

The Way of the World Summary

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The Story Begins with a Complicated Past: Before the play starts, many events have already happened. Mrs. Arabella Fainall was once married to a man named Languish. After his death, he left her all his wealth. Later, Arabella started a secret love affair with a young man named Mirabell. But Mirabell ended the affair because he was afraid that if Arabella got pregnant, it would destroy her honour. So, he advised her to marry Mr. Fainall. Arabella followed his advice and married Fainall. Even after the affair ended, she and Mirabell remained close friends.

Now, Mirabell is in love with Millamant, Arabella's cousin. Millamant lives with her wealthy aunt, Lady Wishfort, who is also Arabella's mother. Lady Wishfort controls Millamant's dowry of £6,000. But Millamant will only get this full amount if she marries with her aunt's approval. So, Mirabell tries to win Lady Wishfort's favour. He praises her and acts like he loves her. But the old lady becomes serious and falls in love with him.

This background provides a clear picture of the Restoration society, where secret affairs, gossip, and social planning were prevalent. People used love and marriage to gain power and wealth.

Mirabell's First Plan Fails: Lady Wishfort's close friend is a woman named Mrs. Marwood. She secretly loves Mr. Fainall, Arabella's husband. When Marwood finds out that Mirabell is using Lady Wishfort to get permission to marry Millamant, she becomes angry and jealous. So, she reveals Mirabell's trick to Lady Wishfort.

Lady Wishfort is shocked. She now believes that Mirabell only wanted to fool her. Her love quickly turns into hate. She becomes determined not to let him marry Millamant. She also starts planning to marry Millamant to someone else: Mirabell's wealthy uncle, Sir Rowland. But Lady Wishfort does not know that Sir Rowland is not real.

This point reveals that love in Restoration times was not always genuine or pure. People often used lies and flattery to achieve their goals. This is one of the main features of Restoration comedy. The characters often conceal their true feelings to secure wealth or a marriage.

Mirabell Starts His Clever Scheme: Mirabell is not discouraged. He creates a new plan. He asks his servant, Waitwell, to marry Lady Wishfort's maid, Foible. Then, Waitwell dresses up as "Sir Rowland," Mirabell's wealthy uncle. With Foible's help, they trick Lady Wishfort into falling in love with this fake "Sir Rowland."

Mirabell's real plan is to reveal this trick later. He wants to use it as a way to blackmail Lady Wishfort into giving her approval for his marriage to Millamant. He thinks she will agree to anything to hide the shame of falling for a servant in disguise.

This point highlights Mirabell's wit and intelligence. He is not strong or violent, but very clever. He represents the true hero of the Restoration comedy. He is someone who solves problems using his brain, not with force. His tricks may seem dishonest, but they are done for love, not for personal gain.

The World of Wit, Gossip, and Manners: The play presents the aristocratic lifestyle of Restoration London. People like Witwoud and Petulant spend their days gossiping, flirting, and pretending to be fashionable. They gather in drawing rooms and coffeehouses to discuss fashion, love, and rumors. But most of them are foolish and fake.

The women also play social games. They compete for attention and try to protect their honour, even if they do not behave honourably. The entire society cares more about appearance than reality.

Through these characters, Congreve shows the false manners of the upper class. He mocks their shallow behaviour with humour. This is why the play is called a Comedy of Manners, as it satirizes the behavior of high-society people.

Fainall and Marwood Make a Dangerous Plan: While Mirabell is working on his plan, Mrs. Marwood hides in a room and hears a conversation between Foible and Mrs. Fainall. She learns about the fake Sir Rowland and everything else. She quickly tells Mr. Fainall. The two of them then make their own evil plan.

Mr. Fainall wants to take full control of his wife's property and Lady Wishfort's money. He threatens to expose Lady Wishfort's secret love for "Sir Rowland." He also threatens to tell everyone that his wife (Arabella) once had an affair with Mirabell. He says he will only keep quiet if Lady Wishfort agrees to his demands.

This reveals the darker side of marriage during Restoration times. Mr. Fainall is not a loving husband. He wants to ruin his wife and her mother to take their money. His marriage was never based on love, only on control and greed.

The Proviso Scene: True Love and Mutual Respect: Before this danger grows, Mirabell and Millamant have a special conversation. This is called the Proviso Scene. In this scene, they openly discuss their future marriage. Millamant says she wants freedom: to wake up late, write letters, and visit friends without control. Mirabell agrees but says she must remain faithful and kind.

This scene is significant. It shows that Mirabell and Millamant love each other honestly. They are different from other couples in the play. They want respect, balance, and truth in marriage, not just money or approval. When Mirabell says, "I like her with her faults, I like her for her faults," it shows how real love should accept both strengths and weaknesses. This moment also presents a modern view of marriage, something rare in Restoration comedies.

Lady Wishfort: Both Comic and Pathetic: Lady Wishfort is a prominent comic figure. She is an old woman who wants to look young and attractive. She falls for fake compliments and dreams of marriage with "Sir Rowland." Her foolish behaviour makes the audience laugh. But at the same time, we also feel sad for her.

She is pathetic because she is trapped in a society that values only youth and beauty in women. That is why she acts silly so that she can hide her age and feel loved. Congreve shows her as both funny and tragic. She becomes a victim of social pressure. That is why many critics say that Lady Wishfort is more pathetic than comic.

Sir Wilfull and Millamant's Free Choice: Lady Wishfort wants Millamant to marry her country nephew, Sir Wilfull. He is a good-hearted man, but not very smart or stylish. Millamant does not love him, so she politely rejects his proposal.

Surprisingly, Sir Wilfull takes it kindly. He does not force her. He decides to go on a journey across Europe instead.

This part of the play supports the idea of marrying for love, not for family pressure. It shows that Millamant is an independent woman who will not accept a man just for money or tradition. It also indicates that Sir Wilfull is simple but honourable.

The Evil Plan Fails and Justice is Restored: Fainall and Marwood begin their final attack. They expose Mirabell's plan and get Waitwell (Sir Rowland) arrested. Fainall demands full control over all the family's wealth. Lady Wishfort is helpless. She even thinks that if Millamant marries Sir Wilfull, the problem might go away. But Fainall still refuses to back down.

At this point, Mirabell takes control. First, he persuades Lady Wishfort to agree to his marriage to Millamant. Then, he brings in Mincing and Foible, who confirm that Fainall and Marwood had

an affair. However, Lady Wishfort argues that this is insufficient to prevent Fainall from taking legal action.

Finally, Mirabell brings Waitwell, who has a legal paper. It shows that Mrs. Fainall gave her whole property to Mirabell before she married Fainall. This means Fainall cannot touch her money. His plan fails completely.

A Perfect Restoration Comedy: The play ends with justice, love, and marriage. Fainall and Marwood are defeated. Arabella gets her property back. Lady Wishfort is safe. Sir Wilfull cancels the marriage proposal. Now, Mirabell and Millamant can marry freely. *The Way of the World* is a perfect example of Restoration Comedy. It includes:

- A story of love and marriage,
- Sharp and witty dialogue,
- Fake love, real love, and secret affairs,
- Foolish upper-class characters,
- A battle between honesty and greed,
- A happy ending with marriage and moral lessons.

It also gives us a clear view of Restoration society, where people prioritized money and fashion over genuine feelings. But Congreve uses wit and humour not just to entertain, but also to criticize this world.