

Congreve's Prose style - The way of the world. -

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Congreve is the supreme master of English Language. He achieved great excellence in his dramatic style which is essentially a style of a prose artist. He is the skilled architect of the edifice of the words and phrases. He has been described by William Carpenter as 'the most skilled and seasoned wordsmith'. His Prose style possesses all those qualities which make it highly effective on the stage. Let us see in a brief.

Congreve's distinct qualities are clarity and brevity. His Prose style is marked by fluence and a complete balance. There is nothing inexact and shoddy about his manner of writing. There is no ambiguity in his expression. Clarity and vividness are the hall marks of his style. Each word that he employs is well weighed and nothing is used for creating an impression of superfluity. In this respect his art is like that of Jane Austen and Walter Pater who insisted that the right words should be used at the right places. The clarity of expression with a force which amounts to Poetry.

Beauty is the lover's gift - Lord, what is a lover, that it can give? Why one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long <sup>one</sup> as pleases, and they die as soon one pleases; and then if one pleases one makes more."

One of the striking features of Congreve's prose is the repeated use of antithesis, that is thoughts and words are used in contrast. Such antithesis sounds very epigrammatic. For example, see the following remarks of Mr. Fainal.

"Hitwood grows by the Knight, like a medler grafted on a crab. One will melt in your mouth and t' other set your teeth on edge, one is all pulp and the other all core."

Congreve has another excellence to his credit in his Prose style. He is musical and rhythmic in his



(5)

sentences. He knows full well the art of writing musical lines, which read like those of Poetry, though touched in Prose. He 'plays up' the language like a great musician. For instance, the following lines -

"O, my, letters - I had letters - I am persecuted with letters - no body knows how to write letters; and yet - one has 'em one does not know why they serve one to him up one's hair."

Congreve knows the art of adapting his speeches to the standard of characters. His Prose is varied to suit a situation, a character or a mood. Foible speaks in a less cultured manner than Mollamant. Lady Wiskfort's manner of speech, when she is anxious by awaiting Sir Rowland, is very much different from her angry outburst at the discovery of deception practised by Foible. Mr. Fainal and Mirabell talk in a stylish way in the opening scene of the play. Really, Congreve's style and expression wonderfully suit the characters in whose mouths the speech is put. His wonderful adaptability and suitability of speech to characters and situation is a great art of which Congreve is a master.

Congreve often employs witicism and sparkling vivacity in his Prose dialogues. His witty dialogues are extremely effective on the stage. It is polished and pointed and goes deep into the mind. Take for example, the following smart and witty expression of Witwoud -

"Age, age, friendship without freedom is a dull as love without enjoyment, or wine without toasting."

Thus, we see that Congreve is a skilled master of Prose style. His Prose bears all the features of a

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great artist. In the words of Hazlitt 'his style is imitable. It is the highest model of comic dialogue. Every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the most polished term. Every page presents a shower of brilliant conceits. The fire of artful raillery is nowhere else so well kept up: =