

**THE WAY OF THE WORLD
AS A
COMEDY OF MANNERS**

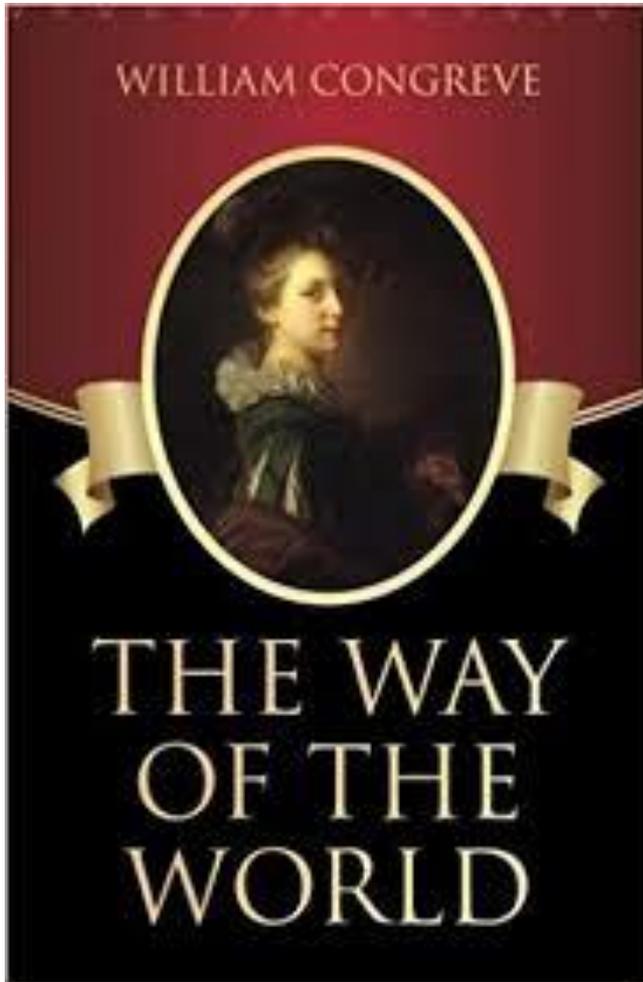
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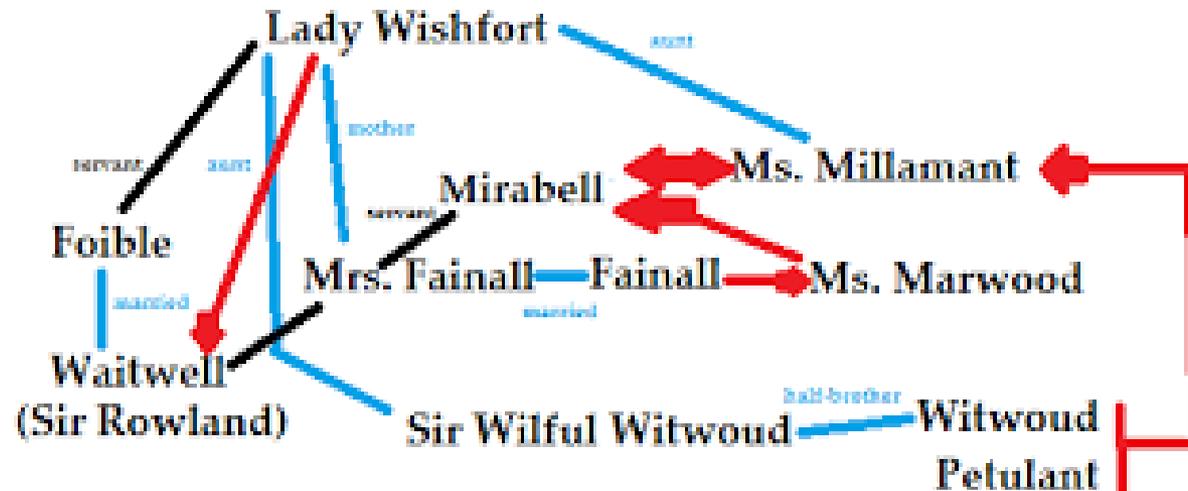
William Congreve, (born January 24, 1670, Bardsey, near Leeds, Yorkshire, England- died January 19, 1729, London), was an English dramatist who shaped the English comedy of manners through his brilliant comic dialogue, his satirical portrayal of the war of the sexes, and his ironic scrutiny of the affectations of his age. His major plays were *The Old Bachelour* (1693), *The Double-Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695), and *The Way of the World* (1700).

THE WAY OF THE WORLD: AN INTRODUCTION



The Way of the World premiered in 1700 at London's theatre in Lincoln's Inn Field, performed by Majesty's Servants, an acting company of the time. Though it is now regarded as one of the best Restoration comedies in existence, it was not well received by audiences at the time, who felt it was too vulgar. *The Way of the World* is still performed today as one of the most famous examples of Restoration comedy.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD: AN OVERVIEW



THE WAY OF THE WORLD: AN OVERVIEW.....

Congreve represents the attitude of the period at its best. The rakehell was no longer a hero; Mirabell is a descendent of the rakehell, but compared with earlier specimens he displays urbanity, grace, and decorum. Congreve's love passages can be graceful and dignified; he treats love with an objective rationalism that is quite apart from the concept of lechery. His comedies are concerned, as comedies have been through the ages, with love and money, frequently complicated by parental opposition. His approach, however, is balanced: Love without money would be a problem, but money without love, the cynic's aim, is not the goal. Likewise, Congreve abhors the sentimental attitude that love will result in the individuals' somehow being submerged in each other; he insists that lovers preserve their integrity as individuals. Love is not metaphysical, not sentimental, not a form of sacrifice. On the other hand, within this context, it is not merely carnal nor a thinly disguised lust; it includes trust, dignity, and mutual respect.

COMEDY OF MANNERS

A comedy of manners, also called a Restoration comedy, was a theatrical form that satirized the social manners of the time, primarily those of the upper class. Horace's *Satires*, published around 35 BCE, and Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, published in 1598, are considered early versions of the comedy of manners genre. However, the genre really flourished in the English Restoration period, spanning 1660 until around 1710. The most famous examples of comedy of manners plays from that era are William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, William Congreve's *The Way of the World*, and Molière's *The School for Wives*, *The Misanthrope*, and *Tartuffe*.

COMEDY OF MANNERS.....

Comedy of manners is usually set in locations exclusive to upper classes, like fashionable homes and private clubs. They include stock characters, especially the fop (a foolish man overly concerned with fashion), elegant young ladies, and older people attempting to live like or reclaim their youths. These plays are often based on love and adultery and include gossip, eavesdropping, and scheming. Conversation is often witty and ironic.

COMEDY OF MANNERS.....

A comedy of manners is meant to present the typical dynamics of the upper classes while also showing what lies beneath the surface. It is making the "fake" seem real by showing how what seems real is actually fake. The comedy of manners aims to unveil for the public the superficiality of the rich. It shows the way in which they try to represent themselves as the epitomes of virtuosity and righteousness to, supposedly, set the example for the less fortunate. Meanwhile, behind closed doors, all sorts of chaos ensues ranging from depravity to immorality, lies, and betrayal.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMEDY OF MANNERS

- Scenes in gathering places for the upper classes (such as fine homes and exclusive clubs).
- The appeal of the comedy of manners is to the intelligence of the audience/reader and not the emotion.
- Stock characters such as fops, country bumpkins, elegant young ladies, and older persons attempting to recapture their youth.
- The presence of at least one pair of very intelligent young lovers.
- Gossips and Romantic intrigues.
- Schemers hatching plots against their enemies.
- Eaves dropping (A character in a closet, behind a curtain, or in another room overhears information that could embarrass or incriminate someone.)
- Scandal or the threat of scandal.
- Witty dialogues and conversations. But the wit is often contrived and artificial.
- The women in these plays were very emancipated and bold and intelligent, unlike the heroines of the Sentimental dramas.
- The institution of marriage was always held to ridicule. Both husband and wives openly expressed their dissatisfaction of their spouses.
- These plays were meant the refined and elegant audience of London and hence the characters belong to upper class London society.
- These plays portrayed the lifestyle of the rich London society realistically in mildly satirical way.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD AS A COMEDY OF MANNERS.....

The society depicted in *The Way of the World* is the upper class fashionable society of London. The action of the play takes place in three places. The first is the chocolate House which was used for socializing and entertainment during the Restoration. The second is St James's Park in London where the upper class people walked before dinner. Witwoud says, "We'll all walk in the park; the ladies talked of being there." The third is the house of Lady Wishfort, an aristocratic woman. Most of the male and female characters of the play are cultured, talented, formal, artificial, fashionable, depraved, 'cold' and 'courtly'. Their qualities are actually a part of Restoration age culture.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD AS A COMEDY OF MANNERS.....

The Way of the World was new in its kind. What Congreve did was to craft characters, more than just give comedians some funny lines to perform. He wanted to do something a bit more intellectual than merely put people on stage to be funny. When confronted with how fake his play seemed, as it was not a traditional nor typical comedy as the audience expected, he remarked, his aim was:

“..to design some characters which should appear ridiculous, not so much through a natural folly . . . as through an affected wit . . . which . . . is also false.”

THE WAY OF THE WORLD AS A COMEDY OF MANNERS.....



William Congreve modelled his characters after people that everyone knew or knew "of", and the fact that they maintained a level of dignity really did not sit well among the audiences at first. He also drew a difference between two things: "Affectation" and "Humour". Affectation, according to Congreve is behaviour we devise. Humour is that which is given to us by nature.

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The genre is characterized by its satirical view of the times, with its particular focus on the relationship between conventional morality and the individual spirit. Its comic characters are often reflections of the shallow aristocrats of court society; they are peopled with libertines and wits, gallants and dandies. The hero is usually sophisticated and critical of convention and fashion: In *The Way of the World*, for example, Mirabell is able to out-rascal the other rogues and thereby wins the love and prosperity he seeks as well as the respect and admiration of the other characters.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD AS A COMEDY OF MANNERS.....

The writers in the restoration theatre have shown the ‘manners’ and ‘morals’ of the ways of life of the higher class aristocratic fashionable society, however, not of the lower class or middle class society. The themes of the Restoration comedy of manners are love, marriage, adulterous relationships amours and legacy conflicts; and the characters generally include would be wits, jealous husbands, conniving rivals and foppish dandies. It “relies for comic effect in large part on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue- often in the form of repartee, a witty conversational give-and-take which constitutes a kind of verbal fencing match.”

THANK YOU