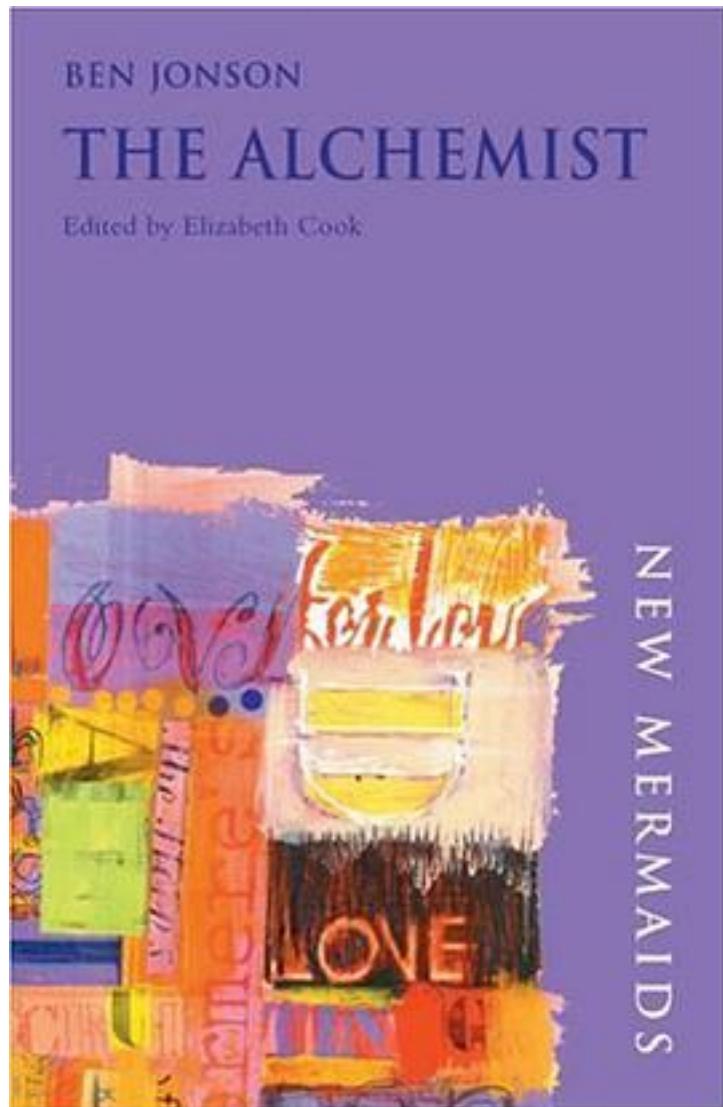


The Alchemist (New Mermaids)



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Set during a plague epidemic in the Liberty of Blackfriars in 1610 - and first performed on tour in 1610 by the company whose London home at Blackfriars was temporarily closed due to a plague epidemic - The Alchemist is a sublimely accomplished satirical farce about people's diverse dreams of self-refinement: they all want to transform themselves into something nobler, richer, more powerful, more virile, just as base metal was supposed to be transformed into gold in the alchemical process. During their master's absence from the house, the con-artists Face, Subtle and Doll Common dupe a series of 'customers' whose desire for aggrandisement leads them to believe in the existence of the fabled Philosopher's Stone. As their equipment boils over and blows up in the offstage kitchen, so their plot heats up and is exploded by the sceptical Surly and the arrival of their master - who quietly pockets their proceeds and marries the rich widow to boot.

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