

## THE WAY OF THE WORLD

### William Congreve:

William Congreve, 1670-1729, was born in Yorkshire, England. As his father was an officer in the army and the commander of a garrison near Cork in Ireland, Congreve was educated at Kilkenny and then at Trinity College, Dublin, where he was a slightly younger college-mate of Jonathan Swift. In 1691, he was admitted to the Middle Temple in London to study law. It is likely that, like Young Witwoud in *The Way of the World*, his interest in law was only a means to take him to London, the center of all excitement.

By 1692, Congreve was already a recognized member of the literary world. His first play, *The Old Bachelor*, was first acted in January 1693, before he was twenty-three years old, and was triumphantly successful. His other plays, *The Double-Dealer*, *Love for Love*, *The Mourning Bride*, and *The Way of the World*, all followed at short intervals. The last of them was presented in March 1700.

For the rest of his life, Congreve wrote no plays. *The Way of the World* was not successful on the stage, and this disappointment may have had something to do with his decision. He engaged in controversy with Jeremy Collier on the morality of the stage, a frustrating experience. He suffered from gout and bad sight. He became an elder statesman of letters at the age of thirty, honored by the nobility, highly respected by younger writers.

In his later years, Congreve conducted an ambiguous romance with Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough. When he died, she erected a tablet to his memory in Westminster Abbey. She also ordered a life-size figure of him and had it seated in his regular place at her table. The feet were swathed in bandages and a doctor "treated" Congreve for gout daily. This rather surprising memento casts its own odd light on the Duchess, perhaps on Congreve, and certainly on the status of the medical profession at the time.

### Introduction to the play:

*The Way of the World* by English playwright William Congreve premiered in London in 1700. Considered one of the best Restoration comedies, it is still performed occasionally today but was controversial in its time due to its bawdy themes and sexual explicitness, which had fallen out of favor in its time. Focused on the adventures of a pair of lovers, Mirabell and Millamant, the story follows their plan to marry and the many steps they must take to obtain the approval of Millamant's bitter aunt, Lady Wishfort. At the same time, supporting characters, including friends, servants, and others, are engaging in their own schemes and affairs. Like many Restoration comedies, the play serves as a satire on the culture of its time. Its themes include criticism of high society and the niceties of courtship, as well as the nature of love and the role of money in marriage. In many ways, *The Way of the World* is about the clash of the old with the new. Despite its sexually explicit themes, it is considered a more nuanced play than many others in the genre.

### The Way of the World Summary

Mirabell, once a womanizer, seeks to marry a girl he loves, Ms. Millamant. Unfortunately, her aunt, Lady Wishfort, holds power over her 6,000 pound inheritance and despises Mirabell because he once pretended to love her. Mirabell and Ms. Millamant devise a plot in which his servant, Waitworth, will marry Lady Wishfort's servant, Foible, and then woo Lady Wishfort in disguise as Mirabell's uncle, Sir Rowland. The scheme proceeds as planned until Ms. Marwood, who unrequitedly desires Mirabell, overhears the plot when Foible fills in Lady Wishfort's daughter, Mrs. Fainall. Ms. Marwood tells the man to whom she is mistress, Mr. Fainall, about the scheme and the fact that Mirabell was also once romantically involved with his wife, Mrs. Fainall. Incensed by this situation, the two plan to foil Mirabell's scheme. Sir Wilfull, a nephew of Lady Wishfort's, comes to town before departing to go abroad, and Lady Wishfort desires for him, though a bumbling man, to marry Ms. Millamant. The situation comes to a head when Lady Wishfort, while visiting with "Sir Rowland," receives a letter from Ms. Marwood revealing Mirabell's scheme. Fainall attempts to use Lady Wishfort and her daughter's precarious social situation as leverage to gain Ms. Millamant's inheritance and all of Lady Wishfort's money through control of his wife's inheritance. However, he is foiled by Ms. Millamant announcing she will marry Sir Wilfull and Mirabell announcing that he has had claim to Mrs. Fainall's inheritance since before her marriage to Fainall. Once Fainall and Ms. Marwood leave, Ms. Millamant rescinds her offer to Sir Wilfull and she and Mirabell receive Lady Wishfort's blessing for marriage, her reputation having been saved by the two lovers.

**Act-wise summary:**

A five-act play, act one begins as as Mirabell and his friend, Fainall, have just finished playing cards. A footman arrives and tells Mirabell that his servant, Waitwell, and Lady Wishfort's maid, Foible, have just been married. Mirabell tells Fainall how much he loves Millamant, and Fainall encourages him to marry her. However, Mirabell learns that if Lady Wishfort marries, he'll lose a large chunk of Millamant's inheritance. The only way to get this money is if he manages to convince Lady Wishfort to consent to their union.

Act two begins in St. James' Park, as Fainall's wife, known only as Mrs. Fainall, and her friend Mrs. Marwood are talking about their hatred of men. Fainall arrives and accuses Mrs. Marwood (with whom he is secretly having an affair) of being in love with Mirabell (which is true). Meanwhile, Mrs. Fainall, who is Mirabell's secret lover, tells Mirabell that she hates her husband. She plots with him to trick Lady Wishfort into giving her blessing to the wedding. Millamant soon arrives, angry about an altercation between Mirabell and her aunt the previous night, and tells Mirabell she disapproves of his plan. As she leaves, Waitwell and Foible arrive, and Mirabell conspires with them about his plan to trick Lady Wishfort.

The scene shifts in acts three, four, and five to the home of Lady Wishfort. Wishfort is a lonely woman, and Foible encourages her to marry Sir Rowland, who is supposedly Mirabell's uncle, so Mirabell will lose his inheritance. However, Sir Rowland is actually Waitwell in disguise. The plan is to trick Lady Wishfort into a marriage that is illegal due to bigotry laws. She will become a social disgrace for marrying a servant. Mirabell will then offer to help her out of the marriage in exchange for her consent to his marriage. Mrs. Fainall and Foible discuss this plan; Mrs. Marwood overhears them and decides to tell the plan to Fainall, who plots to steal his wife's money and run away with Mrs. Marwood.

Mirabell and Millamant, both strong-willed and determined, discuss the terms of their marriage and what they expect, showing the depth of their love for each other. Mirabell proposes to Millamant, and with Mrs. Fainall's encouragement, she accepts. Mirabell leaves just as Lady Wishfort arrives. Lady Wishfort tells Millamant she wants her to marry her nephew, Sir Willful Witwoud, who is visiting from the country. Lady Wishfort receives a letter telling her of the Sir Rowland plot. Sir Rowland steals the letter and accuses Mirabell of trying to sabotage the wedding; Lady Wishfort agrees to sign a marriage contract with Sir Rowland that night.

In act five, Lady Wishfort has discovered the plot, and Fainall has had Waitwell arrested. Mrs. Fainall tells Foible that all now know of her affair with Mirabell. Lady Wishfort appears with Mrs. Marwood, who is in her good graces for exposing the plot. Fainall appears and uses the knowledge of Mrs. Fainall's affair and the contract to blackmail Lady Wishfort into transferring her money to him. Lady Wishfort offers Mirabell her consent to the wedding if he can save her fortune and honor. Mirabell calls on Waitwell, who produces a contract in which Mrs. Fainall transfers her property to Mirabell. This cancels out the blackmail attempts, and Mirabell tears up the contract as soon as it's done. Having neutralized Fainall's blackmail attempt, Mirabell receives the blessing of Lady Wishfort and is free to marry Millamant with the full inheritance.

### **Character Sketch:**

**Mirabell:** In a complicated play with multiple subplots and schemes, most of the action surrounds Mirabell and his quest to win Millamant's hand in marriage. For this reason, he might be viewed as the play's protagonist. Young, handsome, and charming, Mirabell draws the affection of nearly every woman in the play: Mrs. Marwood, Mrs. Fainall, Millamant, and Lady Wishfort. His womanizing ways create complications when he wants to settle down with Millamant, particularly because his flirtation offends Millamant's aunt, Lady Wishfort. He must concoct an elaborate plan to trick Lady Wishfort into agreeing to his engagement. He is a fashionable, intellectual, and clever man-about-town, popular with the ladies. He was Mrs. Fainall's lover before her marriage to Fainall and has broken his fair share of hearts (usually unintentionally) by not returning the sentiments of every woman who fancies him. Now in love with Millamant, he's ready to develop a mature and monogamous relationship. Though he wants to get married, he finds himself on the bad side of quite a number of other characters who concoct plans of their own to ruin his chances at doing so, particularly Lady Wishfort and the adulterous couple Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. However, he does have a number of loyal followers ready to assist him in his plan to win Millamant, save her dowry, and defeat Fainall. Members of his team include his servant Waitwell, his servant's wife, Foible, and his former lover and still good friend, Mrs. Arabella Fainall. He is quite generous toward these allies and helps each out of tough scrapes, often by using a combination of capital and cunning.

**Lady Wishfort:** A vain woman, fifty-five years old, who still has pretensions to beauty. She is the mother of Mrs. Fainall and the guardian of Millamant. She is herself in love with Mirabell, although

she is now spiteful because he offended her vanity. Lady Wishfort is in some ways a grotesque representation of traditional society. She values her reputation above all else and believes her beauty to be her only offering to a man. Although she claims to hate men, she's actually desperate for romance, which explains her vengeful attitude toward Mirabell for leading her on and her desperate attempts to woo Sir Rowland. Lady Wishfort doesn't know whom to trust, lashing out at those who love her and believing the lies of those who deceive her. At the end of the play, she commits one of the play's only acts of true love in her willingness to hand over her fortune to protect her daughter's reputation. A wealthy, old widow, mother to Arabella Fainall, and aunt to Millamant, Witwoud, and Sir Wilfull, Lady Wishfort is a vain and silly woman who tries to act younger than she actually is. As a result, she comes off as quite foolish and annoying. Lady Wishfort is eager to remarry and quickly falls in love with Sir Rowland. She wears a lot of makeup to hide her wrinkles, which calls attention to her age. Though throughout much of the play, she claims to hate Mirabell and seeks revenge against him for pretending to flirt with her, her hatred is really fueled by her unrequited love. She is the leader of "cabal-night," a club that consists of mostly women who gather at her house to gossip about how much they hate men, particularly Mirabell. Easily fooled, she trusts the opinion of her best friend Marwood, who is betraying her. Foible, her lady-in-waiting, is actually working for Mirabell. As matriarch, she is in charge of arranging her niece's marriage and protecting her dowry until she gets married. This role, of course, is threatened by Fainall, who she later claims is not the man she wanted her daughter to remarry.

**Millamant:** Millamant represents the more modern woman of the Restoration Period. She's witty, beautiful, and independent. Millamant enjoys the attention of her various suitors and won't give up her independence to marry anyone. Before she agrees to Mirabell's proposal, she creates a long list of terms he must agree to. At the end of the play, Millamant does end up engaged to Mirabell, but she also accepts Sir Wilfull's proposal in an attempt to secure her inheritance. This act suggests that money is more important to Millamant than love is. Spoiled, beautiful, and rich Millamant could have any man she wants and knows it too. She is very fashionable and popular in London. Though she can seem cruel and uncaring towards Mirabell, she does love him but is very guarded with her emotions. She is very independent and loves poetry. Before she gets engaged, she enjoys keeping Mirabell on his toes and tries to make him jealous by spending time with the fools, Witwoud and Petulant, even though she isn't romantically interested in them. She mainly supports her aunt Wishfort in all things and doesn't initially offer much resistance to her aunt's proposition to marry her off to first Sir Rowland and then her cousin, Sir Wilfull, in order to thwart Mirabell. When she does agree to marry Mirabell, she sets multiple conditions to assert her continued independence within the marriage, which Mirabell, after setting some conditions of his own, readily accepts.

**Fainall:** Fainall is a classic villain. As the play progresses, his character goes from bad, to worse, to monstrous in his unyielding pursuit of money and power. He starts out having an affair with Mrs. Marwood (bad). He then tries to blackmail his mother-in-law out of her fortune (worse). When that fails, he tries to beat his wife (monstrous). The antagonist of the play, Fainall is a sneaky, insecure, and traitorous fellow with a not so good reputation around town—basically, he has all the negative qualities that Mirabell does not. He is the second husband of Lady Wishfort's daughter, Mrs. Arabella Fainall. A kept man, he hates his rich wife and is having an affair with his wife's friend, Mrs. Marwood. Together, he and Marwood have developed a plan to cheat Millamant out of her dowry, Arabella out of her property, and Lady Wishfort out of her entire fortune. As the play goes on, it becomes clear that Fainall's hot-tempered personality is not compatible with effective scheming.

Susceptible to intense jealousy, Fainall believes (correctly) that Marwood loves Mirabell and is unable to hide his anger. Once, he even lashes out at his lover, who almost reveals their affair to all their friends. However, he curbs his temper and expends more energy into ruining Mirabell. Fainall hides his dislike of his wife but many people around him suspect that their marriage is a sham and that he is having an affair with Marwood. Mirabell is one such doubter. By the end of the play, when it is clear that Mirabell has triumphed, Fainall unleashes all his rage on his wife, threatening her with physical harm.

**Mrs. Fainall:** Mrs. Fainall experiences deep character growth as the play progresses. She eventually dismisses the traditional views of her wifely role and embraces the new independence of the Restoration Period. At the start of the play, Mrs. Fainall toils in a loveless marriage, secretly pining for her old lover, Mirabell. As Fainall's terrible treatment intensifies, Mrs. Fainall realizes she must make more of her own happiness rather than wait for a man to offer it. She ends the play by reclaiming her name, Arabella, and telling her husband that she despises him. Known as Mrs. Fainall through much of the play, Arabella Fainall is Lady Wishfort's daughter and Millamant, Witwoud, and Sir Wilfull's cousin. She was once married to a rich man named Languish who died and left her his fortune. While a widow, she began an affair with Mirabell. They ended the affair before she got married to Fainall and remained close friends. Mirabell trusts and admires the steady and clear-thinking Mrs. Fainall immensely and tells her every detail of his plan. Mrs. Fainall esteems Mirabell in the same way and still seems to have feelings for him. However, she never reveals that she still loves Mirabell and doesn't ruin his plan, though she does encourage Sir Wilfull to propose to her cousin, Millamant, and is noticeably less patient with Millamant as the play develops. Mrs. Fainall hates her husband immensely but doesn't learn about his affair until Foible reveals it to her. She distrusts Marwood and suspects that she's in love with Mirabell, too

**Mrs. Marwood:** Mrs. Marwood is Fainall's lover. She plots against Mirabell throughout the play as revenge for her unrequited love. Mrs. Marwood has as much wit and beauty as Millamant, but she uses these characteristics to exploit others. She takes what she wants from others until she's finally discovered and expelled at the end of the play. Fainall's lover and Lady Wishfort's best friend, Marwood is cunning and manipulative. Likely in love with Mirabell, who doesn't love her, she is able to convince Fainall that she only loves him, while making him feel incredibly guilty for doubting her. Marwood is an adept liar, particularly around her female friends, Mrs. Fainall and Lady Wishfort. But even despite having a questionable moral compass, Marwood also gives very candid advice to those who would rather follow fashion trends at the expense of following their hearts. In particular, she advises Millamant to stop pretending to be interested in other men and Witwoud to acknowledge his step-brother Wilfull, rather than treat him like a stranger.

**Foible:** She is Lady Wishfort's servant. She was apparently once a beggar and perhaps homeless before Wishfort saved her from the streets and gave her a job. She is a smart and eloquent woman and Mirabell is very pleased with her service, promising to reward her with land and money for her help in his scheme. She has recently gotten married to Mirabell's servant, Waitwell, in a secret ceremony. She is very much in love with her new husband and teases him often. She deeply respects Mrs. Fainall and is the only character who recognizes and is sensitive to the poor woman's suffering and heartbreak in helping Mirabell marry Millamant.

**Waitwell:** He is Mirabell's hardworking servant who Mirabell allows to marry Foible. Newly married, he is eager to sleep with his wife throughout the play. In fact, it is one of his many motivators to comply with Mirabell's plan. Though not as cunning as his wife, he does put forth a good effort at trying to deceive Wishfort into thinking that he truly is a gentleman named Sir Rowland.

### Other Characters:

**Young Witwoud:** A fop. He came to London from the country to study law but apparently found the life of the fashionable man-about-town more pleasant. He has pretensions to being a wit. He courts Millamant, but not seriously; she is merely the fashionable belle of the moment.

**Petulant:** A young fop, a friend of Witwoud's. His name is indicative of his character.

**Sir Wilfull Witwoud:** The elder brother of Young Witwoud, he is forty years old and is planning the grand tour of Europe that was usually made by young men to complete their education. He is Lady Wishfort's nephew, a distant, non-blood relative of Millamant's, and Lady Wishfort's choice as a suitor for Millamant's hand.

**Mincing:** Millamant's maid.

**Peg:** A maid in Lady Wishfort's house.

### THEMES:

**Social Etiquette and Reputation:** questions and comments upon the manners and social conventions of a greatly sophisticated, artificial society. Comedy of manners are usually set in locations exclusive to upper classes, like fashionable homes and private clubs. They include stock characters, especially the fop (a foolish man overly concerned with fashion), elegant young ladies, and older people attempting to live like or reclaim their youths. These plays are often centered around love and adultery and include gossip, eavesdropping, and scheming. Conversation is often witty and ironic. The Restoration writers weren't interested in silly things like nature (ew, dirt), or grand philosophical questions (ugh, boring). They were interested in all the drama that went on in the society in which they lived. The writers of this period were obsessed with social life: who people fall in love with, who they want to marry, who they sleep with, who they betray, and how much money they have or don't have. It's a literature that focuses on the intrigue that takes place in drawing rooms, in salons, and in bedrooms, flamboyance and superficialities. A major element of the play is the importance of **fashion and makeup**. The scene in Act II in which Lady Wishfort puts on makeup with the help of her servants calls this especially into focus, as she discusses the need and difficulty of altering one's appearance to look as good as a painted picture of oneself. **Dance** (and song) are employed in scenes at Lady Wishfort's house as a way to demonstrate her lavish wealth, and the use of dance can also immerse the modern audience further in the world of Restoration England with its strict social rules of propriety, compared to today's loose and gender-mixed dancing. Restoration Comedies also employ rich, imagery-laden and metaphorical language to create characters with wit and insight.

**Women:** Refer to the character sketches to get an idea of women in this comedy.

**Marriage, Adultery, and Inheritance:** It is of course main theme in *The Way of the World*, and it seems that characters have much more of a problem with the potential for a tainted reputation than with any moral or emotional imperative not to cheat on their spouse. This starts in the first place with the problem that, though the primary marriage being arranged in the play seems to be based on love, many of the marriages set in place before the play, like Mrs. Fainall's marriage to Fainall, were done more tactically as ways to ensure money and reputation. A major conflict in the play too is who will have claim to Ms. Millamant's inheritance, with Fainall attempting to leverage his wife's apparent adultery to get claim to her, and Ms. Millamant's, inheritance.

**Friendship:** Same-gender and opposite gender friendships are called into question in this play, as it is said and demonstrated that none of these relationships is particularly strong or trusting. The women-women and men-men pairings, though originally posing as friends, join schemes against one another based mostly on money and reputation. As for women-men pairings, we do not see many in the play that are not based on either mutual love or the love of one and disdain of the other. Certainly, friendship is as falsely fashionable and tactical as anything else in the play.

**Money:** Money and love are tied closely in *The Way of the World*, and perhaps as much as reputation, Lady Wishfort's fate after the play rests on her being able to dole out inheritances appropriately. However, as members of the upper class, much regarding money is dealt with quite flippantly, like having dance performers over at the house or, early in the play, ordering chocolate and drinks. It is important to note that Ms. Millamant's half-inheritance of 6,000 pounds would amount today to many, many thousands of dollars, making the point of multiple characters lusting after it more clear.

**Social Class:** The presence of two main classes in the play - upper class and servants - calls attention to social class as a theme in the play, though one that is not written with the satirical eye Congreve gives to upper class behavior alone. As Congreve writes it, Foible and Waitwell, servants to Lady Wishfort and Mirabell, seem delighted to be married against their will and participate in a romantic scheme at the beck and call of Mirabell. This is perhaps not true to life, though it gives them both the ability to exert secretive power over members of the upper class. Within the upper class, it is also demonstrated through jokes about one another that being well-educated and well-mannered is of utmost importance, and there can be social division atop economic based on these elements of etiquette and status.

**Jealousy, Deceit, and Intrigue:** In Congreve's play, jealousy, deceit, and intrigue are important and interrelated plot devices that drive the action of the play by creating conflict between characters. In many ways, the play can be thought of as a competition between Mirabell and Fainall to deceive the

other by means of opposing schemes to gain control of Lady Wishfort and her fortune. Each man is assisted in his plan to outdo the other.

**Love and Romance:** Central to *The Way of the World* is the romantic relationship between Millamant and Mirabell. To modern readers their relationship may seem confusing, even strange, but their witty exchanges and seeming absence of physical affection characterize the ideal relationship felt during the Restoration Period. Ideal relationships in the Restoration Period, such as Mirabell and Millamant's, were characterized by equality and independence—although society still judged women's purity more harshly than men's, as seen in the unbalanced treatment of Mrs. Fainall and Mirabell's affair, as Mrs. Fainall needed to be protected against "scandal" while Mirabell was essentially free to do as he pleased. Mirabell matches Millamant's wit and humor in ways her other suitors, Petulant, Witwoud, and Sir Wilfull, do not. Their pithy exchanges highlight society's desire for wit, particularly when contrasted with the banal crudeness of her other suitors, who are at various times described as drunk, vain, ignorant, and salacious. Millamant, as the archetypal heroine—she's beautiful, strong, clever, and independent—has no time for bumbling suitors like Sir Wilfull and stands in strong contrast to Lady Wishfort, who comically falls all over herself to impress Sir Rowland. Unlike Mrs. Fainall, who, until pressed at the very last moment, submits to the demands of a cruel husband, Millamant does not let Mirabell control anything. She lists all her demands before accepting Mirabell's proposal, including that she may wear what she pleases, socialize and communicate with whomever she chooses, never be forced to entertain his dull relations, eat when and what she pleases, and be allowed privacy in her room. These relationship demands would have been very fashionable (and controversial) during the Restoration Period as society fought against the conservative, traditional gender expectations that had so long existed.

**Money and Greed:** As the play purports, greed is "the way of the world." One cannot live without money, but the pursuit of it often corrupts relationships. None of the play's characters live without some level of greed. Each makes decisions to protect, earn, or steal fortunes. The central conflict of the play revolves around Millamant's sizeable inheritance and how it can be protected through marriage. As a stipulation of her guardianship, Lady Wishfort refuses to pass on Millamant's inheritance unless she marries a man of her approval. When Mirabell falls out of Lady Wishfort's good graces, he must concoct a complicated plan to both earn Millamant's hand and protect her inheritance. Even Millamant, who clearly loves Mirabell, likely wouldn't marry him without her money—she even goes so far as to engage herself to Sir Wilfull, a man who disgusts her, in an attempt to preserve her fortune.

Fainall and Mrs. Marwood's greed casts them as the play's villains because they seek to steal what is not theirs. Fainall marries Lady Wishfort's daughter for her money, which he spends on his mistress, Mrs. Marwood. He concocts plots to blackmail Lady Wishfort out of her own fortune and Millamant's inheritance, threatening to divorce his kindhearted wife should Lady Wishfort not comply with his demands. When his plans are discovered, Fainall remarks that "'tis the way of the world," suggesting that greed makes the world go round. Dedication to money with no love present would seem highly distasteful and unacceptable in the realm of the play; dedication to love without money would be difficult and impractical given their lives.



## SYMBOLS

**Makeup** : Makeup is important to the play as the physical representation of beauty and youth. Lady Wishfort is the main character who interacts with makeup, and she notes its importance in the time leading up to the appearance of her supposed suitor, Sir Rowland, who has seen her in another physical representation of youth and beauty, a small painted picture of her. She feels the need to live up to this painted standard by painting herself.

**Ms. Marwood's Letter** : Ms. Marwood's letter is unseen until late in Act IV, but lingers as a symbolic element of the coming climax since the time she promises to write it after overhearing the scheme early in the play. When it does arrive in Lady Wishfort's hands, it physicalizes the gossip and backstabbing that floats throughout and drives the plot of the play.

**Alcohol** : Alcohol is sometimes seen onstage, as in Lady Wishfort's dressing room, and sometimes implied to have been imbibed offstage. However, the effect of too much alcohol seems to be to lower people's level of propriety which is so important to social status in Restoration England. Thus, alcohol as a symbol represents the desire or ability to escape some of this rigid propriety, but can also be wielded in the schemes of others for this very reason.

**Waitwell's "Sir Rowland" Outfit** : Though there are not specific notations on the requirements of Waitwell's disguise as Sir Rowland, it can be assumed that his costume is the exact embodiment of an upper class fashion. Since Mirabell outfits him, it can be assumed that it will follow Mirabell's style to some extent, but as he is supposed to be Mirabell's uncle it will also have to be appropriate for an older age group. This physicalization of the costume element of fashion, as all fashion is just real-world costuming, calls attention to the silly and theatrical nature of society and physical societal signs of status.

**Lady Wishfort's House** : The fact that so much of the action is taken in one physical location demonstrates the closed off and near-incestual nature of upper class Restoration society. Because the action is so contained, gossip spreads quickly and fights can occur suddenly. Secret romance, too, is harder to hide in confined quarters, leading to situations like Ms. Marwood's spying from the closet, something that couldn't have happened unless the plot was largely confined to a single house.

**Masks**: Masks symbolize dishonesty in *The Way of the World*. Masks were worn as fashion during the 17th century and are a frequently used prop in Restoration Period plays, particularly in scenes of dishonesty or infidelity. In *The Way of the World*, characters wear masks in a foolish attempt to hide their true identities or feelings. Masks were falling out of fashion, however, as referenced by Mirabell's demand that Millamant never wear masks in their marriage—"that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall"—and Millamant's disgust at the idea that she would wear a mask, which she calls "detestable imprimis," at all. Perhaps because masks are no longer in fashion in the play, they are no longer functional: Marwood wears a mask at the end of Act II as she attempts to "cover" her affair with Fainall and the tears that result from their bickering. The mask fails to hide either, however, as Foible easily recognizes Marwood and her emotion. Similarly, Petulant wears a

mask in a vain attempt to hide his identity as he flits around town, trying to make himself look more popular. Again, his friends easily recognize his true identity and mercilessly mock him behind his back. Mask-wearing characters attempt to use masks to hide their identities, but their failure to do so assures audiences that good will prevail in this farce.

**Character Names:** Congreve's character names symbolize their true nature. Some of the characters names literally define their personalities: Petulant, for example, means "trifling" or "superficial," which precisely characterizes the silly fop. Witwoud means "would have wit," which again perfectly characterizes Witwoud's desire to be seen as a "wit" like Mirabell. The word foible means "the weaker part of a sword blade, between the middle and the point," which helps define the character Foible's relationship with Lady Wishfort. Although she doesn't have the status or power her ladyship has, Foible's intelligence makes her powerful. Millamant reflects her countless admirers: in French, mille means "thousand" and amant means "lover." Mirabell's name, on the other hand, hints at his both his own attractiveness and his love of Millamant's beauty: mira means "look" and bella means "beautiful" in Spanish. Again, the word "fain" meant to strongly desire or "fix one's heart upon." With this definition, Fainall translates to "desires everything," which hints at the character's greedy nature. Marwood breaks down into "mar," which means destroy, and "wood," or in this case, "would," suggesting her sneaky character would destroy you if given the chance. Wishfort's name reflects her exaggerated desperation for romance, suggesting she can only "wish-for-it."

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