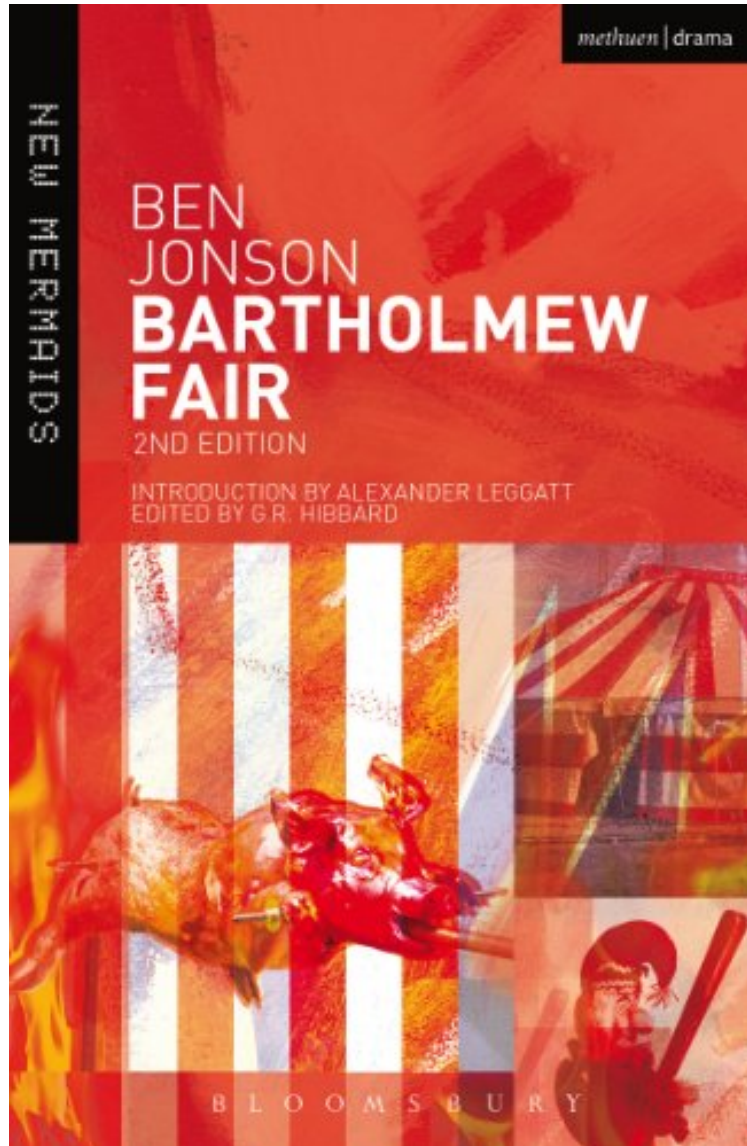


[E-BOOK] Bartholmew Fair (New Mermaids)

## Bartholmew Fair (New Mermaids)

*Ben Jonson*

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**Ben Jonson : Bartholmew Fair (New Mermaids)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bartholmew Fair (New Mermaids):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Douglas K. ClarkClassic!8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Good Footnotes Can Save the Day, or the PlayBy Michael WischmeyerBen Jonson requires effort. His allusions to topical events tend to be obscure today, his penchant for having some characters quote Latin phrases can be a barrier (some characters misquote Latin, and we, the alert audience, are supposed to chuckle), and his use of unfamiliar colloquialisms and bawdy comments is yet another challenge.Despite these difficulties, Jonson's

humor has weathered four centuries and most readers - with a little persistence - will enjoy Jonson's better known plays like *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair*. In some ways I found *Bartholomew Fair* to be more difficult than either *Volpone* or *The Alchemist*. Even with a second reading, I still needed to refer to the cast listing to keep track of the multitude of characters (thirty-five or so) that come and go. To make matters worse some characters insist on wearing disguises and changing their names. The dialogue, as I alluded earlier, nearly overwhelmed me at times, but I was rescued by the excellent footnotes by G. R. Hibbard in the New Mermaid edition to unravel obscure comments. Thanks in part to Hibbard's footnotes, not only did I survive, I have actually developed a liking for *Bartholomew Fair*'s fortune hunters, country bumpkins, foolish gentry, zealous Puritans, bawdy lower class elements, a pompous judge, purse snatchers and con men. *Bartholomew Fair* has a rather unusual introduction in which Ben Jonson cautions his audience that the author is sensitive to criticism and it would be best that they behave. Jonson had not forgotten the acrimonious reception for his most recent play, a tragedy titled *Catiline*, and he had no intention of having this play suffer likewise. Incredibly, Jonson had stagehands read a contractual agreement between the playwright and the audience defining rules for a proper and appropriate method of criticism. Fortunately for all, *Bartholomew Fair* proved to be popular. It remained so for many years. I have also used the inexpensive Oxford World Classics edition titled *The Alchemist and Other Plays* and its footnotes are quite helpful. My preference is the New Mermaids edition published by A C Black/W W Norton. The introduction is more extensive, the font larger, and the paper quality better, but it is a little more expensive. I of 1 people found the following review helpful. Lively, Humorous Visit to *Bartholomew Fair* By Michael Wischmeyer *Ben Jonson's Bartholomew Fair (1614)* is zany, much like the classic movie *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Respectable gentlemen and ladies of London somewhat unwisely visit the annual *Bartholomew Fair*. Encountering an odd mix of conniving characters, they become embroiled in a maze of plots, deceptions, and disreputable festival activities and are robbed, tricked, mocked, beaten, thrown into stocks, and recruited as prostitutes. I was continuously overwhelmed by the comings and goings of characters of all sorts, almost as though I was being jostled along in a festival crowd. I have now read *Bartholomew Fair* several times, and yet I still find it necessary to revisit the cast listing as new characters appear. Many characters are aptly named: the attorney John Littlewit, the suitor Winwife, the zealous Judge Overdo, the quarrelsome Tom Quarlous, the satirical Humphrey Wasp, the respectable Grace Wellborn, the madman Trouble-All, and the ballad singer Nightingale. Other names are simply memorable: Joan Trash, Lantern Leatherhead, Ezekiel Edgeworth, Mooncalf, Captain Whit, and Punk Alice. The list goes on. In Jonson's time little concern was given for the setting. Stages were largely empty, with perhaps a simple prop or two. Unexpectedly, Jonson has the second act begin with trades people assembling their stalls and booths on stage. The booths remain on stage throughout the play, helping the audience orient themselves as the action jumps from one spot to another. The Drama Classics series published by Nick Hern Books of London provide affordable, tightly bound, small paperback editions of plays for students, actors, and theatregoers. The introduction by Colin Counsell to *Bartholomew Fair* was quite good. It outlines the plot, describes the characters, but avoids academic discussions on interpretational and textual analysis. I like the small, durable Drama Classics editions as they are easy to carry. There is one drawback. A short glossary of difficult words is provided, but there are no footnotes. For a reader new to Ben Jonson, good footnotes offer substantial help. The lower class dialogue and topical allusions can be puzzling. An inexpensive collection of Ben Jonson's plays is published by Oxford Univ. Press in the World's Classic series with the title *The Alchemist and Other Plays*.

Early modern London - too foggy and Protestant to have a carnival - offered its inhabitants commercial events during which to indulge their need for bodily delights and festival exuberance. The fair of *St Bartholomew*, held annually in Smithfield on 24 August, served Jonson as an opportunity to dissect a wide cross-section of Londoners and their various reasons for spending a day out among the booths, stalls, smells and noises of the fair. Unusually magnanimous for a Jonsonian city comedy, the main thrust of the satire is not against fools, madmen, fortune-hunters, cuckolds or prostitutes, but against hypocrisy and bigotry. This edition shows that the play can be read as a comprehensive refutation of puritanism and the London magistracy, both of whom were attacking the theatre (and the festive culture of which it was still part) as idolatrous, seditious and disorderly.

About the Author Ben Jonson contributed to *Every Man Out of His Humour*; *Bartholomew Fair*; *The Staple of News*; *Volpone*; and *Sejanus, His Fall*; all from Manchester University Press.