



William Congreve, *The Way of the World*

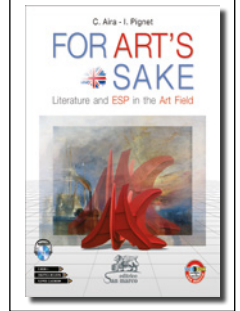
William Congreve was the son of an army officer who was in command of a garrison in Ireland. After college he went to London, and was entered as a student of law. He soon gave up law for literature, enjoyed the friendship of intellectuals like Swift, Steele and Pope and held several governmental offices.

Congreve soon started writing plays and his real career began with the brilliant appearance and instant success of his first comedy, *The Old Bachelor*. The types of Congreve's first work were the common conventional properties of stage tradition; but the fine and clear-cut style in which these types were reproduced was his own. What is now considered the unequalled masterpiece of English Restoration comedy, *The Way of the World*, met originally with little success, possibly because the public were increasingly in favour of middle-class values and morality.

The two main characters of the play, Mirabell, a reformed rake, and Millamant, a coquette, are in love, though their feelings are often hidden beneath a mask of wit and cynicism. The name Millamant is of Italian origin (meaning thousands of lovers) as is the name Mirabell (good-looking); a typical feature of the Restoration Comedy is to give characters names that reflect their main traits.

Congreve's plays are characterized by complex intrigues in which the heroes contrast creditors, paternal interdictions and villains, in order to gain both money and love. His works stand out for the sparkling brilliance of their dialogue and the purity and perfection of their language. Though the plays show a world of hypocrisy and the characters have their failings, Congreve spreads a clear message: marriage can be the basis for a happy relationship if the two partners show honesty and generosity.

C. Aira - I. Pignet
**FOR ART'S
SAKE**
Literature and ESP in
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ACTIVITIES

- 1 Talk about Congreve's topics, language and style.

