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REFLECTION OF SOCIETY IN THE WAY OF THE WORLD

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Abstract

William Congreve's *The Way of the World* is called a mirror of English Society. The themes and Characters in the play reflect types of people, behaviors and situations that all levels of British society would have been familiar with. It is an ironic commentary on the ways of the society of the time. Congreve has depicted the social life of the fashionable men and women of the Restoration age. During this period, gravity, spiritual zeal, moral ethics and decorum were thrown to winds. The King was through 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. Corruption was rampant in all walks of life. The ladies and gentleman of upper classes were busy in love and lust. The fond of fashion created a 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. The married women had unfair relations with other men. People of this age were frequent visitors of the parks, play houses and hotels. These were the centers of love affairs and love intrigues. The coffee houses were overcrowded. This was the picture of Congreve 's age. In 'The Way of the World', The dramatist has presented the true picture of the contemporary society.

Keywords: Depict, Frequent, Flutter, Degenerate, Lust, Intrigues and Ironic

The literature is a reflection of the society is a fact that has been widely acknowledged. Literature indeed reflects the society, its good values and its ills. In its corrective function, literature mirrors the ills of the society realize its mistakes and make amends. It also projects the virtues or good values in the society for people to emulate. Literature as an imitation of human action, often presents a picture of what people think, say and do in the society. In literature, we find stories designed to portray human life and action through some characters who by their words, action and reaction convey certain messages for the purpose of education, information

and entertainment. The play 'The Way of the World' also reflects contemporary society. William Congreve represents the real picture of contemporary society of his time. It is a fine flower of restoration literature. The entire play is set in London. The playwright 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. 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.

Corruption was rampant in all walks of life. The ladies and gentlemen 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. There was complete absence of sexual morality. The fond of fashion created a 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.

The married women had illicit relations with other men. Their husbands were cuckold. People of this age were frequent visitors of the parks, playhouses and hotels. These were the centers of love affairs and love intrigues. The coffee houses were overcrowded. This was the picture of Congreve's age. In the play, the dramatist has presented the true picture of the contemporary society. Here he has described the infidelity of married women, the fashionable life of ladies and gentlemen and the intrigues of lovers. All the characters of this play are fond of fashion. Lady like Wishfort uses heavy cosmetics to hide her faded beauty and wrinkles. Public places like Chocolate house and St. James' park provide an opportunity for the lovers to enjoy their games of love, lust and intrigues. The play opens with the scene of a chocolate house. Here Mirabell and Fainall are playing cards. In 'The Way of the World' male characters are pursuing female characters. Mrs Marwood is enjoying sensual pleasure with Mr. Fainall. Mrs. Fainall hates her husband and she has soft corner for Mirabell. Millamant loves Mirabell but she has soft corner for Petulant and Witwoud. Mirabell has had an affair with a young widow but he persuades to marry Fainall. Marriage has no sanctity at all. There is an atmosphere of free love in this play. Love intrigues occupy an important place in The Way of the World. The entire play deals with the intrigues of Mirabell to win the hand of Millamant. To achieve his aim, he pretends to make love to Lady Wishfort, an elderly lady. When he fails, he hatches a deeper plot? He knows that she is desirous of marrying again. Thus, he sends his servant to her as Sir Rowland to deceive her. Mr. Fainall has illicit relation with Mrs. Marwood. He is also busy in an intrigue to grab the property of his mother-in-law. 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 Arriaga. Thus, before marriage, she wants Mirabell to agree that she would be free to do anything even after marriage.

The Way of the World presents a true picture of the Restoration Age. It reflects the social life of the Day. 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, the witty way of expression, their dealing with love, marriage and adulterous relationships etc. It is an age of loose morals and 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 the characters in the play are of weak 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. Mirabell had a relationship with Mrs. Fainall earlier. She still seems to admire her ex-lover. Her Husband also maintains an illicit love affair with Mrs. Marwood. 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. He also pretends to love Lady Wishfort but actually loves her niece Millamant. This pretense is done only to please her and to get her permission to marry her niece. Ultimately, she is deceived and disappointed.

Thus, William Congreve paints an authentic picture of the upper-class society.

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