

## Volpone as a Mammon Figure

RAMKRISHNA BHATTACHARYA

Aubrey Beardsley's illustration of the first scene of *Volpone* is well known. The frontispiece to the 1898 edition of *Volpone* drawn by him shows Volpone standing before his collection of treasure with folded hands, almost in a gesture of paying oblation. Volpone's very speech opens with an adulation of gold. The speech has been analysed in detail by all commentators, more recently by Erich Segal. He notes the parallel to that of Barabas in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, who "describes his possessions with luxurious language" (Segal 372). Segal also notes that Jonson has added "unabashed blasphemy" to "Marlovian preternatural greed". It is ironical that the invocation to the "sonne of Sol" is "said to have influenced" Milton's invocation to Light in *Paradise Lost*, Book 3. (Segal 372)

What however, is missing in the existing commentaries is the iconography of the Mammon figure that first makes its appearance in English literature in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. The passage runs as follows:

An uncouth, salvage, and uncivile wight,  
Of grisly hew and fowle ill favour'd sight;  
His face with smoke and tand, and eies were blard,  
His head and beard with sout were ill bedight,  
His cole-blacke hands did seeme to have been seard  
In smythes fire-spitting forge, and nayles like clawe appeared

His yron cote, all over growne with rust,  
Was underneath enveloped with gold.  
Whose glistering glosse, darkened with filthy dust,