

Themes of Love, Marriage, and Money in The Way of the World.

Writer: William Congreve | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

How does Congreve treat the themes of love, marriage, and money in the drama “The Way of the World”?

William Congreve's (1670-1729) “The Way of the World” (1700) is a famous Restoration comedy. The play shows how people live, love, and marry in high society. Congreve does not give a romantic fairy tale. Instead, he shows real life. Love is mixed with money. Marriage is treated as a contract. People think more about wealth and reputation than true feelings. Through the story of Mirabell, Millamant, Lady Wishfort, Fainall, and others, Congreve explains how love, marriage, and money control human relationships.

Love as Freedom and Understanding: The true love story in the play is between Mirabell and Millamant. Their love is not too emotional. It is intelligent and witty. Millamant does not want to lose her independence. Her famous line shows this desire:

“My dear liberty, shall I leave thee?”

Mirabell also loves her and accepts her faults. This shows real love, not selfish desire. He says that beauty comes from love itself. When he loves Millamant, she becomes beautiful to him. This shows a modern idea of love. Love is based on understanding and freedom, not only looks.

Their love is equal. Both speak openly. Both respect each other's wishes. This kind of love is shown as ideal in the play.

Marriage as a Contract, Not a Romance: Marriage in the play is not shown as a romantic dream. It is shown as a careful agreement. The best example is the proviso scene between Mirabell and Millamant. Before marriage, Millamant places many conditions. She wants freedom in dress, friends, and daily life. She does not want to be called sweet names like “joy” or “jewel.” She finds it disgusting. She wants politeness and distance even after marriage. She says:

“Let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while...”

Mirabell accepts her conditions calmly. He even asks if she has more demands. This shows that marriage should protect happiness, not destroy it. Congreve supports this modern view of marriage.

In contrast, Lady Wishfort represents old-fashioned marriage. She wants to marry Sir Rowland only to look young and desirable. As she tells her maid Foible:

“Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes.”

She covers her face with makeup and worries about her looks. Her behavior is foolish and comic. Through her, Congreve criticizes marriages based only on appearance and pride.

Money as the Center of Conflict: Money is very important in the play. Almost every action is connected to money. Millamant's fortune creates the main problem. Lady Wishfort controls it. She will not give it unless Millamant marries someone she approves. Mirabell truly loves Millamant, but he also needs her money. Even Millamant will not marry without her fortune. This shows how practical people are.

On the darker side, Fainall and Mrs. Marwood represent greed without love. Fainall marries Mrs. Fainall only for money. He spends it on his mistress. Later, he tries to blackmail Lady Wishfort. When his plot fails, he says,

“‘Tis the way of the world.”

This line shows his belief that greed rules society.

False Marriage and Broken Love: Mrs. Fainall's marriage is unhappy and cruel. She has no love or safety. At the end, she finally stands against her husband.

Mrs. Marwood also shows selfish love. She says it is better to be loved and left than never loved. Her love is possessive and harmful. Through her, Congreve shows how love without honesty becomes destructive.

To wrap up, Congreve presents love, marriage, and money as closely connected. True love exists, but it must survive in a world ruled by wealth and reputation. Marriage is shown as an agreement based on equality and freedom, not blind romance. Money controls actions, creates

conflict, and exposes human greed.

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