

**VIVEKANANDA COLLEGE
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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: The Way of the World

Course Title: 18th century British Literature

Paper: CC8

Semester: 4th

Name of the Teacher: Nabankur Roy

Name of the Department: English

The Way of the World

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by William Congreve

Study Material

Introduction

The Way of the World was first performed in 1700. It is one of the ~~best~~ best comedies ever written in English. As with any good art, its truths are universal. The comedy makes its points in a way that makes us laugh, but they hit home. The society of Restoration England, similar in many ways to our own, has, as its main social concerns, men and women's desire for each other, and the pursuit of each other, complicated by money issues; the nature of marriage; the preoccupation with fashion and appearances; hypocrisy; greed and morality. The play shows gossips and fools, and that both women and men can be silly, evil, ~~or~~ strong, ^{or} decent. It shows that love makes fools of everyone.

Restoration England

The play is a comedy, a satire about life in the Restoration. It is about love and the ways of the world — this world: the world of the wealthy in London, 1700. The play presents a picture of high society in Restoration England. London is the heart of this world. Its colourful characters, its extreme fashions, its new chocolate houses and its parks, where all can meet (and most importantly) be seen, are part of the play, as much as the tireless intrigues

around love and marriage and money. Samuel Pepys, a real person, who recorded daily life in his diary from 1660 to 1669, is our best source for careful detail of the times.

The Restoration refers to both a specific date in English history, 1660, and to a period of time. It is named after the restoration of the Monarchy. The English execute their King, Charles I, 1649 and after civil war. He is "tried" as a traitor, after he too loses a battle with the "Roundheads", the Puritans.

William Congreve, Playwright (1670-1729)

William Congreve is 30 when his play, The Way of the World, opens. This sparkling comedy is his last play.
(The Way of the World)

His plays

- The Double Dealer (comedy)
- Love for Love (comedy)
- The Mourning Bride (poetic tragedy)
- The Way of the World (comedy)

Short Plot Summary (Synopsis)

The Way of the World represents the pinnacle of Congreve's achievement even though it was not successful on the stage when it was first performed in 1700, largely due to the play's complexity. Although the play has only one main plot and covers a single day, it is crowded with numerous events and intrigues.

The plot of *The Way of the World* seems to follow a logic of its own. Before the action of the play unfolds, certain events are understood to have previously taken place. Mirabell, a typical Restoration beau, is devising a secret scheme to win Millamant's hand in marriage, gaining her fortune as well. Lady Wishfort is opposed to this match because her vanity has been offended by Mirabell, who earlier pretended to court her although he was really in love with Millamant, her ward. Mrs. Marwood, Fairall's mistress, has revealed Mirabell's deception to Lady Wishfort out of jealousy, since she herself loves Mirabell. The problem arises from the fact that half of Millamant's fortune of six thousand pounds is under Lady Wishfort's control and will be given to her only if she marries the suitor chosen by her.

Themes

- Lifestyle of the 18th century Restoration society, problems in both personal and social behaviours, manners and customs.
- Feminine vulnerability / female (In)dependence
- Love and money
- Country vs. urban life
- True love (between Mirabell & Millamant) v/s fake love (between Marwood & Fairall)
- True wit v/s false wit.
- Jealousy, deceit & intrigue.