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lamant. Thus, the necessity of the legal money cannot be overlooked by idealistic lovers insofar as it keeps their body and soul clean together. This is one of the realistic aspects advocated by Congreve.

The presentation of sexual connotations prevails in most drama which may often be dealt with euphemistically. What prompts critics to satirize *The Way of the World* is the fact that Congreve has been very frank and direct when criticizing the social ills of the Restoration period without any preservation. Most important is the proviso scene that is designed to be against the society's shortcomings. It is made as a manifesto against wantonness, adultery and immorality. The scene suggests some idealistic remarks related to the sacred relation between husband and wife, so that he may awaken society, especially husband, to realize the consequences of their ill social mores in which they strictly believe.





William Congreve's *The Way of the World* as Social Criticism

The sordid realities in relation to the Restoration social relationships have been exposed in *The Way of the World*. They are those relationships to be found among the aristocrats. The title of the play sums up the gist of it in that it reveals the kind of lifestyle followed by a certain slice of life represented by the aristocratic society. Its characters deal with one another in such a way as to achieve a high level of happiness on the account of their moral values that seem to perish into the air when it comes to the question to their enjoyment brought about by getting money and estates by illegal means and by getting illicit sexual experiences. Allardyce Nicoll has his word in this regard. He says that comedy of manners of the Restoration period has set its emphasis on “the young gallants in their prime quest of amorous adventure” (Allardyce Nicoll, 1976: p. 280) Nicoll adds that this type of drama hold a mirror reflecting “the morally vicious but intellectually brilliant atmosphere of the salons and the chocolate-houses.” (Allardyce Nicoll, 1925: p. 219).

As a trait of human nature, Congreve cannot deny the love of money and the legal materialistic gains as he lets Millamant and Mirabell think of getting the great amount of money from the former's aunt, which should be given to her after her marriage according to a previous will from the deceased family of Mil-





unique type of culture. There was complete freedom among the women. They were like jolly butterflies that fluttered from one flower to another to satisfy their passions.

(<https://www.englitmail.com/2016/12/the-way-of-world-reflects-social-life.html>)

What Congreve wants to express in this comedy of manners is that ideal marriage should be based on, in the first place, sacrifice, not to mention mutual respect and understanding. The proviso scene has explicated all the problems that may lead to the social decay of the family life. It shows that men must not be egoistic. Harmony should be the basis of the relationship between husband and wife. To some critics, the proviso scene may sum up what Congreve considers to be the ideal marriage and the ideal love as well:

The proviso scene is recorded as Congreve's contribution to the philosophy of love. It is essential that husband and wife should give each other the liberty and not interfere too much in each other's activities; respect each other's privacy too to avoid possible disillusionment. Distance makes the heart go fonder. Once Millamant is convinced of Mirabell's love, she throws away her defences and comes out as a genuine lover.

(Congreve in Cunningham, 1966: p. 285)





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the woman of his time that is featured by vanities, foolishness and high pride. Besides, he does not believe in the notion that a woman would have a woman confidant. Her confidant should be her husband, for he dislikes the idea that his future wife would have hidden matters with other women. Furthermore, he does not like to see his future wife using cosmetics for the sake of showing her beauty to other people. To use masks during the day at home is prohibited. Tight clothes during pregnancy are prohibited inasmuch as they affect the child that is in the womb. All kind of foreign drinks are prohibited. It seems that Mirabell appears to be the mouthpiece of his creator, especially when criticizing all false women living during the Restoration period—women having illegal relationships with men, whose reputation has been already disgraced and stained. Congreve seems to criticize the social mores of the Restoration women that are stained with bad reputations due to the social conventions and traditions imposed upon woman of the time:

Corruption was rampant in all walks of life. The ladies and gentleman of upper classes were busy in love and lust. The pursuit of women was the main business of men. The man had become licentious animal. The ideal of love was corrupt. There was complete absence of sexual morality. The fond of fashion created a





married at all...

Or

....Trifles!- As liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories and wry faces on your parts; to wear what I please; and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance: or to be intimate with fools, because they may be your relations. Come to dinner when I please; dine in my dressing-room when I am out of humour, without giving a reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea-table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. these article subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

(The Way of the world, V, ii)

Mirabell has condescended to the conditions set by Millamant and declares that he is no longer having the power to command. His attitude in this respect shows that he will have no authority towards the behavior of his future wife, and therefore he seems to be a benign husband for her. His ideals show that he does not like





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famous in its time because it has been made for the first time in the history of the English people in general and the history of the Restoration drama that a fiancée imposes conditions upon her fiancé which should be set into practice after marriage. One of these conditions is that the husband should keep a certain distance from his wife which permits her to behave independently. She demands that their characters as husband and wife should be independent; each behaves within the domain set for him/her. Their relation as husband and wife will come to an end if one of them violates these conditions. She rejects the principle that a wife is the property of man, nor does she believe that man is the property of woman. None of them should interfere in the personal affairs of the other. Thus, she tells Mirabell that she will agree to marry him just in case he accepts her conditions. As part of the proviso scene, the following excerpt is significant in this regard:

...don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler and Sir Francis...

Or

...Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together; but let us be very strange and well-bred: let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well-bred as if we were not





flects-social-life.html)

The new woman in the eye of Congreve is Millamant who manages to impose certain provisions upon her future husband, so that she can gain a sense of independence, which is a situation contrary to the conventions of the Restoration society. She wants to witness new family relationships, so that she would not appear to be like the imbecile Restoration woman set under the control of her husband. Being a foil of the aforementioned ladies controlled by their husbands and lovers, Millamant wants to practice the kind of social relationships that are based on reciprocal respect and mutual understanding between husband and wife. These principles, she thinks, will give her more independence and freedom:

Millamant's bargain with Mirabell is an important feature of the fashionable society. It shows the true picture of the morality of the age. She thinks that her liberty would be crushed by marriage. Thus before marriage, she wants Mirabell to agree that she would be free to do anything even after marriage.

(<https://www.englitmail.com/2016/12/the-way-of-world-reflects-social-life.html>)

It seems that Congreve hints at the idea of the kind of nuptial life that is ideal per se. The “proviso scene” becomes very





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mands, and therefore she decides not to live in a countryside as her aunt suggests to her—an idea which she regards as being foolish and crazy. Furthermore, she is clever enough to take care of any future incident that may disturb her future life when living with Mirabell as a wife. Ideas of disillusionment and frustration haunt her mind, so that she comes to the conclusion that she must pose some conditions concerning her future life with Mirabell. What prompts her to do so are her negative observations of the false yet hypocritical social relationships related to her own relatives. She exhibits her serious steps when dealing with the idea of marriage. Her behavior in this way can be regarded as being reasonable. She designs certain conditions because of her fears of disillusionment in marriage as far as the financial situation is concerned:

Here Congreve has depicted the social life of the fashionable men and women of the Restoration Age. During this period gravity, spiritual zeal, moral earnestness and decorum were thrown to winds. This was a peculiar age. The king was thorough debauch. He had a number of mistresses and numerous children. He was surrounded by corrupt and degenerate courtiers. There was no moral code for them.

(<https://www.englitmail.com/2016/12/the-way-of-world-re->





pervades this drama from beginning to end, which is found in Mirabell's attempt to beguile Lady Wishfort. He has devised that damn trick to win her agreement of marrying Millamant. She shows her contempt when discovering that trick. The theme of deception has been well explicated in Ian Ousby's expression, and as follows:

The comedies are distinguished by the wit and elegance of their dialogue as well as by their skilful plotting and the crafty deployment of contrasting characters and themes. They are mannered explorations of social values, marital practices and the scope given to intrigue and deceit by prurience in high places.

(Ousby, 1996: p. 89)

Millamant's point of view concerning the way of the world has taught her to act wisely in that she should behave in such a way that she must fulfill her wishes as far as her future husband is concerned. Thus, she thinks that she should act as an independent woman when dealing with her husband. It seems that Congreve wants to illustrate the point that woman in his age should no longer yield to the fraudulent wishes of their husbands and that they should have the least degree of independence as long as a woman, like man, is a human being having his/her wishes and rights. She no longer acquiesce to her aunt's orders and de-





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the sole heir of her aunt's [Lady Wishfort's] estates. Her relative Witwood has an eye on her and favors her to be his wife. Besides, her aunt has recommended him to be her husband. However, it is Mirabell who can win her and be her favorite due to his wit and tremendous understanding of the way of the world which exposes a narrow-minded society living in London, including those citizens ranging from old men, soldiers and down to servants who figure out in the background, whereas "the foreground is occupied by beaux and fops and rakes, flirtatious, giddy girls, naughty married ladies just getting their second wind, testy old husbands, as jealous as they are impotent" (John E. Cunningham, *Restoration Drama*, 1966: p. 36). Nevertheless, Millamant and Mirabell seem to be compatible to each other in that both of them are clever and truly love each other in a very faithful manner. They understand how to get the best from the way of the world they are both watching together. Furthermore, they are considered the most ideal couple in the eye of the other characters. Both of them win the admiration of all the other characters.

There are certain human traits socially condemned such as jealousy, envy and covetousness. The dandy Mirabell has been envied by Mrs. Marwood. Lady Wishfort appears to be inimical to him and decides not to marry Millamant off to him. Deception





characters of *The Way of the World* are “metaphorically speaking, painting their own faces—cultivating appearances that are at odds with reality. Hence, Mirabell’s premarital condition to Millamant suggests a conscious rejection of the affectation and pretense that characterize the foolish sector of society” (<https://www.enotes.com/topics/way-world>). Amorous manifestations are shown to be amalgamated with the search of money to be obtained by any legal or illegal ways. Love adventures are made for the sake of love, money and properties by those gallants who risk their social relationships. Mirabell understands the way how the people of world live and interact with one another, which gives him the chance to plot against others for the sake of bringing about his materialistic rewards. *The Way of the World* exposes characters attending the chocolate houses that are morally vicious and clever enough to plan the programs that may keep their body and soul together.

Millamant is depicted as being the cleverest yet most beautiful of all the women characterized in *The Way of the World*. Besides, she is the sole virtuous woman among her peers of the aristocrats who sacrifice their money for the sake of sex, legal or illegal. Hence, she has been chased by all the gallants, fops and rakes that figure out in this drama due to the fact that she is





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that witnessed a society that supports the exposition of the kind of drama in which connotations to sex and other materialistic yet abused practices are referred to. This indicates that Congreve has been quite aware of the psychological representations of the society among which he once lived.

It must be noted that in every particular aspect of real life hypocrisy assumes its identity. Since *The Way of the World* deals with characters representative and expressive of real life, Congreve exposes a protagonist that appears to be a hypocrite because he woos Lady Wishfort for the sake of getting the hand of her niece in marriage. Mirabell further does a hypocritical deed in his attempt to deceive Lady Wishfort when he makes his servant pretend to be a gentleman named Sir Rowland that is going to woo Lady Wishfort for the sake of marrying her, and at the same time he can keep on pursuing his beloved Millamant. It may be concluded therefore that deception is part and parcel of the social relationships of the Restoration society members of which a certain number watch themselves incarnated by the characters acting on the stage. Here is the presentation of an example of contrast between what really is and what really appears to be—a contrast between actuality and false appearances. Congreve seems to criticize the deceptive nature of mankind. The





life of the English society at the time as the aristocratic spouses marry one another for the sake of increasing their wealth and of gratifying their sexual appetite as is the case with Mr. and Mrs. Fainall, not to mention the fact that they, as husband and wife, have illegal sexual relations with others:

Mrs Fainall the first cousin of Millamant was Mirabell's mistress and spent considerable time with him. However, on the suspicion of pregnancy she gracefully parted company with Mirabell and married a rogue Fainall who blindly accepted her as his wife primarily to gratify his lust for money. Mirabell had a prodigal past but his presence dependence on the good will of Mrs. Fainall, his ex-mistress, is welcomed by her. She still has affection for him.

(Subhash Bisaria, 2009: p. 26)

The Way of the World faithfully exposes the manners of the Restoration society; they are the manners of those characters representative of actual ones such as the Lady Wishfort that deserves and arouses pity, the true lovers Mirabell and Millamant, the tricky Mrs. Marwood that always assumes the character of the liar ready to lie for the sake of achieving a certain aim. They are those characters that stay in the memory of the audiences and readers as well because they find their counterparts in actual life. They exhibit the complex relations adopted during a new epoch





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human nature and human aspirations when the issues related to sex, money and love are addressed. So, when considering the love affair between Mirabell and Millamant, Congreve seems to make his touches upon the fact that there exists the kind of love that is true and faithful and very distant from being termed within the domain of lust and sexual experience. As to the Fainall's aspirations, Congreve wants to depict the vanity of human ambitions and aspirations insofar as the latter's goals will now be fulfilled no matter how much he endeavors to do in this respect. Thus, one can come to the conclusion that Congreve: "is doing more than hold up to ridicule the assumptions that governed the society of his time. He could not regard love as the gratification of lust or as a battle of the sexes, a matter of wit rather than of feeling" (Subhash Bisaria, 2009: p. 13). For example, the scene in which Mirabell and Millamant make a love agreement or a love deal, so to speak, shows that their relationship of love should be considered apart from any sexual tendency and is to be against any social cynicism that may pervade the Restoration mores. Their love has been, according to Bisaria, an emotional demand for keeping a defense "against the cynicism that pervaded the society" (Subhash Bisaria, 2009: p. 13).

Restoration marital situations reflect one aspect of the social





self-centeredness, self-interests and any other selfish desires including the cheap desire of the flesh. Even the protagonist of this comedy is not exempted from the materialistic and selfish domain of the other characters. He has already made love to Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. He has cheated Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Wishfort as has been already shown. Finally, he turns his attention to Millamant's fortune and is graving for marrying her using legal and illegal ways possible to achieve his aim, though apparently his love seems to be true and his apparent behavior indicates that he is faithful to Millamant which indicated in his consent to her marriage conditions set in what is called by critics as the proviso scene—the scene in which she discloses her conditions for her marriage with him.

Before settling down to Millamant, Mirabell proves himself to be a well-trained libertine who is able to successfully chase women and easily let them fall in his lap. However, though the beginning of the play shows certain similarities between Mirabell and Fainall when they are sitting in the chocolate house where they start to play the game of cards, there seems in later developments of the action that there is a significant difference between both of them. At this terminal point Congreve wants to point to a fact about human nature insofar as he holds a mirror reflecting





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beguiling characters wearing masks hiding fops, rakes, libertines and rogues featured by affectations, intrigues and avarice. However, Mirabell and Millamant's love is pure and genuine, which is central to the action of the play. Though it is encompassed by all sorts of false love and false social relations, not to mention pretended love, the two lovers manage to proceed with their love till the end of the play that is crowned by their legal marriage. In this respect Congreve declares, that the hypocritical characters are meant to be ridiculed in most of our comedies are of fools so gross, that, in my humble opinion, they should rather disturb rather than divert the well-natured and reflecting part of an audience; they are rather objects of charity than contempt; and instead of moving our mirth, they ought very often to excite our compassion.

(Congreve in John E. Cunningham, 1966: p. 127)

Congreve intentionally cites the theme of covetousness in *The Way of the World* so as to reveal one of the social ills that is not only a feature of the Restoration society, but also a feature of humankind. Among the society members there are those who used to acquire fortunes throughout employing fraudulent methods in their social relationships. This indicates that the actions and movements of most of the characters are determined by their





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, decent. It shows that love makes fools of everyone.

(Jane Moore, 2008: 1)

On the other hand, Mirabell loves Millamant, Mrs. Fainall's cousin and Lady Wishfort's niece and ward. From the beginning, Mirabell wears the black mask that hides his real intentions when acting over Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Wishfort. At the same time, he conspires to marry Waitwell off to Foible. Hence, the relation between Mirabell and Mr. Fainall has been pushed by antagonism near to open conflict. Throughout the game they have played, Fainall gets some hints that he has been duped for twice times by Mirabell, for Mrs. Fainall was once Mirabell's beloved and Mrs. Marwood, Mr. Fainall's sweetheart, love Mirabell. Despite Millamant's real intentions to have Mirabell as her husband, in the meantime, she entertains herself by teasing him playfully.

Obviously, the main theme in *The Way of the World* which is the basis of its action and the respective social relationships is the theme of love. The action of this play revolves around the theme of love—the love between Mirabell and Millamant. Their love figures out in a social environment that is primarily crowded with





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period—something outdated, an atmosphere that has been well expressed in the drama of the time: “If scarcely revolutionary in themselves, the plays of the period are a response to revolution and to the seventeenth century’s experimental reversal of values. The comedies do not offer anything so pretentious as redefinitions but they do continue to irritate and laugh audiences into reaching out for definitions” (Sanders, 1999: 273).

The *Way of the World* exposes characters that struggle with one another and build up false relationships featured by the use of intrigues; they cheat one another for the sake of making love, getting money and estates. All these representations can make one call this type of drama as a social critique intended to criticize the social life of the Restoration people whose actual image characterized by licentiousness and indulgence in sensual pleasures as pictured in the Restoration comedy of manners.

On the other hand, due to the belief that human manners are the basis of human nature, one can say that Congreve does not only ridicule the manners of the Restoration society, but also the manners of mankind at all time. Briefly speaking he ridicules human manners as to their

main social concerns, men and women’s desire for each other, and the pursuit for each other, complicated by money issues; the





ing during the Restoration period:

So, we can say that William Congreve paints a damaging picture of the upper class of the society- a society which is extremely hypocritical in nature and devoid of any sense of morality. Through the play we see only the luxurious and the sophisticated class.

(https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/162911/17/10_chapter%204.pdf)

When considering the ideology of the English society before and after the Restoration period, one can find tremendous changes in the manners of people due to the change of traditions, conventions and social mores as a whole. It has been indicated that the whole situation of the seventeenth century turned upside down from the strict rules of the Puritans to the loose social relationships practiced by people after Charles II ascended the throne. The new epoch has made a radical change in the life of people, and the theater is no exception: "While in exile in France, the court of Charles II had acquired a new tone of worldliness and self-conscious, sophistication that was to affect literary as well as social forms" (Martin Price, 1973: p. 7). The progressive and revolutionary representations adopted during the reign of the Puritans became reactionary during the Restoration





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Marwood, without his spouse's knowledge.

(<https://www.enotes.com/homework-help...>)

It is a shame directed towards the Restoration audiences that watch themselves on the stage—they are indirectly satirized and criticized by the dramatist. The audiences can see their image on the stage: “Mostly the fashionable gallants and ladies went to the play to talk, to flirt, to show themselves off in their fine dresses, and to hear the latest scandal, and they saw their images reflected in the characters of the play” (Subhash Bisaria. p. 27).

Lady Wishfort who is fifty five years old is having a great desire for marriage. Almost all the characters of this drama are occupied with plots and intrigues made for the sake of materialistic desires and the cheap desire of the flesh to be fulfilled by any means possible. Mirabell is greatly attracted to Millamant whom he loves very much and whom he urgently wants to marry. She is Lady Wishfort's niece and Mrs. Fainall's cousin.

Mirabell pretends to love Lady Wishfort but he really loves her niece Millamant. He behaves in this way so that he can have Lady Wishfort's consent to achieve his aim—marrying Millamant. Thus, Lady Wishfort has been left disappointed. One can only realize the effects of intrigues on character and action, which are part and parcel of the lifestyle of the aristocratic society liv-





hawk's eye is also on Millamant's fortune.

(Subhash Bisaria. p. 27)

It should be noted that the beginning of the play points to one of the significant practices to be found among the social relationships including plots and intrigues that are designed against one another on the hopes of getting materialistic gains and opportunities to have sexual intercourses. However, the love relationship between Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall (her name when single was Arabella) comes to an end due to her marriage with Mr. Fainall who has married her upon Mirabell's request. The latter has thusly cuckolded the former which seems something ordinary that does not hurt the dignity of either one. But it is something against the virtuous principles that consider adultery blasphemous. In consequence, this is an attack against characters without ardor. The Restoration comedy of manners, therefore, shows that married women are possibly made frail, whose husbands can be easily cuckolded:

Congreve's *The Way of the world* is a perfect instance of criticizing the restoration society. The characters represent the treachery and clandestine society. Ladies deceive their husbands and so do as the males. Mr. Fainall marries Lady Wishfort's daughter for property and on the other hand he keeps on love affair with Mrs.





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that may be useful to cover his expenditures on another woman—Mrs. Marwood—with whom he makes illegal love. It has been then a marriage of convenience.

It seems that the love of money plays a great role in the life of those characters exposed on the Restoration stage: “Money played an important role even in this relationship [with Mrs. Marwood] and he hooked her not only for the pleasures of love but also for money which he spent on her and himself” (Subhash Bisaria. p. 27).

Complications then appear between Mirabell and Mr. Fainall which unfold their narcissism and self-centeredness, who quarrel on another prey that forms the estates of Millamant's inheritance. Peculations, greediness and covetousness, and above all pretentiousness are to govern the behave of almost all the characters of *The Way of the World*. Concerning the issue of Mirabell, for instance:

there is a passionate and painful encounter of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood in which accusations and counter-accusations, alternating with gestures of rebelliousness and appeasement, exhibit the basically egocentric quality of their feelings and the mordant effects of the association. Fainall is a rogue not satiated by this; he has set his eyes upon Lady Wishfort's estate as well. His





Fainall finds it a very good opportunity to exploit the riches of this woman. Therefore, Congreve's critique is made against those who faces are covered by masks that indicate that they are not what they seem to be, for behind the mask one can see a deceitful person who can by no means be confidential. Besides, Mrs. Marwood pretends to be the optimal friend of Lady Wishfort, but in reality she is the beloved of the latter's would-be son-in-law who deliberately wholeheartedly acts to exploit the latter's property. Hence, Congreve draws a portrait of the English aristocratic society in such a way that *The Way of the World* has become a disgracing document set against social conventions and practices on the hope of re-establishing new moral values.

Social criticism can be directed towards the fact that Mirabell has married Mrs. Fainall off to Mr. Fainall because the former fears the notion that she may cause him a problem in case she becomes pregnant from their last sexual intercourse , so that a probable social disgrace can be avoided before it can possibly occurs. The very beginning of the play exposes social ills related to adultery and cheating. On the other hand, Mr. Fainall who appears to be a respectable gentleman agrees to marry such a woman because he thinks of getting certain amounts of money from her due to the fact that she is rich—an amount of money





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behavior:

The Way of the World is an exquisite portrayal of the contemporary society of the Restoration period. It gives us a better knowledge of the manners, the mentality and the outlook of the aristocratic men and women of the Restoration society- their fashionable way of life, their witty way of expression, their dealing with love, marriage, and adulterous relationships etc. Over all, the play is a perfect portrayal of the people and society of Congreve's age.

(<http://englishliterature24.blogspot.>)

The axis of *The Way of the World* revolves around an upper-class man that seems to be neither rich nor poor. At the beginning of the play, it is disclosed that he has already had sexual relationships with the woman called Mrs. Fainall that was once a widow acquiring a new name after she married Mr. Fainall. Hence, her second marriage has endowed her with a new name that is Mr. Fainall: "The showy relationship of men and women of the Restoration society is presented excellently through the couple of Mr. and Mrs. Fainall." (<http://englishliterature24.blogspot.>). Marrying Arabella off to Mr. Fainall is a very good opportunity for Mirabell who is going to get rid of a possible scandal in case she becomes big pregnant by his sexual intercourse, and





MIRABELL. You are a fortunate Man, Mr. Fainall.

FAINALL. Have we done?

MIRABELL. What you please. I'll play on to entertain you.

FAINALL. No, I'll give you your revenge another time, when you are not so indifferent: you are thinking of something else now, and play too negligently; the Coldness of losing Gamester lessens the Pleasure of the Winner: I'd no more play with a Man that slighted his ill Fortune, than I'd make Love to a Woman who undervalu'd the Loss of Reputation.

(I, i.)

St. James Park is the location of Act II, which is a fashionable outdoor place. Lady Wishfort's house points to the setting of the last three acts of the play, which encompasses a familial environment where characters socially deal with one another. The comic atmosphere is almost created in this house which unfolds "the fashions of the time, its manners, its speech, and its interest" (Subhash Bisaria. p. 4).

The Way of the World is a drama that documents the lifestyle of a group of characters who disclose the way how they live, love, intrigue, marry and cheat one another for the sake of getting materialistic gains such as love, money and sex. The play also exposes the kind of social relationships that govern their





William Congreve's *The Way of the World* as Social Criticism

(<http://englishliterature24.blogspot.>)

The Restoration comedy of manners, especially *The Way of the World*, depicts love as a favorite social pastime. It is then the reality of the social life of the Restoration period that is depicted on the stage. It should be noted that the shaping factors of the Restoration comedy of manners are the social and political developments conditioned by the prevailing conventions whatsoever “taking as its main theme the manners and behaviors of the class to which it was addressed, it dealt with fops, fanatics, fools, excited amateur scientists, imitators of French customs, conceited wits” (Subhash Bisaria. P.12). However, the main theme to be depicted in this kind of drama is the theme of sexual life followed by a pretty number of courtiers whose ideals consider the concept of freedom in the first place.

The Way of the World starts with an action that takes place in a public chocolate-house established according to the fashions of the time, in which figure out two men, one of them is a man-about-town that is called Mirabell and Mr. Fainall whom Mirabell considers to be a man of fine reputation. They are engaged in a card game which turns to be later on symbolic of a game which they are going to play on the level of social relationships and which it concerns their beloveds:





of the social life during the Restoration period inasmuch as the drama of this period is mainly concerned with vogues, fashions and lifestyle of people who maintain and establish themselves as being respectable by many and various means.

To depict the manners of people living in a certain period in a dramatic performance requires the dramatist to have access into reality, and therefore, the dramatist should, as far as possible, approach the reality of the life of the aristocracy who are primarily concerned with matters of love, sex and properties. Hence, the setting of the comedy of manners, especially *The Way of the World*, is often depicted in the streets and gardens of London. Hence, indecent thoughts and imagery are referred to on the stage, which makes critics harshly disapprove them, for love is depicted as being a matter of social pastime, not an innocent relation conducive to a virtuous relation—legal marriage:

The Restoration is a period of loose morals and the play gives us an adequate idea of the prevailing morality. The play has a number of characters all belonging to the polished, upper class society. Most of these characters have very weak sense of morality. They have no other business but motivating actions relating always to illicit love affairs, marriage, courtships etc. Mirabell and Millamant are in love with one another.





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social relationships that are the basis of the period's conventions, traditions and aspirations. In it, characters figure out to be seen as being representative of the aristocratic people whose ideals and ideologies are distinct and distinguished from those of the ordinary people. Even the audiences of this kind of drama are representative of that upper class, which lets one to announce that the spectators are to watch their counterparts on the stage. The manners of the aristocratic audience are depicted on the stage. Thus, the Restoration comedy exposes men and women whose main concerns are relations based on self-interests that lead them to adopt illegal means such as intrigues, tricks and every means, possible legal or illegal, to achieve their aims. They are those "relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upper-class society" (Abrams, M. H. and Harpham, Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 2009: p. 49-50).

Congreve greatly depends on the use of wit in order to produce the comic effects. He also uses sparkle of dialogue depending on repartee and conversations colored with wit conducive to verbal combats, not to mention a break away with social principles and decorum made by jealous husbands, curious dandies, rogues, rakes and libertines. Therefore, for full understanding of the comedy of manners, one ought to have a conspicuous account





expressions and juxtaposition of characters and themes as well are important features of his drama. He explores the moral values of Restoration society in his drama throughout exposing its social principles, nuptial values and the mores related to the way of life led by both the middle and the upper classes, which are all wrapped by a tendency towards sex, intrigues and deception. His drama is featured by the “explorations of social values, marital practices

and the scope given to intrigue and deceit by prurience in high places” (Ian Ousby, 1996: p. 89). They are those values that concern the upper class society.

The Restoration audiences find their comfort in watching comic scenes and situations which the comedy of manners responds to their demands in this regard. The comic spirit is their main concern rather than the tragic representations attached to the Elizabethan theater. They are fond of watching the manners of people which satiate their curious nature and craving for the reflections of the social relationships. They are interested and entertained by “social brilliance; fine manners, witty conversation ... practiced and admired, intrigue [that] formed the daily business of the gallants and their ladies” (Nicoll, 1976: 278-79).

The Way of the World tackles the manners of Restoration





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characters that find their counterpart in actual life, which leads one to think that the audiences of this drama are watching their character and action on the stage—an accession to the realm of realism. Hence, *The Way of the World* can be regarded as a very important to history in general and to the history of the English people in particular:

The married women had unfair relations with other men. Their husbands were cuckold. People of this age were frequent visitors of the parks, play houses and hotels. These were the centres of love affairs and love intrigues. The coffee houses were overcrowded. This was the picture of Congreve's age.

(<https://www.englitmail.com/2016/12/the-way-of-world-reflects-social-life.html>)

Much fame has been allotted to Congreve due to the significant number of the comedies which he wrote during the Restoration period. He has got a very good status among not only the British dramatic media but also among World Theater. His position as a brilliant dramatist has been confirmed and established by the publication of other plays besides the one under consideration these dramas are *Old Bachelor* (1693), *The Double Dealer* (1693), *Love for Love* (1695), and his single tragedy, *The Mourning Bride* (1697). Skilful plotting, elegant dialogue, witty





the history of the English people—the Restoration period which marks a turning point in the change and development of a new ideology concerning social relationships inasmuch as the Puritan ideology has already been quitted on the political and social level. The new ideals are then those imported to England by Charles II and his entourage who support the kind of lifestyle adopted in France and imaged on its stages:

When the people of England invited Charles Stuart to return to his country and grace the throne, he brought with him the lifestyle and manners that had become second nature to him and his group of nobles in exile in France. The ostentatious adoption of French styles and ideas by the aristocracy marked the deliberate distancing of Restoration England from the character of Cromwellian England.

(CONGREVE: The Way of the World https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/162911/17/10_chapter%204.pdf)

Since the dramatist tries to depict the kind of life lived by a certain people, relying on his observations in an age looking forward to change its way of life towards a more open life characterized by gaiety happiness and merrymaking throughout gratifying their appetite for sex and properties. They are those





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This research paper is mainly concerned with the study of the theme of social criticism to be made about one of the significant comedies entitled *The Way of the World*, written by William Congreve (1670-1729), published in 1700 and regarded as his masterpiece in modern times though it made him frustrated and averted from drama due to its disappointing reception in its time, which is considered under the heading of the Restoration comedy of manners. Restoration comedy of manners, as it is generally accepted, finds its origin in Moliere's and Ben Jonson's comedic prerequisites exposing social interests and concerns. Social criticism requires pondering and profound insight into the kind of social relationships and communications adopted by the characters that figure out in the play, in which there is interplay of action and character that is conducive to the ending intended to be by the dramatist, which is always a happy one. As its title indicates, the play is primarily related to a particular world, a particular society within which the characters deal with one another, so that the portrait of their world is quietly made obvious.

The Way of the World is a comedy in which the dramatist faithfully holds a mirror to reflect the lifestyle of a particular society—the society that lives during a very critical period in





المستخلص

تتناول الدراسة مسرحية وليم كونكريف «طريق العالم (1700) مسلطة ضوءا جليا على معطيات النقد الاجتماعي لقد تم لصق التهم بهاتين المرحيتين على إنهما يفصحان عن جوانب تنتهك الجوانب الحياتية مثل الجنس والعلاقات اللاأخلاقية والنشاطات الفاضحة. تؤكد الدراسة بان هذه المعطيات موجودة فيهما ولكن ليس بسبب عرض الشرور الاجتماعية فحسب وإنما لاغراض اخرى تتلخص بالنقد الاجتماعي كما تفترض هذه الدراسة. تنضوي هاتين المسرحيتين تحت عنوان الكوميديا الاخلاقية التي تعكس اسلوب الحياة لمجتمع عصر العودة في فتر زمنية اتسمت بالكثير من التغيرات الاجتماعية والسياسية. يتم تحليل هاتين المسرحيتين من حيث الموضوعات والشخصيات التي تم تقديمها بطريقة بحيث تلبي ذوق جمهور عصر العودة الذي يفضل الاستمتاع بمشاهدة المشاهد التي تعرض المضامين الاباحية والمؤامرات وجميع انواع الشرور الاجتماعية. وعلى الرغم من ذلك فان الكاتبين المسرحيين المذكورين استهدفا بصدق أنتقدا بشدة الشرور الاجتماعية بكل جوانبها بقد تعلق الامر بهذه الشرور الاجتماعية. ومما يثير الاهتمام فانه من الممكن اعتبار مسرحية (طريق العالم) وثيقة تاريخية توثقان اسلوب الحياة خلال فترة عصر العودة لانهما يعرضان بامانة أخلاق المجتمعات التي عاشت خلال هذه الحقبة الزمنية. ومما لاشك فيه فان وجرلي وكونكريف على دراية تامة بتقاليد واعراف وطموحات وثقافة وظروف مجتمعا غارقا في وحل الرذيلة.





Abstract

This study deals with William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700), shedding strong light on the representations of social criticism. The plays have been accused of showing offensive aspects of life such as sexuality, bawdy relations and libertine activities. The latter representations do exist in them, not only for the sake of exposing evil representations, but for a further end, which is, as this study hypothesizes, social criticism. The two plays are comedies of manners reflecting the way of life the Restoration society lived during an era of tremendous social and political change.

The *Way of the World* are analyzed in terms of themes and character that are presented in such a way as to respond to the taste of the Restoration audiences that preferred to enjoy seeing scenes unfolding sexual connotations, intrigues and all sorts of evil and debauchery. Nevertheless, the two dramatists mentioned hereinabove aim to genuinely castigate the social evils of the society represented by the spectators who watch characters that resemble them in almost every aspect as far as sex, intrigues and debauchery are concerned.

Interestingly enough, *The Way of the World* can be considered historical documents recording the style of life during the Restoration period insofar as they faithfully present the manners of people at that time. Wycherley and Congreve know very well the traditions, conventions and aspirations, culture and circumstances of a society indulged in debauchery.



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