



COURSE CODE: MAEGD 202

COURSE NAME: PURITAN TO
EIGHTEENTH CENTUARY
LITERATURE

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND
ONLINE EDUCATION
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

MASTER OF ARTS

**ENGLISH
BLOCK II**



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MAEGD-202 PURITAN TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

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BLOCK II

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UNIT 6: READING *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

UNIT 7: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

MODULE VI: WILLIAM CONGREVE:
*THE WAY OF THE
WORLD*

UNIT 15: RESTORATION COMEDY AND THE
WAY OF THE WORLD

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

For your convenience we have divided **MAEGD 202: Puritan to Eighteenth Century Literature** into three blocks. This the third block in which we have included the following Modules with unit division as described below.

Module III: Jane Austen has been designed to familiarise the reader with *Pride and Prejudice* and its author Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice* is one of Austen's best known and widely read novels, which throws light on some of the crucial issues of the England of Austen's time. **Unit 6: Reading *Pride and Prejudice*** will present a detail and elaborate study of the story of the novel. Learners will be helped to understand the actions when they will go through the text more extensively. **Unit7: Critical Analysis of the text** primarily focusses on the thematic concern of the novel by discussing themes of marriage, class and property in the novel. Also, the readers shall see how the characters engage themselves with each of these and are shaped and emerged by the social and economic considerations of their time.

Module VI will familiarize you with one of the trend-setting comedies belonging to the genre of Comedy of Manners produced during the Restoration period. It has a single unit (Unit 15) and it will discuss features of Restoration Comedy, theatre conventions of that period, audience and actors, life and works of William Congreve. Apart from giving background information, this unit will also offer you ideas about the play *The Way of the World*, its major themes, major characters and the place of *The Way of the World* in the genre Comedy of Manners.

Hope reading of all the blocks with select, but representative works of the periods will be fruitful to you and you shall have a comprehensive knowledge of drama from beginning to Restoration.

MODULE III: JANE AUSTEN

UNIT 6: READING PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit has been designed to familiarise the reader with *Pride and Prejudice* and its author Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice* is one of Austen's best known and widely read novels, which throws light on some of the crucial issues of the England of

Austen's time. Romance, marriage and property are some of the driving forces of the society this time and Austen through a discussion of man- woman dynamics throws light on the marriage game in this period.

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The unit aims at introducing Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. Jane Austen, one of the most popular English novelists, will be discussed in this unit. It would also deal with the various themes, characters and style of Jane Austen in the novel

By the end of this unit, you shall be able to:

- identify the distinctive writing style of and themes in Jane Austen
- get an insight into the key events in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*
- know something about the characters in the novel

6.2 JANE AUSTEN

6.2.1 *Life*

Jane Austen was born on December 16, 1775 in Steventon, Hampshire of England to George and Cassandra Austen. George Austen worked as a rector in a Steventon church. This accounts for Austen's modest and middle class background. Austen was largely home-schooled. She never married, rather choosing to spend her life amid friends and family. She was a keen observer of details and incidents around her and used to note down everything. Her observation of people and surroundings largely provided the basis for rural England settings and characters in her novels. Her novels were published under the pen name of "A Lady". This enabled her

to preserve her privacy at a time when serious literary activity was considered as something beyond the feminine sphere.

6.2.2 *Works*

Austen has to her credit six major novels, namely *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818). She had also begun a novel called *Sandition* which was left incomplete due to her death. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* managed to draw more popularity and critical attention than the rest.

6.2.3 *Style and themes*

Though Austen lived a presumably sheltered life in Regency England, she managed to produce an impressive body of works that continues to grow in popularity even after 200 years. In all of her novels, Austen focuses primarily on courtship and marriage. It is to be noted that Austen's novels never touch on the political themes though there were the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and the American War of Independence during her time. It is because of this reason that her novels are said to be carved on "two inches of ivory". Her writings mainly concerned themselves with the people and mannerisms of rural England and the domestic life therein. One reason for this might be that Austen's surroundings were far removed from the political turmoil of the mainland which allowed her to ignore them as her concerns. Having said this, it must also be noted that though she did not address the political scenario of her time directly, these events indirectly affected her characters in the novel.

All of Austen's novels are written in the realistic style, meaning that events are narrated chronologically and in a straightforward manner. There is a third person omniscient narrator

who gives an account of the events and of the characters. Use of wit and humour to comment on the follies of the characters is an important feature in any Jane Austen novel. Austen's continued popularity derives from her perfectly balanced plots, witty dialogues, as well as the ironic tone of the omniscient narrator, both amusing and critical at the same time. Her characters are all too human and lifelike, her language easy flowing and readable and her knowledge about human nature deeply insightful.

LET US STOP AND THINK



Regency England

Regency refers to the reign of George IV also known as Prince Regent from 1811-1820. This period saw a growing consciousness in fashion, literature, culture and taste in general. The Prince himself patronised ornate architecture and splurged heavily on beautiful art pieces. This period also gave rise to publication in large numbers of fashionable pamphlets, novels and other writings. This led to a growing consciousness of taste and refinement. Class differences also widened in this period. People of an upper class were marked by their refined fashion sense. This differentiated them from people of lower class who were too poor to indulge themselves in fashionable items.

6.3 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

6.3.1 *About the novel*

Pride and Prejudice starts with one of the most popular opening lines in literature: “*It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife*”. This is a hint to marriage being the central theme of the novel. Here the Bennet sisters and their parents are looking for suitable grooms for their daughters. The arrival of the wealthy Mr. Bingley and his friend Mr. Darcy in their neighbourhood causes a stir among the young girls, including the Bennet family and the

mothers of these women try out every possible means to book these men for their daughters. However, the focus is on the romance between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy whose pride keeps them from yielding in easily to the other's subtle advances.

LET US STOP AND THINK



The title 'Pride and Prejudice' comes from a phrase in Francis Burney's novel *Cecilia; or, Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782). Dr Lyster, one of the characters in the novel utters this moral to the main pair of lovers: "[I]f to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you owe your miseries, so wonderfully is good and evil balanced, that to PRIDE and PREJUDICE you will also owe their termination" (931).

6.3.2. *Summary of the Novel*

Charles Bingley's renting of the manor of Netherfield Park causes a great stir in the nearby village of Longbourn, especially in the Bennet household. With five unmarried daughters—Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia—Mrs Bennet's primary concern in life is to see them all married and settled. Mr Bennet, the retiring patriarch of the family, is forced to pay a social visit to Bingley, after which the Bennets attend a ball at which Bingley is present. He is quite taken with Jane, the eldest, the nicest and the prettiest Bennet sister, and spends much of the evening dancing with her. Bingley comes across as a warm person and is popular among the gathering. His close friend, Darcy, however creates quite a different impression as he haughtily refuses to dance with Elizabeth, which establishes him as an arrogant, unlikeable character and it is this pride in Darcy that leads to the prejudice of Elizabeth, the protagonist of the novel.

Over subsequent weeks, through various social interactions, Darcy finds himself increasingly attracted to Elizabeth's charm and intelligence. Jane's friendship with Bingley also continues to blossom, and Jane is invited to pay a visit to the Bingley mansion. On her journey to Netherfield Park, she is caught in the rain and catches a cold, forcing her to stay over for several days. In order to tend to Jane, Elizabeth hikes through muddy fields, her appearance setting off different feelings among the household members with Miss Bingley being disdainful and Darcy quite taken with her devotion to her sister. Miss Bingley's spite towards Elizabeth increases as she notices this as she too is interested in Darcy.

When Elizabeth and Jane return home, they find their cousin, Mr Collins at their household. Mr Collins is a young clergyman who is to inherit Mr Bennet's property, which has been "entailed," which means that it can only be passed down to male heirs. Mr Collins is vain, foolish and the very caricature of snobbishness, and he is quite enthralled by the Bennet girls. He makes a pompous proposal of marriage to Elizabeth. She hastily turns him down wounding his pride as well as angering her mother. Meanwhile, the Bennet girls have become friendly with militia officers stationed in a nearby town. Among them is Wickham, a handsome young soldier who is especially attentive toward Elizabeth and tells her how Darcy cruelly cheated him out of an inheritance. Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy hardens.

At the beginning of winter, the Bingleys and Darcy return to London. Jane is much dispirited by this move. Mr Collins becomes engaged to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's best friend and the poor daughter of a local knight. When Elizabeth tries to reason Charlotte out of the engagement, she explains that she needs the match for financial reasons. Charlotte and Mr Collins get married and Elizabeth promises to visit them at their new home. As winter progresses, Jane visits the city with her uncle and aunt, the

Gardiners (hoping also that she might see Bingley). Miss Bingley visits her there and is very rude to her, while Bingley fails to visit her at all. Jane is made miserable by these events.

That spring, Elizabeth visits Charlotte at Hunsford, who now lives near the home of Mr Collins's patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who is also Darcy's aunt. Darcy comes on a sudden visit to Lady Catherine and encounters Elizabeth, whose presence leads him to make a number of visits both to the Collins's home and to Elizabeth's frequent haunts in the grounds. One day, he makes a shocking proposal of marriage, which were termed in phrases that quite mortified Elizabeth and she quickly refuses. She tells Darcy that she considers him arrogant and unpleasant, and blames him for steering Bingley away from Jane and disinheriting Wickham. Darcy leaves her but shortly thereafter a letter is delivered to her. In this letter, he admits to urging Bingley to distance himself from Jane, but claims he did so only because he thought their romance was not serious. As for Wickham, he informs Elizabeth that the young officer is a liar and that the real cause of their disagreement was Wickham's attempt to elope with his young sister, Georgiana Darcy.

This letter causes Elizabeth to rethink her feelings about Darcy. She returns home and is guarded in her manners toward Wickham. The militia is leaving town, which makes Lydia and Kitty distraught. Lydia manages to obtain permission from her father to spend the summer with an old colonel in Brighton, where Wickham's regiment will be stationed. With the arrival of June, Elizabeth goes on another journey, this time with the Gardiners, people she respects and admires. The trip takes her to the North and eventually to the neighbourhood of Pemberley, Darcy's estate. At Pemberley, she is favourably impressed with the building and grounds, and all her doubts about Wickham's duplicity are cleared when she hears from the servants as to how wonderful a master

Darcy is. To her surprise, Darcy arrives suddenly and is cordial in his behaviour toward her, something she had not expected after their last meeting. Making no mention of his proposal, he entertains the Gardiners and invites Elizabeth to meet his sister.

Shortly after that, a letter arrives from home, with the information that Lydia has eloped with Wickham and that the couple is nowhere to be found. There is a suspicion that they may be living in sin together out of wedlock, and even more worrying is the fact that Wickham might not have any intention of marrying Lydia. Elizabeth hastens home after informing Darcy of what has transpired. Mr Gardiner and Mr Bennet go off to search for Lydia, but Mr Bennet eventually returns home empty-handed. Just as everyone loses hope, a letter comes from Mr Gardiner saying that the couple has been found and that Wickham has agreed to marry Lydia in exchange for an annual income. The Bennets are convinced that Mr Gardiner has paid off Wickham.

Now married, Wickham and Lydia return to Longbourn briefly. Lydia is unrepentant and frivolous as ever. From a careless word of Lydia, Elizabeth realises that Darcy had a role in their wedding. She applies to Mrs Gardiner and is given the whole story about Darcy's involvement in the case. It was Darcy who had convinced Wickham for the wedding by giving him an annual income. The newly-weds then depart for Wickham's new assignment in the North of England. Shortly thereafter, Bingley returns to Netherfield and resumes his courtship of Jane. Darcy goes to stay with him and pays visits to the Bennets but makes no mention of his desire to marry Elizabeth. Bingley, on the other hand, presses his suit and proposes to Jane, to the delight of everyone but Bingley's haughty sister. While the family celebrates, Lady Catherine de Bourgh pays a visit to Longbourn to accost Elizabeth and says that she has heard that Darcy is planning to marry her. Since she considers a Bennet an unsuitable match for a

Darcy, and more importantly is determined to have her daughter marry Darcy, Lady Catherine demands that Elizabeth promise to refuse him. Elizabeth spiritedly refuses, saying she is not engaged to Darcy, but she will not promise anything against her own happiness. Lady Catherine approaches Darcy to complain about the wilfulness of Elizabeth, but this instead emboldens Darcy to propose Elizabeth again. This time, Elizabeth accepts his proposal, and both Jane and Elizabeth are married.

6.4 CHARACTERS

6.4.1 *Elizabeth*

Elizabeth Bennet's character has been well constructed and given multiple dimensions. She is a round character, meaning that she is not entirely good or bad, she has her flaws and virtues which make her an individual and not a type. She is a foil to her sister Jane. While Jane is all nice and lacks pride, Elizabeth has a strong sense of pride and cannot always be nice to people when she does not feel like. However, unlike her sister, she can see through the motives and intentions of people. Unlike her friend Charlotte, monetary considerations are not the most important while marrying. She requires her partner to be compatible in spirit and emotions as well. That is why she could turn down Collins' proposal. She later goes on to marry Darcy who shares her passion and spirit of mind.

She has limitations too. Her ability to read people is not infallible.

She is sometimes too quick to judge people as can be seen in her judgements on Darcy and later Wickham. She has high opinions of Wickham and misjudges Darcy. We see a gradual development of the character of Elizabeth as she overcomes her earlier prejudices and moves forward to a life of bliss.

6.4.2 *Darcy*

Darcy, again, is a round character. He first comes across as a proud and haughty person. He is wealthy, intelligent and always ready to demean people who he thinks are lower than him. His pride over his lineage and consciousness of his social status makes him an arrogant man. Yet he too is a warm man among those he cares for. He turns down Bingley's suggestion to dance with Elizabeth saying, "She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me." Later, however, he ends up falling for the complexity of Elizabeth. His pride keeps him from immediately confessing his love for Elizabeth. In this, he is quite similar to Elizabeth, who too does not admit her emotions. Darcy, however, is more intelligent than her. While Elizabeth could not suspect the intentions of Wickham, Darcy was able to not just understand but also expose him to the rest. His care for Bingley and his sister, Georgiana, illustrates his human side. Helping Lydia and the Bennet family in secret is his way of caring for Elizabeth. Elizabeth's initial rejection of him enables him to take note of his haughty stance. In the end he is able to overcome his pride and convince Elizabeth of his earnestness.

6.4.3 *Jane and Bingley*

Like Elizabeth and Darcy, Jane and Bingley have similar character traits. Both Jane and Bingley are flat characters- simple, loving people, devoid of any complications of character or any guile of nature. Both she and Bingley fall for each other at first sight. Jane is the eldest of the Bennet sisters. She stands in contrast to that of her sister. She is quite good and soft hearted. This is why a slight criticism or rebuke is enough to bring tears to her eyes. Opposed to Elizabeth, Jane is quite naïve. She cannot see through people and thinks of everyone to be essentially good. She has all

accomplishments required of a woman of her time to be the ideal homemaker. Bingley is wealthy but quite humble and essentially good natured. He lacks the sarcasm of Darcy. Unlike Darcy, Bingley is too considerate of people's emotions and would never make a hurtful remark.

6.4.4 Mr and Mrs. Bennet

The characters of Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet stand in contrast to each other. Mr. Bennet is a detached character. He does not bother himself with household affairs like the marriage of his daughters. He expresses himself only occasionally in witty remarks directed mostly at his wife. Mrs. Bennet on the other hand is loud and foolish. She can go to any lengths to book the most eligible son for her daughters. However, in face of the retiring nature of her husband, it is only her anxiety/concern that keeps the family going. Mr. Bennet's lack of hold on his family exemplifies itself in the elopement of Lydia who ends up badly with Wickham.

6.4.5 Mr. Collins

Mr Collins is a pompous, young clergyman who stands to inherit Mr Bennet's property as it has been entailed. He is a servile character, constantly toadying to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, his patroness. Mr Collins, after being rejected by Elizabeth, proposes and marries her best friend, Charlotte, Sir Lucas' daughter. However, it is to be noted that in Jane Austen's novels clergymen are a huge and imposing presence, particularly because of the influence of religion in everyday life.

6.4.6 Wickham

Wickham is a soldier stationed at Meryton. He is a charming, chivalrous con man. He tries to charm Elizabeth but then elopes with Lydia with no intention of marrying her. He is finally forced



to marry Lydia at the behest of Darcy. However, the marriage is not an ideal one as he keeps exacting money from Darcy to maintain a living.

6.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we get a glimpse of the key events in the text of *Pride and Prejudice*. The novel centres on the courtship between Elizabeth and Darcy, two unconventional characters, and the way they overcome their respective pride and prejudice to emerge happy in marriage. Austen focuses primarily on domestic themes and situations in her novels.

6.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Jane Austen as a novelist.
2. Where does the title “Pride and Prejudice” come from?
3. What do you understand by the term “Regency”?
4. Which are the characters that come across as “proud” or “prejudiced”?
5. Compare and contrast the characters of Darcy and Bingley.
6. Examine the character of Elizabeth in relation to that of her sister Jane.



6.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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Bloom, Harold. *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice: Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*. New York: Chelsea House Publications, 2007. Print

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UNIT 7: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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7.2.2 Class/ Property

7.3 *Pride and Prejudice* and Austen's England

7.3.1 Status of Women

7.3.2 The Setting

7.3.3 Novel of Manners

7.4 *Pride and Prejudice* in the text

7.4.1 Characters exemplifying pride and prejudice

7.5 Summing Up

7.6 Assessment Questions

7.7 References and Recommended Readings

7.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit primarily focusses on the themes of marriage, class and property in the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Also, the readers shall see how the characters engage themselves with each of these and are completely shaped by the social and economic considerations of their time.

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at engaging the readers with some of the critical issues in the text. It tries to bring to light some of the recurring concerns that Austen tries to bring forward through the text. After going through this unit, the readers will be able to:

- Have an idea of some of the important themes
- Appreciate the novel in terms of its context
- Understand the title and its implications

7.2 THEMES IN PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

7.2.1 *Marriage*

Pride and Prejudice opens with one of the most quoted lines in literature: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” This is hint to the fact that the novel will deal with marriage as its central theme. The statement underlines the importance of marriage is more important for women as it would provide them with financial and social security and for men as marriage would provide the men with children who they could leave their property to. All characters in the novel concern themselves in some way or the other with marriage. In the very first chapter, we see Mrs. Bennet’s concern about marrying off her daughters to respectable gentlemen to secure their future. This is the reason why the arrival of Mr. Bingley in the neighbourhood causes such stir not just in the Bennet family but also among other families with eligible women for marriage. Young women are raised by training them in all the feminine accomplishments required for the smooth functioning of a household. Attracting suitors for marriage seems to be the sole concern for these women. Yet Jane Austen seems to espouse a certain kind of marriage that gives more weightage to compatibility between the partners, rather than marriages based on just financial security.

The marriage of Darcy-Elizabeth or Bingley-Jane is thrown into sharp contrast when compared to the marriage of Charlotte-Collins or Mr-Mrs Bennet. The latter two marriages are marriage of convenience and in such marriages, one of the parties is sure to be very unhappy by the temperament of the other. The couples, Darcy-Elizabeth and Bingley-Jane, have a much better chance at happiness together because though they come from different social backgrounds, they have common interests and respect each other.

7.2.2 Class/ Property

Class forms an important part of the social dynamics of the England not just in the eighteenth/nineteenth century but even today. The society is constituted by strict class divisions on the basis of property. While the Bennets may socialize with the upper-class Bingleys and Darcys, they are clearly their social inferiors and are treated as such. Austen satirizes this kind of class-consciousness particularly in the character of Mr. Collins who spends most of his time toadying to his upper-class patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Although easily overlooked, this conception of the importance of class is shared, among others, by Mr Darcy, who believes in the superiority of his birth; Miss Bingley, who dislikes anyone not as socially acceptable as she is; and Wickham, who will do anything to raise himself into a higher station.

The only means of upward social mobility was either through inheritance or through marriage. In this novel, we find Mrs. Bennet looking for wealthy suitors for her daughters in order to financially secure their position and also to climb the social ladder. The opening line- "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a fortune must be in want of wife"- establishes direct links between marriage and property. Marriage is important for men as a means of securing their property to their children. Women in that society did not have property rights, therefore marriage was the only way for them to gain financial support. This also meant that women could not inherit property as is evident in the novel, where Mr Collins, a distant relative of the Bennets, inherits the Bennet's estate in the absence of a male heir.

Austen herself is often criticized as being a class conscious. She doesn't really represent anyone from the lower classes; those servants she does portray are generally content with their lot. Austen does criticize class structure but only a limited slice of that structure.

LET US STOP AND READ



ENTAILMENT as defined by Webster's Collegiate Dictionary refers to the restriction of property by limiting the owner's lineal descendants or to a particular class thereof. The entailed property was to be inherited by a male progenitor. Usually the estate was entailed to the eldest son of the family. In absence of a son, the property would be entailed to a male relative.

7.3 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND AUSTEN'S ENGLAND

7.3.1 Status of Women

Jane Austen derived much of the material for her work in her own surroundings. Her plots concern the country England of her time with its mannerisms and mores. The characters in her novels are deeply rooted in and formed by their social settings. The women in Austen's novels also show typicality of the women of her times. Women in the England of the eighteenth/ nineteenth century were to be well versed in all the feminine accomplishments and niceties. They were raised with proper training in all the required spheres in order to attract wealthy suitors. In this novel too we find the ladies and their mothers trying to make their way towards a suitable marriage. Jane, the prettiest and the most "accomplished" of all the Bennet daughters is the first to attract a suitor. Women were confined to the domestic sphere and were not allowed to step out of the household to earn their living. Therefore, they had to depend solely on their male counterparts to provide for them. The situation of women in *Pride and Prejudice* therefore aptly represents the situation of women in Austen's England.

7.3.2 The Setting

Pride and Prejudice is set in the country atmosphere of Regency England. As has been stated earlier, Jane Austen chose to focus on country mannerisms, customs and people as her subject

matter. Her focus seems to be narrowed down to a small group of people. That is why she is said to carve her stories on “two inches of ivory.” However, with her limited material she manages to aptly capture the social exchanges in country England at the turn of the eighteenth century. For example, she presents marriage as the central concern of the families with eligible sons and daughters. This was very true of the social dynamics of the Regency England. This was the time when women were groomed a certain way in order to be proper wives to their husbands. In this novel too we find the society insisting on certain “accomplishments” while looking for the suitable bride. Also balls were organised in such societies where the eligible men and women would gather and exchange courtesies, in the process finding their suitable match.

Another important issue in the novel is class/ property. In Regency England, the gap between rich and poor widened and the class division and hierarchy in the society were strictly maintained. That is why we find people in *Pride and Prejudice* conscious of their class. This is the same reason why parents in this novel are keen on marrying off their daughters to wealthy aristocrats. Again there are references to the Bennet property being “entailed” which means it would pass on to a male relative in absence of any immediate male heir. This throws light on the poor economic status of women in Regency England. They did not have property rights and were to depend on their husbands to look after themselves.

Regency England was a time of political turmoil. The French Revolution, Napoleonic wars, the American War of Independence etc were some of the upheavals that threatened England around that time. Austen is often criticised for not taking into account any of those or even their influence in her novels. Though she might not be aware of the implications of the political climate of the time, the novel is not without any trace of the same. The military regiment stationed at Meryton shows that the country is in a state of war.

Hence the countryside and by implication Austen's novel are not free from its effects.

7.3.3 *Novel of Manners*

Pride and Prejudice can be categorised as a novel of manners. The novel of manners is a genre that emerged in the nineteenth century. However, traces of this genre can be found way back in the eighteenth century in the works of Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson. As the name suggests this type of novel focuses on mannerisms, social conventions and mores of a particular class. More often than not, the gentry or the emerging middle class is its focus. The nineteenth century English society was marked by changes in the society brought about by industrialization, urbanization, and revolutions in transportation and communication. With a weakening aristocracy and the rise of the mercantile class, the standard markers for determining an individual's position in society were becoming increasingly unreliable. In a way, the novel of manners seems to have emerged to clear up this precarious situation by offering detailed renderings of how the various groups behaved in everyday situations, and by both faithfully recording as well as prescribing codes of conduct. Many novels of manners brought forth the contrasts between the customs of the various groups, examining not only class and economic differences, but also the differences between city and countryside, an earlier agrarian culture and a contemporary industrial order.

The novel of manners often deals with gender issues as well, and highlights the different prevalent standards for manners and morals between men and women. The ideals prescribed for women were often a source of anxiety for nineteenth-century women writers, who dominated the genre—an anxiety that plays itself out in the novels. In many woman-authored novels, the interaction of the individual characters with the social conventions of their times is not

a happy one, and the conventions themselves are more likely to be satirized than celebrated.

All these characteristics can be seen at work in *Pride and Prejudice*. In this novel we find the mannerisms of the country society in Regency England. Austen faithfully portrays the behaviour of men and women in relation to marriage. She also discusses the various schemes, devices charm, and accomplishments involved in securing a good partner. The novel particularly marks out the various skills which the England of Austen's time required of young men and women.

7.4 PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN THE NOVEL

7.4.1 Characters exemplifying 'pride' and 'prejudice'

The novel *Pride and Prejudice* shows characters who are in some way proud or prejudiced or both. But the characters best exemplifying these traits are Elizabeth and Darcy. Darcy is proud of his high birth. He comes across as an arrogant person and even comments on Elizabeth- "She is tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt me." His pride makes him disregard the Bennets and keeps him from confessing his love for Elizabeth. On the other hand, Elizabeth is equally proud, not of her high birth but of her mind. She would never compromise when it comes to finding the right partner. For her marriage is not a materially prosperous life but also compatibility in spirit. Therefore she turns down the marriage proposal of Mr. Collins, who she thinks has a weak mind. She eventually falls for the taste and character of Darcy but would not confess owing to her pride. At one point she is also prejudiced against Darcy after what she hears from Wickham. However, both she and Darcy are eventually able to overcome their arrogance and prejudice and base a relationship on respect and love.

The other characters too show these traits in varying degrees. Miss Bingley is proud of her status and prejudiced against people lacking fine touches. She likes Jane but disapproves of Elizabeth when she arrives at Netherfield with her muddy clothes. Lady Catherine de Bourgh again is proud of her class and estate and looks



down upon other people. Jane, Bingley, Mr Bennet and Charlotte are the characters which do not have the slightest trace of either arrogance or prejudice. Through the novel Austen shows how characters that lack arrogance and prejudice or characters who are able to overcome them are eventually happy.

7.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we read the text in context of Regency England of Austen's time. We read about the society and mannerisms of Regency England and how these have been played out in the text of the novel. We discussed marriage, class, property as some of the important themes in the text. The status of women in Austen's England and how their lives revolve around marriage have been dealt with. Also, we examined some of the important quotations from the text which throw light on the characters and the themes in the novel.

7.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What role does social class play in the society depicted by Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*?
2. Elaborate on the intricate connection between money and marriage in this novel.
3. Comment on Charlotte's decision to marry Collins. What does it reveal about the status of women of the time?

4. Give a comparative analysis of the different marriages and married couples that we see in the novel?
5. What are the man-woman dynamics at play in this novel? Do you think they were aware of the differential treatment at work everywhere?
6. How did Darcy and Elizabeth grow to like each other? Are there any specific incidents that brought about this change?
7. In light of your reading of the text, comment on the opening line of the novel. Does the novel prove the truth of the assertion?



7.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

Bautz, Annie. *Jane Austen- Sense and Sensibility/Pride and Prejudice/ Emma: Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. New York: Macmillan, 2010. Print

Morrison, Robert. Ed. *Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice: A Sourcebook*. London: Routledge, 2005. Print

MODULE VI: WILLIAM CONGREVE: *THE WAY OF THE WORLD*

UNIT: 15: RESTORATION COMEDY AND “THE WAY OF THE WORLD”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 15.0 Introduction
- 15.1 Learning Objectives
- 15.2 Restoration Comedy
- 15.3` Theatre Conventions
- 15.4 Audience and Actors
- 15.5 William Congreve: Life and Works
- 15.6 Reading the play *The Way of the World*
- 15.7 Major Themes
 - 15.7.1 Conspiracy and Intrigues
 - 15.7.2 Gender Relations and marriage
- 15.8 *The Way of the World* as Comedy of Manners
- 15.9 Major Characters
- 15.10 Style
- 15.11 Summing Up
- 15.12 Assessment Questions
- 15.13 References and Recommended Reading

15.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to William Congreve’s play *The Way of the World*. It will also offer useful information about the background of the play and the playwright. This corpus of information will certainly help you in the contextualisation of the play. You will have a better idea of the contemporary society and how people used to behave at that time and what their value system was. The follies and foibles of the time have been explored through the satirical and ironic style of the playwright. You will be better placed now to appreciate the text.

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit will acquaint you with the major characteristics of Restoration comedy and with one of the key playwrights of the Restoration period, William Congreve and his work, *The Way of the World*. After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- acquaint yourself with the Restoration age in English literature.
- familiarize yourself with the major characteristics of the Restoration drama.
- read critically the selected play which is one of the most representative of Comedy of Manners or Restoration comedy
- analyse the major thematic concerns and the stylistic form of the play

15.2 RESTORATION COMEDY

The period from 1660 to 1700 is usually known in English literature as the Restoration Age. The age is named after the restoration of King Charles II to the throne of England in 1660 after the rule of Cromwell as the Lord Protector from the year 1653. When Oliver Cromwell died in the year 1658, the Protectorate began to collapse and in 1660 the Parliament voted to restore Charles II to the throne. The whole nation gladly accepted the change of government from Commonwealth to monarchy and England entered into a new epoch of life and literature. Restoration was a reaction against the excessive moral severity of Puritanism. The decorum, seriousness, and the moral intensity of the Puritans were replaced by complete opposite forces and almost the whole nation, particularly the court, indulged themselves in violent excess. Charles II himself was extremely immoral and audacious in his attitude; and the ministers in his court were also similar sort of people – immodest and corrupt. The Restoration period was marked by laxity in moral propriety and it began a process of social transformation.

The period considered the religious enthusiasm of the Puritans as marks of hypocrisy and believed in living a sophisticated and worldly life, looking at everything through the lens of scepticism and disbelief and subjecting everything to the inspection of reason. In religion, they lacked the spiritual conviction and devotion of the Puritans and most of them had just a conventional adherence to the Church of England.

The environment of merriment, licentiousness and immoralities also affected the art and literature of the period. The people of the Restoration period found it difficult to believe anything which was beyond the concrete affairs of life and were more interested in the practical, the rational and the demonstrable in literature, rather than anything imaginative and spiritual which abounded in literature of the period that preceded the Restoration period. The use of conceits of the metaphysical poets of the 17th century and the use of highly regular rhymed pentameter couplets were done away with in favour of satire.

Another significant change that came about during the Restoration period was the restoration of the theatres. Before the Restoration period, the theatre had been closed for a period of 18 years because it was considered sinful by the religious and political leaders to go to the theatres or to be associated with it in any way. But Charles II, as he himself loved drama, encouraged drama and theatre in England. Theatre developed and the subject was taken up from current affairs, political, ecclesiastical and sexual. The period saw many innovations in theatre, including the important new genre called, Restoration comedy or Comedy of Manners.

The Restoration Comedy of Manners flourished from 1660 to 1710. This type of comedy was greatly influenced by playwrights like Plautus, Terence, Moliere and the Spanish dramatist, Calderon. After the public stage performances had been banned for 18 years by the Puritan regime, the re-opening of the theatres in 1660 signalled a new beginning of English drama. People now freely began to see the stage plays. There was now also a new set of audience – the middle class along with the aristocrats and their servants. The playgoers were mostly

attracted to comedies and by up-to-the-minute topical writing, crowded and bustling plots, introduction of the first professional actresses and by the rise of the celebrity actors. William Congreve was one of the most prolific writers of the Comedy of Manners and he strove to present a true picture of the lives and manners of the contemporary society in his comedies. Comedy of Manners has got certain characteristics. It is notorious for its sexual explicitness, witty and blunt sexual dialogues, boudoir intrigues, sensual innuendos, rakish behaviour and witty language.

Besides Congreve, there was a crop of talented writers like Dryden, Etherege and Wycherley who wrote Comedy of Manners, but Congreve is the undisputed master of this literary genre as he is able to portray a very realistic depiction of his contemporary society. He draws the most entertaining and amusing picture of the men and women of Restoration society and displays his wit and humour in the plays. His main concern in the plays is the life-style of contemporary men and women mostly belonging to upper class society and he exposes satirically their shortcomings, vices and follies. The figure of fops, dandies, coquettes and elements of love, conspiracies and intrigues are the regular features of his plays. He presents things very clearly, free from any sort of ambiguity which shows his clear influence from Shakespeare. In his plays the characters have a very unconventional perspective of life which was full of fun, ecstasy and juvenile irresponsibility.

15.3 THEATRE CONVENTIONS

After the theatres were re-opened during the Restoration period, the control of the London public theatre went to two of Charles II's courtiers – Killigrew and Davenant. They opened new playhouses to accommodate the audience of the period who were smaller in number after years of Puritan dominance. The size of the playhouses was much smaller as the audience mostly belonged to aristocratic families who

preferred intimacy. Killigrew and Davenant proceeded in different directions in terms of making renovations of the theatre. Killigrew preferred a U-shaped seating on two levels, and a benched pit on the auditorium floor. His theatre was not very different from the old “private” theatres of Shakespeare’s times. On the other hand, Sir William Davenant converted a tennis court into a playhouse but he made it in the manner of the court theatre and it also featured scenery. In order to attract the middle class audience, Davenant felt the need to equip his theatre with scenery. His plans for a new theatre included scenes and machines. He also preferred to have women play female roles rather than men. By the mid-seventeenth century, the continental roofed playhouses, actresses and scenery had become very popular. But, the scenery was not built in three dimensions, “but painted on flat, canvas-covered frames called wings, lined up on each side of the stage, with the view closed off about the middle of the scenic area with larger flats: shutters” (Fisk 9). However, Restoration acting companies were organized much like those in Shakespeare’s day. Davenant and Killigrew, although were the main people who also held royal patents, did not own the companies. The companies were run for business and shares in them were sold to raise funds to meet requirements – furnishing theatres, hiring actors, producing plays, etc.

Interestingly, in 1682, The King’s and Duke’s companies merged. Towards the end of the 17th century more playhouses came into being, like the Bridges Street Theatre, theatre in Dorset Garden, The Queen’s Theatre and Drury Lane Theatre. By the beginning of the 18th century, everything from playwriting to the nature of audience changed. The trend was towards less risqué dramatic offerings, greater visual spectacle, more songs and dances, bigger theatres and larger but less sophisticated audience.

An important characteristic of all restoration theatre, and unique to England, was an apron or forestage – “an acting area forward of the curtain thrusting well into the audience space, with permanent proscenium entrance doors on each side” (Fisk 7). This space was quite

close to the audience which gave them the feeling of closeness. The scenic area remained at the back and the performer could, “if they wished, move back and use the scenery as an environment instead of a decorative background” (Fisk 8). The forestage, variously called the platform, area, stage, theatre, scene and proscenium was used as a space from where the performers usually recited their witty dialogues, soliloquies, asides to the audience.

Again, Restoration theatres featured not only scenery but also machines for creating aerial flight, appearances from above and below, ocean waves and other special effects. Many devices such as cranes and trap doors were also used. For lighting, since there was no electricity, candles, tallow lamps and chandeliers were used. Costumes were also an important part of the visual display. Most actors wore ‘modern’ dresses – the fashion of the day which added to the audience’s sense of familiarity with the world of the play.

15.4 AUDIENCE AND ACTORS

The audience of the Restoration theatre was very different from the modern audience of today’s time. Since there was no provision to create virtual darkness in the theatre, the audience created a lot of commotion and distraction for the actors. The audience could see each other and therefore were less likely to remain quiet when the performance was going on. They were also acquainted with the plots and therefore watching the play was never their sole motive of going to the theatre. They had other motives like social adventure.

During the Restoration period, the audience affected the course of drama. Their likes and tastes decided whether the theatre should stage a comedy, melodrama or other types of drama. The companies were often funded by patrons. In the playhouses, the patrons had access to the backstage and the actors and actresses were not safe from the bullies of the patrons. In fact many theatre patrons went to playhouses because they were on the lookout for women and sexual games. They passed

comments, criticisms and tomfoolery to the actors and actresses acting on stage. For many Restoration spectators theatre was a game, like the games played out in so many plays of the period, and people enjoyed the imitations of immorality that they were so closely acquainted with. The spectators often disrupted the performances and misbehaved, especially if the play did not meet their expectations. But, they also appreciated good acting which could keep them glued to their seats. They responded to the performances speaking to the actors themselves.

The actors and actresses of the Restoration England were objects of public fantasy. Their job was to attract people to the playhouses and since there were not too many actors and actresses, the few who acted had to work very hard, working for long hours throughout the season. But it was also during this time when actors and actresses achieved celebrity status – became popularly recognized public figures.

15.5 WILLIAM CONGREVE: LIFE AND WORKS

William Congreve was born in the year 1670, at Bradsey, near Leeds. His father was a Cavalier and he spent his childhood in Ireland. Congreve's schooling started in the year, 1681 when he was sent to Kilkenny for his primary education. In 1696, he joined Trinity College and received his master degree in 1696. Jonathan Swift was one of his schoolmates and they remained friends for the rest of their lives. William Congreve gained proficiency in Greek and Latin at quite an early age.

When Congreve was twenty years of age, he fell in love with Beatrice Nelson, daughter of an architect, whom he met at London theatre. His love for her was very intense but Beatrice's uncle was not in favour of their marriage. Congreve, therefore, decided to end their lives by consuming poison. Congreve, fortunately, survived the effect of poison. However, they could never get married to each other. Congreve

attended Beatrice's marriage to Horace Well which was held at a cathedral.

After this incident, Congreve concentrated on writing plays. His first work was however a novel called, *Love and Duty Reconciled or Incognita*, which is a work of comedy of errors. The novel is full of comic elements such as mistaken identity, use of masks, assumed names, disguised persons, etc. Congreve also wrote poems and his poetical works appeared in an anthology known as *Miscellany of Original Poems*. The half cynical song, 'The Decay', is the most popular segment of this anthology.

However, Congreve's poetic skills did not bring any fame for him. In fact, some of his poems were severely criticized. Soon Congreve came into contact with Dryden and his relationship with such great men of letters inspired him to try his luck in the field of drama. At the age of twenty-three he produced his first comedy, *The Old Bachelor*, in 1693. It was performed on the stage and was highly appreciated by the spectators. Congreve skilfully manipulated the success of *The Old Bachelor* in his second play, *The Double Dealer*. But this play was not as successful as the first one. The play lacked wit and humour and was a melancholic tragic-comedy. He therefore, rejected his technique of tragic element in his comedy as he did in his earlier play, *The Double Dealer*, and wrote his next play, *Love for Love* in the form of a pure comedy. This play, which glorifies love, helped Congreve re-emerge as an outstanding comedy playwright of those times.

William Congreve also wrote a tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*, which appeared in the year 1697. *The Way of the World* is Congreve's last comedy which placed him in the zenith of literary success. *The Way of the World* is a reservoir of wit, humour, sparkling dialogues and lively characters. It deals with the life-style of the upper class of the Restoration period. Congreve lived for twenty-eight years after the success of *The Way of the World*. However, in the last phase of his life, he suffered from gout and cataracts on both eyes. He met with a carriage accident in late September 1728. He never recovered from the injuries

from this accident and died in London in January 1729 and was buried in Poet's corner in Westminster Abbey.

15.6 READING THE PLAY *THE WAY OF THE WORLD*

The play opens with a prologue which is spoken by Mr Betterton.

ACT I

As the play opens, Mr Fainall is involved in a conversation with Mirabell about Millamant, Mirabell's beloved. However, Millamant's aunt, Lady Wishfort does not approve of Mirabell, and Millamant is not free to marry according to her own wishes because if she does so she will lose half of her fortune. Lady Wishfort dislikes Mirabell because Mirabell had pretended to love her in order to hide his love for Lady Wishfort's niece, Millamant. Mirabell, therefore, makes a secret scheme which is not revealed to us until later. Mirabell directs his servant, Waitwell to get married to Foible without any delay and the servant humbly obeys the master's orders. Mirabell tells Mr Fainall that Millamant has committed a number of mistakes in the past but he loves her in spite of all her faults. Fainall then advises him to forget Millamant's faults and enjoy her charm alone.

A letter for Witwoud brought by a messenger reveals that Sir Wilfull, who is half-brother of Witwoud, had already arrived in London. Sir Wilfull is Lady Wishfort's nephew and she wants him to woo Millamant and marry her. Sir Witwoud and Mr Petulant who themselves want to marry Millamant does not like Sir Wilful coming to London. Mr Petulant and Sir Witwoud further inform Mirabell that his uncle is coming very soon to court Lady Wishfort.

Mirabell and Fainall decide to go for a walk on the Mall. At the same time, Petulant and Witwoud also decides to go for a walk in order to make satirical comments on ladies and to tease them. Mirabell however does not like their idea and rebukes them and stops them from

causing any embarrassment to the ladies. All the principal characters are introduced in the opening Act except Millamant and Lady Wishfort. Mirabell's plot remains the major point of interest in the Act.

ACT II

The second Act opens with Mrs Fainall and Mrs Marwood discussing men and their impulsive nature at St. James Park. Both of them outwardly show their hatred for men although it is noticeable that they do not mean what they say. Both of them are shy when they talk about Mirabell which shows that they have some affection for him. After Mirabell and Fainall arrive Mirabell and Mrs Fainall go away leaving Fainall with Mrs Marwood. Mrs Marwood informs Mr Fainall that there is something suspicious going on between Mirabell and Mrs Fainall. Here, we also come to know that Mrs Marwood is Fainall's mistress and he had married Mrs Fainall only for her fortune. As Mrs Marwood informs Mr Fainall about his wife's involvement with Mirabell, Mr Fainall detects Mrs Marwood's jealousy of for Mrs Fainall as she herself evinces interest in Mirabell. Mrs Marwood however tries to convince Mr Fainall that she loves him only and not Mirabell. Mr Fainall then confesses his love for Mrs Marwood and his willingness to marry her, but only after he possesses the fortune of his wife. He chides Mrs Marwood for revealing Mirabell's plans to Lady Wishfort because the secret would have helped him to become a richer man. Mrs Marwood starts weeping because of the dispute with her lover which ends in a reconciliation.

After Mr Fainall and Mrs Marwood leave the stage, Mirabell and Mrs Fainall re-enter the stage which offers new revelations. Mrs Fainall reveals that she had married Mr Fainall only to protect her reputation as she was pregnant with Mirabell's child at the time of her marriage. Mirabell also shares his secret plan with Mrs Fainall. He tells Mrs Fainall that he has directed his servant, Waitwell to marry Foible who is the maid-servant in Lady Wishfort's house. After that Waitwell will

disguise himself as the uncle of Mirabell and present himself as a suitor to Lady Wishfort. Mirabell plans to reveal the truth about Waitwell later and would propose to release Lady Wishfort from the clutches of a married man but on the condition that she will have no objection to his marriage to her niece, Millamant.

At this point of time Millamant enters the stage followed by Witwoud and Millamant's maid servant Mincing. She is thoroughly aware of her charm and her power over Mirabell. She is apparently quite prepared to go along with Mirabell's plot, which Foible has revealed to her, a clear indication that she intends to have Mirabell.

ACT III

The scene is in a room in Lady Wishfort's residence.

As the scene begins, Lady Wishfort is busy in her make-up as she has been informed by her maid-servant that Sir Rowland is coming to meet her. She is not satisfied with the make-up and rebukes the maid, Peg for her inefficiency in the art of make-up.

In the meantime, Mrs Marwood comes and tells Lady Wishfort that she has seen Foible talking to Mirabell which annoys Lady Wishfort because she wants her plan to marry Sir Rowland to remain a secret; she does not want Mirabell to know about it because Sir Rowland is Mirabell's uncle and it could place Lady Wishfort in an embarrassing situation.

After that Foible comes and tells Lady Wishfort that Sir Rowland is impatiently waiting to meet her and kiss her hand. Lady Wishfort however, first interrogates her about her meeting with Mirabell in the park. Foible is clever and she was already prepared for this question. She lies to Lady Wishfort saying that she has spoken to Mirabell only because he was using derogatory words for her lady and she wanted to give him back a proper reply. When Lady Wishfort learns about this she becomes furious at Mirabell and decides to teach him a lesson. Foible further urges Lady Wishfort to accept Sir Rowland as her husband.

In the meantime, Mrs Fainall, Lady Wishfort's daughter arrives at her mother's residence and speaks to Foible and tell her about her intention to support Mirabell in his plot against her mother, Lady Wishfort. Foible informs Mrs Fainall that she was seen by Mrs Marwood during her conversation with Mirabell and also about how she tackled Lady Wishfort regarding the matter. Mrs Marwood overhears the conversation.

Lady Wishfort comes and informs Mrs Marwood about the arrival of her nephew, Sir Wilfull. Mrs Marwood who is annoyed with Mirabell, in order to teach him a lesson suggests that Sir Wilfull can be a suitable husband for Millamant, Mirabell's lover.

At this juncture, Petulant and Sir Wilfull Witwoud appear. Sir Wilfull refuses to recognize his foppish brother, and Petulant Witwoud refuses to recognize his rustic elder brother. Afterward, when Mrs Marwood is left alone with Fainall, she describes Mirabell's plot to him and Fainall becomes angry thinking of his unfaithful wife. Mrs Marwood prepares a scheme for Mr Fainall through which he can get half of the fortune of Millamant. They know that Lady Wishfort loves her daughter very much and they can insist Lady Wishfort to hand over Millamant's money to Fainall on the threat of making public Lady Wishfort's daughter's transgressions.

ACT IV

The scene is in a room in Lady Wishfort's house.

The scene opens with Lady Wishfort preparing herself, working on her appearance and posture to receive Sir Rowland. Lady Wishfort also hints to Sir Wilfull that he should try to win the heart of Millamant. However, Sir Wilfull feels embarrassed in front of Millamant because he was found in a drunken state by Millamant and because of the derangement caused by excessive drinking; Sir Wilfull was unable to understand anything that Millamant had spoken to him. He feels only grateful when Millamant later dismisses him.

Mirabell appears in the scene and a conversation ensues between Mirabell and Millamant which is also often referred to as the proviso scene. Millamant puts forward certain conditions to marry Mirabell. Millamant tells Mirabell that she wants complete dedication from Mirabell after her marriage to him. She further tells him that she doesn't want any interference from anybody in her daily routine. For example, Mirabell cannot compel her to rise early in the morning as she is habitually a late-riser; Mirabell cannot address her by such out-dated phrases like, 'My sweet love', 'My dear', or 'Sweetheart', etc.; he cannot compel her to go to theatres or to attend any social gathering. She also says that she should be free to meet anyone and receive anybody at any time, and write letters to anybody even after they get married.

Mirabell also puts forward his own terms and conditions to marry Millamant. He tells Millamant that she cannot hide any personal affair from him, she cannot indulge in heavy drinking and she cannot wear tight-fitting dress which would be harmful for the baby. Both of them agree on the conditions and Millamant allows Mirabell to kiss her hand as a token of love.

Lady Wishfort is annoyed with Sir Wilful because he drinks too much. Lady Wishfort is afraid that he might lose the opportunity to win over Millamant because of his drinking habits. In the meantime, Mirabell's servant, Waitwell appears as Sir Rowland in front of Lady Wishfort and proposes marriage to her. He tells her that he is impatient to marry her and any further delay could be fatal for his heart. He says very cruel things against Mirabell and declares his intention to teach Mirabell a lesson. A messenger appears at that moment with a letter which reveals that Sir Rowland is actually Mirabell's servant, Waitwell. Waitwell however manages to convince Lady Wishfort that the letter has been sent by Mirabell to create misunderstanding between the two of them. He further tells Lady Wishfort that he is ready to hand over all his assets to her and Lady Wishfort becomes very pleased to know this.

ACT V

This is the last act of the play. In the first scene Lady Wishfort comes to know of the real identity of Sir Rowland from Mrs Marwood. She also gets to know that Foible is also involved in the conspiracy and she becomes furious.

Foible on the other hand informs Mrs Fainall about the love affair of Mrs Marwood and Mr Fainall. Lady Wishfort also comes to know about her daughter, Mrs Fainall's affair with Mirabell. Mr Fainall blackmails Lady Wishfort and Lady Wishfort lands into a critical situation as she is unsure about what she should do in order to protect her daughter. Meanwhile Sir Wilfull tries to explain the reason for Mirabell's intrigue to Lady Wishfort saying that he had plotted only to win the love of Millamant.

Mirabell ultimately rescues Lady Wishfort from the clutches of Fainall by proving his involvement in the conspiracy along with Mrs Marwood and that the legal documents that Fainall possesses are all fake and that Mrs Fainall had already given all her legal rights to Mirabell before her marriage.

Lady Wishfort finally gives her consent to the relationship between Mirabell and Millamant.

The play ends with an epilogue.

15.7 MAJOR THEMES

15.7.1 Conspiracy and Intrigues

The Way of the World has a very complex plot as it is packed with intrigues and conspiracies. The intrigues and conspiracies showcase the prevalent immorality and values of upper class society in London. Almost all characters are involved in intrigues. Mirabell, the hero of the play plots a conspiracy in order to dupe Lady Wishfort because he wants to marry her niece, Millamant. He presents his servant Waitwell as Sir Rowland in front of Lady Wishfort so that he can woo her. Waitwell does everything as Mirabell instructs him and Foible also gives her full

co-operation to the scheme. In the same way, Mr Fainall who is the son-in-law of Lady Wishfort also schemes with Mrs Marwood to usurp the property of Lady Wishfort, Mrs Fainall and Millamant. The plot proves a failure as Mirabell is able to foil the treacherous plan of Mr Fainall and Mrs Marwood. Mirabell fabricates another plan to save Millamant's property taking the help of Sir Wilfull, Lady Wishfort's nephew. In fact Lady Wishfort is also involved in a conspiracy as she is willing to marry Sir Rowland so that she can have her revenge on Mirabell.

15.7.2 Gender Relations and marriage

Love and marriage are important themes in the play. There are different varieties of love shown in the play and the different lovers handle love in different ways and fall in love for different reasons. The main motive for choosing life partners is to avail wealth. Even the most ideal couple in the play, Mirabell and Millamant, love each but even they are not ready to sacrifice their monetary interest. Millamant too, on the other hand is not ready to compromise with her freedom after marriage. It is interesting to note that even though Mirabell claims to love Millamant, he has affairs with other women like Mrs Marwood and Mrs Fainall. *The Way of the World* presents to its readers a world where love and money are important for all people. Even an old lady like Lady Wishfort dreams of having a man to love her which makes her come across as desperate, vain and pathetic. Money and love share a deep relation in the play as the characters believe that love thrives on money and love without money is bound to fail.

15.8 THE WAY OF THE WORLD AS 'COMEDY OF MANNERS'

The Way of the World is one of the best examples of the Comedy of Manners, a type of comedy which was in vogue during the Restoration period. Along with Congreve, there were others like Wycherley, Etherege and Vanbrugh who wrote comedies of manners.

Comedies of manners mainly aimed at satirising the social follies prevalent in their time. *The Way of the World* contains satirical elements like elements of love, marriage, romantic dialogues, wit and humour, conspiracies which are essential ingredients of Restoration comedy. The play maintains a satirical tone from the beginning to the end and throws ample light on the sophisticated class of society in England at that time. Some of the most important characters in the play are women and they are shown as sophisticated, crazy about fashions and love affairs and are shown as devoid of any moral values and principles. All the characters like Mrs Fainall, Mirabell, Mrs Marwood, Mr Fainall and Lady Wishfort give a clear picture of the upper classes of the contemporary society and their immoral behaviour. For instance, Mirabell suggests that Mrs Fainall marry Mr Fainall in order to conceal her pregnancy with him. Mr Fainall on the other hand does not take his wife's relationship with Mirabell very seriously and he himself has an illicit relationship with Mrs Marwood. The love affair between Millamant and Mirabell is the only genuine relationship among the many love-affairs in the play.

The Way of the World depicts a picture of the affectations of the people, particularly women in upper class, sophisticated society. He satirises them for their obsession with fashion. All the women characters dress in very tight fashionable dresses which were very much in fashion during those times. Congreve mentions about Cabal nights when women of the upper class of society assemble and gossip about various scandalous affairs. Lady Wishfort despite crossing the age of fifty still likes to dress up as young women do and takes make-up very seriously and scolds her attendant because of her inefficiency in the art of make-up. Along with the craze for fashion, the feeling of vanity and jealousy was very much common among the women of Restoration society. Mrs Marwood who likes Mirabell a lot develops jealousy for Millamant. Jealousy is shown as a universal weakness among all women of the period.

Conspiracies and Intrigues are an important feature of the Comedy of manners. *The Way of the World* is filled with intrigues and

conspiracies as men and women are deeply involved in plotting and scheming. Almost all the male characters in the play plot to trap rich women in order to acquire their wealth. In the case of Mr and Mrs Fainall, Mr Fainall marries Mrs Fainall only for her wealth. He also plots to usurp the property of Lady Wishfort on the basis of an illegal document. On the other hand, Mirabell also pretends to be in love with Lady Wishfort in order to marry her niece Millamant. Mrs Marwood and Fainall also fabricate an intrigue to exploit Lady Wishfort and even Sir Wilfull joins Millamant in an intrigue when he declares that Millamant is ready to marry him.

The play is filled with witty dialogues. The characters often try to exhibit their capabilities by using witty dialogues and passing vulgar comments to prove their hopeless wit. Petulant, Witwoud and Sir Wilfull are perfect examples of this type of characters. Congreve uses a lot of humour in constructing the dialogues of the characters. For example, when Witwoud refuses to recognise Sir Wilfull because he comes from the countryside saying it is unfashionable to recognize relatives, Sir Wilful loses his temper and replies by saying that fashion is foolish and Witwoud is not better than a fop.

Thus, as a comedy of manners, *The Way of the World* presents a vivid picture of the Restoration period and depicts the follies and vices of the people as a group.

15.9 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Millamant

Millamant can be called the heroine of the play. As a character, she is unique in various aspects. She is often described as the ‘wisest, wittiest and most mature of Restoration coquettes’ (Lynch xx). She moves in the Restoration milieu wearing mask of etiquette and affectation. She displays her wit and beauty at every opportunity that she gets and she is the one who trains Mirabell to give up his sententious

behaviour and be a good and worthy lover. She comes across as a strong woman who does not want to be dominated by men. She belongs to a high class of society and is very sophisticated and commanding in her approach. She overshadows all other characters because of her sparkling wit and intellectual prowess. Her beauty and grace attracts many lovers but she is very particular in her choice and is a very confident woman. She receives innumerable letters from her lovers but she wouldn't go through them as she thinks that the letters haven't been written in a proper way. She says, "I hate such letters because they don't know the art of letter writing."

Millamant hates any form of pride in men. Therefore, although she likes Mirabell, she also hates him because of his vanity. She never feels any compunction in chiding men for their stupidity. Although she is not a man-hater, she is of the view that there should be a code or discipline in love for every man and they must live within their limits. Millamant reveals herself as a true lover of freedom and she would not compromise with her liberty. Therefore, when she discusses their love with Mirabell, she puts a condition before him that she would love him only if he can agree to certain conditions. She says, "I would like to be free to pay visits to and from whom I please; I would be free to write and receive letters without any interrogation from by you; I would wear what I please; and choose conversation with regard only to my taste; I have no obligation to converse with wits, what I don't like because they are your acquaintance; or to be intimate with fools, because they may be your relations." She makes it a point to tell Mirabell in advance, that she is not like the usual type of women who can accept domination and exploitation from their husbands. Millamant does not like to be addressed with phrases like 'My Sweet Love' or 'Sweetheart' but is at the same time romantic, has deep love for poetical verses and loves to recite romantic verses composed by Suckling. She is however not a hopeless romantic but a very firm and stable person. She dislikes any kind of superficiality and the company of women who are silly, stupid and wear masks to hide their age. She reveals herself as a true feminist,

an egoist and a straight forward person who is not ready to live under the influence of her husband. The proviso scene proves this. She puts forward her conditions in a very strong manner before Mirabell and although she likes Mirabell, she doesn't let Mirabell influence her and remains firm in her demands. She has also certain feminine qualities like her desire to be wooed by men, especially Mirabell. Sometimes she exhibits a rare sense of humour. She appears very amusing when she prevents Witwoud from using unlimited number of similitude because she is fed up with all that. Millamant is not without her share of follies but the magnitude of her personality absorbs her follies.

Mirabell

Mirabell emerges as the chief protagonist of the play. Apparently, he appears as a typical Restoration beau envied by others for his wit and different characters try to expose his follies. Mirabell is one of the principal characters involved in the intrigue in the play, which he plots both to win Millamant for her beauty as well as her fortune. He pretended to be in love with Lady Wishfort and later tried to win her favour to marry Lady Wishfort's niece, Millamant. He created the fictitious character of Mirabell's uncle to win over Lady Wishfort. But he also proves himself to be a good person when he saves Lady Wishfort's from the clasp of Mr Fainall. He plotted against Lady Wishfort but his intention was not callous and he had done everything only to win Millamant. In the proviso scene, he immediately accepts the conditions put forward by Millamant which shows him to be a very loving person. He not only accepts Millamant's conditions but also states his own conditions, which shows his wit. His comments on characters like Fainall, reveals his common sense and they are full of wit and irony. He is mature in intellect and in his judgement and is able to come out of difficult situations because of this quality. He can also be very satirical and cynical at times. For instance, he ridicules women who wear make-up and masks to cover up their age and women who strive to look slim when their bellies and hips have swollen with pregnancy.

There are in fact many aspects to his character. The different characters in the play have different opinions about him. Fainall, for example calls him a “gallant man” although he does not like his attitude; for Lady Wishfort he is an imposter and a confirmed cheat but she also admires him for his intellectuality and Millamant, although she does not declare it openly, loves him from the core of her heart. He is a very lively character who combines wit, energy and judgement. He shows patience in adverse situations and although he has certain weakness, he proves himself to be a true lover of Millamant.

Lady Wishfort

Lady Wishfort is one of the central figures around whom the play revolves. She is a snob, naive, old and desperate to get a husband. Congreve highlights Lady Wishfort’s social and sexual hypocrisy in fashioning her character. She tries to hide her age by applying make-up and wants to be wooed by men. Most of the conspiracies in the play are woven around her and she is unaware of them. While Mirabell flirts with her to win her favour in order to marry her niece, Millamant, Mr Fainall conspires against her to take away Mrs Fainall’s property.

As a character she is different from other women characters in the play like Millamant, Mrs Marwood and Mrs Fainall. There is an element of humour in her character which evokes laughter among the audience. The different situations in which she lands herself make her a humorous figure. She comes across as a funny character because she can be easily wooed, she believes all the false praises that men shower about her appearances, spends a lot of time applying make-up and behaves like a teenager although she is over fifty years of age. When she gets to know that Sir Rowland is going to meet her she says, “Yes, but tenderness becomes mere best – a sort of dyingness – you see my picture has a sort of – what, should I call it Foible? A melting look in the eyes? Yes I will look so, my niece Millamant pretends to have this kind of look. But she is devoid of a good physical appearance.” The readers enjoy her follies to a great extent.

Lady Wishfort later finds herself in a helpless condition and her character evokes pathos. She is apparently a very authoritative figure who controls significant amount of wealth but she also exhibits stupidity most of the times. She becomes a victim to a number of conspiracies. Her servant, Foible and her friend, Mrs Marwood exploit and influence her in a negative manner and Fainall blackmails her. She is not only slow at realising other people's trickery but is also bad at defending herself. She lacks good judgement and is easily deceived by people around her and doesn't know how to distinguish between a good person and a bad person. She has a deep dislike for Mirabell but ultimately it is he who comes to her rescue and saves her fortune and social reputation.

She does not show enough patience in most of the circumstances. She becomes impatient in waiting for Sir Rowland and she asks her maid servant, "But art thou sure, Sir Rowland will not fail to come? Or he will not fail when he does come?" She is easy to lose her temper and becomes easily annoyed. Lady Wishfort comes to hate men and her hatred for men is justified as she is deceived by men like Mirabell and Mr Fainall and her nephew Sir Wilfull disregards her. Although she is the subject of Congreve's satire, she also becomes a helpless, pitiable character and is able to gain pity and sympathy of the readers.

15.10 STYLE: WIT/ IRONY IN THE WAY OF THE WORLD

The Way of the World is a comedy where wit and irony pervade. Although some critics like to believe that the play is a comedy with serious overtones, it will not be wrong to claim that wit is the essence of its seriousness. Irony is an integral part of the speeches of the characters and it is closely related to style and wit.

Congreve possessed the imagination that delighted in a playful inventiveness and therefore he had filled the speeches in *The Way of the World* with verbal wit. However, Congreve did not give his readers any definition of wit, but, he wanted his spectators to distinguish between a

true wit and a witwoud. Dryden says that wit is something which is more than verbal word play (puns, similitudes, antitheses, etc.) According to him, it also points to a traditional ideal of decorum (“a propriety of words and thoughts”). Propriety is the norm by which wit can be measured in *The Way of the World*. For instance, Sir Wilfull and Lady Wishfort’s are loud characters which lend their dialogues an affected quality. On the other hand, Petulant’s repetitive speech makes him come across as a fool who tries to affect the ways of the brave, but that only aggravates his folly. Witwoud is a more obvious case of wit without judgement. He is a parasite who aims only at impressing other people. He desperately wants to erase his past and wishes to be accepted in the world of fashion but comes across as fatuously self-congratulatory, and transparently foolish. Witwoud is a kind of industrious but incompetent apprentice in an inverted world.

Many of the improprieties of characters concern the abuse of language. The characters’ speeches do not show any link between ‘words’ and ‘thoughts’. For instance, Sir Wilfull’s address to Millamant in Act IV Scene I, Wilfull tries to use vocabulary of fashionable gallantry without having any idea about what they mean, and he uses them repeatedly.

The incongruity between natural speech and affected wit is even more apparent in the case of Lady Wishfort. She loves to appear as a refined woman and her dialogue is often studded with malapropisms which are the result of her affected learning. Her dialogue with Peg in Act III Scene I show faulty intellectual connections.

Lady Wishfort. I have no more patience – if I have not fretted myself till I am pale again, there’s no Veracity in me. Fetch me the Red – The Red, do you hear, Sweetheart? An errant Ash colour, as I’m a Person. Look you how this Wench stirs! Why dost thou not fetch me a little Red? Did’st thou not hear me, Mopus?

Peg. The Red Ratifia does your Ladyship mean, or the Cherry Brandy?

Lady Wishfort. Ratifia, Fool? No Fool. Not the Ratifia Fool – Grant me patience! I mean the Spanish Paper Idiot, Complexion Darling.

Congreve also highlights false wit in *Petulant*. In one instance, he tells Millamant of his attitude toward Witwoud which shows his disdain for the meaning of words and therefore the affected nature of his speech. He says, “If he says Black’s Black – if I have a humour to say ‘tis Blue – Let that pass – Alls one for that. If I have a humour to prove it, it must be granted” (III.i. 404-406)

The abuses of wit can also be found in other characters like Mrs Marwood, Mrs Fainall and Fainall. The character of Mrs Marwood proves that wit and madness are closely related. Mrs Marwood’s speech abounds in absolutes: “never”, “every”, “always”, etc. She is always ready to make rash statements which she does not carry out. In a bitter encounter with Fainall, she says, “But not to loathe, detest, abhor Mankind, myself, and the whole treacherous World” (II. 273-238). Fainall replies to Mrs Marwood saying, “Nay this is Extravagance”, which highlights the discrepancy between her words and her actual intentions.

Like Mrs Marwood, Mrs Fainall is also capable of making statements that she does not believe. But in her case, it stems from naiveté and a faulty education. The confusions of her speech emerge as a consequence of a lack of judgement. Again, in the case of Fainall, although he can be mistaken for a true wit, his speech lacks Mirabell’s plain sense. Congreve condemns false wits like Fainall and Mrs Marwood because their wit, far from enabling them to engage with reality, merely entangles them with their own illusions.

It is Mirabell and Millamant who dramatize true wit. Congreve brings out the true wit in them by initially placing them in opposition to each other, each one doubting the other one’s integrity. Both of them are

wary and difficult, resenting the loss of judgement that love imposes even as they accept it. Mirabell says, “As for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a love, for I like her with all her faults: nay, like her for her faults ... They are grown as familiar to me as my own frailties; and in all probability, in a little time longer, I shall like ‘em as well”. Millamant also declares, “Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing, - for I find I love him violently.” The two characters are rational and they test each other and themselves, if they can be honest in marriage. Millamant’s affectations also do not make her come across as artificial but they are clearly defensive exercises. In fact, she makes an attempt to free herself and Mirabell from the world of hypocrisy. In the proviso scene, they fight with each other but for a vision of marriage free from the hypocrisy around them. The triumph of the play, ultimately, is in the surfacing of lovers who, through a balance of strong affection and self-knowledge, achieve a balance that liberates them from the power of the world.

15.11 SUMMING UP

In *The Way of the World* we have seen how Congreve weaves a perfect Restoration comedy by bringing in the elements of love, wit, intrigues, rakish behaviour, etc. in the play. The play is reflective of the various follies of the age like immorality, affectation, social hypocrisy of the period and Congreve satirises them in the play.



15.12 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Attempt a biographical sketch of William Congreve and discuss the major works by the playwright.
2. Assess William Congreve as a playwright of the Restoration Period.
3. Critically analyse *The Way of the World* as a comedy of manners.

4. Critically discuss the Proviso Scene of the play.
5. Discuss Congreve's art of characterization in *The Way of the World*.
6. "In *The Way of the World*, Congreve has highlighted the relations of men and women in marriage." Do you agree with this statement?
7. "Wit is the basic strength of Congreve's *The Way of the World*."

Explain this maxim with appropriate examples.



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JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS

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