

CHAPTER 3

CONGREVE AND THE COMEDY OF MANNERS

The Comedy of Manners flourished during the age of Dryden. It is also known as 'Restoration Comedy'. We see a great influence of Moliere and Spanish dramatist Calderon in the comedy of Restoration period.

As far as William Congreve is concerned, he is considered to be one of the prolific writer of the Comedy of Manners. In the form of 'Comedy of Manners', Congreve presents a true picture of Contemporary society. It is a kind of literary genre in which we find a magnificent exhibition of thoughts and actions. In Comedy of Manners, we find a description of those intrigues and conspiracy which are hatched by those gentlemen and ladies who come from sophisticated and aristocratic society.

William Congreve is undoubtedly, one of the representatives of such sort of writing. However, Dryden, Etherge and Wycherley are also known as the frontline writers of the art of 'Comedy of Manners', but Congreve is undisputedly unparalleled in this literary genre. Congreve in his 'Comedy of Manners' portrays a realistic picture of his contemporary society. He draws a most entertaining image of the men and women of Restoration Society, he presents them in such a manner that they appear very funny. As far as the play *The Way of the World* is concerned, it is the masterpiece of Congreve. In this play Congreve has displayed a remarkable dexterity in the implication of wit and humour. We find a great influence of the contemporary fashionable society over William Congreve and this is the reason that one can see clear involvement of those manners in his writings. Congreve is a sort of writer who is endowed with the quality of describing his thoughts in a mind-blowing style. In his plays a frequent use of wit and humour is apparently visible. Congreve's style of writing *Comedy of Manners* is simply majestic. His writing style contains all those features which make it extremely outstanding and watchable.

Congreve is an undisputed genius of the art of writing 'Comedy of Manners'. He is a complete architect of the edifice of idioms and phrases. One of his contemporaries, has called him 'a most proficient

and seasoned Wordssmith'. Although we find some drawbacks in Congreve's art of writing the 'Comedy of Manners'. The art of characterization and the plot in his plays have been marred by many technical and artistic shortcomings; but nevertheless, his flawless and excellent style is complementary to these drawbacks.

An excellent amalgamation of tragic and comic elements

In the writing style of William Congreve, we see an excellent blending of tragic and comic elements. In his 'Comedy of Manners', we find a combination of lucidity, brevity, flexibility and simplicity. Congreve is the master of blending these elements in his writing style. The pivotal point of his subject-matter is the life-style of contemporary men and women. He has exposed the vices and follies of these aristocratic people of the society. In other words, Congreves' Comedy of Manners exposes the short-comings of the people of upper-class of society. When we go through the subject matter of Congreve's 'Comedy of Manners', we find it extremely amusing and this is the reason that readers and spectators enjoy it in its entirety.