

Every Man In His Humour Summary

Every Man in His Humour Summary Introduction *Every Man in His Humour* is a classic comedy play written by the celebrated English playwright Ben Jonson. First performed in 1598, the play is renowned for its witty dialogue, complex characters, and satirical depiction of societal norms. This work is a quintessential example of Elizabethan comedy, blending humor with social critique. The play explores themes of identity, social pretension, and human folly, making it a timeless piece that continues to entertain and provoke thought. In this article, we will delve into a comprehensive summary of the play, analyzing its plot, characters, themes, and significance.

Background and Context The Play's Origins *Every Man in His Humour* was written during the late 16th century, a period marked by vibrant theatrical activity in England. It was part of a competitive tradition among playwrights, with Ben Jonson seeking to establish himself as a master of comedy. The play was first performed at The Theatre, a prominent venue of the time, and was notable for its lively language and satirical edge.

Literary Significance The play is significant for its pioneering use of character-based comedy and its critique of social pretensions. It also reflects the Renaissance interest in human nature and individual personality. The play's structure, consisting of interconnected subplots and a diverse cast of characters, exemplifies Jonson's skill in creating layered, dynamic theatrical works.

Plot Overview Main Plot The central storyline revolves around a character named Master Matthew, a wealthy merchant, and his desire to marry his daughter, Rachel, to a suitable match. However, various characters and subplots intertwine to create a tapestry of humorous situations and social satire.

Subplots and Character Interactions The play features multiple subplots involving different characters, each representing various social classes and personality types. Some key subplots include:

- Sogliardo's Pretensions: A naive and boastful merchant who aspires to social prominence.
- Wellbred's Hypocrisy: A gentleman who pretends to virtue but is duplicitous.
- Hippolito's Love Affair: A young man from a noble background pursuing his love interest.
- George Downright's Foolishness: A comic character known for his absurd antics.

These subplots are woven together through a series of misunderstandings, disguises, and humorous dialogues, culminating in a series of revelations and social critiques.

Character Analysis Major Characters

1. Sogliardo - A boastful and naive merchant who is eager to elevate his social standing. His overconfidence and foolishness are sources of comedy.
2. Wellbred - A hypocritical gentleman who pretends to virtue and social superiority, often engaging in pretentious speech.
3. Hippolito - A passionate young nobleman in love, representing youthful ardor and idealism.
4. George Downright - A foolish and comic character whose antics highlight human folly and the absurdity of certain social pretensions.
5. Master Matthew - A wealthy merchant and father of Rachel, whose desire for a suitable match drives the main plot.
6. Rachel - The daughter of Master Matthew, caught between her father's wishes and her own desires.

Supporting Characters - Various servants, friends, and suitors who add humor and complexity to the storylines. - Characters such as Sir Epicure Mammon and Sir Lucius O'Trott serve as satirical caricatures of greed and foolishness. Themes and Messages Social Satire *Every Man in His Humour* criticizes social pretensions and the obsession with status. Through exaggerated characters and humorous situations, Jonson exposes the absurdity of societal hierarchies and superficial virtues. Human Folly and Vanity The play highlights various human vices such as greed, hypocrisy, foolishness, and vanity. Characters' pursuits of social elevation and reputation often lead to comic misadventures. Identity and Deception Disguises, misunderstandings, and mistaken identities are central to the plot, emphasizing the fluidity and complexity of personal identity. The Human Condition Ben Jonson's work reflects Renaissance humanism's focus on individual personality, emphasizing that human nature is inherently flawed yet humorous. Key Scenes and Their Significance The Disguise Plot A common device used in the play, characters often disguise themselves to achieve their aims. This leads to comic situations and exposes characters' true nature. The Comic Confrontation The play culminates in a series of confrontations where characters' pretensions are revealed, often with humorous irony. These moments serve as social critiques and moral lessons. The Resolution Unlike many comedies of the time, *Every Man in His Humour* ends with a resolution that often involves the recognition of true character and the rejection of superficial virtues. Critical Analysis Style and Language Jonson's language is characterized by sharp wit, clever wordplay, and poetic devices. The play's humor arises from character dialogues, irony, and satirical commentary. Influence and Legacy *Every Man in His Humour* influenced later English comedy, notably the development of character-driven humor. Its exploration of social pretensions remains relevant, and it is considered a significant work in the evolution of English drama. Conclusion *Every Man in His Humour* is a masterful comedy that combines humor, satire, and social critique. Its rich characters, intricate plotlines, and insightful themes make it a timeless piece of Elizabethan theatre. The play not only entertains but also invites audiences to reflect on human follies and societal norms. Through its clever portrayal of individual quirks and societal pretensions, Jonson crafts a work that remains relevant and influential centuries after its first performance. Final Thoughts Understanding the summary of *Every Man in His Humour* provides valuable insight into the social and theatrical landscape of Elizabethan England. It exemplifies Jonson's skill in blending comedy with serious social commentary, making it a significant contribution to English literature. Whether viewed through the lens of historical context or modern relevance, the play continues to delight and provoke thought, securing its place as a timeless classic.

Every Man In His Humour Summary: A Deep Dive into Ben Jonson's Satirical Masterpiece Introduction *Every Man In His Humour* is one of William Shakespeare's contemporary Ben Jonson's most celebrated comedies. First performed in 1598, this play stands as a quintessential example of Elizabethan comedy, blending sharp satire, lively

character portrayals, and a keen observation of societal mores. Its enduring relevance lies in Jonson's ability to dissect human follies and societal pretensions with wit and insight. In this article, we explore a comprehensive summary of the play, its key themes, characters, and its significance within the broader context of Elizabethan theatre and social commentary.

Background and Context

Before delving into the plot details, it's essential to understand the historical and literary context of *Every Man In His Humour*. Written during the late 16th century, the play emerged at a time when English theatre was flourishing, and playwrights like Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Jonson were experimenting with new forms of comedy and tragedy. Ben Jonson was known for his satirical edge and moral seriousness, often contrasting with the more romantic or fantastical elements of Shakespeare's works. *Every Man In His Humour* exemplifies Jonson's interest in the "humours" theory—a concept rooted in Renaissance medicine that suggested human personality was governed by a combination of bodily fluids, or "humours." This theory became a foundation for comic characterization, as characters' personalities could be exaggerated or stereotyped based on their dominant humour.

Plot Overview

A Synopsis of the Play's Core Narrative

At its core, *Every Man In His Humour* is a comedy of manners centered around the lives and interactions of a diverse group of characters, each embodying particular traits or "humours" that influence their behavior.

- **The Central Plot:** The play principally revolves around the humorous (in both senses) misunderstandings and schemes of the characters, especially focusing on the young and ambitious Sir Lucius O'Trigger and his father, Sir Thomas O'Trigger.
- **Main Characters and Their Humours:**
 - **Captain Bobadill:** Embodying the humour of boastfulness and bravado.
 - **Welsh Justice:** Representing seriousness and a desire for social order.
 - **Fastidious Sir Epicure Mammon:** Obsessed with wealth and luxury.
 - **Sogliardo:** The foolish, naive character, whose simplistic view of life provides comic relief.
 - **Tib and Wellbred:** Servants who mirror and mock their masters' follies.

The play unfolds through a series of scenes where characters' interactions reveal their exaggerated traits. For example, Sir Epicure Mammon's obsession with wealth leads him into humorous conflicts, while Sogliardo's naivety results in comic misunderstandings.

Key Events

- The disguises and mistaken identities among characters fuel much of the comedy.
- The young lovers, often caught in schemes to marry or avoid parental control, add a romantic subplot.
- The resolution involves a series of revelations that expose the caricatured traits of each character, restoring social order and moral balance.

Major Themes and Satirical Elements

1. The Human Condition and the Humours Theory

Jonson's play is fundamentally a satire of human eccentricities, using the "humours" theory as a lens to examine personality traits. Each character epitomizes a particular humour, exaggerated to comic effect:

- **Boastfulness** (Captain Bobadill)
- **Avarice** (Sir Epicure Mammon)
- **Vanity** (Fastidious)
- **Foolishness** (Sogliardo)

This approach allows Jonson to critique societal pretensions and individual vices, suggesting that human behavior is often governed by innate, exaggerated traits.

2. Social Satire and Class Critique

The play also offers a satirical commentary on social classes and pretensions.

For instance: - The ambitions of young characters striving for social elevation. - The pretensions of the wealthy and the foolishness of those who seek status without virtue. - The disparity between appearance and reality. Jonson's sharp wit exposes the hypocrisies and superficialities of Elizabethan society, making the comedy not just entertaining but also a moral critique.

3. Human Folly and Self-Deception

A recurring motif is the tendency of characters to deceive themselves or others about their true nature. For example, characters often pretend to be more virtuous or clever than they are, leading to comic situations that underscore human self-deception.

Character Analysis

Sir Lucius O'Trigger and His Father - Sir Lucius: Young, ambitious, and eager to climb the social ladder, he embodies youthful vanity and pretension. - Sir Thomas O'Trigger: His father, more pragmatic but equally foolish in his own way, represents the older generation's follies.

The Servants: Tib and Wellbred - They act as comic foils and often expose the absurdity of their masters' pretensions. - Their wit and cunning are pivotal in resolving misunderstandings.

The Wealth-Obsessed Sir Epicure Mammon - His obsession with wealth and luxury satirizes greed and materialism. - His interactions reveal the shallow values of those obsessed with social status.

Sogliardo: The Naive Dreamer - Embodying simplicity and foolishness, Sogliardo's antics serve as comic relief and a critique of naive optimism.

Structure and Style

The Play's Composition

- The play is structured as a series of loosely connected scenes, with a focus on character interactions rather than a tightly plotted narrative. - It employs a variety of comedic devices such as disguises, mistaken identities, and witty dialogues.

Language and Wit

- Jonson's language is characterized by sharp wit, puns, and clever repartee. - His use of verse is precise, often employing rhymed couplets that heighten the comedic effect.

Significance and Legacy

Influence on Elizabethan and Jacobean Theatre

Every Man In His Humour set a precedent for character-driven comedy rooted in social satire. Its focus on individual traits and societal critique influenced subsequent playwrights.

Ben Jonson's Artistic Philosophy

The play reflects Jonson's belief in comedy as a moral instrument—aimed at exposing vice and promoting virtue. His emphasis on "humours" as a basis for character creation was innovative and influential.

Modern Relevance

Though rooted in Elizabethan society, the play's themes of human folly, pretension, and self-deception remain relevant today. Its comic portrayal of exaggerated traits continues to resonate with audiences, highlighting the universality of human weaknesses.

Conclusion

Every Man In His Humour remains a significant work in the canon of English comedy. Through its vivid characters, sharp satire, and insightful commentary on human nature and society, it offers a timeless reflection on human follies. Ben Jonson's masterful blending of humor and morality ensures the play's enduring appeal, making it a crucial study for anyone interested in the evolution of theatrical comedy and social critique. Whether appreciated for its literary artistry or its social commentary, the play continues to entertain and provoke thought centuries after its first performance.

Questions & Answers About every man in his humour summary

No	Question	Answer
1	What is the main theme of 'Every Man in His Humour'?	The play primarily explores themes of human folly, social pretensions, and the humorous misjudgments of characters in their pursuit of happiness and social status.
2	Who are the central characters in 'Every Man in His Humour'?	The play features several key characters, including Sir Fopp, Sir Jonathan, and Captain Bobadil, each representing different types of foolishness and social pretensions.
3	How does Ben Jonson use satire in 'Every Man in His Humour'?	Ben Jonson employs satire to criticize societal norms, pretentious behavior, and individual follies, often through exaggerated characters and humorous dialogue.
4	What is the significance of the title 'Every Man in His Humour'?	The title suggests that each person has their own peculiar traits or 'humours,' and the play humorously examines these individual idiosyncrasies and the ways they influence behavior.
5	How does 'Every Man in His Humour' reflect Ben Jonson's views on human nature?	The play reflects Jonson's belief that human nature is inherently flawed and humorous, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and the folly of pretension.
6	Is 'Every Man in His Humour' considered a comedy or a satire, and why?	It is considered both a comedy and a satire because it humorously depicts human follies while critically examining societal pretensions and individual character flaws.

comedy, William Shakespeare, play summary, satire, characters, themes, Elizabethan theatre, humor, plot overview, character analysis