

everyman in his humour summary

Everyman in His Humour is a comedy play written by the English playwright Ben Jonson in 1598. This work is a significant contribution to the genre of comedy and is notable for its exploration of human nature and societal norms. The play is a benchmark of the comedic tradition in English literature and serves as an essential precursor to the more developed forms of comedy that would emerge in the following century. This article delves into the plot, characters, themes, and the historical context of the play, providing a comprehensive summary and analysis of Jonson's work.

Plot Summary

Everyman in His Humour is set in London and revolves around the lives of several characters who exemplify different human traits and social archetypes. The play begins with a prologue that introduces the audience to the comedic nature of the work and the central idea that each character is a reflection of various human follies.

Main Characters

- Bobadill: A braggart soldier who epitomizes the vice of pretentiousness and cowardice.
- Mathew: A foolish and gullible individual who often falls prey to the antics of others.
- Edgworth: A money-minded character who represents greed and materialism.
- Clement: A wise character who often serves as a foil to the other foolish characters.
- Wellbred: A witty and clever character who navigates the social dynamics with ease.

Plot Development

The narrative unfolds through a series of comedic encounters and misunderstandings among the characters. The primary storyline follows the interactions between Bobadill, Mathew, and Edgworth as they engage in various humorous escapades. The play also touches upon themes of social class and the absurdities of human behavior through a mix of slapstick humor and witty dialogue.

The major plot points include:

1. Bobadill's Bravado: He boasts about his military exploits but is revealed to be a coward when confronted with real danger.
2. Mathew's Misadventures: His naivety leads him into comical situations, highlighting the humor in ignorance.
3. The Clash of Values: The characters' contrasting values create conflict, especially between those who prioritize wealth versus those who seek genuine relationships.

Ultimately, the climax of the play showcases the folly of the characters when they are faced with the consequences of their actions, leading to a resolution that reinforces the moral lessons underpinning the story.

Themes

Everyman in His Humour is rich in themes that reflect both the personal and societal dynamics of Jonson's time. The following are some of the most prominent themes explored in the play.

Human Folly

One of the central themes of the play is the exploration of human folly. Each character embodies a different type of foolishness, serving as a critique of the societal norms and behaviors prevalent in Elizabethan England. The humorous portrayal of these vices encourages the audience to reflect on their own flaws and the absurdities of human nature.

Class and Society

Jonson delves into the class structure of his time, examining how social status impacts personal relationships and individual behavior. The interactions among characters highlight the absurdities of social pretensions and the often superficial nature of social hierarchies.

Bravery and Cowardice

The character of Bobadill serves as a focal point for the theme of bravery versus cowardice. His exaggerated claims of valor juxtaposed with his actual behavior serve as a reminder of the importance of authenticity and the dangers of false bravado.

The Nature of Comedy

Through the use of wit, satire, and humor, Jonson also reflects on the nature of comedy itself. The play invites the audience to laugh at the characters' follies while simultaneously encouraging a deeper understanding of human behavior and societal norms.

Historical Context

Everyman in His Humour was written during a period of significant cultural and artistic development in England. The late 16th and early 17th centuries saw the rise of the English Renaissance, a time characterized by a flourishing of literature, arts, and theater. Playwrights like Jonson, Shakespeare, and Marlowe were redefining the boundaries of dramatic expression.

Influence of Commedia dell'Arte

Jonson's work was also influenced by the Commedia dell'Arte, an Italian theatrical tradition known for its improvisational style and stock characters. The archetypal figures in *Everyman in His Humour* mirror those found in Commedia, showcasing the universality of certain human traits across cultures.

Reflection of Elizabethan Society

The play provides a lens through which to view the values and concerns of Elizabethan society. Issues such as class distinction, gender roles, and the quest for social mobility are all interwoven into the fabric of the narrative, making it a relevant commentary on the times.

Literary Style

Jonson's writing is characterized by its sharp wit and use of language. His skillful use of verse and prose allows for a dynamic reading experience, with humor that resonates on multiple levels. The dialogue is laced with puns, wordplay, and clever repartee, showcasing Jonson's mastery of comedic language.

Use of Satire

The play employs satire to critique the follies of its characters and, by extension, the society in which they live. Jonson's keen observations and incisive commentary invite the audience to laugh while also prompting them to consider the implications of the characters' behaviors.

Impact and Legacy

Everyman in His Humour has had a lasting impact on the genre of comedy and the development of English literature. Jonson's exploration of human nature and society paved the way for future playwrights, influencing the comedic styles of the Restoration and beyond.

Modern Relevance

The themes and characters in Jonson's play continue to resonate with modern audiences. The exploration of human folly, societal norms, and the absurdities of life make it a timeless piece that remains relevant today.

Performances and Adaptations

Since its premiere, *Everyman in His Humour* has been performed and adapted in various forms. The play's comedic elements lend themselves well to modern reinterpretations, making it a popular choice for theater companies seeking to engage contemporary audiences.

Conclusion

In summary, *Everyman in His Humour* is not just a comedic play; it is a profound reflection on the complexities of human nature and the societal constructs that shape our lives. Through its rich characterizations, sharp wit, and insightful commentary, Ben Jonson provides an enduring exploration of the follies that define humanity. The play's legacy continues to inspire, entertain, and provoke thought, making it a cornerstone of English literature and a vital piece of the comedic tradition.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of 'Everyman in His Humour'?

The central theme of 'Everyman in His Humour' revolves around the complexities of human nature and the folly of individuals, showcasing how personal traits and societal norms influence behavior and relationships.

Who is the author of 'Everyman in His Humour'?

'Everyman in His Humour' was written by the English playwright Ben Jonson in 1598.

What is the significance of the character 'Humour' in the play?

In the play, 'Humour' represents a dominant characteristic or trait of a person that influences their actions and interactions, reflecting the Jacobean belief in the connection between personality and humor.

How does Ben Jonson use satire in 'Everyman in His Humour'?

Ben Jonson employs satire in 'Everyman in His Humour' to critique the social customs and behaviors of his time, exposing the absurdities and contradictions inherent in human nature.

What role does the setting play in 'Everyman in His Humour'?

The setting serves as a backdrop that highlights the social dynamics and interactions among characters, emphasizing the comedic elements and misunderstandings that arise from their differing humours.

What are some notable characters in 'Everyman in His Humour'?

Notable characters include Mathew, who is obsessed with his own virtue; Cob, a foolish countryman; and Wellbred, who embodies wit and cleverness, all contributing to the exploration of various human traits.

How does 'Everyman in His Humour' reflect the values of the Jacobean era?

'Everyman in His Humour' reflects Jacobean values through its focus on individuality, the critique of social pretensions, and the exploration of moral and ethical dilemmas faced by characters in a rapidly changing society.

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