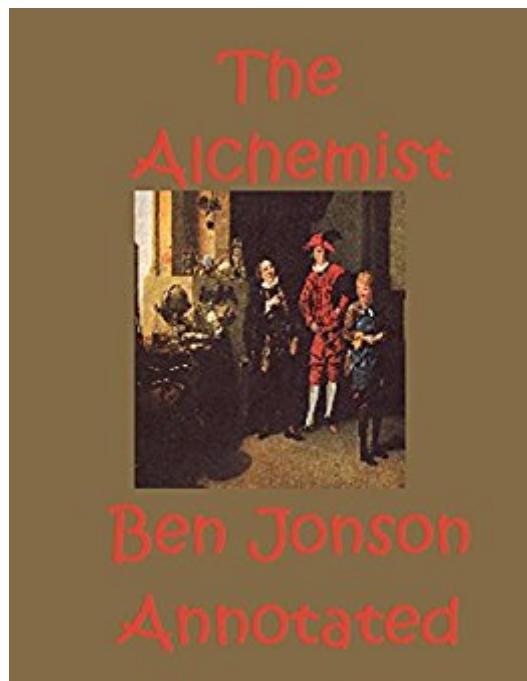


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The Alchemist (Annotated)



Synopsis

The Alchemist is a comedy by British playwright Ben Jonson. First performed in 1610 by the King's Men, it is generally considered Jonson's best and most characteristic comedy; Samuel Taylor Coleridge claimed that it had one of the three most perfect plots in literature. The play's clever fulfilment of the classical unities and vivid depiction of human folly have made it one of the few Renaissance plays (except the works of Shakespeare) with a continuing life on stage (except for a period of neglect during the Victorian era). This edition has been formatted for your Kindle, with an active table of contents. The play has also been annotated, with additional information about the work itself and also Ben Jonson, including an overview, background, synopsis, analysis, stage history, publication history, biographical and bibliographical information.

Book Information

File Size: 732 KB

Print Length: 240 pages

Publication Date: February 8, 2016

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01BLUSICY

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #1,280,354 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #67 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas & Plays > Medieval #490 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Drama & Plays > Classical & Early #662 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Literature & Fiction > Anthologies & Literature Collections > Drama & Plays

Customer Reviews

I recently read the early 17th century comedy "Volpone", my first introduction to Ben Jonson. I was surprised by how well Jonson's humor had traveled through 400 years of cultural change. I did have difficulty with Jonson's dedication (several pages), the introductory argument, and the prologue as well as a "Pythagorean literary satire" in Act One, Scene One. But thereafter I found the humor to be natural and enjoyable. I even found myself somewhat sympathetic for the unscrupulous Volpone,

Mosca, Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino. I immediately hunted around on my dustier bookshelves for other works of Ben Jonson. "Epicene" was less easy to digest, but was worth the effort. There is a surprising twist in the final scene and I suggest that the reader avoid any literary criticism or introductions to "Epicene" until after your first reading. I had less empathy for the characters in "Epicene" and it was difficult to identify any "good guys". The characters were not terribly disagreeable, but simply dilettantes that had little concern for morality or ethics. The dialogue is more obscure (and more bawdy) than in "Volpone". I found it helpful to first read the footnotes for a scene before actually reading the scene itself. "The Alchemist" is more like "Volpone". The main characters are unscrupulous con-men; their targets are gullible, greedy individuals. I learned quite a bit about alchemy, at least alchemy as practiced by 17th century con-men. As with "Volpone" and "Epicene", I was unable to predict how Ben Jonson would bring the play to a satisfactory conclusion. I enjoyed "The Alchemist" and I expect that I will read it again. I don't know if it is performed very often, but it would probably be quite entertaining.

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