

How Does Congreve Satirize the Contemporary Society in “The Way of the World?”

Writer: William Congreve | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

How does Congreve satirize the contemporary aristocratic English society in “The Way of the World?”

William Congreve (1670-1729) was an English playwright, satirist, poet, and Whig politician. His “The Way of the World” (1700) mocks rich English society. He makes fun of English Men’s fake love, lies, and selfish ways. He does this with wit, humour, and clever talk. Most of his characters are rich, proud, and full of bad habits. They care more about money and looks than real love or truth. So, the play is a strong satire on the rich people of his age.

Loose Morals: The people in the play have no strong morals. They lie and cheat for love or money. Mrs. Fainall once loved Mirabell, then married Mr. Fainall. But she still likes her old lover. She says,

“If we will be happy, we must find the means in ourselves, and among ourselves.”

Through these words, she shows her love for Mirabell and hatred for Mr. Fainall. Her husband also cheats on her with Mrs. Marwood. These love stories show how people break trust. Even marriage does not stop them. This shows how weak their moral values are.

City Life and Rich People: This play shows rich people in London. They go to parties and play cards. They talk cleverly and jokingly. They do not care about truth or kindness. They only care about love, marriage, and money. Lady Wishfort, Millamant, and Fainall live like this. They follow high society rules. In the following way, Fainall makes a humorous remark about city women.

“Now I remember, last night was one of their cabal-nights: they have ’em three times a week and meet by turns at one another’s apartments, to sit upon the murdered reputations of the week.”

Fake Love and Marriage:

In this play, marriage is not for love. It is for money or gain. Mirabell wants to marry Millamant for her money. Through the subsequent words, Mirabell falsely shows his love for Millamant.

"I like her with all her faults; nay, like her for her faults."

Lady Wishfort wants her daughter to marry a rich man. Mrs. Fainall once loved Mirabell and then married Fainall. Nobody truly loves each other. Love is a tool to get something. This fake love makes the story funny and sad. So, the play clearly shows false love and marriage.

Old People and Fashion: Even old people try to act young. Lady Wishfort is fifty-five. But she still wants to look pretty. She uses makeup and dresses like a young girl. The following quote shows her extreme vanity.

"I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes."

She also wants to marry again. It looks very funny. Congreve shows how people fear age. They want to live fake lives. They care more about looks than truth. This also shows how silly fashion was at that time.

In summary, Congreve uses his play to show the truth. The rich people in this play are selfish, greedy, and fake. They cheat each other and break trust. They care only about looks, love-games, and money. They do not follow real values. Congreve laughs at them through his story. But he also teaches us a lesson. We should not follow such fake lives. His play is a mirror to the bad sides of his society.