

The Way of the World (Comedy) B.A. Part II (Hons) (Paper - IIIrd) (Plot)

The Way of the World Summary. Mirabell once a womanizer, seeks to marry a girl he loves, Ms Millamant. He devises a plot in which his servants, Waitwell, will marry Lady Wishfort's servants, Fobite and then use 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 Fobite fills in Lady Marwood tells the man whom she is mistress, Mr. Fainall, about the scheme and the fact that Mirabell was also romantically involved with his wife, Mrs. Fainall. Sir Wilful, 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 now comes to a head when Lady Wishfort, while visiting with Sir Rowland, receives a letter from Ms. Marwood revealing Mirabell's schemes. 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 Wilful and Mirabell announcing that he has had claims to Mrs. Fainall's inheritance since before her marriage to Fainall's inheritance. Once Fainall and Mrs. Marwood leave, Ms. Millamant rescinds her

her offer to Sir Wilfull and she and Mirabell receive Lady Wishfort's blessing for marriage, her reputation now having been saved by the two lovers.

The question of a woman's role in society is brought to the foreground in some progressive in the way of the world. The freedoms a woman can have in and out of marriage are also shown and discussed in the play, from the famous "proviso scene" to Lady Wishfort's ability to overlook Waitwell's disguise for the chance to marry a man at an older age.

Marriage and adultery are of course main themes 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 Mrs. Millamant's inheritance, with Fainall attempting to leverage his wife's apparent adultery to

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get claim to her, and Mrs. Millamant's inheritance

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 satirical eye. Congreve gives to upper class behaviour alone. As Congreve writes it, ~~Bob~~ Poible and Waitwell, servants to lady Wishfort and Milabell, seem delighted to be married against their will and participated in a romantic scheme at the beck and call of Milabell. This is perhaps not true to life, though it gives them both the ability to exert secret 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 ~~then~~ elements of Etiquette and Status.

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