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Volpone; Or, the Fox

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Ben Jonson



Published by the Library of Alexandria

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Dtails sur le produit Publi le: 2012-12-27
Sorti le: 2012-12-27
Format: Ebook
Kindle

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur
In 1592, Jonson returned from abroad penniless. Soon after he married, almost as early and quite as imprudently as Shakespeare. He told Drummond curtly that his wife was a shrew, yet honest; for some years he lived apart from her in the household of Lord Albany. Yet two touching epitaphs among Jonsons Epigrams, On my first daughter, and On my first son, attest the warmth of the poets family affections. The daughter died in infancy, the son of the plague; another son grew up to manhood little credit to his father whom he survived. We know nothing beyond this of Jonsons domestic life. Returning to the autumn of 1598, an event now happened to sever for a time Jonsons relations with Henslowe. In a letter to Alleyn, dated September 26 of that year, Henslowe writes: I have lost one of my company that hurteth me greatly; that is Gabriel [Spencer], for he is slain in Hogsden fields by the hands of Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer. The last word is perhaps Henslowes thrust at Jonson in his displeasure rather than a designation of his actual continuance at his trade up to this time. It is fair to Jonson to remark however, that his adversary appears to have been a notorious fire-eater who had shortly before killed one Feeke in a similar squabble. Duelling was a frequent occurrence of the time among gentlemen and the nobility; it was an

impudent breach of the peace on the part of a player. This duel is the one which Jonson described years after to Drummond, and for it Jonson was duly arraigned at Old Bailey, tried, and convicted. He was sent to prison and such goods and chattels as he had were forfeited. It is a thought to give one pause that, but for the ancient law permitting convicted felons to plead, as it was called, the benefit of clergy, Jonson might have been hanged for this deed. The circumstance that the poet could read and write saved him; and he received only a brand of the letter T, for Tyburn, on his left thumb. While in jail Jonson became a Roman Catholic; but he returned to the faith of the Church of England a dozen years later. On his release, in disgrace with Henslowe and his former associates, Jonson offered his services as a playwright to Henslowes rivals, the Lord Chamberlains company, in which Shakespeare was a prominent shareholder. A tradition of long standing, though not susceptible of proof in a court of law, narrates that Jonson had submitted the manuscript of *Every Man in His Humour* to the Chamberlains men and had received from the company a refusal; that Shakespeare called him back, read the play himself, and at once accepted it. Whether this story is true or not, certain it is that *Every Man in His Humour* was accepted by Shakespeares company and acted for the first time in 1598, with Shakespeare taking a part. The evidence of this is contained in the list of actors prefixed to the comedy in the folio of Jonsons works, 1616. But it is a mistake to infer, because Shakespeares name stands first in the list of actors and the elder Knowell first in the *dramatis personae*, that Shakespeare took that particular part.

Prsentation de l'diteurIn 1592, Jonson returned from abroad penniless. Soon after he married, almost as early and quite as imprudently as Shakespeare. He told Drummond curtly that his wife was a shrew, yet honest; for some years he lived apart from her in the household of Lord Albany. Yet two touching epitaphs among Jonsons Epigrams, *On my first daughter*, and *On my first son*, attest the warmth of the poets family affections. The daughter died in infancy, the son of the plague; another son grew up to manhood little credit to his father whom he survived. We know nothing beyond this of Jonsons domestic life. Returning to the autumn of 1598, an event now happened to sever for a time Jonsons relations with Henslowe. In a letter to Alleyn, dated September 26 of that year, Henslowe writes: I have lost one of my company that hurteth me greatly; that is Gabriel [Spencer], for he is slain in Hogsden fields by the hands of Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer. The last word is perhaps Henslowes thrust at Jonson in his displeasure rather than a designation of his actual continuance at his trade up to this time. It is fair to Jonson to remark however, that his adversary appears to have been a notorious fire-eater who had shortly before killed one Feeke in a similar squabble. Duelling was a frequent occurrence of the time among gentlemen and the nobility; it was an impudent breach of the peace on the part of a player. This duel is the one which Jonson described years after to Drummond, and for it Jonson was duly arraigned at Old Bailey, tried, and convicted. He was sent to prison and such goods and chattels as he had were forfeited. It is a thought to give one pause that, but for the ancient law permitting convicted felons to plead, as it was called, the benefit of clergy, Jonson might have been hanged for this deed. The circumstance that the poet could read and write saved him; and he received only a brand of the letter T, for Tyburn, on his left thumb. While in jail Jonson became a Roman Catholic; but he returned to the faith of the Church of England a dozen years later. On his release, in disgrace with Henslowe and his former associates, Jonson offered his services as a playwright to Henslowes rivals, the Lord Chamberlains company, in which Shakespeare was a prominent shareholder. A tradition of long standing, though not susceptible of proof in a court of law, narrates that Jonson had submitted the manuscript of *Every Man in His Humour* to the Chamberlains men and had received from the company a refusal; that Shakespeare called him back, read the play himself, and at once accepted it. Whether this story is true or not, certain it is that *Every Man in His Humour* was accepted by Shakespeares company and acted for the first time in 1598, with Shakespeare taking a part. The evidence of this is contained in the list of actors prefixed to the comedy in the folio of Jonsons works, 1616. But it is a mistake to infer, because Shakespeares name stands first in the list of actors and the elder Knowell first in the *dramatis personae*, that Shakespeare took that particular part.

Biographie de l'auteurBen Jonson (1572 1637) was an English playwright, poet, actor, and literary critic of the 17th century, whose artistry exerted a lasting impact upon English poetry and stage comedy. He popularised the comedy of humours. He is generally regarded as the second most important English playwright during the reign of James I after William Shakespeare. Jonson was a classically educated, well-read and cultured man of the English Renaissance with an appetite for controversy (personal and political, artistic and intellectual) whose cultural influence was of unparalleled breadth upon the playwrights and the poets of the Jacobean era (16031625) and of the Caroline era

(16251642).