



This review of a show at the Edinburgh Fringe 2018 was published on Tuesday 21 August.



**ABOUT THIS SHOW**

3-11, 13-18, 20-26 Aug, 6:35pm-8:55pm

Paradise in Augustines

[Info & Tickets](#)

**ABOUT THIS REVIEWER**

Jane Bristow

[Who's this?](#)



## Volpone

*Volpone* is a rare chance to see Ben Jonson's 1606 farce brought to life. It may be 400 years old, but the intricate plot and biting satire of human weakness continues to fascinate in this competent revival from Arbery Productions.

Reimagined in 19th-century Venice, the story centres on the wealthy Volpone (Italian for "sly fox"), who is dying and tended to by his "faithful" Mosca ("fly"). Or so the good people of Venice think: "vulture, raven, crow all seek my dying carcass" he laments, as it emerges that Volpone and his servant have been entertaining themselves for a few years by getting people to compete to be named as his heir.

First Voltore ("vulture") the lawyer drops in, to check if Volpone is any closer to death; next comes Corbaccio ("raven"), who in this adaptation is a miserly widow, and decides to disinherit her own son for a better shot at inheriting Volpone's fortune. Finally, there's Corvino ("crow"), who happens to have a beautiful wife – a fact which gets the ever-letchy Volpone's attention in no time. The nimble Mosca manages to use each against the other, and a young man, an upset son and a ridiculous English couple enter the mix. The stage is set for some very disgruntled people... and complex mistaken identities.

The elaborate web created by Mosca calls for a lot of effort from the cast, who clearly relish the pace of the play. Some brilliantly cynical lines are delivered by Mosca and Volpone, such as when the master argues against medical help as "doctors make you pay for your own death." The pair, who are deftly played by Vanashree Thapliyal and Alastair Lawless, showcase Jonson's mocking attitude to greed.

It's not surprising that for modern ears there are some difficult parts to *Volpone*. Lines such as Corvino saying to his wife "be now my whore if you hold dear to your life" are troubling to hear in what is otherwise a comedy, particularly when she's interpreted in this production as little more than a cowering wreck. Some of the acting wasn't very consistent too, though this is rescued by the excellent chemistry of the two main performers.

It's well worth a watch for fans of 17th century theatre, with the performers generally doing justice to Jonson's sassy lines. [A very enjoyable way to see one of the masterpieces of Jacobean theatre.](#)