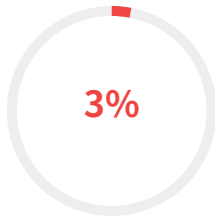


AI detection report

Assessment Report - 02 Oct, 2025

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What does a comparative study of *The Jew of Malta* and *Volpone* suggest about the contrasted characteristics of Marlowe and Jonson as dramatists?

A Comparative Study of Marlowe and Jonson: *The Jew of Malta* and *Volpone* Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1590) and Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1606) offer a striking contrast in the dramatic temperaments of two of the most influential playwrights of the English Renaissance. While both plays center on cunning, morally ambiguous protagonists who manipulate those around them, a comparative study reveals fundamental differences in character conception, moral vision, dramatic method, and overall artistic temperament.

Character Conception: The Overreacher vs. The Comic Type Marlowe's Barabas is a figure of extraordinary ambition and audacity, whose greed and lust for revenge propel the narrative. He is conceived on a grand, almost mythic scale, embodying the extremes of human desire and cruelty. As Barabas declares, "I count religion but a childish toy, / And hold there is no sin but ignorance" (Marlowe 1.1). Barabas dominates the stage, his energy and audacity creating a sense of awe and terror. In contrast, Jonson's *Volpone*, though equally clever and deceitful, is a comic figure whose scheming is bound by the social and moral framework of the play. Whereas Marlowe revels in the dramatic energy of an individual will, Jonson's focus is on exposing human folly and vice through carefully constructed types. *Volpone* observes, "What a rare punishment is avarice to itself!" (Jonson 1.4). Jonson's characters, such as the legacy-hunters, function as social mirrors, exaggerating human vices for didactic and comic purposes, rather than presenting complex psychological portraits. As Tulip notes, "*Volpone* owes its origin and deep structure to Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, and its more complex social satire reflects Jonson's engagement with contemporary Venetian society" (Tulip 231). This highlights both Jonson's debt to Marlowe and his distinctive approach to social satire.

Moral Vision: Amoral Spectacle vs. Moral Satire The moral vision of each playwright further underscores their differences. *The Jew of Malta* presents an amoral universe: Barabas's villainy captivates, and the supposedly virtuous characters—the Christians—are hypocritical and flawed. Marlowe's interest lies in the spectacle of power, deception, and revenge rather than in moral instruction. Barabas cynically declares, "Thus every villain ambles after wealth, / Although he ne'er be richer than in hope" (Marlowe 3.4). Jonson, however, constructs *Volpone* as a deliberate satire: vice is ridiculed, corruption is unmasked, and poetic justice is ultimately served. Where Marlowe excites awe through dramatic excess, Jonson seeks corrective laughter, using comedy as a means to reinforce societal norms and ethical boundaries. As Mosca states, "Your parasite / Is a most precious thing, dropped from above, / Not bred 'mongst clods and clot-poles, here on earth" (Jonson 3.1). Modern scholarship emphasizes this distinction: Donaldson observes, "In Jonson's universe, civic misconduct is the ultimate offence, a form of 'blasphemy' against the polis," contrasting with Marlowe's more individualistic portrayal of immorality (Donaldson 15).

Themes and Treatment of Religion Another key difference lies in the playwrights' treatment of religion. In *The Jew of Malta*, religion functions as a tool of hypocrisy and manipulation. Marlowe presents a world where Christians and Turks alike exploit faith for personal gain, suggesting that moral corruption is universal (Bevington 212). By contrast, Jonson's play does not center on religious critique; the focus is on social morality and ethical conduct. Volpone's schemes are not condemned on religious grounds but on ethical ones, reflecting Jonson's concern with civic virtue and societal order (Orgel 47).

Dramatic Method and Style: Rhetorical Flourish vs. Structured Satire Dramatic technique and style further distinguish the two authors. Marlowe's verse is characterized by soaring blank verse and rhetorical brilliance, often favoring dramatic spectacle over structural cohesion. His episodic plot and heightened theatricality amplify the grandeur of his characters' ambitions. For instance, Barabas declares, "As for myself, I walk abroad a-nights, / And kill sick people groaning under walls" (Marlowe 1.1). Jonson's craftsmanship, by contrast, emphasizes meticulous plotting, precise language, and social realism. *Volpone* opens with a declaration of self-importance and wit: "Hail to the world's soul, and mine. / More glad than is / The teeming earth to see the longed-for sun / Peep through the horns of the celestial ram" (Jonson 1.1). Jonson's use of classical unities and structured dialogue reflects his commitment to order and decorum in drama.

Artistic Temperament and Audience Reception Ultimately, a comparative reading of *The Jew of Malta* and *Volpone* illuminates the contrasting artistic temperaments of Marlowe and Jonson. Marlowe emerges as the dramatist of romantic excess, fascinated by the extremes of individual will and ambition. Jonson exemplifies the classical satirist, committed to social critique, moral instruction, and orderly comedy. Marlowe's audience is drawn into the thrilling spectacle of Barabas's intellect and audacity, while Jonson's spectators are guided to laugh at folly and reflect on their ethical choices. As Kermode notes, "Marlowe enthralls through character as a force of nature; Jonson instructs through comedy as a reflection of society" (Kermode 88).

In essence, Marlowe's theatre exhilarates through the force of human desire and audacity, whereas Jonson's theatre instructs through measured exposure of folly and vice. The addition of modern critical perspectives underscores how both dramatists, while differing in style and moral vision, contributed fundamentally to Renaissance drama and the evolution of character and satire on the English stage.

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