

CONGREVE AND MAUGHAM - TREATMENT

OF LOVE IN THEIR COMEDIES

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ABSTRACT

‘Congreve and Maugham - Treatment of love in their Comedies’ deals with their different approaches to love. With his refined fancy and a sense of realism, Congreve could add to the wit and satire of the Restoration period, his approach to love was unique in its own way as he could provide purity of subject and delicacy of treatment. His approach to love was emotional, idealistic, artistic and sophisticated. Congreve could harmonize the irony, wit and insolent words of Restoration comedy with his delicate treatment of love and balanced treatment both as a writer and as an artist. His contribution was in the purity of matter and delicacy of form, it was unique thing in the restoration period. Maugham was very practical and subtle in his approach to love. Being a medical man, he believed that love was a biological requirement based on sex. Actually, it was sex which predominated and love hardly existed in life. Maugham was always scientific and logical.

I. INTRODUCTION

Both Congreve and Maugham achieved a great reputation as writers of comedies, their treatment of love had imparted a unique touch to their respective works. With his refined fancy and sense of realism Congreve could add to the wit and satire of the Restoration period, his approach to love was unique in its own way as he could provide purity of subject and delicacy of treatment. With his talent and qualities, he could give a new shape to it and his treatment of love was absolutely rational, artistic and sophisticated. Congreve could harmonize the irony, with and insolent verb of the Restoration Comedy with his delicate treatment of love and balanced temperament both as a writer and as an artist. His contribution was in the purity of matter and delicacy of form, it was a unique thing in the Restoration period. “One feels that elegant raillery has now been bred in, that a new generation has risen which has this inborn gift, and carries it to perfection by means of conscious culture.”

Maugham had also established himself as a brilliant writer of comedies in modern times. His treatment of love gave a peerless touch to his comedies, they became extra-ordinary charming, delightful and fascinating. He was also, basically, a writer of comedies, he was not at his best in his tragedy, and he gave up drama writing because he thought that Shakespearean drama should be revived. But as a writer of comedies, he was simply superb, and they were highly sparkling with love, satire, humour and irony. The background of love imparted a unique touch to his comedies; they had always been enjoyed, appreciated and admired by spectators, readers and critics.

II. FINDINGS

Congreve was very artificial, courtly and sophisticated in his treatment of love; Maugham was very subtle and practical. Being a medical man, he believed that love was a biological requirement based on sex. Actually, it

was sex, which predominated and love hardly existed in life. Maugham studied love and sex under three headings –

1. Woman as a symbol of love and sex,
2. Woman and her sex appeal and
- 3 Attitude to love, sex and marriage.

As a man of science and scientific background he rationalized love and presented it in his comedies in a rational and realistic manner. Of course, both Congreve and Maugham dealt with love, sex and marriage in their various comedies but their approaches and treatments were entirely different and they had shown their originality in their individualistic conceptions of love.

Congreve satirized manners in a pure and simple manner and people were highly spell-bound by it. Love was the background of all his works, in ‘The Old Bachelor,’ ‘The Double Dealer,’ ‘Love for Love.’ ‘The Way of The World,’ love had been treated with perfect delicacy, courtly sophistication and artificiality. According to Leigh Hunt, we came across in him heartless lords and ladies who used to say witty things to one another, and were always buzzing in some maze of intrigue. Congreve laid more stress on brilliance and the virtues of style than on the depth of life. He was also saved from oblivion by the sheer strength of style. Bonamy Dobree further quoted Meredith : “He hits the mean of a fine style and a natural in dialogue. He is at once precise and voluble ... In this he is a classic, and is worthy of treading a measure with Moliere.” Thus, the world of Congreve had its limited framework in spite of the treatment of love. “In this solid frame-work, which offers nothing exceptional, psychological raillery and dialogue are displayed with incomparable brilliance.” His presentation became personal idealistic and realistic for example, the characters of Millamant and Mirabell combined heart, mind and all sensibilities. “The exact and restrained skill of a master tones down the radiance of these figures, who came very near to their realm of romantic fancy, without actually entering it.”

The theme of the Play ‘The Old Bachelor’ based on the mannerism in love was the exposing of the Old Bachelor, the Surly Heartwell ‘Pretending to slight women.’ He honestly felt: “I am for having everybody be what they pretend to be; My Talent is chiefly that of speaking truth, which I don’t expect should recommend me to people of quality.” Furthermore, Heartwell enjoyed every opportunity to rail bitterly at all the hypocrisies, and nauseous cant of his friends ‘snarling odious Truths, and entertaining company like a physician with discourses of their diseases and infirmities.’

Thus, in the treatment of love, love intrigues played a very important role. Heartwell lamented his sad situation in a love scene with Silvia: “Oh Manhood, where art thou! What am I come to? A woman’s Toy; at these years; Death, a bearded Baby for a Girl to dandle.” When Belinda had pity for Vainlove, he became furious :

Damn your pity! – But let me be calm a little – How have I deserv’d this of you? And of ye? Sir have I impair’d the honour of your House, promis’d your sister Marriage and whor’d her? Madam, have I had an opportunity with you and bauk’d it?

William Congreve wrote his second play ‘The Double Dealer’ with a view to satirizing the follies and vices of society. Cynthia and Nellefont made a convincing as well as a diverting pair; they were undoubtedly in love without having a passionate romance. Congreve had depicted the artificiality and folly of love, both of them could understand the problems in the path of love. Congreve had dealt with their love in a delicate and artistic manner:

Cynthia – You know we marry for love.

Mellefond- Love, Love down right very villainous Love.

Congreve further gave his another comedy ‘Love for Love’ full of the theme of love and excellent comic parts. Foresight was the superstitious old astrologer, Ben was a cheerful sailor at home from the sea, Miss Prue had her folly and Mrs. Frail had her scheming. Congreve had very well given the moral of the drama through Angelica. Scandal complimented her for punishing an inhuman father and rewarding the faithful lover and transforming him into a perfect gentleman. She retorted:

Men are generally hypocrites and infidels, they pretend to worship, but have neither zeal nor Faith; how few like Valentine would persevere even to Martyrdom, and sacrifices their interest to their constancy. The miracle today is. That we find a lover true, not that a Woman’s kind.

Congreve had dealt with the theme of love remarkably, borrowing his characters and themes from earlier English comedies and action was very carefully contrived. Sir Sampson and Miss Prue were given the right words and mannerisms as were fitted to their parts. The love between Angelica and Valentine was presented in a romantic tradition; there was the final reconciliation between them.

Then came Congreve’s final and greatest comedy ‘The Way of the World.’ It was his masterpiece of literary art and his final vindication of mankind. “In it glows the true Congreve, the Congreve to whom detraction was wearisome, and who aspired after that very fragile thing, beauty itself.” He wrote this comedy with a view to pleasing his audiences.

It was a classical comedy with perfection of the language, the beauty of dialogue and purity of style with the justness of manners. The love affairs between Mirabell and Millamant and Fainall and Marwood had been wonderfully presented. Mirabell had accepted his beloved with all her qualities as well as faults. He exclaimed dramatically:

I like her with all her faults; nay like her for faults. Her follies are so natural or so artful, that they became her, and those Affections which in another woman would be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable...

Millamant has wit but uncertainty of character. She entered the stage with her full glory and style ‘with fan spread and streamers out. She boasted of her beauty and cruelty, but Mirabell said that her cruelty would destroy her lover and it would put an end to her death. At this Millamant retorted: “Beauty the Lover’s gift Lord, what is a lover? What can it give? Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases one makes more.” In Millamant, we could find a Shakespearean heroine who could outwit her lover.

Congreve had presented intrigues in love, ‘The Way of the World’ was the richest comedy in this field also. Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood possessed all realism, they symbolized all insane jealousy.

Mrs. Marwood was Fainall’s mistress, but she also loved Mirabell. Thus, Mrs. Fainall had double reason to be jealous of her. Fainall was again jealous of Mirabell and goaded Mrs. Marwood into a great disappointment.

Congreve presented the scene between Fainall and Mrs. Marwood wonderfully:

Fainall - Will you yet be reconciled to truth and me!

Mrs. Marwood - Impossible. Truth and you are inconsistent. I hate and shall forever.

Fainall - For loving you!

Mrs. Marwood - I loathe the name of love after such usage; and next to the guilt with which you would asperse me, I scorn you most. Farewell.”

Congreve presented the sincerity of his men and women in the domain of marriage. "It is true that the men are not righteous over much; they represent the common sense attitude even in Victorian days, they sowed their wild oats. But once they have come to marriage, they show the utmost sincerity." Thus, with his qualities and limitations, Congreve could portray love in his comedies marvelously reminding us of William Somerset Maugham.

Maugham also painted love with all its artificialities and hypocrisies, because sex was always at the root. Maugham proved to be a greater psychologist in his comedies; he added humour with love and sex. Being a scientist, he emphasised the element of sex as the fundamental aspect of love. His women or heroines were advanced having different approaches to love and sex, they changed their colours frequently being sometimes practical, realistic and passionate. Lady Fredric realising the importance of love told Admiral in the beautiful comedy 'Lady Frederick': "And believe me when the two young things love one another, it is better to let them marry. Love is also a very rare thing in this world; one really ought to make the most of it, when it is there." Maugham was writing comedies with a different purpose, he widened the scope of them by giving a broader conception of love. Lady Frederick, with all her eccentricities had a heart of gold, therefore, she reflected her humanitarian love by releasing the young boy-Marquess of Mareston from her entanglements and ultimately going to her befitting partner Mr. Paradine Fouldes. Maugham depicted this rational and psychological love comparing it to infatuation representing the modern trends.

Maugham went beyond the mannerism of Congreve and tried to give a factual description of love. Both Congreve and Maugham understood the basic importance of love and sex in their comedies and expressed them according to their own conceptions.

Heartwell, the old bachelor was drawn to women in spite of his efforts, hating and despising himself for it, but unable to fight against the impulse. Suddenly, Heartwell stood before the house of Silvia and he was so much attracted by her that he wanted to marry her. He tried to stand against the common impulse: "O thou, delicious, damn't, dear destructive woman!" Maugham also realised that the demand of love and sex was always beyond the reach of mankind. Mellefont would call love villainous, but still he would fall in love and embrace it with all its pains. Angelica in 'Love for Love,' outwitting the hero Valentine proclaimed that men were generally hypocrites and infidels. It created a lot of irony and humour, Maugham's approach was different, love was biological need. Congreve could reach sometimes Shakespearean heights; Maugham could reach realistic and universal aspects of life. For Congreve, love was the need of a fashionable and aristocratic society, for Maugham, it was the reflection of human satisfaction.

Congreve used strategies in love, they added to the satirical atmosphere of his comedies. Edward Mirabell and Millamant were in love in 'The way of The World.' Mirabell feigned love to Lady Wishfort in order to get more opportunities. With all complicated situations of stratagems, Mirabell and Millamant were reunited in the bonds of marriage. Lady Wishfort, being the pivot of the play, played a key role in the domain of love and marriage also. Congreve, therefore, could achieve a remarkable excellence of wit, satire and humour. Lady Frederick, Mrs. Dot of Maugham seemed to be possessing the charm of Millamant, Angelica and Silvia, but their humanitarian touch became greater and nobler. Being not so aristocrat and fashionable in treatment as Congreve was, Maugham was more matter-of-fact, factual and rational. Congreve's heroines had their financial aspect apart from their beauty, with and whimsicality.

Maugham combined sincerity and practical wisdom in her heroine 'Penelope,' even the title of the comedy had been given after her. She loved her husband Dickie from the core of her heart: "I have simply worshipped the ground he walked on. I have loved him as no man was ever loved before." 'Penelope' was a wonderful comedy having all simplicity of expression and nobility of design, at the instance of her wise father Dr. Golightly, Penelope provided all unlicensed freedom to her wayward husband to bring him back. She was disgusted with her husband's flirtations with her own friend Ada Ferguson. She cried out: "I'm going to divorce him. I'm going to make an awful scandal." Her father Mr. Golightly, being a professor of Mathematics was a very rational and calculating man so advised her to 'take every opportunity of throwing him into Ada Ferguson's society....' The father further advised her simple daughter:

You must keep guard on your tongue and your eyes
and your smiles and your temper.

In Congreve's 'Love for Love,' Tattle taught simple Prue to be somewhat diplomatic. In Maugham's 'Penelope,' the practical professor gave another piece of powerful advice to her daughter: "A wise woman never lets her husband to be quite - quite sure of her. The moment he is, cupid puts on atop - that becomes a church warden." Maugham dealt with the social traditions and etiquettes prevailing in the middle-class people rather than in the aristocratic society as it was found in Congreve. Maugham presented another kind of love in his remarkable comedy 'The Land of Promise.' Love and marriage had been symbolised for creativity, Norah Marsh declared her love for Taylor in the end knowing her own fertility: "... Love has been growing in me slowly month by month and I couldn't see it." Being a scientist, Maugham was concerned with creativity; love and sex were symbolical of pro-creation.

In his another comedy 'Smith', Maugham gave a very rational and biological approach to love. Freeman, a very laborious farmer came to Rhodesia for the sake of meeting his sister Rose there and for finding a wife for himself. Although, he was supposed to be uncivilized in his attitude to life, he was very realistic and practical in his approach to love and marriage. He felt sorry for the so-called civilized people of the West who had no love, family and children. They were simply groping into the dark having no happiness. Freeman observed: "... a woman could suffer no greater misfortune than to have no children." But, the so-called modern ladies like Rose despised children: it was the wastage of 'the youth in having children.' Freeman was practical like Maugham: "But if you put a strong healthy man and a strong healthy woman together, love will come." N.K. Naik observed: "The theme in both 'Smith' and 'The Land of Promise' is almost identical - the contrast between the artificial hothouse life and false values of upper-middle class society and the healthy natural life and true values of the farmers in the colonies who struggle with nature to turn a wilderness into cultivated land."

During the second phase of his dramatic career between 1914 to 1926, Maugham wrote wonderful comedies, like 'Our Betters,' 'Caroline' (The Unattainable), 'Caesar's Wife,' 'Home and Beauty,' 'The Circle,' 'The Unknown,' 'East of Suez' and 'The Constant Wife' etc. All these charming plays reflected his approach to comedy. The heroine of the play 'Pearl' Grayston, symbolizing American charming manners and the hypocrisy of the Western civilization stood for all frankness in love. She led a free adventurous life in sex also, as a symbol of sex; she had no serious thoughts about love and marriage. For her these words and children had no meaning, as she had a very practical and biological approach to love and marriage. "Marriage is an affair of convenience rather than of sentiment." Congreve presented love, sex and marriage in an ornamental manner

with wit, fun and satire; Maugham depicted it with all frankness in the modern context. Congreve had shown in his sophisticated comedies that widows and widowers were having many love affairs; such a trend was also found in the world of Maugham. Maude in ‘The Unattainable’ had a very frank opinion: “After mature consideration, I have come to the conclusion that one husband is not enough for one woman.” Caroline having the same opinion was very happy: “Good heaven; I’ve found one much more than I wanted.” She thus, symbolized the extremity of sexual desire in the western women. Maugham satirized love and marriage in his most pleasant comedy ‘Home and Beauty’ in the background of war. The heroine Victoria was sandwiched between her two husbands – the two former heroes of the war – Major William Cardew and Major Frederick Launders. The first hero was supposed to be dead, but he was alive. Victoria married the second time to Major Frederick Launders. But when Major William Cardew came back, he was stunned to find that he has been deprived of both home and wife. Maugham represented the most ignoble features of a woman during the war, she gave up both husbands – the war heroes and went to the third-one – Paton – a young bachelor and a builder of ships. She was fascinated by his riches and property; he had already earned a lot of wealth during world war. Both Congreve and Maugham used this satirical element; they exploited human hypocrisy and manners. “War - like suffering brings with it not only the heroic but man’s most selfish detestable qualities as well.”

In another charming comedy ‘The Circle’, Maugham depicted human emotions, feminine frivolity and male lust for career and greatness. He exposed the hypocrisy of love among aristocratic classes. Congreve did the same in his comedies, but it was a representation of mannerisms. Maugham exposed the modern civilization. ‘The Sacred Flame’ and ‘For Services Rendered’ were the beautiful comedies by Maugham of his last period. In ‘The Sacred Flame,’ the dramatist had given a wonderful treatment to the themes of love and sex. Stella, the wife of the invalid husband Maurice fell in love with his younger brother Colin for ‘the madness that possessed me.’ And it resulted in pregnancy. Maugham presented a modern concept of morality. The mother – in – law of Stella, Mrs. Tabret found out a convenient solution; she gave heavy sleeping dose to her invalid son in order to put an end to his suffering as to the entire family’s. She gave her logic: “I gave him life and I took life away from him.” Thus, both, the mother and Stella kept the sacred flame burning alive. Maugham presented ‘a society which places correct behavior ahead of the fundamental passions and in doing, equates goodness with chastity. Thus, both Congreve and Maugham had studied love in their different comedies. Congreve idealised and emotionalised love keeping the Restoration traditions and manners, his comedies, therefore, had a lot sparkling wit, irony and fun with lively dialogue and poetic presentation. He cared very much for courtly sophistication, refinement, verbal style and ornamentation.

Maugham started writing dramas at very mature age; his treatment to love, sex and marriage was thoroughly practical, rational, matter-of-face scientific and biological. Congreve idealised and glorified sex, Maugham presented sex like Bertrand Russel as a natural requirement. “Sex is a natural need like food and drink.” Maugham also believed in the Life Force, in which women had a greater power than that of men. M.C. Kuner depicted their psychology: “These women inflict pain not because they are parched by a thirst for authority but because they are so blinded by the overpowering urge that the sense of decency or responsibility is obliterated. Regardless of whatever impulse quickens it, women’s power is not Shavian joke but cosmic disaster.” Congreve with all his achievements could not acquire the range of Maugham; his attitude remained confined to Restoration times, while Maugham’s became modern and universal.

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