

## Functions of Animal Images in *Volpone*

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**Abstract:** In the comedy *Volpone*, or the Fox, Ben Jonson uses symbolism and satire to create a fable world. He borrows ridiculous animal images to represent the human world, satirizing human greed, deception, and desire. This paper applies close reading to analyze the animalized characters in order to explore the functions of animal images in characterization, emplotment, and thematization.

### 1. Introduction

As one of the most controversial works in British dramatic history, Ben Jonson's *Vopone, or The Fox* (usually abbreviated as *Volpone*) has caught people's attention ever since its debut in 1606. Between 1785 and 1921, *Vopone* was not staged, but it kept its unique charm for different critics (Dutton, *Ben Jonson* 17). Ever since T.S. Eliot commented on *Volpone* in 1919, some researches have been done for it. This paper discusses the studies of animal images in *Volpone* from three aspects: characters, plots as well as themes.

Based on recent researches on *Volpone*, there is consensus that all the characters in the play lower themselves to the level of animal images because of their avarice (Hallett 51). Ronald Broude also mentions that *Volpone* applies the beast fable that the fox feigns death to catch carrion (230). In this animal world, the application of animal images serves to underline the "bestial qualities of some of *Volpone*'s characters" (Broude 230). In this form of dramatic wit, those animalized characters are prone to follow a special pattern of beastly behavior. As a result, the audience would find that those animal images produce "a surprisingly unconventional outcome" (Kay 19).

Perhaps none of the devices which Jonson used was more tellingly handled than that dealing with animal images in *Volpone*. Though some scholars have probed into the fable and bestiary elements in *Volpone*, what they have overlooked is the striking functions of animal images in characterization, emplotment, and thematization. Through a complex method of comparing different characters with diverse animals in the play, this paper finds that *Volpone*'s animal images are inextricably a part of the development of characters, the working-out of plots, and the maintenance of underlying themes.

This paper applies close reading to analyze the animalized characters in order to explore the functions of animal images in characterization, emplotment, and thematization. With regard to characterization, the animal images with different features help to characterize and categorize different human characters. As for the plot of *Volpone*, fox stories constitute the bulk of the main plot, while the parrot images (Sir Politic Would-be and Lady Would-be) in the subplot support the main plot by partly imitating it. Concerning thematization, the 'animals' in *Volpone*, embodying the different representations of greed, turn out to be self-destructive, which helps to portray such a major theme of the play.

### 2. Animal Images and Characterization

In *Volpone*, Jonson explores aspects of human nature by comparing characters to animals. With beastly behaviors, men pervert their essential nature. They become the animalized characters and turn into half-man and half-brute creatures. "As men, they duplicate the habits of beasts; as beasts, they brutishly travesty humanity" (Barish 87).

From the ancient animal fable to animalized figures in *Volpone*, we witness the power of animal images on characterization. Under the beastly masks, characters in *Volpone* present the diverse features of a fox, a fly, birds of prey, a falcon, and parrots. The animal images with different features help to characterize and categorize different human characters.

According to the characters' names and certain scenes, "Now, now, my clients begin their visitation; vulture, kite, raven, and gor-crow, all my birds of prey" (1.2.87-9) and "my vulture, crow, raven, come flying hither on the news to peck for carrion" (5.2.63-7). *Volpone* is based on the storyline of the fox who pretends illness to catch those birds of prey. Those animalist names give an insight into the nature of each character.

In *Volpone*, every beast has its own distinct feature or symbolic association. For instance, in *Animal with Human Faces*, the fox is a cunning shape-shifter who likes running in circles, which symbolizes the misers, usurers, and even the Devil (Rowland 76-80). *Physiologus* has given its explanation like this: the Devil is also very crafty in his ways. He who would eat his flesh dies. So they both belong to adultery, covetousness, lust, and murder (qtd. in Parker 14). As for the vulture Voltore, he is linked to avarice and persuasiveness, especially in lawyers, "your tongue, sir, tipped with gold for this" (4.6.64). Usually the vulture has a keen scent, as shown in "He has the quickest scent" (5.2.108-9) and "my vulture, heaving his beak up i' the air" (5.6.27-8).

In the bestiaries, a raven (Corbaccio) and a crow (Corvino) are likely to be confused. On the one hand, the crow, however, is prone to decorate itself with peacocks' feathers, which conforms to "our spruce merchant" Corvino (1.4.161). In Beryl Rowland's *Birds with Human Souls*, Corvino's pandering of his wife is echoed by the medieval fable that a white crow is turned black by Apollo because of tattling his wife's disloyalty (35-8). On the other hand, the raven is the symbol of longevity with the croak presaging the death (Rowland, *Birds* 143-9). It tends to ignore its offspring, which echoes the scene of Corbaccio's disinheriting his son Bonario. The fly Mosca acts as the final link among those predators. Thomas Moffet notes that such kind of fly is the best cure for fox's evil (945). The name "Musca" is often applied to parasites in Latin and regarded as the devil himself (Moffet 951).

Similarly, there are many symbolic implications on Sir Politic's disguise as a tortoise. Thynne regards a parrot on a sea-tortoise as a symbol of eloquence as well as wisdom (36). What's more, the tortoise alone serves as the symbol of "prudent self-reliance" (the Aesopian meaning of "slow and sure"), which gives an extra irony to the "self-interest" represented by the fox (Thynne 37). In *Volpone*, the tortoise has the deeper symbolic values, which focuses on the "silence" that is contrasted with the eloquence of the parrot.

According to *O.E.D.*, the falcon Peregrine is "so called because the young were not [...] taken from the nest [...] but caught on their passage or 'pilgrimage' from their breeding place" (qtd. in Parker 16). It accords with Peregrine's overhasty and malicious action on a false presumption. The group of falcon and tortoise, however, is the classic symbol of the wise man, which means the balance of "fast" and "slow" or not going to both extremes. When the characters in *Volpone* become different animals, they actually turn to be mere caricatures of living men, or "utter fools devoid of common sense" who abandon the virtues in the hope of pursuing the wealth (Kernan 2938-41). And the animal images with different features help to characterize and categorize different human characters.

*Volpone* is a play about how the crafty fox Volpone and the parasitic fly Mosca fool the carrion-loving birds of prey. Jonson puts the different beasts together to name diverse characters. It seems that those characters' names have suggested a hierarchy that is found in the chain of being (Hallett 53). What is easily overlooked is Jonson's fine-line differentiation among the animalized characters (Weld 185).

Volpone is "an old fox, an old reynard; an old, crafty, sly, subtle companion; sneaking, lurking, wily deceiver" (Dutton, *Volpone* 40). In the beast fable, cunning is the most vivid feature for a fox. And the animalized figure Volpone represents this characteristic from his superb disguise skill.

Secondly, let's focus on Mosca. As Volpone's parasite, Mosca is a special kind of 'fly', or "a demonic food polluter" or the pollution itself (Skulsky 304). According to Creaser's *Volpone*, the parasite, "a busy-body and uninvited guest", is traditionally symbolized by the fly (40). Jonson writes

about parasites in Discoveries, “They are an odious and vile kind of creatures that fly about the house all day, and, picking up the filth of the house like pies of swallows, carry it to the nest-the lord’s ears-and often-times report the lies they have feigned, for what they have seen and heard” (112-51). Just like the traditional stage parasites, Mosca knows how to depend on others for financial gains. Parasitic avarice is the most distinguishable feature of the fly Mosca.

Voltore is a ravenous bird called a vulture, or “a greedy cormorant”, which is applied metaphorically both to legacy-hunters and lawyers (Dutton, *Volpone* 40). With the acute smell, a vulture is always the first one to arrive. Throughout the play, acuteness is Voltore’s most remarkable feature.

Corbaccio is a “filthy great raven” and also the name of a worm breeding in horses (Dutton, *Volpone* 40). It is not ominous for a raven to nest. The Bible (Psalms, 167.9; Proverbs, 30.17; Luke, 12.24) gives instances of ravens neglecting their young, who therefore have to rely on heaven. Similarly, the animalized character Corbaccio also shows the mercilessness when treating with his offspring.

The fourth legacy hunter Lady Would-be (or Lady Pol) is a chattering parrot, which is well-known for its colorful fur in fable stories (Dutton, *Volpone* 104). Just like a parrot’s beak, which is noted for its redness, her nose is red too (4.2.73). The parrot Lady Pol represents the vanity feature by overemphasizing on her make-up.

The group of Sir Politic Would-be (Sir Pol) and Peregrine belongs to the subplot. They occupy the minor part of the play. “Pol” associates him with the parrot, which is famous for its powers of mimicry, one of many bird-types in the cast of *Volpone* (Barish 83). In animal fables, a parrot always learns the words of others for its vain curiosity. In *Volpone*, this feature is represented by the animalized character Sir Pol.

As for Peregrine, he is a falcon or a haggard hawk that is used in hunting (Lat. *Falco peregrinus*). Hawks are sacred to Apollo because they “strike ignorance” and “make fools their quarry” (Dutton, *Volpone* 40). In the fable tradition, a falcon could be a complementary extreme to a tortoise. And Peregrine shows the vulture-like over-hastiness in attempt to strike and expose Sir Pol.

*Volpone* and Mosca, as the beastly ones of playing tricks, represent the upper (or superior) state of animalistic existence. The gullible characters or birds of prey are associated with the lower beasts like a vulture, a raven, a crow, and a parrot. The group of falcon and parrot belongs to the beasts in the subplot, which are also a classical animal combination. With the help of animal images, we can see the cunning of *Volpone*, the parasitic avarice of Mosca, the acuteness of Voltore, the ruthlessness of Corbaccio, the jealousy of Corvino, the vanity of Lady Would-be, the vain curiosity of Sir Politic, and the over-hastiness of Peregrine.

Mosca and *Volpone* stand at the apex in the chain of being. The animal images, a cunning fox and a greedy fly, bring a useful aid for characterization. Similarly, it is an oversight not to see the competition for the legacy-hunting among Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino and Lady Would-be. They belong to a similar level of duplicity and represent as the group of legacy hunters including a vulture, a raven, a crow, and a parrot. Nevertheless, they are not only served as “fodder” for the fox’s and the fly’s monstrous and depraved appetite (Gianakaris 50). They also represent the various aspects of nature, like acuteness, mercilessness, jealousy, and vanity. The last group of animal images shows the vain curiosity and over-hastiness of Sir Pol and Peregrine in the subplot. After studying the characters in animal images, this thesis continues to discuss the function of animal images for emplotment.

### 3. Animal Images and Emplotment

Jonson has regarded the tact of the fox feigning death as an allegory of the deception of legacy-hunters in the main plot (Scheve 242). The recognition of the fox image in *Volpone* can shed light on the emplotment in the main plot, for it helps to create the storyline like feigning death and mortifying of a fox.

As for the subplot of *Volpone*, the text takes the parrot as the major image, whose parroting indicates the mimic of the subplot to the main plot. For a long time, the subplot scenes are

problematic for modern audiences and critics, for they interrupt what is already a long and complex plot and are full of dated references. But if taking animal images into account, we will find that they are critical to the understanding of the main plot in *Volpone*. And Jonson is so wise to put images of parrots into the subplot so as to draw out the parallels between the double plots.

Lucius H. Holt assumes that, Jonson chooses the fable of *Volpone* with judgment. It means the “paying obsequious and constant courtship” to a childless wealthy man (the fox), hoping to get the bountiful legacies in return. It has been a practice of all times, and in all nations (“Jonson’s” 63). Throughout the comedy *Volpone*, Jonson makes use of the fox’s feigning death at first and asserts that “This is call’d mortifying of a FOXE” in the end (5.12.125). Jonson takes the fox as the major image, whose related fables form the storyline in the main plot.

In the main plot, Volpone feigns illness as the fox feigns death to mock its enemies. The gold which “gilds the rhetoric of the early speeches” turns out to be the carrion-flesh in the latter half of *Volpone* (Hill 327). And it is Mosca, the blow-fly, who feeds upon the gold. It is the vulture Voltore, the raven Corbaccio, the crow Corvino, and the parrot Lady Would-be who smell the “carrion-flesh” and compete for the legacy. Therefore, by feigning death like a fox, Volpone realizes the cheating of birds of prey and pushes the development of the main plot.

Besides feigning death of a fox, Jonson introduces the idea of “mortifying” of Volpone’s flesh (5.12.125) to form the storyline in the main plot. An animal’s “case” is its hide, not its hiding place (Skulsky 306). When the fox Volpone loses its case or hide, it loses itself—or loses “its poor excuse for a self” (Skulsky 306). It is called the mortifying of a fox. Together with feigning death of a fox, the mortifying of a fox provides the story materials for the main plot and helps the plot’s development.

In John D. Rea’s edition of *Volpone*, it seems to be the first time to notice that Sir Politic Would-be, like the characters of the main plot, has his “niche” in the common beast fable. Sir Pol is like the chattering poll parrot, and his wife is a “deadlier” sample of the same types (Barish 83).

Therefore, it is very reasonable for Jonson to invent the Would-be subplot. The parrots in the subplot imitate their environment, and without knowing that they are mimicking the actions of the main characters (Barish 83). When the two parrots imitate others’ actions, they supply the function of parody for the characters in the main plot. Besides, through mimic parrots, the Would-be scenes perform the role of parallel imitation for the main plot in *Volpone*. The subplot succeeds in adding more density and complexity of vision to the main plot.

No matter in the main plot and the subplot, Lady Pol has presented an ability of mimicry like a parrot. As a mimic parrot, Lady Would-be is a combination of jealous Corvino, perversely learned Voltore, and Corbaccio who makes compromising proposals to Mosca and leaves himself under the control of the “blackmail” (Barish 84).

Both the parrot Lady Would-be and the crow Corvino are controlled by Mosca through sexual jealousy and worry for the public reputation. Besides, Lady Would-be is very assertive, which is a parody of the quality of the lawyer Voltore in the main plot. Just like the voluble vulture, she insists on speaking the last word with the Avocatori. Even the fox evaluates that she can even persuade a lawyer (3.5.9). Similar with the raven Corbaccio who offers the “dram” and mocks the faked curealls (2.6.21), she provides the similar evil solicitude for Volpone by offering a hand-made cap and confusing medical advice to Volpone. Both of them represent the similar gullibility.

As a mimic parrot, Lady Would-be supplies the function of parody for the characters in the main plot, including jealous Corvino, perversely learned Voltore, and compromising Corbaccio. In the following part, this paper focuses on the imitations of the parrot Sir Pol.

When it comes to the parrot Sir Pol, he appears three times on the stage of *Volpone*. Every appearance accompanies with the flight. When Corvino attacks the Scoto acted by the fox, Sir Pol flees the scene for the suspect that it may be some tricks of state and probably directed at him. The second flight goes to the scene when Lady Would-be attacks Peregrine, the supposed “female devil in a male outside” (4.2.55). And in the end, with the tortoise shell, Sir Pol runs away again, which in turn proves himself as a fraud and a coward. Fooled by Peregrine, he flees “to shun this place and clime forever, creeping with house on back, and think it well to shrink my poor head in my politic shell”

(5.4.90-91). Sir Pol represents the ability of mimicry like a parrot and realizes the function of imitating the main character Volpone.

The parrot Sir Pol's plans for power and riches, the sense of rank, appetite for novelty, sort of eccentric behaviors, and triviality in his diary are in accordance with certain actions of the fox Volpone (Parker 38).

As an imitative animal, Sir Pol is addicted in his own ingenuity like the fox Volpone, including the get-rich-quick plans. When Volpone uses the legacy as a bait to receive gifts from birds of prey, Sir Pol talks about several moneymaking schemes that he is undertaking, for example the red herrings for the State of Venice (4.1.50-5), outlawing of small timber-boxes (4.1.85-90), the plague-test with onions (4.1.115-25). Just like Volpone who hopes the fulfillment of sexual seduction to prove himself a normal man, Sir Pol looks for the recognition as a spy and dealer of state secrets. It corresponds to the lecherous fox who wishes the sexual experience instead of the sexual action. Sir Pol even asserts that he could sell the entire state of Venice to the Turk if he wants to (4.1.130). Besides, the parrot's meanness on the expenditure (4.1.136) offers the correspondence to the fox's luxury in the main plot (3.7.190). Furthermore, when Sir Pol's self-confidence on acumen causes his exposure in act 5, it actually foresees the fox's being betrayed by the fly in the end.

Therefore, those two parrots are imitators, just like the Britons aping Venetians. As a parrot, Lady Pol imitates the legacy suitors, including the jealous crow, the perversely erudite vulture, and the compromising raven. At the same time, Sir Pol turns out to imitate one of the main characters, the fox Volpone. Next, the mimic scenes of the couple parrots serve the function of parallel imitation to the main plot.

Back to the story-lines of the main plot and subplot, there are three parallel imitations we should notice. Firstly, the parrot Sir Pol creates the false alliance with Peregrine and even treats Peregrine as his confidant (4.1.42-4). This kind of relationship is similar to the vulnerable one between Volpone and Mosca in the main story-line (Parker 39). Secondly, the scenes between Lady Pol and Volpone can function as "a burlesque of the parallel scenes" in main plot (Barish 87). With the role of the legacy hunter, Lady Pol is equal in the position with Volpone's other clients, Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino, attending the fox Volpone for the purpose of gaining the fortune. Thirdly, there is also the fable imitation in double plots. To some extent, the falcon Peregrine's torment of Sir Pol is similar to the fox Volpone's trick of Corvino in terms of the fable elements.

In conclusion, the fox stories, mimic parrots, and three parallel imitations of plots have represented an intimate relationship between animal images and emplotment in *Volpone*. The feigning death and mortifying of a fox provide the storyline for the main plot. Besides, when the two parrots imitate the Venetians, they unconsciously mimic the characters in the main plot. Through mimic parrots, the subplot provides parallel imitation for the main plot, including the alliance relationship, legacy hunting scenes, and fable stories. In the next content, this thesis continues to discuss the function of animal images in thematization.

#### **4. Animal Images and Thematization**

In *Volpone*, Jonson uses the animal images or "presentation of man as a beast" as a satiric device to suit the themes (Welsh 45). In this way, he succeeds in drawing up a play that is strongly moralistic, which provides the moral instruction and criticism for the audience. In this satiric comedy, those animal images are mocked, for we respond by feeling superior. We can enjoy the antics of the beasts, but regard them with contempt. A moralist would assume that we are prone to repel their greed by rejecting it (Hume 92).

Besides, in *Volpone*, all the legacy suitors whom Volpone and Mosca gull are described either as disgusting and depraved birds of prey or as the "vulgar" parrot. Though they all belong to the same beastly level, the fox and the fly are given "a certain moral credit" for punishing those birds (Manlove 248). And the very ending of the parasitic fly Mosca conforms to the "punishment for greed" theme, namely the justice realized within those animals themselves.

As John S. Weld has said, in *Volpone*, Jonson indeed satirizes greed or avarice with those animalized characters (177). Corvino is jealous, but he also foolishly panders his wife for the legacy. Gulled by Mosca, Corbaccio loses his son as well as his inheritance. Voltore is described as a dazzling lawyer, but his acuteness pales in the pursuit of legacy. Sir Pol and Lady Pol are prone to mimic, but they imitate the others in a wrong way. Similarly, Volpone and Mosca are clever, but they show a greater eager to manipulate the others. Therefore, what we are likely to ignore is the different representations of greed represented by those animal images.

First of all, let's focus on the legacy hunters or birds of prey. Corbaccio makes use of his son to gain favor with Volpone, while Corvino directly employs his wife to win Volpone's wealth. Voltore, on the other hand, uses both of the other suitors to carry out "a brilliant defense of the fox and thus earn the reward for him" (Gianakaris 51). Therefore, in the animal fable, Jonson distinguishes between them in degree of greed, not in kind. As for the parrot characters, Sir Politic Would-be is a "bumbling" English traveler, who regards himself as the self-appointed politician of the world (Manlove 239). And his wife, with those assumptions of refinement, certainly reveals her own vulgarity when aping Venetians. As the imitative parrots, they satisfy their greed through social emulation.

Jonson, through writing *Volpone*, has succeeded in criticizing the greed. The evil consequences of their greed include the vulture Voltore's unreliable testimony for legacy, the raven Corbaccio's disinheriting his son for gold, the crow Corvino's prostituting his wife for fortune, and parrots' social emulation.

In James D. Redwine's eyes, what is worth mentioning is that *Volpone* is a study of man's "wolfish compulsion" to make other characters suffer with a faked mask (301). With the animal images of a fox and a fly, Volpone and Mosca make a series of plots and tricks out of greed. Their desire for manipulation, however, makes them prefer to play all kinds of crafts and step on the road of tricks. It in turn serves as a good foundation for deception between the fox and the fly and realizes the theme of "punishment for greed". In *Volpone*, Jonson creates a complicated portraiture of animalized characters. Compared with the gullible animals like a vulture, a raven, and a crow, Volpone and Mosca are more cruel and hypocritical. In a certain way, Volpone and Mosca demonstrate the emerging greedy men of the Renaissance regardless of hierarchical station. They both want to gain more, but their efforts remain in vain at last.

C. J. Gianakaris also mentions that, for Jonson as well as any learned humanist of his age, their final goal of comic drama was to teach and to entertain (45). As for the ethical intention or effect of *Volpone*, scholars raise a series of evidence including "parodied moral commonplace", "beast-fable elements", "imagery", and "morality patterns" (Hill 322).

Indeed, beastly behaviors nearly remove the play's action from the everyday world of ordinary employment (Paster 57). But in this world, Jonson draws a picture of an animal society that is greedy or decadent morally, but subjected to "a rigorous judicial code" (Perkinson 18).

In the main plot, Volpone feigns illness as the fox feigns death to mock its enemies. The gold which "gilds the rhetoric of the early speeches" turns out to be the carrion-flesh in the latter half of *Volpone* (Hill 327). It is the vulture Voltore, the raven Corbaccio, the crow Corvino, and the parrot Lady Would-be who smell the "carrion-flesh" and compete for the legacy. The vulture disobeys the basic principle to shield the crime of the fox and the fly. The raven is cheated by the fox and the fly at the cost of his young son Bonario. The crow is fooled to go on the path of betraying and pandering his wife Celia. The parrot Lady Pol imitates the Venetian courtesan to seduce Volpone and Mosca. In the last scene, the court gives due punishment to them. The judges disbar Voltore. Corbaccio is stripped of all his property and hands the fortune over to his son (5.12.110-133). Corvino is sentenced to public humiliation, being rowed through the canals of Venice with donkey's ears (5.12.135). Lady Pol is mocked by Mosca, "raise no tempest with your looks; but hark you" (5.3.39). Sir Pol is ridiculed by the falcon Peregrine who asks Sir Pol hide in a wine cask made of tortoise-shell to escape the arrest (5.4.55-60). After the humiliation of a fly and a falcon, the two parrots go back to England (5.4.85-8).

Perhaps it is the best way to conclude the cast of *Volpone* like this: there is no positive model here for “ethically proper behavior” and therefore the audience is left to form the judgment based on the “antics” in the play (Gianakaris 45). After a series of the tricks, as a result, nobody gets what he or she wants in *Volpone*. Innocent people are tricked by birds of prey, who in turn are duped by still shrewder and cleverer animals. In this animal world, it is decadent morally, but subjected to a rigorous judicial code. Thus, the punishment is doomed for the birds of prey and parrots in *Volpone*.

All in all, Jonson, through animal images, has succeeded in representing the evil consequences of greed, including Voltore’s perjury, Corbaccio’s disinheriting his son for gold, Corvino’s prostituting his wife for fortune, the parrot couple’s social emulation, and desire for manipulation of Volpone and Mosca. He is also successful to realize an acknowledgment of the theme “punishment for greed” with the destruction of animalized characters in *Volpone*.

## 5. Summary

The animal images in *Volpone* include a fox, a parasitic fly, a vulture, a crow, a raven, parrots, and a falcon. This paper applies close reading to analyze the animalized characters in order to explore the functions of animal images in characterization, emplotment, and thematization.

The features of the animal images help to characterize and categorize the main personalities in the play. Jonson has put one beast off against another for revealing the different features in each character. Thanks to the diverse characteristics of the differently endowed beasts, we observe their conduct according to the value projected by different animal fables and lore. A fox and a fly, as the beastly ones of playing tricks, belong to the upper or superior state of animalistic existence. They represent the cunning of Volpone and the parasitic avarice of Mosca separately. The gullible characters or legacy hunters are associated with the lower beasts like a vulture, a raven, a crow, and a parrot. Through them, we can see the acuteness of Voltore, the mercilessness of Corbaccio, the jealousy of Corvino, the vanity of Lady Would-be. The last group of falcon and parrot belongs to the beasts in the subplot. They show the vain curiosity of Sir Politic and the over-hastiness of Peregrine.

Fox stories constitute the bulk of the main plot, while the parrot images (Sir Politic Would-be and Lady Would-be) in the subplot support the main plot by partly imitating it. Feigning death of a fox and mortifying of a fox help to create the storyline in the main plot. The parrot images help to form the subplot’s parallel imitation to the main plot. On the one hand, the parrot Lady Pol imitates the legacy suitors, including jealous Corvino, perversely erudite Voltore, and compromising Corbaccio. At the same time, the parrot Sir Pol imitates the fox Volpone. On the other hand, there are three parallel imitations of the subplot to the main plot.

Concerning thematization, the “animals” in *Volpone*, embodying the different representations of greed, turn out to be self-destructive, which helps to portray such a major theme of the play. For the satisfaction of greed, birds of prey and parrots do a series of inappropriate actions. The vulture Voltore gives the unreliable testimony. The raven Corbaccio disinherits his son. The crow Corvino prostitutes his wife. The parrot couple undertakes the social emulation. The fox Volpone and the fly Mosca desire for manipulation. Jonson draws a picture of an animal world that is decadent morally, but subjected to the rigorous justice. Instead of being morally depraved, people live vicariously through them so as to effectively purify the negative thoughts in that real world of London. The destruction of those birds of prey and parrots suggests that the moral principle still functions according to the familiar “punishment for greed” law. As a recompense of Volpone’s cheating others, Mosca cheats all the fortune of Volpone, which ironically foreshadows the destiny of the fly’s own downfall. In the initial success and ultimate failure of the fly, Jonson assumes that there is an inherent greed force, which relies on the vanity of success and breaks down its own greed-doers.

All in all, the animal images in *Volpone* not only add an insight to the characterization and categorization of different human characters, but also provide the fox storyline and parrot images that form the subplot’s parallel imitation to the main plot. The self-destruction of greedy animals also conveys the depth to the “punishment for greed” theme in *Volpone*.

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