

A dried leaf on a stem, positioned vertically on the left side of the slide. The leaf is dark brown and elongated, with a pointed tip. The stem is thin and dark, extending from the bottom left towards the top left. The background is a light, textured surface, possibly aged paper or parchment, with some faint, irregular brown spots.

William Congreve's  
*The Way of the World*

ENGLISH LITERATURE ( I ) WEEK 14




# Restoration Theater

- 1642-60: Puritan Closing of the Theaters
- Audience: Courtiers and Hangers-on.
- Actors: Small Professional Companies/  
Relatively few Roles



# Neoclassic Tragedy


- Heroic Figure
- Theme of Love and Honor
- Unities of Time, Place, and Action
- Blank Verse (Lines of Unrhymed Iambic Pentameter)
- Locales in Greece/Rome
- Plausibility

- 
- Dryden's *All for Love*: “the unities of time, place, and action are more exactly observed than perhaps the English theatre required.”



# Restoration Comedy

- Comedy of Manners: “It deals with the relations and intrigues of men and women living in a sophisticated upper-class society, and relies for comic effect in large part on the wit and sparkle of the dialogue[...]as well as on the violations of social standards and decorum by

- 
- would-be wits, jealous husbands, conniving rivals, and foppish dandies (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*)
  - William Congreve, William Wycherley (*The Country Wife*), George Etherege, George Farquhar



# William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700)

- Restoration Comedy
- Comedy of Manners
- Wit & False Wit
- Morality
- Scene Shift  
(Whenever a character enters or exits,  
scene changes.)




# Summary


(from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*)

- Mirabell (a reformed rake) is sincerely in love with and wishes to marry Millamant, who, though a coquette and a highly sophisticated wit, is a virtuous woman. Mirabell some time before has married off his former mistress, the daughter of Lady Wishfort, to his friend Fainall. (NEXT)






Fainall has grown tired of his wife and has been squandering her money on his mistress, Mrs. Marwood. In order to gain access to Millamant, Mirabell has pretended to pay court to the elderly and amorous Lady Wishfort, who is the guardian of Millamant and as such controls half her fortune. (NEXT)



But his game has been spoiled by Mrs. Marwood, who nourishes a secret love for Mirabell and, to separate him from Millamant, has made Lady Wishfort aware of Mirabell's duplicity. Lady Wishfort now loathes Mirabell for making a fool of her—an awkward situation, because if Millamant should marry without her guardian's consent she would lose half her fortune, and Mirabell cannot afford to marry any but a rich wife. (NEXT)



It is at this point that the action begins. Mirabell perfects a plot to get such power over Lady Wishfort as to force her to agree to the marriage, while Millamant continues to doubt whether she wishes to marry at all.



# Characters' Stereotyped Names

- Fainall: feign all
- Mirabell: Mira (to look), bell (beautiful)
- Witwoud: wit, woud (would? wood?)
- Waitwell: wait, well
- Mrs. Marwood: Mar (to damage)
- Millamant: Mil (thousand), amant (lover)
- Foible
- Mincing
- Petulant



# Act 1 Outline

- Mirabell and Fainall: the former's plot with Lady Wishfort discovered.
- Millamant's financial status
- Witwoud's half-brother, Sir Wilfull is coming to town.
- Mirabell's use of Waitwell and Foible




## Act 1—A Chocolate House

\* Social framework

FAILALL Prithee, why so reserved? Something has put you out of humor.

MIRABELL Not at all. I happen to be grave today, and you are gay; that's all.


FAINALL Confess, Millamant and you quarreled last night after I left you; my fair cousin has some humors that would tempt the patience of a stoic. What, some coxcomb came in, and was well received by her, while you were by?



MIRABELL Witwoud and Petulant; and what was worse, her aunt, your wife's mother, my evil genius; or to sum up all in her own name, my old Lady Wishfort came in.


FAINALL O, there it is then—she has a lasting passion for you, and with reason.






FAINALL Now I remember, I wonder not they were weary of you: last night was one of their **cabal** nights; they have 'em three times a week, and meet by turns, at one another's apartments, where they come together like the coroner's inquest, to sit upon the murdered reputations of the week [...].






MIRABELL And who may have been the foundress of this sect? My Lady Wishfort, I warrant, who publishes her detestation of mankind, and full of the vigor of fifty-five, declares for a friend and ratafia; and let posterity shift for itself, she'll breed no more.

>>NEXT




FAINALL The discovery of your sham addresses to her, to conceal your love to her niece, has provoked this separation. Had you dissembled better, things might have continued in the state of nature.

>>NEXT



MIRABELL I did as much as man could, with any reasonable conscience: I proceeded to the very last act of flattery with her, and was guilty of a song in her commendation. Nay, I got a friend to put her into a lampoon and compliment her with the imputation of an affair with a young fellow, which I carried so far that I told her the malicious town took notice that she was grown fat of a sudden; and when she lay in of a dropsy, persuaded her she was reported to be in labor.  
(NEXT)




The devil's in it, if an old woman is to be flattered further, unless a man should endeavor downright personally to debauch her; and that my virtue forbade me. But for the discovery of this amour, I am indebted to your friend, or your wife's friend, Mrs. Marwood.



## Repartee between the Two Men

**FAINALL** You are a gallant man, Mirabell; and though you may have cruelty enough not to satisfy a lady's longing, you have too much generosity not to be tender of her honor. Yet you speak with an indifference which seems to be affected, and confesses you are conscious of a negligence.

>>NEXT<sub>21</sub>



MIRABELL You pursue the argument with a distrust that seems to be unaffected, and confesses you are conscious of a concern for which the lady is more indebted to you than is your wife.




# Mirabell's Plot

MIRABELL Well, is the grand affair over? You have been something tedious.

FOOTMAN Sir, there's such coupling at Pancras that they stand behind one another, as 'twere in a country dance. Ours was the last couple to lead up; and no hopes appearing of dispatch, besides the parson growing hoarse, we were afraid his lungs would have failed before it came to our turn; so we drove around to Duke's Place, and there they were riveted in at trice.





**MIRABELL** So, so, you are sure they are married?

**FOOTMAN** Married and bedded, sir. I am witness.






## Social Criticism

FAINALL He [Squire Witwoud's brother, Sir Wilfull] comes to town in order to equip himself for travel.

MIRABELL For travel! Why the man that I mean is above forty.

FAINALL No matter for that; 'tis for the honor of England that all Europe should know that we have blockheads of all ages.

>>NEXT



MIRABELL I wonder there is not an Act of Parliament to save the credit of the nation, and prohibit the exportation of fools.

FAINALL By no means, 'tis better is 'tis; 'tis better to trade with a little loss than to be quite eaten up with being overstocked.

>>NEXT



# Witticism

MIRABELL Pray, are the follies of this knight-errant, and those of the squire his brother, anything related?

FAINALL Not at all. Witwoud grows by the knight, like a medlar grafted on a crab. One will melt in your mouth, and t'other set your teeth on edge; one is all pulp, and the other all core.

MIRABELL So one will be rotten before he be ripe, and the other will be rotten without ever being ripe at all.



# False Wit

WITWOUND That's hard, that's very hard. A messenger, a mule, a beast of burden, he has brought me a letter from the fool my brother, as heavy as a panegyric in a funeral sermon, or a copy of commendatory verses from one poet to another. And what's worse, 'tis as sure a forerunner of the author as an epistle dedicatory.

>>NEXT




MIRABELL A fool, and your brother, Witwoud!

WITWOUD Aye, aye, my half brother. My half brother he is, no nearer upon honor.

MIRABELL Then 'tis possible he may be but half a fool.

WITWOUD Good, good, Mirabell, *le drôle!*  
Good, good. Hang him, don't let's talk of him.



PETULANT Explain? I know nothing.—Why, you have an uncle, have you not, lately come to town, and lodges by my Lady Wishfort's

MIRABELL True.

PETULANT Why, that's enough.—You and he are not friends; and if he should marry and have a child, you may be disinherited, ha?



## Act 2 Outline

- Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood's mutual deceptions and probings
- Fainall and Mrs. Marwood's quarrel
- Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall's talk about their past and the former's new plot
- Mirabell, Witwoud the false wit, and Millamant the hard-to-get





## Act 2—St. James's Park

\* undercurrents

MRS. MARWOOD Certainly. To be free, I have no taste of those insipid dry discourses with which our sex of force must entertain themselves apart from men. We may affect endearments to each other, profess eternal friendships, and seem to dote like lovers; but 'tis not in our nature long to persevere. Love will resume his empire in our breasts, and every heart, or soon or late, receive and readmit him as its lawful tyrant.





# Battle of the Sex

MRS. FAINALL Bless me, how have I been deceived! Why, you profess a libertine.

MRS. MARWOOD You see my friendship by my freedom. Come, be as sincere, acknowledge that your sentiments agree with mine.

MRS. FAINALL Never.

MRS. MARWOOD You hate mankind?

MRS. FAINALL Heartily, inveterately.

>>NEXT



MRS. MARWOOD Your husband?

MRS. FAINALL Most transcendently; aye, though I say it, meritoriously.

MRS. MARWOOD Give me your hand upon it.

MRS. FAINALL There.

MRS. MARWOOD I join with you. What I have said has been to try you.




## Lovers' Quarrel

MRS. MARWOOD And wherewithal can you reproach me?

FAINALL With infidelity, with loving another, with love of Mirabell.

MRS. MARWOOD 'Tis false. I challenge you to show an instance that can confirm your groundless accusation. I hate him.

>>NEXT



FAINALL And wherefore do you hate him? He is insensible, and your resentment follows his neglect. An instance! The injuries you have done him are a proof: your interposing in his love. What cause had you to make discoveries of his pretended passion? To undeceive the credulous aunt, and be the officious obstacle of his match with Millamant?




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FAINALL Why, what will you do?


MRS. MARWOOD Disclose it to your wife; own what has passed between us.

FAINALL Frenzy!

MRS. MARWOOD By all my wrongs I'll do't—  
I'll publish to the world the injuries you have done me, both in my fame and fortune: with both I trusted you, you bankrupt in honor, as indigent of wealth.


>>NEXT<sup>39</sup>





FAINALL Your fame I have preserved. Your fortune has been bestowed as the prodigality of your love would have it, in pleasures which we both have shared. Yet, had not you been false, I had e'er this repaid it.—'Tis true—had you permitted Mirabell with Millamant to have stolen their marriage, my lady had been incensed beyond all means of reconcilment: (NEXT)





Millamant had forfeited the moiety of her fortune, which then would have descended to my wife—and wherefore did I marry, but to make lawful prize of a rich widow's wealth, and squander it on love and you?




## Mirabell the “Reformed Rake”


MRS. FAINALL You have been the cause that I have loved without bounds, and would you set limits to that aversion, of which you have been the occasion? Why did you make me marry this man?

MIRABELL Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions? To save that idol, reputation. If the familiarities of our loves had produced that consequence, of which you were apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father’s name with credit, but on a husband?

(NEXT)




I knew Fainall to be a man lavish of his morals, an interested and professing friend, a false and a designing lover; yet one whose wit and outward fair behavior have gained a reputation with the town, enough to make that woman stand excused who has suffered herself to be won by his addresses. A better man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion; a worse had not answered to the purpose. When you are weary of him, you know your remedy.



MIRABELL Waitwell and Foible. I would not tempt my servant to betray me by trusting him too far. If your mother, in hopes to ruin me, should consent to marry my pretended uncle, he might, like Mosca in *The Fox*, stand upon terms; so I made him sure beforehand.

>>NEXT



MRS. FAINALL So, if my poor mother is caught in a contract, you will discover the imposture betimes; and release her by producing a certificate of her gallant's former marriage.

MIRABELL Yes, upon condition that she consent to my marriage with her niece, and surrender the moiety of her fortune in her possession.



# Mirabell and Millamant Meeting

MIRABELL Here she comes, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread and streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders.—Ha, no, I cry her mercy.

MRS. FAINALL I see but one poor empty sculler, and he tows her woman after him.

MIRABELL You seem to be unattended, madam.—You used to have the beau monde throng after you; and a flock of gay fine perukes hovering round you.

>>NEXT<sub>46</sub>



## False Wit

WITWOUND Like moths about a candle—I had like to have lost my comparison for want of breath.


MILLAMANT O, I have denied myself airs today. I have walked as fast through the crowd—

WITWOUND As a favorite just disgraced; and with as few followers.

MILLAMANT Dear Mr. Witwound, truce with your similitudes: For I am as sick of 'em—

>>NEXT<sup>47</sup>






**WITWOUD** As a physician of a good air—I cannot help it, madam, though 'tis against myself.

**MILLAMANT** Yet again! Mincing, stand between me and his wit.

**WITWOUD** Do, Mrs. Mincing, like a screen before a great fire. I confess I do blaze today, I am too bright.



MIRABELL Aye, aye, suffer your cruelty to ruin the object of your power, to destroy your lover.—And then how vain, how lost a thing you'll be! Nay, 'tis true: you are no longer handsome when you've lost your lover; your beauty dies upon the instant: for beauty is the lover's gift [...].


>>NEXT



## Millamant's Wit

MILLAMANT O, the vanity of these men! Fainall, d'ye hear him? If they did not commend us, we were not handsome! Now you must know they could not commend one, if one was not handsome. Beauty the lover's gift?—Lord, what is a lover that it can give? Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases, and then if one pleases one makes more.

>>NEXT  
50



**WITWOUD** Very pretty. Why, you make  
no more of making of lovers, madam, than  
of making so many card-matches.

**MILLAMANT** One no more owes one's  
beauty to a lover than one's wit to an echo.



# Plot Suspected


MIRABELL Stand off, sir, not a penny. Go on and prosper, Foible. The lease shall be made good and the farm stocked if we succeed.

FOIBLE I don't question your generosity, sir. And you need not doubt of success. If you have no more commands, sir, I'll be gone; I'm sure my lady is at her toilet, and can't dress till I come. O dear, I'm sure that [*Looking out.*] was Mrs. Marwood that went by in a mask; if she has seen me with you I'm sure she'll tell my lady



## Waitwell's New Status

- WAITWELL Why, sir, it will be impossible I should remember myself—married, knighted, and attended all in one day! 'Tis enough to make any man forget himself. The difficult will be how to recover my acquaintance and familiarity with my former self; and fall from my transformation to a reformation into

- 
- Waitwell. Nay, I shan't be quite the same Waitwell neither—for now I remember me, I'm married and can't be my own man again.
  - Aye, there's my grief; that's the sad change of life;
  - To lose my title, and yet keep my wife.





## Act 3 Outline

- Lady Wishfort's waiting for Sir Rowland
- Mrs. Marwood's discovery of Foible's treachery
- Millamant's song
- Mrs. Marwood and Fainall's plot to get Lady Wishfort's inheritance



## Act 3—A Room in LADY WISHFORT'S House


\* Some Awareness of the Undercurrents

LADY WISHFORT *at her toilet, PEG waiting.*

LADY WISHFORT Merciful, no news of Foible  
yet?

PEG No, madam.


LADY WISHFORT I have no more patience. If I  
have not fretted myself till I am pale again,  
there's no veracity in me. (NEXT)




Fetch me the red—the red, do you hear,  
sweetheart? An errant ash color, as I'm a  
person. Look you how this wench stirs!  
Why dost thou not fetch me a little red?  
Didst thou not hear me, mopus?

PEG The red ratafia does your ladyship  
mean, or the cherry brandy?

>>NEXT



LADY WISHFORT Ratafia, fool. No, fool.  
Not the ratafia, fool. Grant me patience! I  
mean the Spanish paper, idiot—  
complexion, darling. Paint, paint, paint,  
dost thou understand that, changeling,  
dangling thy hands like bobbins before  
thee? Why dost thou not stir, puppet?  
Thou wooden thing upon wires.



MRS. MARWOOD O madam, you cannot suspect Mrs. Foible's integrity.

LADY WISHFORT O, he carries poison in his tongue that would corrupt integrity itself. If she has given him an opportunity, she has as good as put her integrity into his hands. Ah dear Marwood, what's integrity to an opportunity? Hark! I hear her—dear friend, retire into my closet, that I may examine her with more freedom. (NEXT)



## Collier's "Short View of the Stage"

You'll pardon me, dear friend, I can make bold with you. There are books over the chimney—Quarles and Prynne, and the *Short View of the Stage*, with Bunyan's works to entertain you.



# Lady Wishfort's Waiting

FOIBLE Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly, indeed, madam. There are some cracks discernible in the white varnish.

LADY WISHFORT Let me see the glass.—  
Cracks, say'st thou? Why I am arrantly flayed—I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes, or I shall never keep to my picture.





## Mrs. Marwood's Plot

**MRS. MARWOOD** Methinks Mrs.


Millamant and he [Sir Witwoud, nephew to Lady Wishfort] would make a very fit match. He may travel afterwards. 'Tis a thing very usual with young gentlemen.

**LADY WISHFORT** I promise you I have thought on't—and since 'tis your judgment, I'll think on't again.



# Millamant's Song

- Love's but the frailty of the mind,
- When 'tis not with ambition joined;
- A sickly flame, which if not fed expires;
- And feeding, wastes in self-consuming  
fires
- .....


- 
- Then I alone the conquest prize,
  - When I insult a rival's eyes;
  - If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see
  - That heart which others bleed for, bleed for me.



## Fainall and Mrs. Marwood's Plot

FAINALL The means, the means.


MRS. MARWOOD Discover to my lady your wife's conduct; threaten to part with her.—My lady loves her and will come to any composition to save her reputation. Take the opportunity of breaking it, just upon the discovery of this imposture. My lady will be enraged beyond bounds and sacrifice niece and fortune and all at that conjuncture. And let me alone to keep her warm; if she should flag in her part, I will not fail to prompt her.



FAINALL So, so, why this point's clear. Well, how do we proceed?

MRS MARWOOD I will contrive a letter which shall be delivered to my lady at the time when that rascal who is to act Sir Rowland is with her. It shall come as from an unknown hand—for the less I appear to know of the truth, the better I can play the incendiary. Besides, I would not have Foible provoked if I could help it, because you know she knows some passages—nay, I expect all will come out. But let the mine be sprung first, and then I care not if I am discovered.

>>NEXT  
66



**FAINALL** If the worst come to the worst,  
I'll turn my wife to grass—I have already  
a deed of settlement of the best part of her  
estate, which I wheedled out of her; and  
that you shall partake at least.



## Act 4 Outline

- Millamant brooding Suckling's poems.
- Sir Wilfull not suiting Millamant
- Millamant and Mirabell's contract
- Mrs. Marwood's letter





## Act 4—A Room in LADY WISHFORT'S House

\* Contrast: Millamant, Mirabell/ Lady Wishfort,  
Sir Wilfull

MILLAMANT [Repeating.]

I swear it will not do its part,  
Though thou dost thine, employ'st thy power and art.  
Natural easy Suckling!

SIR WILFULL [WITWOUD] Anan? Suckling?

No such suckling neither, cousin, nor stripling: I  
thank heaven I'm no minor.

>>NEXT<sup>69</sup>



## Sir Wilfull Paying Court to Millamant

MILLAMANT Ah rustic, ruder than Gothic.

SIR WILFULL Well, well, I shall understand your lingo one of these days, cousin. In the meanwhile I must answer in plain English.



# The Marriage Contract


MILLAMANT Positively, Mirabell, I'll lie abed in a morning as early as I please.

MIRABELL Then I'll get up in a morning as early as I please.


MILLAMANT Ah! Idle creature, get up when you will—And d'ye hear, I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names.

MIRABELL Names!


>>NEXT



MILLAMANT Ay, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar—I shall never bear that—Good Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, no kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler and Sir Francis: (NEXT)




nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers; and then never to be seen there together again; as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together, but let us be very strange and well bred: let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well bred as if we were not married at all.



MIRABELL *Item*, I article, that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall; and while it passes current with me, that you endeavor not to new coin it. To which end, together with all vizards for the say, I prohibit all masks for the night [...]. *Item*, I shut my doors against all bards with baskets, and pennyworths of muslin, china [...].

>>NEXT



MIRABELL I denounce against all strait  
lacing, squeezing for a shape, till you mold  
my boy's head like a sugar loaf; and  
instead of a man-child [...].





## Act 5 Outline

- Foible and Mincing revealing
- Fainall's demand
- Mirabell's solution



## Act 5—A Room in LADY WISHFORT'S House

\*Appearance and Reality

LADY WISHFORT O my dear friend, how can I enumerate the benefit that I have received from your goodness? To you I owe the timely discovery of the false vows of Mirabell; to you I owe the detection of the imposter Sir Rowland. And now you are become an intercessor with my son-in-law, to save the honor of my house, and compound for the frailties of my daughter.



## Fainall's Demand

FAINALL O, if you are prescribed marriage, you shall be considered; I will only reserve to myself the power to choose for you. [...]. Next, my wife shall settle on me the remainder of her fortune not made over already; and for her maintenance depend entirely on my discretion. [...]. Lastly, I will be endowed, in right of my wife, with that six thousand pound, which is the moiety of Mrs. Millamant's fortune in your possession; and which she has forfeited [...] by her disobedience [...].




# Mirabell's Revelation

**MIRABELL** Mr. Fainall, it is now time that you should know that your lady, while she was at her own disposal, and before you had by your insinuations wheedled her out of a pretended settlement of the greatest part of her fortune—

**FAINALL** Sir! Pretended!

>>NEXT



MIRABELL Yes, sir. I say that this lady while a widow, having, it seems received some cautions respecting your inconstancy and tyranny of temper, which from her own partial opinion and fondness of you she could never have suspected—she did, I say, by the wholesome advice of friends and of sages learned in the laws of this land, deliver this same as her act and deed to me in trust, and to the uses within mentioned [...].



## Question 1

- After Foible has exposed the love affair between Mrs. Marwood and Fainall, Fainall says, “If it must all come out, why let ’em know it, ’tis but *the way of the world.*” What does Fainall mean by “*the way of the world*”?



## Question 2

- The “proviso” scene between Mirabell and Millamant is famous. In which ways does their proviso react against the way of the world? What are their concepts of marriage?





## Question 3

- Is Congreve's *The Way of the World* moral or immoral?



## Question 4

- What is the function of wit in this play?



## Question 5

- Can you analyze the characters in terms of the discrepancy between appearance and reality?



## Question 6

- Mirabell is a “reformed rake”. What does that mean? Can you find examples in the text?



## Question 7

- Why is Lady Wishfort so repulsive?



## Question 8

- What is the significance of the class inversions in the play ( such as Waitwell becoming a knight)?



## Question 9

- How might the design of the theater affect the staging and acting of this play?