

“The character of Lady Wishfort evokes more pathos than pleasure.” Comment.

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“The character of Lady Wishfort evokes more pathos than pleasure.” Comment.

Or, “Lady Wishfort in “The Way of the World” is more pathetic than comic.” Comment.

Lady Wishfort is a funny but sad character in William Congreve's (1670-1729) play “The Way of the World” (1700). She is old, rich, and full of pride. She wants to look young and get married again. She falls in love with a fake man called Sir Rowland. She hates Mirabell because he fooled her. She is also very proud and vain. People laugh at her, but we also feel sad for her. So, she is more pathetic than comic.

Proud and Vain: Lady Wishfort is very proud of her beauty. She puts on heavy makeup to look young. She wears rich clothes and acts like a young girl. But people laugh at her silly look. She cannot see her own foolishness. She thinks all men love her beauty. That makes her easy to fool. Her pride becomes her weakness. This makes her a comic figure. But also, we feel sorry for her age. The following quote shows her extreme vanity.

“I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes.”

Here, Lady Wishfort acts like a foolish lover. She tries hard to look young. She wants Sir Rowland to like her.

Easily Fooled: Lady Wishfort always trusts the wrong people. She believes Mrs. Marwood is her true friend. But Marwood secretly works against her. She depends on her maid Foible. He also helps Mirabell trick her. When she discovers Foible's betrayal, she angrily asks,

“Have you made a passive bawd of me?”

Even her own daughter and niece hide Mirabell's plans from her. By the end, she realizes everyone deceived her. This makes her feel helpless and alone. Her foolish trust brings her pain.

Role as a Mother: She is the mother of Mrs. Fainall. But she fails in her duty as a mother. She does not know about her son-in-law's plan. She does not see Fainall's evil mind. She also tries to control Millamant's life. She wants to choose her husband. But her choices are always wrong. She cannot protect her family's honour. She becomes a weak and helpless woman. Her failure gives us pain, not joy. So, we feel sorry for her situation.

Desperation for Love: Lady Wishfort wants to remarry. She falls for any man who flatters her. She even loves Mirabell, who tricks her. Her need for love is sad. She is old but acts like a young girl. This makes her funny but also pitiful. Her loneliness drives her actions. She is a victim of her own desires. This makes her more pathetic than comic. The following quotation supports this idea.

"Bring what you will; but come alive, pray come alive."

Here, she begs Sir Rowland (actually Waitwell in disguise) to return quickly. This shows how desperately she wants love and attention.

To sum up, Lady Wishfort looks funny at first. We laugh at her love and makeup. We enjoy her silly words and acts. But slowly, we feel sorry for her. She is old and lonely inside. She wants love, but gets fooled. Her own daughter is in trouble. She cannot help her family. She becomes a victim of others' plans. So, she gives us more pain than fun. She is a sad figure, not just comic.