

## The Way of the World as a Restoration Comedy of Manners

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The terms “Restoration Comedy” or “Comedy of Manners” refer to a particular type of comic drama that developed in England following the Restoration of Monarchy in 1660. As suggested by its title, it is a type of comedy that focuses on “manners” or code of conducts that the society thrusts upon the individuals. Comic moments are created in these plays by depicting characters who do not follow these manners properly.

The play *The Way of the World* by William Congreve is considered to be one of the finest examples of Restoration Comedy. It was written by Congreve at a time when a section of the society had started rejecting this type of theatre. This negative attitude was a result of the depiction of vulgarity and immorality by these plays. The middle class people in particular started disliking these plays after Jeremy Collier wrote a scathing critique of these plays titled “Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage” in 1698. Therefore, when Congreve wrote this play he had to make a very serious attempt for winning the audience. As a result, this play became a little different from the typical Restoration Comedies.

Comedy of Manners was infamous for showing adultery and immorality. In most of the cases these plays showed the central characters behaving in a carefree and immoral manner. For instance, in the play *The Provoked Wife*, the virtuous woman Lady Brute is shown to become an infidel while her husband Sir John Brute is shown to be an alcoholic and abusive person. Congreve tried to present a more sober play by making both of his main characters, namely, Mirabell and Millamant are very different from characters like Sir John or Lady Brute. Many of the Restoration Comedies contained scenes that had vulgar moments in abundance. For instance the infamous Act IV Scene iii of *The Country Wife* showed Lady Fidget’s seduction by Horner in a very lewd manner. Congreve refrained from using scenes of this kind and instead used the brilliant Proviso Scene in Act IV that showed the two central characters having a very significant discussion on maintaining their individualities after their marriage. What Congreve retained from the previous examples of Comedy of Manners was the use of brilliant wits and intellectual humour. Nearly all of his characters use a sparkingly witty language that entertains even the readers of the present day. In short, the play appears to be a refined version of Comedy of Manners in which the objectionable aspects were removed or toned down for making the play win over its critics.