

“The Way of the World” as a Comedy of Manners.

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What do you mean by Comedy of Manners? Justify “The Way of the World” as a comedy of manners.

A Comedy of Manners is a funny play. It shows the silly lifestyle of rich people. These people live in big cities and follow high society rules. They talk in a clever and funny way. Their main goal is love, money, fashion, and gossip. These plays make fun of lies, cheating, and fake love. William Congreve's (1670-1729) “The Way of the World” (1700) is a good example. It shows the funny and foolish life of rich people. It has all the things of a Comedy of Manners.

City Life and Rich People: This play shows rich people in London. They go to parties and play cards. They talk in a clever and joking way. 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.

Wit and Clever Talk: This play is full of wit. The people talk in smart and funny ways. They use jokes and sharp words. Millamant and Mirabell talk in this way. Their “proviso scene” is full of clever words. They talk about marriage and set funny rules. Even foolish people like Witwoud and Petulant speak in odd and silly ways. This clever talk is a key part of the Comedy of Manners.

Fashion and Vanity: The people in this play love fashion. Lady Wishfort is fifty-five. But she tries to look young. She puts on heavy makeup. Millamant also talks about her fashion. She wants freedom even after marriage. The following quote shows Lady Wishfort’s extreme vanity.

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

Here, she acts like a foolish lover. She wants Sir Rowland to like her. This foolish fashion life is a big part of this comedy.

Moral Weakness: All the people in the play are weak in values. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are both cheaters. Mirabell also cheated Lady Wishfort. Mrs. Fainall had a love affair before marriage. Nobody in the play is honest. They lie, cheat, and plan to hurt others. They do not care about good or bad. The play shows this moral fall in a funny way.

In summary, “The Way of the World” is a true Comedy of Manners. It shows the funny and fake life of rich people. It has wit, love tricks, fashion, and lies. It makes fun of city people and their silly lifestyle. The play also shows how people forget good values. It is full of sharp talk and comic acts. William Congreve uses smart jokes to show deep truths. So, this play is a great example of this type of comedy.