

The way of the World

1. *The way of the world* is a good example for comedy of manners. Justify.

A genre of comedy that flourished during the Restoration period is the Comedy of Manners. It is a play to entertain audience but not to educate or to modify them. It is typically set in the upper class to reflect their life style and it satirically presents London Aristocratic Society's follies and foibles. It spectacularly presents Aristocratic society's fashions, manners, infidelity, avaricious lifestyle, love of wit etc.

'The Way of the World' is a seamless illustration of comedy of manners written in Restoration period by William Congreve. The play is considered by critics as a pure comedy of manners and William Congreve as the finest writer of comedy of manners. The very **title** of the play, *The Way of the World* points to the '**way**' the central characters of the play adopted in order to surmount obstacles created by their rivals to attain their wishes. Congreve makes fun of marriage and love in this play. The play deals with the love intrigues in upper class society. Sex is treated with absolute bluntness in the play. The play is a faithful reflection of upper-class society. Its prose is lucid and characters are well drawn.

In comedy of manners we find gorgeous young girls, licentious women, jealous and greedy husbands, fops and gallants around charming young girls. All these characters are found in the play *The way of the world*. Mirabella, Protagonist of the play, has an illicit relation with Arabella but he convinces her to marry Fainall. Fainall marries Arabella only for her property and he maintains an affair with Mrs. Marwood. Mirabell loves Millamant but Millamant has soft corner for Petulant and Witwoud. To achieve his desire Millamant butterflies Lady Wishfort to please her as she is the guardian of Millamant's property. Lady Wishfort makes her up with cosmetics to hide her wrinkles of old age. She wants marry a young man. She even yearns for Mirabell's love. Lady Wishfort's son-in-law Mr.Fainall contrives to grab her property. All these characters' effort to accomplish their desires create wit in the play. All these love intrigues make the play a perfect comedy of manners.

2. What is the main theme of the play "The Way of the World"?

William Congreve fabulously illustrates the ways of living in Aristocratic Society in Restoration Period. It aims to unveil for the public the superficiality of the rich. In the prologue itself Congreve declares his motto. The play satirises and pokes fun at the ways of the world. Money overrides love. He announces that the aim of his play is to entertain audience, not to reform them. Marriage, adultery, inheritance of property of others in disingenuous ways and strategies of characters to outwit others are the major themes in the play "The Way of the World". In many ways, the play can be analysed as a competition between Mirabell and Fainall to betray each other by their conspiracies to gain control over Lady Wishfort and her opulence. Each and every character in the play becomes an instrument for them to reach their desired target.

Edward Mirabell is the protagonist of the play. He is a vogueish, well-informed, and clever man-about-town. He casted a spell over the majority of Aristocratic women, every

woman fancies him. He had illicit relation with a widow Ms. Arabella, daughter of Lady Wishfort before her marriage with Mr. Fainall. They ended the affair before she got married to Mr. Fainall and after her marriage they remain good friends throughout the play. His love for Ms. Millamant and his expectation of legitimate income through her are the stirring factors in this play. His love intrigues to obtain her hand for marriage with the consent of her aunt and guardian of her property Lady Wishfort bring comic effect in the play. The adulterous couple Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood and Lady Wishfort concoct plans of their own to ruin his love and his desire to marry Millamant and a good number of other characters Mrs. Fainall, Foible, Waitwell, Petulant and Witwoud succour him in executing his plan to marry Millamant.

Lady Wishfort, a wealthy old widow, mother to Arabella Fainall and aunt and guardian to Millamant. Her silly desire to look young in her old age and her imprudent exertions to marry a young man brings comic effect to the play. Her heart longs for Mirabell and Sir Rowland. She spends her time most of the play trying to gain revenge against Mirabell for pretending to be interested in her. She innocently confides in malicious Marwood and becomes a prey to her own son-in-law Mr. Fainall, who tries to grab hold of all her assets and have a hold over her. Mr. Fainall takes his tricks and announces that they are the “ways of the world”. Finally Mr. Millamant comes to her rescue. She appreciates his generosity and promises to give him her niece and her fortune, if he saves her from ruin. Mirabell brings to light the illicit relation of Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood with the help of Mincing and Foible and their stratagems to catch hold of Arabella’s and Lady Wishfort’s property. They testify against Marwood about her affair with Fainall. Mirabell finally divulges that before Arabella Languish’s marriage with Mr. Fainall, she signed away her fortune to Mirabell to prevent Fainall from trying to wheedle it out of her and declares that Arabella’s precautions are “the way of the world”. Finally, Fainall apprehends that he has been outfoxed. The adulterous couple, humiliated and defeated, swear that they spend the rest of their life trying to take revenge. According to Mirabell’s plan both love and fortune have been preserved and Lady Wishfort is convinced to undo all her vengeful acts. She gives her consent to the marriage of Mirabell and Millamant. Arabella regains her independence, attains freedom from Fainall and becomes owner of her own property after getting back the document that controls her fortune. Millamant cherishes her staunch ideas about individuality. Thus “The way of the World” is a perfect specimen for comedy of manners and Congreve is a great writer of this genre.

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