

Picture of the Contemporary Society in Congreve's *Way of the World*=

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.

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. But we see that this hero previously had a relationship with Mrs. Fainall. Mrs. Fainall, though married, still seems to admire her ex-lover. Her husband also maintains an illicit love affair with Mrs. Marwood. The showy relationship of men and women of the Restoration society is presented excellently through the couple of Mr. and Mrs. Fainall.

We again see that Lady Wishfort is fifty-five but even at this stage of life she fancies herself to get married. At the same time, almost all the men and women of this society are involved in intrigues to fulfill their worldly desires. They want to fulfill their desire and ambition at any cost. Mr. Fainall marries Lady Wishfort's daughter for money. Mrs. Fainall, on the other hand, takes adequate precautions against any possible betrayal by her husband with the help of Mirabell. Mirabell also pretends to love Lady Wishfort but actually loves her niece Millamant. This pretence is done only to please her and to get her permission to marry her niece. Ultimately she is deceived and disappointed.

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.