



# **Compiled and designed and modified by:**

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**Introduction:** — Born in Yorkshire in 1670 William Congreve is generally regarded as the most influential figure of Restoration Comedy of Manners. The tremendous success of his first play *The Old Bachelor* in 1692 made him produce the other general pieces like *The Double Dealer*, *Love for Love*, *The Mourning Bride* and *The Way of the World* at short intervals.

*The Way of the World* was first produced in 1700. It stands nonpareil in the total range of the Restoration plays. The plot is highly complicated one. It is based on the loveless marriages, unhappiness in marriage, marriage for money and marriage for love etc. It presents a damaging picture of the contemporary world.

Congreve died on 1729.

## **Model Essay Type Question and Answer: —**

### **1. Presentation of contemporary society picture / A faithful recollection of the upper-class life in *The Way of the World*.**

Some critics have labelled Congreve's *The Way of the World* as immoral and vicious. But it is not correct to call a Restoration Comedy immoral in tone or content. Congreve's aim in writing this comedy was to depict the ways of the world of the upper-class society in London in the year 1670. The society of this time was frivolous and licentious in their outlook and conduct. But there was nothing obscure in the dialogue or in the situation of the play. So it would be wrong to call the play immoral.

The restoration of Charles II to the throne of England brought a wave of free and immoral behaviour among the court circles of London. Conventional morality was laughed at. Marriage had lost its sanctity and free love was the order of the day. The pursuit of the women pretended to hate men but their desire was to be admired by men. There was no sanctity of

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relationships. Here men are all bad charactered. They hatch intrigues for love or money. Money is the be-all and end-all of this society. Fainall hates his wife and loves Mrs. Marwood. He is intriguing to force Lady Wishfort to give him his wife's property as well as half the property of Millamant. There is the impression of free love in the play. Mirabell had an affair with Mrs. Fainall when she was the widow of Mr. Languish and he persuaded her to marry Fainall to save her reputation.

The ladies are all widows but are engaged in love- affairs with young men. Mrs. Fainall marries Fainall and remains friendly with Mirabell. Mrs. Marwood is matched with Fainall in villainy. Being rejected by Mirabell she started hating him and became his sworn enemy. Millamant do talks like a coquette, but does nothing immoral. She is genuinely in love with Mirabell and respects him as a man far superior to fools like Witwoud and Petulant, and uncultured men like Sir Wilful. She is respected for the excellence of her character. Lady Wishfort is an old widow, faded and wrinkled, who tries to look young and beautiful by using paint and power. She does not know the art and to grow old gracefully.

All these characters are thoroughly cynical and heartless. Hating one's wife and flirting with someone else's wife is common play with them. Marriage is a social bargain. Affection for one's brother on mother is out of fashion. Mrs. Fainall helps Mirabell in his plot against her own mother. Witwoud refuses to recognise his own half-brother, Sir Wilful Witwoud.

This is a true reflection of the society of Congreve's time, that was corrupt and infected with hypocrisy, artificiality, frivolity and immortality. But the charge of calling the play immoral in tone is incorrect. What Congreve has shown in the play is a true and realistic depiction of the Restoration society. He makes the vices and follies not attractive but ridiculous. Not being a moralist or reformer, he gently satirizes immorality, hypocrisy, fashion, artificiality etc. Lady Wishfort is ridiculous and pitiable. Fainall and Mrs Marwood did not succeed and Millamant's love for Mirabell Succeeded. Mrs. Millamant is one such character among these immoral characters who is constants and pure in her love and wins universal respect and admiration.

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## **Model Short Type Question and Answer: —**

### **1. Bring out the signification of the black box in the play.**

Ans: The black box in Congreve's *The Way of the World* acts as a device of anagnorisis in the play. Congreve in the course of the play reveals certain events of the past through the conversations of the characters: for example, Mrs. Marwood's relationship with Fainall, Mirabell's past affair with Mrs. Fainall etc. Congreve measures these secrets slowly person by person, until the final revelation in Act V where all pretences are destroyed. Mr. Fainall's and Mirabell's revelations, and the bringing out from a black box of the deed renders Mr. Fainall powerless. The subtle use of the black box containing the legal documents thus helps to subvert the evil design of Mr. Fainall.

### **2. Bring out the significance of Proviso Scene in the play.**

Ans : The Proviso Scene in Act IV Scene I of Congreve's *The Way of the World* is considered the finest in Restoration Comedy. This scene is an emblem of the Restoration comedy at its civilized best. In the Restoration convention, in every exchange between a man a woman each tries to build his/her own ego. The Proviso Scene is the reconciliation of these seeming irreconcilables. Mirabell will be a husband. Millamant will dwindle into a wife, but they have made a victory of their mutual surrender.



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3. What do the names 'Lady Wishfort' and 'Witwoud' signify?

Ans: In William Congreve's play *The Way of the World* the proper names are coined very significantly. For example, the character of Lady Wishfort is given away in her name. The suffix *fort* is from the Late Latin suffix *fortare*, which is derived from the Latin word *fortis* meaning strong. Actually, she wishes and wishes. Thus, the association of strong with Lady Wishfort indicates the magnitude of her wishes, the strength of her character when her wishes fail to come true. In the end of the farcical satire, Lady Wishfort sets her wishes aside to preserve the reputation of her daughter. Mrs. Fainall sets aside her jealous protestations preventing Mrs. Mirabell's, her niece's happiness; and forgives all evil schemes perpetrated against her. This seems to speak to at least two of the possibilities for the *fort* suffix, Congreve trusts us to decide how odoriferous Lady Wishfort's wishes really are.

On the other hand, the name of Witwoud suggests, he's a pretender to the title (like 'Sir Politic Would-Be' in *Volpone*, the play to which this play openly alludes in Act II). As his very name implies, Witwoud represents a person who has delusions of being a great wit.