



ISSN: 2663-8118 (Online) | ISSN: 2074-9554 (Print)

Journal of Al-Frahedis Arts

Available Online: <http://www.jaa.tu.edu.iq>

Tikrit University

J.F.A

Journal of Al-Frahedis Arts

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Iraq**Keywords:**

- William Congreve,
- The Way of the World,
- Comedy of Manners, upper class.

ARTICLE INFO**Article history:**

Received: 05/6/2019
Accepted: 05/9/2019
Available Online: 24/11/2019

**Congreve's 'The Way of The World' as A
Comedy Of Contemporary Manners****A B S T R A C T**

In order to shed light on the manners of one of the classes of the upper class, this research will analyze William Congreve's The Way of the World as a comedy of modern manners. It aims to illustrate The Way of the World's satirical use of comedy of manners and to clarify the genre's significance in parodying the affluent lifestyles of wealthy families. The play's incidents, which will contribute to exposing their way of life, offer humorous reflections of their manners. Through this play and its conflict, the author attempts to demonstrate how they still adhere to some archaic customs of wealthy families.

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1. Introduction

The way of the world is a play written by William Congreve who was born at Bardsey near Leeds, on January 24th in 1670. He spent his childhood in Ireland, where his father had settled during the reign of Charles II. He is a great restoration dramatist. He wrote a novel, a few poems and several dramas. *The way of the world* is the best play of Congreve. The play deals with faults of the restoration society like adulterous relationships, love, marriages, property conflicts and the rivalries amongst the people of upper class. This study deals with these manners as we mentioned before which can be called as the comedy of manners. It deals with the manner of living of the people belonging to this society the fashionable world in the age of the write of the play. This study aims to examine William Congreve's *The Way of the World* as a comedy of contemporary manners to shed light on the manners of modern life of one of the classes of the high-class community. It contends to demonstrate the satirical use of comedy of manners in *The Way of the World* and to explain the importance of this genre in satirizing the flourished life of rich families.

2. Definitions of the Comedy of Manners

1. "The comedy of manners originated in the New Comedy of the Greek Menander, C. 342-292 B.C. (as distinguished from the old comedy represented by Aristophanes. C.450-c.385 B.C) and was developed by the Roman dramatists Plautus and Terence in the third and second centuries B.C." (Abrams, 2005:39).
2. "The comedy of manners also called anti sentimental comedy is a form of comedy that satirizes the manners and affectations of contemporary society and questions societal standards." (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/comedy-of-manners)

3. "Comedy of manners, witty, cerebral form of dramatic comedy that depicts and often satirizes the manners and affectation of a contemporary society. A comedy of manners is concerned with social usage and the question of whether or not characters meet certain social standards."

(www.britannica.com/art/comedy-of-manners)

4. "The comedy of manners is a genre of comedy that flourished on the English stage during the Restoration Period." (www.enotes.com/topics/comedy-of-manners)

3. Comedy of Manners

The English comedy of manners was early exemplified by Shakespeare's works and was given a high polish in Restoration Comedy (1660-1700). The Restoration form owes much to the brilliant dramas of the French writers Moliere, 1622- 73. It deals with the relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upper-class society, and relies for comic effect in large part on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue as well as on the violations of social standards and decorum by would be wits, jealous husbands, conniving rivals and foppish dandies (Abrams, 2005:39).

We come to know that this term is employed to the comic plays which have been written in England during the period of the restoration. It deals with the fashionable manners of the society. The manners of love, marriages, adulterous relationships property conflicts. The characters generally include fops, fanatics, fools concerted wit, flirts and imitators of French customs.

The way of the world is not an exception of the fact it is a fine comedy of manners and William Congreve was one of the principal authors of the comedy of manner in the restoration period.

4. The Way of the World as a Comedy of Contemporary Manners

There are several features indicate that *the way of the world* can be considered as a comedy of contemporary manners. First the social fashionable manners of the women of the age and the fop's men. Secondly, the adulterous relationships or illicit love among most of the characters in the play, like the relationship between the hero of the play Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall and between Mr. Faiall and Mrs. Marword (Butler, 1999:38).

Love and marriages is also one of the features of the comedy of manners like that of Mr. Fainall and of play like property conflicts and rivalries amongst the people of upper class.

One more feature of these genre of play is the proviso scene between the hero of the play Mirabell and the heroine, Millamant.

5.1 The Social Fashionable Manners

The restoration comedies chiefly concerned with the relationship between men and women, sexual relationships, love and marriage. The play deals with the manners of the people of the age. One of them is the social fashionable manners of both sex, women and man each one represents his/her position in the society as father, mother, son, girl, etc. the restoration dramatists portrayed the manners and the living of people drawn from aristocratic class (Dabree, 1924:53).

5.1.1 Women

Women often described as social problems the problems which have been created by their infidelity their husband. They were emphasizing on their external appearance, their cloths cosmetics or makeup, their manner of walking and talking. Not only this but also they betrayed their husband. The women of

that time live in an atmosphere of social vices which result in jealousy and mutual suspicion. Their affairs made the life of their husbands miserable.

The relationship of men and women, illegitimate relationships, love affairs, adultery, true and false courtship, unhappiness in marriage. Marriage for the sake of money and marriage for the sake of love are some of the manners of living of that age (wilde,1910:74).

Most of the women characters in the play are interested only in the manners we have mentioned before her make-up, her lover, shopping, dressing well, illegitimate relationship etc. women like Lady Wishfort, Mrs. Fainal and Mrs. Marwood etc are example of women of that age.

5.1.2 Men

The restoration comedies were chiefly concerned with the relationship between and concerned with the relationship between men and women. So men also have their in this play as part of the society described (McCormack,2005:78).

The fops, the so called gentlemen and the false wit of those times must also not escape our attention. They are represented by without and petulant whose affectations and antics amuse us a great deal. The pay courtship to Millamant for fashion's sake. So obsessed is petulant to show off a high image and make other gentlemen take notice of him and feel jealous that he hired women to come and ask for him in public. His favorite pastimes to pass comments on the ladies on the mall and ask them blush. So, men also contribute to the manners of such society and really the writer has succeeded in his portrait of the fashion of the time.

5.2 The Adulterous Relationship or Illicit Love

The play deals with several social factors. Adulterous relationship or illicit love is one of the prevailing moralities in the restoration age.

In the restoration period of loose morals, the prevailing morality is presented quit well in the play. Adulterous relationship and illicit love are conveyed through Mrs.Fainall, Mr. Fainall, Mrs. Marwood and even the hero of the play, Mirabell (Palmer, 1913:47).

5.2.1 Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall

One of the adulterous relationships in this play is between Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall. Mrs. Fainall, Lady Wish fort's daughter begets pregnancy by her married to Mr.Fainall in order to cover up their guilt. Mr.Fainall here refers to himself as anticipated cuckold. Mr. and Mrs. Fainall do not get along well. Their relationship is Joke, superficial and Spiteful (Sawyer,1931:24).

The one thing to be kept in mind about Mrs. Fainall is that she has just become a widow and the period mourning is not even over when she begins a new relationship with Mirabell.

Thus, we see adultery, false relationship and marriage for money. Now all this is mockery of love but Mirabell and his mistress treated their love affairs. Merely as a sport and that lady is married off to another man, she does not want to disappear from Mirabella's life and the two continues to be friends. Not only has this but she helped him in his pursuit of another charming girl, Millamant who also happens to be her cousin (Felski,2000:43).

5.2.2 Mr. Fainall and Mrs.Marwood

The second false or illicit relationship is between Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. Lady Wish fort's daughter, Mrs. Fainall had agreed to marry this man to cover up the consequences of her illegitimate relationships with

Mirabell and this man Mr. Fainall had gone into marriage with this woman for the sake of fortune. These couples are not happy as it is though they maintain a façade (Wain, 1956:370).

As a result of the unhappy married life of the two and as it is not a love marriage but to cover up another adultery and false relationship is in Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood love affair. Mrs. Marwood was actually in love with Mirabell, but when she couldn't make up with him, she fell on Mr. Fainall, but not forgives Mirabell for refusing her love. Even after being in relationship with Fainall she continues to like Mirabell secretly but the revenge is also a motive in her mind.

Mr. Fainall does not want to lose her as she is an important person and an important link to his acquisition of Lady Wishfort and his wife Mrs.Fainall's wealth. He also asserts to Mrs. Marwood that as soon as he gets the fortune of his wife, he will marry her and they will go somewhere to another world, if their plan to divest lady Wishfort and Millamant is succeeded. Thus this relationship contributes to two or more features of the comedy of manners: the adultery, illicit love and property conflict.

5.3 Love and Marriage

Love and marriage were the most central features of the restoration comedies. Through such features, the dramatics reveals the manners of the aristocratic society. The way of the world is one of such plays that gives a real picture of the manners of the restoration age or the aristocratic society (Cunningham,1966:55).

Love and marriage are presented through the relationships of various characters in the play like that of Mr. Fainall with Mrs. Fainall wait wall with Foible and Mirabell with Millamant.

5.3.1 Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Fainall

The relationship between Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Fainall is not a relation of love affair but it is the result of another illicit love or adultery between Mrs. Fainall and Mirabell. So, in order to cover up the pregnancy of Mrs. Fainall, she gets married to Mr. Fainall who accept this marriage or we can call it the deal not because he loves Mrs. Fainall, but for the sake of money and property.

This relationship is one of the false relationships in this play which portrait or depicts the manners of the aristocratic society of the restoration age. It is a kind of marriage of convenience as the two has something to fulfill through this marriage. First, it is to cover up the pregnancy of her which made Mrs. Fainall marries Mr. Fainall. Secondly, it is the greediness and the conflicts of property which made Mr. Fainall marry Mrs. Fainall (Holand, 1959:61). Thus, this marriage is really depicting the true picture of the aristocratic society. It is a complete failure.

5.3.2 Waitwell and Foible

Another example of what we can call it a marriage of convenience; it is the marriage of Waitwell and Foible. Waitwell is the servant of Mirabell and Foible is the maid of Lady Wishfort.

It is a kind of physical love as well as a marriage of convenience thought this convenience not on the side of the couple but for the interest of someone else who is Mirabell. It is a part of Mirabell plan. The plan through which Mirabell tries to get the consent to his marriage with Millamant. He has

arranged for a false uncle, Rowland to love and win Lady Wish fort. The false uncle is Waitwell. Sex-relationship is the core of this relationship (Muir, 1970:76). Thus, this marriage is another example of love and marriage which present the social life of the time of the writer and satirizing the manner of the restoration age.

5.3.3 Mirabell and Millamant

The central love relationship in the play is that of Mirabell and Millamant. Millamant is a young charming woman. Mirabell is a young handsome man. Their love is true. Mirabell who was in an illicit love with Mrs. Fainall, the first cousin of Millamant, now is in love with Millamant but it is a true love not a false one. Both of them lay down their marriage conditions and accepts them instantly. Mirabell makes a plan to make lady Wishfort ready to allow him to marry Millamant. Finally, the two lovers get married (Taylor, 1963:72). This kind of relationship represents the ideal love and sure love and emotions; their relation is the most important one as they represent the hero and the heroine of the play.

5.3.4 The Proviso Scene Between Mirabell and Millamant

The ‘Proviso scene’ between Mirabell and Millamant had been universally praised. It provides a good comic entertainment and at the same time has serious overtones. The introduction of the proviso scene in the play owes its allegiance to the community of such scenes in most restoration comedies.

The affair’s between Mirabell and Millamant reaches the acme in the proviso. In this famous scene the two lovers laid down the conditions for their marriage which shows that their life does not have the value of love and

passion but the conditions and manners which also can be destroyed with first problem.

The demand of Millamant is stated in an witty and entertaining manner have serious overtones. Millamant speaks, quit rightly so for the personal liberty and insist on having it.

Thus the proviso scene serves a double purpose and this is its remarkable feature. The scene provides rich comic entertainment. At the same time, it has a serious as it defines the on which two persons in love can lead a harmonies married life.

5.5 Property Conflicts

Legacy conflicts were common in those days. Young men sought after rich ladies for marriage. Money was the prime consideration for the matrimonial relationships. Fainall marries lady wish forts daughter for her money. Mr. Fainall in league with Mrs. Marwood tries to partake of Millamants's legacy.

Intrigues were very common in matrimonial alliances as well as a part of social and domestic life. Mirabell though the hero of the play courts lady wish fort thought the objects of his courtship is Millamant (Congreve, 2009:65). So, property conflicts are one the manners of the time of the restoration age. The manners of the aristocratic society.

6. Conclusion

The Way of the World has many of the characteristics of a comedy of manners. All or most of the aristocratic society's manners from the Restoration era were shown in the play. The attire, etiquette, speech, coffee shops, drawing

rooms, and the streets and gardens of London were all aspects of upper-class life that were included in the play.

Love is elicited by socially acceptable behaviours; adulterous relationships, love, and marriage were the majority of such behaviours in that era. Most of the characters in the play exhibited certain behaviors that played a key role in highlighting the attitudes adopted by wealthy aristocratic families, which they consider a fundamental standard in their daily lives.

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