

# Irony in Punishing the Innocent

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The animal allegory is a common device in storytelling, using specific animals to represent certain virtues or vices, ending in a moral teaching. These animals represent a quality that is central and unchanging, it is not in their nature to develop and evolve, and they stand as a single metaphor. Ben Jonson used allegory in the creation of his play *Volpone* or as it is styled in the in Quarto edition, *Volpone, the Foxe* (Parker 2), where each human character is quickly established through Italian names and other means as relating to a single allegorical character. *Volpone* is established as a fox, therefore cunning and a trickster, creating a beast fable reminiscent of Aesop. In addition to animal references, Jonson utilizes *commedia dell'arte* which also uses allegorical characters which always represent certain characteristics and act out specific plots (Parker 12) where *Volpone* is based on *Pantalone di Bisognosi*, a Venetian merchant driven by the desire for wealth (Parker 22). Through use of these literary devices, which Jacobean audience would have recognized (Parker 24), Jonson created characters who were fixed, and who could not be changed through any means, and their failure and punishment provided a moral lesson. In audiences ability to recognise the allegorical base of each character, that there was no way these characters could develop, meaning in any instance where it was suggest a character might change was dramatic [irony](#). One scene with a particular abundant amount of irony is when *Volpone* is on trial for lying about his state of health but instead puts the

fault on Celia, who is promptly confirmed as an adulterer upon entry of Lady Would-Be. The irony has many folds; the beast fable structure frames almost everyone b...

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..., Mosca, and Corvino, had never committed these acts against Celia, and it only focused on the legacy hunting, perhaps the punishment doled out at the end of the play would seem unfair or too harsh to the audience and the full arch of a more beast fable could not have been achieved, but with the innocent and virtuous Celia so greatly wronged, each punishment is completely justified.

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