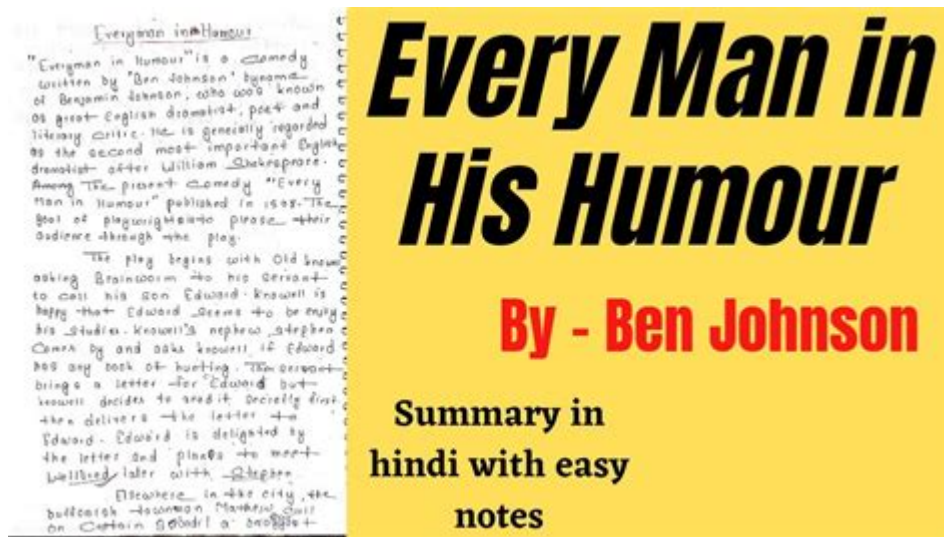# Every Man In His Humour Summary

Every Man in His Humour is a classic play written by the esteemed English playwright Ben Jonson in 1598. This work is considered one of the cornerstones of English comedy and laid the foundation for the later developments of the genre. Jonson's mastery of character and his exploration of human nature through humor are vividly presented in this play. The play is notable for its intricate plot, well-defined characters, and the use of humor as a vehicle for social commentary.

Overview of the Play

"Every Man in His Humour" is structured in five acts and revolves around the lives of various characters, each embodying a specific "humour" or temperament. The play is set in London and showcases the dynamics among a diverse group of characters, revealing their ambitions, desires, and follies. The central theme revolves around the idea that every person is defined by their humour, which dictates their behavior and interactions.

The Concept of Humours

In the context of the play, "humours" refers to the ancient belief in four bodily fluids (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile) that were thought to influence personality and behavior. Jonson's characters each represent one of these humours, which drives the play's comedic elements.

Major Themes

1. Individuality: Each character's humour defines their actions and relationships, illustrating the complexity of human nature.
2. Social Critique: Jonson uses humor to critique societal norms and human follies, revealing the absurdities of life.
3. Deception and Misunderstanding: The play is filled with misunderstandings and deceptions, highlighting themes of trust and betrayal.

Character Analysis

The characters in "Every Man in His Humour" are varied and richly developed, each serving as a representation of different social strata and personal motivations.

Main Characters

1. Humphrey Wasp: A lively and comedic character who embodies the spirit of the play.
2. Master Stephen: A foolish, naive character whose blunders create much of the play's humor.
3. Old Knowell: A wise older man who represents reason and experience, often contrasting with younger characters.
4. Fitzdottrel: A gullible man who becomes embroiled in misunderstandings and schemes.
5. Wellbred: A charming young man who assists in the unfolding of the plot.

Supporting Characters

- Brainworm: A clever servant who manipulates the events to his advantage.
- Mrs. Knowell: The wise wife who often provides the voice of reason.
- Clement: A romantic figure whose love story intertwines with the main plot.

Plot Summary

The plot of "Every Man in His Humour" is intricate and involves multiple subplots that come together in a satisfying conclusion.

Act 1: Setting the Stage

The play opens with an introduction to the main characters and their respective humours. The audience is introduced to Old Knowell, who is concerned about his son, Edward, who has been influenced by negative company. The act sets the tone for the comedic misunderstandings that will ensue.

Act 2: The Rise of Conflict

As the plot develops, misunderstandings arise, particularly involving Fitzdottrel and his schemes. Characters collide, and their distinct humours lead to humorous situations. Brainworm, the crafty servant, begins to manipulate events to create further confusion.

Act 3: Climax of Confusion

The third act sees the height of confusion, where characters' plans go awry. Fitzdottrel's gullibility is exploited, and the audience is treated to a series of comedic scenes that highlight the absurdity of the situations.

Act 4: Resolutions and Revelations

In the penultimate act, the misunderstandings start to unravel. Characters confront each other, and true intentions are revealed. This act showcases Jonson's skill in weaving together the various plotlines.

Act 5: Conclusion

The play concludes with a resolution of the main conflicts. Characters learn from their experiences, and the comedic elements culminate in a satisfying finale. The audience is left with a sense of closure and reflection on the nature of human behaviour.

Literary Significance

"Every Man in His Humour" is significant not only for its comedic brilliance but also for its contribution to the development of English drama. Jonson's use of the humour theory to explore character motivations was innovative for its time. The play's influence can be seen in later works of comedy, including those of Shakespeare and Molière.

Impact on English Comedy

- Character Types: Jonson's distinct character types influenced the creation of stock characters in later comedies.
- Social Commentary: The use of humor as a critique of society paved the way for more sophisticated comedic storytelling.
- Structure and Form: The five-act structure became a standard for future playwrights.

Conclusion

In conclusion, "Every Man in His Humour" is a timeless exploration of human nature and the complexities of individuality. Through its engaging plot and richly developed characters, Jonson's play provides not only entertainment but also a critical lens through which to view society. Its enduring legacy in the realm of English comedy underscores its importance as a foundational text that continues to resonate with audiences today. The interplay of humours serves as a reminder of the diverse motivations that drive human behavior, making the play relevant in contemporary discussions of character and identity. As one delves into Jonson's work, the humor becomes a vehicle for deeper reflections on life, relationships, and the human condition.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main plot of 'Every Man in His Humour'?

The play revolves around the comedic interactions of various characters, each defined by their particular humor or temperament, and how these traits lead to misunderstandings and humorous situations.

Who is the author of 'Every Man in His Humour'?

The play was written by Ben Jonson and first performed in 1598.

What are the main themes explored in 'Every Man in His Humour'?

Key themes include the nature of human behavior, the influence of humor on personality, and the social dynamics of Elizabethan society.

How does Jonson categorize the characters in the play?

Jonson categorizes characters based on the four humors: sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic, which represent different personality types.

What is the significance of the character 'Mathew' in 'Every Man in His Humour'?

Mathew serves as a comic figure whose interactions with others highlight the absurdities of human nature and the folly of taking oneself too seriously.

What role does satire play in 'Every Man in His Humour'?

Satire is a central element, as Jonson critiques contemporary society, manners, and the various follies exhibited by his characters.

How does 'Every Man in His Humour' reflect the social context of its time?

The play reflects the social hierarchy and cultural norms of Elizabethan England, showcasing the quirks and pretensions of different social classes.

What is the structure of 'Every Man in His Humour'?

The play is structured in five acts, following a traditional plot progression that builds up to comedic confrontations and resolutions.

What is the significance of the title 'Every Man in His Humour'?

The title suggests that everyone has a distinct temperament that influences their actions, emphasizing the universality of the types of humor that define human behavior.

How has 'Every Man in His Humour' influenced modern

comedy?

The play has laid the groundwork for character-driven comedy and the exploration of personality traits in comedic narratives, influencing many later writers and playwrights.

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