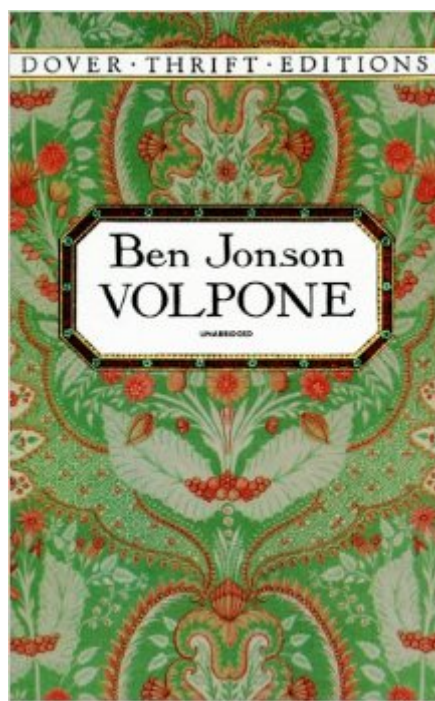


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Volpone (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Bitter, satiric comedy in blank verse is one of the great Elizabethan dramatist's finest plays. The plot concerns a wealthy, lecherous old man who feigns a mortal illness in order to solicit bribes from greedy acquaintances who hope to inherit his fortune. Many complexities of plot and connivance ensue, but in the end, the guilty parties are exposed and punished. Explanatory footnotes.

Book Information

Series: Dover Thrift Editions

Paperback: 128 pages

Publisher: Dover Publications (May 20, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0486280497

ISBN-13: 978-0486280493

Product Dimensions: 0.2 x 5.2 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.5 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (21 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,728,169 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #535 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas & Plays > Comedy](#) #3148 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Dramas & Plays](#) #4322 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas & Plays > Regional & Cultural > European](#)

Customer Reviews

I had expected Jonson's plays to be difficult and certainly less rewarding than Shakespeare. Surprisingly, despite the passage of four centuries, the humor in "Volpone" remains natural and entertaining today. I have now read several other comedies by Ben Jonson, but "Volpone" remains my favorite. I did have difficulty getting started with "Volpone". The rather long dedication, the argument, and the prologue all took their toll. To make matters worse, I was completely confused and lost in Act One, Scene One, by a "Pythagorean satire", entertainment provided by Volpone's eccentric servants, Mosca, Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone. (I later learned that Jonson may have added this literary satire for special performances at Oxford and Cambridge. Apparently Jonson knew his scholars well, as "Volpone" was well-received at both universities.) Fortunately, Scene One is not representative of the play, and I had little difficulty thereafter with either the plot or the humor. Unlike Shakespeare, Ben Jonson's characters seldom reflect on their motivations in soliloquies or insightful dialogue. We meet characters without great complexity. Once we know them, we find that

they remain in character and behave predictably. This does not mean his characters are shallow or uninteresting. I even found myself somewhat sympathetic for the unscrupulous Volpone, Mosca, Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino. They are all villains, just not particularly villainous villains. Even though the characters behave predictably, the plot is anything but predictable. The confusion builds throughout the play and I had no idea how Jonson was going to resolve the situation in Act Five. I quite enjoyed "Volpone" and I would like to have an opportunity to see it on stage someday.

Well, I liked this a LOT more than I thought I would. I assumed that Jonson would write plays like Shakespeare, and I am very selective about which Shakespeare plays I really enjoy (namely, 'Othello'). But this, this is such a good book. I don't even usually like reading plays. Let me explain why it is so good: Firstly, although Volpone is caught out at the end, the whole of the play is a gloriously satisfying dance of mind-games and pure hedonism. For vicarious living, it's great. I, for one, wish I was as clever as Volpone. For those who take delight in the sheer style and talent of people who thoroughly enjoy life, this is a play for you. Admittedly Volpone is a completely amoral character, but the satisfaction in his plots comes because those who he is punishing are immoral themselves. I have to admit, perhaps I wish I was so amoral because of the consequent enjoyment. Secondly - I love how many levels this play works on. It is simultaneously both a homage to and a mockery of traditional morality plays - everything seems to have worked out by the end, but when the results are thought through, the end is not satisfactory. Good has not triumphed over evil as in traditional morality plays; evil has sabotaged itself, a subtle but important difference. Celia seems to have been let off, but in that era it is likely that her tripled dowry will be owned by her father and she will become a disgraced divorced woman. Thirdly - Peregrine is wonderful. He is the dry, cynical person who knows exactly what's going on and has sussed every plot - this character should be in every play. There are two very small, insignificant reasons why I have not given this 5 stars. Firstly, I wish that Volpone had gotten away with his schemes.

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