttke, Marlena Melzian
Lady Would-Be's two serving-women	Maren Göttke and Helena Gaubiz

The action takes in Venice place over the course of one day.

There will be one interval of 20 minutes. A bell will sound three minutes before the performance continues to warn you.

The first part runs for about 100 minutes, the second for about 75 minutes.

Please switch **mobile phones** and **peeping watches off**: actors and neighbours will be greatly distracted by any bleeping and use of them (including SMS-ing) during the performance.

If you wish to take photographs, please note that the use of flash (*Blitzgeräte*) is **strictly forbidden**: the flash itself and any 'pre-flash' programme is extremely distracting. We will be making a video recording of a performance and can provide you with a copy on request.

In the interests of other members of the audience and the cast, anyone using a mobile phone or flash will be requested to leave the theatre immediately.

Volpone – the plot

Volpone, a Venetian nobleman, has been fooling the city's rich for years. By making them believe that he is about to die without an heir, he has attracted three legacy hunters, outdoing each other in their efforts to be sole inheritor of his wealth: Corbaccio (an ancient nobleman), Voltore (a cunning lawyer) and Corvino (a merchant). Assisted by his servant, Mosca, Volpone manages to convince Corbaccio to disinherit his own son to make Volpone his heir instead, while the otherwise highly jealous Corvino is persuaded to offer Volpone a night with his young wife, Celia.

But they are not the only ones eyeing Volpone's fortune. An English couple, Sir and Lady Politic Would-Be, visiting Venice, are working their own schemes in the city. Sir Politic, accompanied and secretly mocked by a clever new arrival, Peregrine, tries to set up a dodgy trade in red herrings, as well as many other 'goods'. His Lady, for her part, is trying to work her feminine charms on

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Volpone to make her name known abroad and maybe scoop off a little money on the way, while also learning the rules of ‘good’ behaviour from the upper-class prostitutes of the city.

When Volpone pretends to have died and installs Mosca as his seeming heir, tempers boil over – especially since Mosca now spots his own chance for power and wealth, and even turns on his master...

Volpone – the message

Ben Jonson (1572-1637) regarded himself as superior intellectually to many of the ‘hedge dramatists’ of his day (including William Shakespeare), and was concerned to demonstrate that superiority in his work. However, he saw himself also fighting on another front, namely against the Puritan forces that were seeking – among other things – to close down the theatres. It is against this background that the moralizing tone of *Volpone* is to be understood: effectively a sermon in dramatic (and comic) form, a satirical lesson for the audience to take home and reflect on, once their laughter has ended.

We find ourselves in *Volpone* in a world of fools – indeed, perhaps the only character who is *not* foolish is Volpone’s fool, Nano. Everyone else will behave foolishly at some point or other. For some, this folly is the result of the other major theme, greed or avarice. The legacy-hunters that flock around Volpone, hoping to cash in on his death, actively seek self-deception: Mosca in particular warns them often that they are deluding themselves, but they close their ears to his warnings. Even Volpone ultimately ignores the alarm bells, cannot resist a final fling of the dice – and loses everything.

There is much that is unpleasant in many of the characters of the play, but not even the two ‘good’ people, Celia and Bonario, escape censure. Their naivety is almost frightening – it is truly foolish and can hardly be expected to rescue them from their predicament – so that we ultimately find ourselves confronted with a fascinating choice: Jonson constructs a clear divide between goodness and badness but also presents us with the choice between foolishness and wit. So do we side with the fools or approve the knaves? That is for you to decide...

Volpone – Jonson isn’t Shakespeare...

It is necessary ... when approaching Jonson to be careful that we do not try to read him through Shakespearean spectacles and so criticize him for failing to do or provide what we have come to expect from reading Shakespeare.

So writes Martin Butler in *Ben Jonson Volpone: A Critical Study*. This is something we of the *Foules* have come to appreciate in the course of the past weeks. While one perhaps misses the poetry of Shakespeare, one realises the greater psychological depth of Jonson’s characters. Butler observes that Shakespeare’s “starting point is the psychological complications of his story”, from which his themes develop, whereas Jonson starts from a particular thematic focus and allows his story and characters to take form around that. Where Shakespeare is maybe more popular (in the broad sense of that term), Jonson is more learned – indeed, many of the lines we have cut concern mythical characters and stories hardly familiar to a 21st-century audience. Where Shakespeare may be more romantic, Jonson is satirical.

Volpone – the production team

Master of Light.....Nicholas Graf
 Lighting design.....Julia Arroja da Silva
 Mistress of Costume.....Saskia Wieland
 Costume design.....Julia Arroja da Silva & Saskia Wieland, assisted by the *Foules*

Mistress of make-up..... Saskia Wieland
 Publicity.....Jana Nittel, Jacqueline Sprindt & Michael Claridge, aided and abetted by the *Foules*
 Schools Pack.....Franziska Ptok, Dunja Rühl, Saskia Wieland
 Programme notes.....Franziska Ptok, Dunja Rühl, Saskia Wieland & Michael Claridge
 Poster.....Alexandra Kind

Directed by Michael Claridge

Who – what – are *The Parlement of Foules*?

They comprise a flock of students of English & American Studies, English-Speaking Cultures (BA) and Transnational Literature (MA) at the University of Bremen. This is the sixteenth year of *Foules* activities; *The Golden Masque of Agamemnon* is their twentieth production.

The name (*das Vogelparlament*) comes from a dream-poem by Geoffrey Chaucer, centring on a conference of birds – or fowls – to choose their mates on St.Valentine's Day. It is thought to have been written in celebration of a marriage, perhaps that of the young King Richard II to Anne of Bohemia in 1382. At the end of the poem, the debate is unresolved, and the birds agree to assemble a year later to decide. (Anyone interested in following up a German link should consult the traditional folksong entitled *Die Vogelhochzeit*.)

Our “Parlement of Foules” assembles twice a year, in fully fledged form with performances in mid-summer and in a slimmed-down version with performances in November. We look forward to seeing you here in the Schnürschuhtheater again, observing our ‘debate’. If interested, contact Michael Claridge at claridge@uni-bremen.de.

Our next performances will be here on 12th, 13th, 20th and 21st November, 2013. Next year is the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth: expect the summer production to be Shakespeare-related!

If you would like details of future productions, send an email to the above email address, so that we can add you to the mailing list of the Bremen English Drama Network, informing lovers of English-language drama (not only in schools) about relevant activities, workshops, performances, guest lectures etc. in and around Bremen.

Bremen University's Faculty of Languages and Literatures offers an MA degree in “Transnational Literature: Literature, Theatre, Film”, containing the option to focus primarily (but not exclusively) on theatre. This includes the possibility of working on a stage production in French or English, work that can focus on acting, assistant direction, publicity and many other areas. We believe Bremen is the only university in Germany offering such a qualification within modern foreign languages. The “English-Speaking Cultures” BA degree includes a biennial course entitled “Shakespeare’s London and Shakespeare’s Globe” with a weeklong excursion to London and workshops in Shakespeare’s Globe, as well as the opportunity to participate in *Parlement of Foules* productions.

The *Foules* would like to express their gratitude to...

Our very good friends at the **Schnürschuhtheater** for housing us yet again

Liz and Matthias Reick for help with orthopaedic props

Everyone who helped spread the word about *Volpone*, and current and former colleagues who have given the *Foules* unstinting support over the past months and years, especially **Elisabeth Arend**, **Jana Nittel**, **Norbert Schaffeld**, and the ‘fabulous four’ fanatical *Foules* supporters for sixteen years: **Janet Sutherland**, **Logie Barrow**, **Ian Watson** and **Andrew Winter**

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