

SEM 4 English Honours. Paper: CC8- *The Way of the World* by William Congreve

Congreve started writing the play in the autumn of 1699. The play was first performed in 1700.

Influences:

1. Congreve describes Terence as 'the most correct writer in the World'. The epigraph on the title –page is taken from Horace's *Second Satire in Satires I*. 'Civilised' Rome bore an affinity to the ethos of the Restoration period, and Congreve himself seemed to present the picture of the perfect gentleman that Cicero had in mind when he wrote *De Officiis*, a treatise 'on Duties', in 44 B.C.
2. Moliere.
3. Dryden saw Congreve as the rising genius of the age. – 'In Him all Beauties of this Age we see;' - Dryden wrote in the prefatory verses to *The Double Dealer*.
4. Ben Jonson : model for *The Way of the World* was Jonson's *Epicoene or The Silent Woman* (1609) . The character of Truewit in Jonson's play inspired Congreve to make his distinction between Truewits and Witwouds and led him to create Witwoud in his play.

Title

1. The phrase 'the way of the world' is repeated several times in the course of the play.
 - a) Act II .i.222- Fainall first uses it – ' the ways of Wedlock and this World' (pg-101)
 - b) Act III- Fainall repeats the phrase. 'all in the Way of the World'(pg-142)
 - c) Act V- Fainall repeats 'tis but the Way of the World' (pg-192)
 - d) Act V - Mirabell picks it and mockingly throws it back at Fainall 'tis but the Way of the World , Sir; of the Widows of the World'.(Pg-196)
2. The title refers to the perception of one main theme- private and public realities.
3. The title reflects the theme of the play- the problem of social living. The play focuses on the relation between individual and the society – a) the man has no way to live except within the way of the world. So he has to protect the society from disruptive sources. b) he also needs to ensure that his personality is not destroyed in the process. Mirabell and Millamant take this double challenge. Fools ,like Petulant and Witwoud , exhibit affectation and artificiality. Fainall and Mrs Marwood threaten the well-being of the society.

4. Mirabell and Millamant use public to protect the private. Fainall and Mrs Marwood use the public to conceal and exploit the private.

Comedy of Manners

1. Dramatists lived in a sophisticated age in which social behaviour became more and more fixed.
2. There is a group of human beings who affect but do not observe the social norms. They create a powerful body of opinion which is no longer concerned with social values but is vitally concerned with preserving the façade of these values.
3. Restoration Comedy thus becomes more concerned with the aberrations of the group and thus unmistakably reflects the age in which it was written.
4. It emphasizes the immediate and actual social framework, and it has been called the Comedy of Manners because it deals with the manners of the age.
5. The dramatists endeavour to distinguish between false manners, to separate pseudo-intelligence from intelligence.
6. The dramatist uses the sharper instrument of wit to preserve the sanity of the intellect.

Wit:

1. Wit is an art of speaking pleasantly and amusingly. Expresses itself in the use of irony, innuendo, epigram, word play etc.
2. The rhetorical devices present statements of dual significance.
3. Juxtaposition of the apparent and hidden meanings supplies the incongruity which is the source of comic laughter.
4. Wit is essentially an exercise of the intellect and the most effective weapon with which a sophisticated society can be made aware of its shortcomings.
5. In *The Way of the World*, there are three 'humour' characters who are not essentially witty. – Lady Wishfort, Sir Willfull, Petulant.
6. Millamant's wit is the most spontaneous, there is less artistry in them.
7. Fainall's remarks have cynical twist in them
8. What distinguishes Mirabell is his seriousness and ethical sense. He has the wit, the polish and grace that the sophisticated society of his age demands.
9. Witwoud's wit is forced and artificial.
10. Wit also involves imagery that gives us glimpses of the larger background of seventeenth century life.

Major Characters:-

Mirabell

1. 'Admirable', perhaps 'an admirer of female beauty'
2. Represents urban gentleman.
3. Intrinsically serious.
4. He impresses us with his shrewd judgement, foresight and practical wisdom.
5. He has the sense of decorum.
6. Passion does not overrule his judgement.
7. Consummate comic hero.

Millamant

1. 'She has a thousand lovers'
2. Her sparkling gaiety delights us all who come near her.
3. Her wit is a natural exuberance of her personality.

Mrs Fainall

1. Generous, bear no malice towards anyone.
2. Acts as a foil to Millamant.

Fainall

1. His cleverness has been warped by his perverted ego.
2. His epigrammatic remarks have an unpleasant flavour about them.
3. 'feigns all'

Mrs Marwood

1. Has cunning and more practical sense.
2. Fainall's mistress but loves Mirabell.
3. Her rejected love turns violently to her thoughts of revenge.
4. One who 'would (wishes to) mar' (harm) all.

Lady Wishfort

1. Her vivid and metaphorical language reveals an energetic and imaginative mind.
2. Her behaviour shows exaggerated affectation.

3. She has two weaknesses-a) her genuine love for her daughter
b) her fascination for Mirabell.

4. 'wishfor't- one who aspires for something she cannot possess[beauty,youth,
and lovers.]