In the literary history the Age of Chaucer is dated from 1340 to 1400 because in 1340 Chaucer was born and in 1400 Chaucer died. But in the history of England, this Age covers the reigns of three English monarchs, Edward III, Richards II and Henry IV.

It was the medieval period in the history of England. This was a period of glaring social contrasts and rapid political changes. In the words of W.H. Hudson, ‘Edward’s reign marks the highest development of medieval civilization in England. It was also the midsummer of English chivalry.

The spirit of his Court was that of romantic idealism which fills Chaucer’s own knight’s tale, and the story of his successive wars with France, and the famous victories of Crecy and Poictiers, as written in the chronicles of Froissart, reads more like a brilliant novel than a piece of sober history. Strong in its newly established unity, England went forth on its career of foreign conquests in a mood of buoyant courage, and every fresh triumph served to give further stimulus to national ambition and pride.’’
But there was another side of the picture too. It was a dark and dismal side of social contrasts. With the increase of trade, the commercial classes rolled in wealth and lived in extravagant luxury. So did the royal families and the nobility. The masses of the people lived in deplorable poverty and misery.

Further epidemic after epidemic ravaged the country. The fierce plague, called the Black Death, broke out in 1348-49. In this epidemic nearly one-third of the population of England died in a single year. The plague reappeared in 1362, 1367 and 1370 with the same fierceness. These epidemics were followed by a fierce famine. These events took away much of the glory of England.

This was followed by a period of unprecedented degradation, hypocrisy and corruption. Its worst phase was seen in the corruption of the church and the clergy. This phase of corruption has been realistically painted by Chaucer in the prologue to the Canterbury tales in the portraits of the monk, the friar, the Sumnour, the pardon, and the parson. This was the shocking state of things in the religious world in England in Chaucer’s Age.

In this Chapter, however, we have discussed some authors before the Age of Chaucer and some authors after Chaucer roughly up to the end of the 15th century.

“What we call the Elizabethan Age in the history of England; We call it the Age of Shakespeare in the history of English Literature. It is also called the Age of Renaissance. In the sphere of religion, it is called the Age of Reformation. In literary Spirit, It covers the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and Kings James I.

It is rightly called the Golden Period in the history of England as also in the history of English Literature. W.H. Hudson says, “By Virtue of wonderful fertility and of the variety and splendor of its production, this period as a whole ranks as one of the greatest in the annals of the world’s literature.”

The Elizabethan Age is predominantly the age of Renaissance in all spheres of Art, Literature, Culture and Architecture. The term ‘Renaissance’ means the rebirth or revival of classical Greek and Italian Art, Literature and Culture that reached England – through Germany and France. Greek and Italian models began to be limited or even copied in England.

The great Greek authors became the models for practically all forms of literature. Homer became the model for writing Epics; Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus for Tragedies, Virgil for Pastorals; Plato and Aristotle for principles of
philosophy and literary criticism, and so on. The English authors felt proud in being able to imitate the classical models. So Pope wrote in his Essay on Criticism.

“Know well each Ancient’s proper character,
His fable, subject, scope in every page;
____________________________________
Be Homer’s works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night.”

But this does not mean that the Elizabethan poets, dramatists and other authors were mere imitators. However, the general atmosphere was changed with the spirit of Renaissance.

Another important current that flowed along with the Renaissance was that of Reformation in religion. Reformation sought to rescue religion from the age-old superstitions and unnecessary rituals.

It was also an Age of new discoveries and explorations of new lands through adventurous voyages. It was equally an Age of intense patriotism. The English people were proud of their country and her achievements. This spirit of national pride and patriotism finds expression in practically all literary productions of the Age. Here is an example of intense patriotism expressed in one of Shakespeare’s historical plays:

“This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This happy Eden, demi-paradise!
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea!
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm,
This England!

Authors and Their Works

King James I of Scotland (1394-1437)
The king’s Quair
Peblis to the play
Christis kirk on the Green

John Lydgate (1370-1451)
Falles of Princes
The Temple of Glass
Story of Thebes
London Lick penny

Geoffry Chaucer (1340 - 1400)
Sir Thomas Malory (15th Century)
Morte d’Arthur
Sir Thomas More (1478-1535)
Utopia (English version)
Tottel:
Miscellany
William Tyndale (1485-1536)
New Testament

Thomas sackville and Thomas Norton
The Boke of the Duchesse (1536-1608) (1532 - 1584)  
The Romaunt of the rose  
The House of Fame  
Troylus Cryseyde  
The Canterbury Tales  
Legends of Good Women  
The Parliament of Foulks  
Gammer Gurton’s Needle  
Sir David Lyndsay (1490 - 1555)  
Gower Douglas (1474 - 1522)  
The Palace of honour  
King Hart  
Conscience  
Wyclif (1320 – 1384)  
The Bible  
Sir John Maundevill (14th Century)  
The Travels Of Sir John Maundevill  
Thomas Occele (1370 – 1450)  
The Governail Of Princes  
Occleve’s Complaint  
La Mala Regle  
The Complaint of Our Lady  
William Dunder (1465 – 1530)  
The Thistle and the rose  
Dance of the Seven Daddly Sins  
Roger Aschem (1515 – 1568)  
The Scholemaster  
Nicholas Udall (1505 – 1556)  
Roister Doister  
John Heywood (1564 – 1627)  
Four P’s  
Edmund Spenser (1552 -1599)  
The Faerie Queene  
William Langland (1330 - 1400)  
Piers the Plowman (A Vision)  
A Treatise on the Astroble  
John Gower (1332 - 1408)  
Confessio Amantis Vox Clamantis  
Speculum Meditantis  
Sir David Lyndsay (1490 - 1555)  
The Dreme  
Meldrum  
Estaits  
Robert Henryson (15th Century)  
Morall Fabillis of Escope  
The Testment Of Cressied  
Orpheus and Eurydice  
William Langland (1330 - 1400)  
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The Testment Of Cressied  
Orpheus and Eurydice
The Shepheardes Calender  
Amoretti  
Epithalamion  
Prothalamion  
Mother Hubberd’s Tale  
The Ruins of Time  
The Tears of the Muses  
Astrophel  
**Phillip Sidney (1554 – 1586)**  
Arcadia  
Astrophel and Stella  
An Apologie for Poetrie  
**Ben Johnson (1573 – 1637)**  
Every Man in His Humour  
Every Man Out of His Humour  
Volpone Or the Fox  
Cynthia’s Revels  
The Alchemist  
Bartholomew Fayre  
Epicaene or the silent Women  
Sejanus His Fall  
Catline His Conspiracy  
The Poetaster  
The Devil as an Ass  
The Masque Of Beauty  
**Daniel (1562 -1619)**  
Delia  
Civil Wars Between the Two Houses of Lancaster and York  
**Michael Drayton (1563 – 1609)**  
The Battle of Agincourt  
England’s Heroic Epistles  
The Barons’ Wars  
Polyolbion  
**William Warner (1558 – 1609)**  
Albion’s England  
**Thomas Sackville (1558 – 1608)**  
The Myrroure for Magistrates,

George Gascoigne (1525 – 1577)  
Steel Glass  
Supposes  
Jocasta  
William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)  
The Two Gentleman of Verson  
The Merry Wives Of Windsor  
Measure for Measure  
The Comedy of Errors  
Love’s Labor’s Lost  
The Taming Of the Shrew  
All’s Well that Ends Well  
A Midsummer Night ‘s Dream  
The Merchant of Venice  
Much Ado About Nothing  
As You Like It  
Twelfth Night  
Romeo and Juliet  
Macbeth  
Hamlet  
king lear  
Othello  
Antony and cleopatra  
Julius Carser  
Timon of Athens  
Coriolanus  
Titus Andronicus  
Troilus And Cressida  
King John  
King Richard the Second  
King Henry the Fourth–part first  
King Henry the Fourth-Second part  
King Henry the Fifth  
King Henry the sixth-first part  
King Henry the sixth-Second part  
King Henry the sixth-third part  
King Richard the Third
Gorboduc

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)
- Tamburlaine the great
- Edward II
- Doctor Faustus
- The Jew Of Malta
- The tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage

George Peele (1558-1597)
- The Araygnement Of Pairs
- The Famous Chronicle of king Edward I

Robert Greene (1560-1592)
- Frier Bacon and Frier Bungey
- Orlando Furioso
- Pandosio

Thomas Nash (1567-1601)
- The Unfortunate Traveler Or.
- The Life Of Jack Wilton

Thomas Lodge (1558-1625)
- The Wounds Of Civil War
- Rosalynde

Thomas Kyd (1557-1595)
- The Spanish Tragedy

John Lyly (1554-1606)
- Euphues, The Anatomy of Wit
- Euphues and His England
- Endymion

Francis Bacon (1561-1626)
- Essays
- The Advancement of Learning

King Henry the English
- Venus and Adonis and rape of Lucre
- Cymbeline
- Pericles
- The Winter’s Tale
- The Tempest

Sonnets (154 in number)

Philip Massinger (1583-1640)
- A new way to pay old debts
- The City Madam
- The Duke Milaine

Thomas Heywood (1575-1650)
- A Women Killed with kidness
- The English Traveller
- The Captives

Francis Beaumont (1584-1616)
- A king and No King
- The Night Of the Burning Pestle

Robert Ascham (1515-1568)
- The Schoolemaster

Robert Burton (1577-1640)
- The Antony Of Melancholy

Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682)
- Religio Medici
- Vulgar Errors
- Hydrotaphia or Urne Burriale
- Christian Morals

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)
- Leviathan

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667)
- The Liberty of Prophesying
- Holy Living
- Holy Dying

Thomas Fuller (1608-1661)
The New Atlantis
Novum Organum

**John Fletcher (1579-1625)**
Philaster
The Maid’s Tragedy

**John Webster (1580-1625)**
The White Devil
The Duchess of Malfi
The Devil’s Law Case

**John Ford (1586-1639)**
The Broken Heart
Tis Pity She is a Whore
The Lover’s Melancholy
Love’s Sacrifice

**William Webbe (16th Centaury)**
Discoveries of English Poetrie

The Church History Of Britain
The Worthies Of England
Good Thoughts and Bad Times

**Sir Thomas More (1478-1535)**
Utopia (English Version)

**Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618)**
History of the world

**Raphael Holinshed**
Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland

**Richard Hakluyt (1552-1616)**
Discoveries of English Nation

**Richard Hooker (1554-1600)**
Ecclesiastical Polity

**George Puttenham (16th Centaury)**
Arte Of English Poesie

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**Ben Jonson: Volpone or the Fox**

Ben Jonson (other name Benjamin) – 1573 – 1637

He said “Shakespeare was not of an age but for all time.’

First play – Everyman in his humour (1598)

Every man out of his humour (1599) (less popular comedy)

Greatest classical comedies

**volpone 1606**
Epicene or the silent woman 1609
The Alchemist 1610

Tragedy
1\(^{st}\) Sejanus 1603 (blood, black bile, yellow bile phlegm
2\(^{nd}\) castiline 1611 earth, water, fire and air)

Four humours

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kaviyakumarcoachingcenter@gmail.com 9994098972 & 9600736379
Four important humours in the theory of humours of Jonson. 1. Choler, 2. melancholy, 3. phlegm, 4. blood. Jonson has based this theory on the old physiology. These four humour correspond with 1. moisture, 2. dryness, 3. heat, 4. Cold. The emergence of humour takes place due to some kind of personality imbalance.

In alchemist Ben Jonson makes an elaborate study of human gullibility. Alchemist – supreme masterpiece of in comedy, performed in 1610 and published in quarto in 1612. Plot of the play Jonson is indebted to Plautus. The opening dialogue of the alchemist seems to recall a scene in “Plautus” Mostellaairia.”

**Characters**

**Volpone** - The protagonist of the play. Volpone's name means "The Fox" in Italian. He is lustful, lecherous, and greedy for pleasure. He is also energetic and has an unusual gift for rhetoric, mixing the sacred and the profane to enunciate a passionate commitment to self-gratification. He worships his money, all of which he has acquired through cons, such as the one he now plays on Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino. Volpone has no children, but he has something of a family: his parasite, Mosca, his dwarf, Nano, his eunuch, Castrone, and his hermaphrodite, Androgyno. Mosca is his only true confidante, and he begins to lust feverishly after Celia upon first setting eyes on her.

**Mosca** - Mosca is Volpone's parasite, a combination of his slave, his servant, his lackey, and his surrogate child. Though initially (and for most of the play) he behaves in a servile manner towards Volpone, Mosca conceals a growing independence he gains as a result of the incredible resourcefulness he shows in aiding and abetting Volpone's confidence game. Mosca's growing confidence, and awareness that the others in the play are just as much "parasites" as he—in that
they too would rather live off the wealth of others than do honest work—eventually bring him into conflict with Volpone, a conflict that destroys them both.

**Celia** - The voice of goodness and religiosity in the play, Celia is the wife of Corvino, who is extremely beautiful, enough to drive both Volpone and Corvino to distraction. She is absolutely committed to her husband, even though he treats her horribly, and has a faith in God and sense of honor, traits which seem to be lacking in both Corvino and Volpone. These traits guide her toward self-restraint and self-denial. Her self-restraint makes her a foil for Volpone, who suffers a complete absence of that quality.

**Voltores** - One of the three legacy hunters or carrion-birds—the legacy hunters continually circle around Volpone, giving him gifts in the hope that he will choose them as his heir. Voltores is a lawyer by profession, and, as a result, he is adept in the use of words and, by implication, adept in deceit, something he proves during the course of the play. He is also something of a social climber, conscious of his position in his society and resentful at being overtaken by others on the way up.

**Corvino** - An extremely vicious and dishonorable character, Corvino is Celia's jealous husband. He frequently threatens to do disgusting acts of physical violence to her and her family in order to gain control over her. Yet he is more concerned with financial gain than with her faithfulness, seeing her, in essence, as a piece of property. Corvino is another one of the "carrion-birds" circling Volpone.

**Corbaccio** - The third "carrion-bird" circling Volpone, Corbaccio is actually extremely old and ill himself and is much more likely to die before Volpone even has a chance to bequeath him his wealth. He has a hearing problem and betrays no sign of concern for Volpone, delighting openly in (fake) reports of Volpone's worsening symptoms.

**Bonario** - The son of Corbaccio. Bonario is an upright youth who remains loyal to his father even when his father perjures against him in court. He heroically rescues
Celia from Volpone and represents bravery and honor, qualities which the other characters seem to lack.

**Sir Politic Would-be** - An English knight who resides in Venice. Sir Politic represents the danger of moral corruption that English travelers face when they go abroad to the continent, especially to Italy. He occupies the central role in the subplot, which centers on the relationship between himself and Peregrine, another English traveler much less gullible than the good knight. Sir Politic is also imaginative, coming up with ideas for moneymaking schemes such as using onions to detect the plague, as well as the idea of making a detailed note of every single action he performs in his diary, including his urinations.

**Lady Politic Would-be** - The Lady Politic Would-be is portrayed as a would-be courtesan. She was the impetus for the Would-be's move to Venice, because of her desire to learn the ways of the sophisticated Venetians. She is very well read and very inclined to let anyone know this, or anything else about her. She is extremely vain.

**Peregrine** - Peregrine is a young English traveler who meets and befriends Sir Politic Would-be upon arriving in Venice. Peregrine is amused by the gullible Would-be, but is also easily offended, as demonstrated by his adverse reaction to Lady Politic Would-be's suggestive comments.

**Nano** - Nano, as his named in Italian indicates ("nano" means "dwarf"), is a dwarf. He is also Volpone's fool, or jester, keeping Volpone amused with songs and jokes written by Mosca.

**Castrone** - The only notable fact about Castrone is that his name means eunuch ("castrone" means "eunch" in Italian). There is not much else to say about Castrone, as he has no speaking lines whatsoever.
Androgyno - "Androgyno" means "hermaphrodite" in Italian, and as in the case of Nano and Castrone, the name rings true. Androgyno apparently possesses the soul of Pythagoras, according to Nano, which has been in gradual decline ever since it left the ancient mathematician's body.

**Plot Overview**

*Volpone* takes place in seventeenth-century Venice, over the course of one day. The play opens at the house of Volpone, a Venetian nobleman. He and his "parasite" Mosca—part slave, part servant, part lackey—enter the shrine where Volpone keeps his gold. Volpone has amassed his fortune, we learn, through dishonest means: he is a con artist. And we also learn that he likes to use his money extravagantly.

Soon, we see Volpone's latest con in action. For the last three years, he has been attracting the interest of three legacy hunters: Voltore, a lawyer; Corbaccio, an old gentleman; and Corvino, a merchant—individuals interested in inheriting his estate after he dies. Volpone is known to be rich, and he is also known to be childless, have no natural heirs. Furthermore, he is believed to very ill, so each of the legacy hunters lavishes gifts on him, in the hope that Volpone, out of gratitude, will make him his heir.

The legacy hunters do not know that Volpone is actually in excellent health and merely faking illness for the purpose of collecting all those impressive "get-well" gifts.

In the first act, each legacy hunter arrives to present a gift to Volpone, except for Corbaccio, who offers only a worthless (and probably poisoned) vial of medicine. But Corbaccio agrees to return later in the day to make Volpone his heir, so that Volpone will return the favor. This act is a boon to Volpone, since Corbaccio, in all likelihood, will die long before Volpone does. After each hunter leaves, Volpone and Mosca laugh at each's gullibility.
After Corvino's departure Lady Politic Would-be, the wife of an English knight living in Venice, arrives at the house but is told to come back three hours later. And Volpone decides that he will try to get a close look at Corvino's wife, Celia, who Mosca describes as one of the most beautiful women in all of Italy. She is kept under lock and key by her husband, who has ten guards on her at all times, but Volpone vows to use disguise to get around these barriers.

The second act portrays a time just a short while later that day, and we meet Sir Politic Would-be, Lady Politic's husband, who is conversing with Peregrine, an young English traveler who has just landed in Venice. Sir Politic takes a liking to the young boy and vows to teach him a thing or two about Venice and Venetians; Peregrine, too, enjoys the company of Sir Politic, but only because he is hilariously gullible and vain.

The two are walking in the public square in front of Corvino's house and are interrupted by the arrival of "Scoto Mantua," actually Volpone in disguise as an Italian mountebank, or medicine-show man. Scoto engages in a long and colorful speech, hawking his new "oil" which is touted as a cure-all for disease and suffering. At the end of the speech, he asks the crows to toss him their handkerchiefs, and Celia complies. Corvino arrives, just as she does this, and flies into a jealous rage, scattering the crows in the square. Volpone goes home and complains to Mosca that he is sick with lust for Celia, and Mosca vows to deliver her to Volpone.

Meanwhile, Corvino berates his wife for tossing her handkerchief, since he interprets it as a sign of her unfaithfulness, and he threatens to murder her and her family as a result. He decrees that, as punishment, she will now no longer be allowed to go to Church, she cannot stand near windows (as she did when watching Volpone), and, most bizarrely, she must do everything backwards from now on–she must even walk and speak backwards. Mosca then arrives, implying to Corvino that if he lets Celia sleep with Volpone (as a "restorative" for Volpone's
failing health), then Volpone will choose him as his heir. Suddenly, Corvino's jealousy disappears, and he consents to the offer.

The third act begins with a soliloquy from Mosca, indicating that he is growing increasingly conscious of his power and his independence from Volpone. Mosca then runs into Bonario, Corbaccio's son, and informs the young man of his father's plans to disinherit him. He has Bonario come back to Volpone's house with him, in order to watch Corbaccio sign the documents (hoping that Bonario might kill Corbaccio then and there out of rage, thus allowing Volpone to gain his inheritance early). Meanwhile Lady Politic again arrives at Volpone's residence, indicating that it is now mid-morning, approaching noon.

This time, Volpone lets her in, but he soon regrets it, for he is exasperated by her talkativeness. Mosca rescues Volpone by telling the Lady that Sir Politic has been seen in a gondola with a courtesan (a high-class prostitute). Volpone then prepares for his seduction of Celia, while Mosca hides Bonario in a corner of the bedroom, in anticipation of Corbaccio's arrival. But Celia and Corvino arrive first—Celia complains bitterly about being forced to be unfaithful, while Corvino tells her to be quiet and do her job. When Celia and Volpone are alone together, Volpone greatly surprises Celia by leaping out of bed. Celia had expected and old, infirm man, but what she gets instead is a lothario who attempts to seduce her with a passionate speech. Always the good Christian, Celia refuses Volpone's advances, at which point Volpone says that he will rape her.

But Bonario, who has been witnessing the scene from his hiding place the entire time, rescues Celia. Bonario wounds Mosca on his way out. Corbaccio finally arrives, too late, as does Voltore. Mosca plots, with Voltore's assistance, how to get Volpone out of this mess.
A short while later, in the early afternoon, Peregrine and Sir Politic are still talking. Sir Politic gives the young traveler some advice on living in Venice and describes several schemes he has under consideration for making a great deal of money. They are soon interrupted by Lady Politic, who is convinced that Peregrine is the prostitute Mosca told her about—admittedly, in disguise. But Mosca arrives and tells Lady Politic that she is mistaken; the courtesan he referred to is now in front of the Senate (in other words, Celia). Lady Politic believes him and ends by giving Peregrine a seductive goodbye with a coy suggestion that they see each other again.

Peregrine is incensed at her behavior and vows revenge on Sir Politic because of it. The scene switches to the Scrutineo, the Venetian Senate building, where Celia and Bonario have informed the judges of Venice about Volpone's deceit, Volpone's attempt to rape Celia, Corbaccio's disinheritance of his son, and Corvino's decision to prostitute his wife. But the defendants make a very good case for themselves, led by their lawyer, Voltore. Voltore portrays Bonario and Celia as lovers, Corvino as an innocent jilted husband, and Corbaccio as a wounded father nearly killed by his evil son. The judge are swayed when Lady Politic comes in and (set up perfectly by Mosca) identifies Celia as the seducer of her husband Sir Politic. Further, they are convinced when Volpone enters the courtroom, again acting ill. The judges order that Celia and Bonario be arrested and separated.

In the final act, Volpone returns home tired and worried that he is actually growing ill, for he is now feeling some of the symptoms he has been faking. To dispel his fears, he decides to engage in one final prank on the legacy hunters. He spreads a rumor that he has died and then tells Mosca to pretend that he has been made his master's heir. The plan goes off perfectly, and all three legacy hunters are fooled.
Volpone then disguises himself as a Venetian guard, so that he can gloat in each legacy hunter's face over their humiliation, without being recognized. But Mosca lets the audience know that Volpone is dead in the eyes of the world and that Mosca will not let him "return to the world of the living" unless Volpone pays up, giving Mosca a share of his wealth.

Meanwhile, Peregrine is in disguise himself, playing his own prank on Sir Politic. Peregrine presents himself as a merchant to the knight and informs Politic that word has gotten out of his plan to sell Venice to the Turks. Politic, who once mentioned the idea in jest, is terrified. When three merchants who are in collusion with Peregrine knock on the door, Politic jumps into a tortoise-shell wine case to save himself.

Peregrine informs the merchants when they enter that he is looking at a valuable tortoise. The merchants decide to jump on the tortoise and demand that it crawls along the floor. They remark loudly upon its leg-garters and fine hand-gloves, before turning it over to reveal Sir Politic. Peregrine and the merchants go off, laughing at their prank, and Sir Politic moans about how much he agrees with his wife's desire to leave Venice and go back to England.

Meanwhile, Volpone gloats in front of each legacy hunter, deriding them for having lost Volpone's inheritance to a parasite such as Mosca, and he successfully avoids recognition. But his plan backfires nonetheless. Voltore, driven to such a state of distraction by Volpone's teasing, decides to recant his testimony in front of the Senate, implicating both himself but more importantly Mosca as a criminal.

Corvino accuses him of being a sore loser, upset that Mosca has inherited Volpone's estate upon his death, and the news of this death surprises the Senators greatly. Volpone nearly recovers from his blunder by telling Voltore, in the middle of the Senate proceeding, that "Volpone" is still alive. Mosca pretends to faint and
claims to the Senate that he does not know where he is, how he got there, and that he must have been possessed by a demon during the last few minutes when he was speaking to them. He also informs the Senators that Volpone is not dead, contradicting Corvino. All seems good for Volpone until Mosca returns, and, instead of confirming Voltore's claim that Volpone is alive, Mosca denies it. Mosca, after all, has a will, written by Volpone and in his signature, stating that he is Volpone's heir. Now that Volpone is believed to be dead, Mosca legally owns Volpone's property, and Mosca tells Volpone that he is not going to give it back by telling the truth. Realizing that he has been betrayed, Volpone decides that rather than let Mosca inherit his wealth, he will turn them both in. Volpone takes off his disguise and finally reveals the truth about the events of the past day. Volpone ends up being sent to prison, while Mosca is consigned to a slave galley. Voltore is disbarred, Corbaccio is stripped of his property (which is given to his son Bonario), and Corvino is publicly humiliated, forced to wear donkey's ears while being rowed around the canals of Venice. At the end, there is a small note from the playwright to the audience, simply asking them to applaud if they enjoyed the play they just saw.

Act I, scene i

The scene is Volpone's house, in the Italian city of Venice, in the spring of 1606. It is morning, and Volpone, whose name in Italian means "the great Fox," enters. He is a Venetian magnifico, or nobleman and accompanying him is his parasite Mosca, best thought of as a personal assistant/manservant/lackey. Volpone asks Mosca to unveil the shrine where Volpone keeps his treasure. Volpone, whose name means "Great Fox" in Italian, talks at length about the beauty and ethereal qualities of his gold. Then he and his parasite—whose name means "Fly"—discuss the way in which he earned his treasure: without hard work, presumably through cons.
They also discuss the liberal way in which Volpone spends his treasure. He also describes the current con he is running; since he is childless, he has no heirs, and since he is extremely wealthy (from his previous cons), there is great interest into whom his estate will go to when he dies. So Volpone is pretending to be gravely ill and near death, prompting three notable citizens who consider themselves potential heirs to shower him with gifts in the hopes that he will make one of them his principal heir.

**Act I, scene ii**

Nano (a dwarf), Castrone (a eunuch), and Androgyno enter. They are here to entertain Volpone, with Nano leading the way. In a pleasant little fable, Nano relates that the soul now in Androgyno's body originated in the soul of Pythagoras. Mosca admits that he, in fact, wrote the entertainment; after Volpone says he was pleased with it. Nano then sings a song praising Fools, such as himself, who make their living by entertaining at the tables of the rich.

A knock is heard at the door; Mosca says that it is Signior Voltore, a lawyer and one of Volpone's would-be "heirs." Mosca goes to see him into the house and comes back to announce that he has brought a huge piece of gold plate with him as a gift. Volpone is excited; his con is working, and he quickly prepares to put on the act of being sick, by getting into his night-clothes and dropping ointment in his eyes. He notes that he has been fooling these would-be heirs for three years, with various faked symptoms such as palsy (tremors), gout (joint-aches), coughs, apoplexy (breathing problems) and catarrhs (vomit).

**Act I, scene iii**

Voltore the lawyer—whose name means "vulture" in Italian—enters with Mosca, and Mosca assures him that he will be Volpone's heir. Voltore asks
after Volpone's health, and Volpone thanks him for both his kindness and his gift of a large piece of gold plate. The magnifico then informs the lawyer that his health is failing, and he expects to die soon.

Voltore asks Mosca three times whether he is Volpone's heir before he is finally satisfied with Mosca's answer, at which point he rejoices. He asks why he is so lucky, and Mosca explains that it is partly due to the fact that Volpone has always had an admiration for lawyers and the way they can argue either side of a case at a moment's notice. He then begs Voltore not to forget him when the lawyer inherits Volpone's money and becomes rich. Voltore leaves happy, with a kiss for Mosca, at which point Volpone jumps out of bed and congratulates his parasite on a job well done. But the game quickly starts again, as another would-be heir arrives, identified only as "the raven."

**Act I, scene iv**

"The raven" turns out to be Corbaccio (whose name means "raven" in Italian), an elderly man, who, according to Mosca, is in much worse health himself than Volpone pretends to be. Corbaccio offers to give Volpone a drug, but Mosca refuses out of fear that the drug may be Corbaccio's way of speeding up the dying process (in other words, some form of poison). Mosca excuses his refusal by saying that Volpone simply does not trust the medical profession in general, to which Corbaccio agrees. Corbaccio then inquires after Mosca's health; as Mosca lists off the ever-worsening symptoms, Corbaccio marks his approval of each one, except when he mishears one of Mosca's replies and gets worried that Volpone might be improving. But Mosca assures him that Volpone is, in fact, getting worse and is in fact nearly dead. This cheers up Corbaccio greatly, who remarks that Volpone is even sicker than he is and that he is certain to outlive; he remarks that it makes him feel twenty years younger.

Corbaccio expresses curiosity about Volpone's will, but Mosca replies it has not yet been written. The old man asks what Voltore was up to at Volpone's house;
when Mosca answers truthfully—that he gave Volpone a piece of gold plate in the hopes of being written into his will—Corbaccio presents a bag of cecchines (Venetian coins) intended for Volpone. Mosca then explain how Corbaccio can be certain of being Volpone's heir; by leaving the bag of cecchines, but also by writing Volpone as his sole heir. Mosca says that when Volpone then writes his own will, his sense of gratitude will compel him to make Corbaccio his sole heir. Corbaccio soon leaves, and Volpone mocks him afterward mercilessly for trying to inherit money from a sick, dying man when he, himself, is on the brink of death.

**Act I, scene v**

The final would-be heir now appears. He is a merchant named Corvino, and his names mean "crow" in Italian. He brings a pearl as his gift; Mosca then lets him know that Volpone has been saying his name constantly, though he is so ill he can barely recognize anyone and is unable to say anything else. Corvino hands over the pearl, and Mosca then informs him he took it upon himself to write up a will, interpreting Volpone's cries of "Corvino" as indicating the Fox's desire to have Corvino be his heir. Corvino hugs and thanks Mosca for his help, then asks whether or not Volpone saw them celebrating. Mosca assures him Volpone is blind. Corvino is worried that the sick man might hear them talking this way, but Mosca assures him he is dead by hurling abuse in his ear; he then asks Corvino to join in, which the merchant does gladly. But when Mosca suggests that Corvino suffocate Volpone, Corvino backs off and begs Mosca not to use violence.

Corvino then leaves, and pledges to share everything with Mosca when he inherits Volpone's fortune, but Mosca notes that one thing Corvino will not share: his wife. When Corvino is gone, another caller arrives: it is Lady Politic Would-be, the wife of the English knight Sir Politic Would-be, but Volpone does not want to talk-or do anything else-with her, so she is not let in. Mosca explains that Lady Politic's reputation for promiscuity is overblown, unlike Corvino's wife, she is not
beautiful enough to be promiscuous. According to Mosca, Corvino's wife is perhaps the most beautiful woman in all of Italy. Volpone is inflamed by Mosca's description, and vows to see her. Mosca explains that she is never let out of the house by the insanely jealous Corvino, and is kept guarded by ten spies. Volpone nevertheless is resolved to see her, so he decides to go in disguise—but not too well disguised, since this might be his first introduction to the beautiful Celia.