

The Way of the World



Adapted from the play by William Congreve

Lorraine Thompson

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

Copyright © 2006, Lorraine Thompson

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

The Way of the World is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and all of the countries covered by the Universal Copyright Convention and countries with which the United States has bilateral copyright relations including Canada, Mexico, Australia, and all nations of the United Kingdom.

Copying or reproducing all or any part of this book in any manner is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or videotaping without written permission from the publisher.

A royalty is due for every performance of this play whether admission is charged or not. A "performance" is any presentation in which an audience of any size is admitted.

The name of the author must appear on all programs, printing, and advertising for the play. The program must also contain the following notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Big Dog Publishing Company, Sarasota, FL."

All rights including professional, amateur, radio broadcasting, television, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved by Big Dog Publishing Company, www.BigDogPlays.com, to whom all inquiries should be addressed.

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

P.O. Box 1400

TALLEVAST, FL 34270

The Way of the World

3

The Way of the World was first performed in 2002 at Athens Academy in Athens, GA: Lorraine Thompson, director.

BETTY: Kendall Sherwood
FOIBLE: Katie Carson
MRS. FAINALL: Cristen Conger
MRS. MARWOOD: Shae Rehmel
MILLAMANT: Lauren Schacher
MINCING: Jenny Leite
LADY WISHFORT: Elizabeth Dyer
PEG: Liz Rarrick
MIRABELL: Nick White
FAINALL: Javier Patino
WITWOUD: Brian Flemming
PETULANT: Ashton Blount
WAITWELL: Owen Anderson
SIR WILFULL: Ryan Martin
FLOWER GIRL: Lauren Gay
LOVER GIRL: Tinsley Sumrell
MESSENGER BOY: Alex Crawshaw
LOVERBOY/MESSENGER: Sam Gollin
PLAYWRIGHT: Andrew Herrington

The Way of the World

COMEDY. This easy-to-stage adaptation of William Congreve's Restoration masterpiece features a hilarious cast of aristocratic rogues and schemers who are determined to prevent the marriage of two young lovers, Mr. Mirabell and Millamant. Millamant's fortune rests on marrying a suitor who has been approved by her rich aunt, Lady Wishfort. But Lady Wishfort detests Mr. Mirabell because he pretended to be in love with her just to gain access to Millamant. To win both Millamant and her fortune, Mr. Mirabell has concocted a plot to dupe Lady Wishfort into marrying his servant, Mr. Waitwell. Then Mr. Mirabell will pretend to discover the imposter and release Lady Wishfort from the marriage on condition that she allow him to marry Millamant. The plan seems as though it may succeed, but the greedy, adulterous Mr. Fainall hears of Mr. Mirabell's scheme and sets forth his own plot to gain access to the inheritance. Twists and turns abound as layers of deceit, greed, and villainy are peeled away. Considered one of the greatest of all Restoration comedies, this play's witty repartee, colorful characters, and acts of human folly will delight audiences.

Performance Time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.

About the Story

William Congreve is considered the greatest English writer of Restoration comedy. Though his plays were generally well received by critics and audiences alike, Congreve was bitterly disappointed by the poor response in 1700 to his final play, *The Way of the World*, which is now considered his greatest work and a dramatic masterpiece. Congreve died January 19, 1729, and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Dramatis Personae

(7 m, 10 f, 4 flexible, optional extras)

MILLAMANT: In love with Mr. Mirabell but must marry someone her aunt, Lady Wishfort, approves of or she will lose her fortune; strong and independent.

MR. MIRABELL: In love with Millamant and her money.

LADY WISHFORT: Aunt to Millamant, Mr. Petulant, Mr. Witwoud, and Sir Wilfull Witwoud; mother to Mrs. Fainall; demanding and overly dramatic.

MRS. MARWOOD: Mr. Fainall's mistress; Lady Wishfort's friend; in love with Mr. Mirabell; greedy and cunning.

MRS. FAINALL: Despises her husband, Mr. Fainall, who she was forced to marry after having had an affair with Mirabell; Millamant's cousin.

MR. FAINALL: Having an affair with Mrs. Marwood; ambitious, deceitful.

MR. WITWOUD: Lady Wishfort's nephew and one of Millamant's suitors; foolish fop with a love for gossip.

SQUIRE WILFULL WITWOUD: Mr. Witwoud's half-brother; ill mannered.

MR. PETULANT: Lady Wishfort's nephew and one of Millamant's suitors; ill-tempered idiot.

WAITWELL: Mirabell's servant; acts as Mr. Mirabell's rich uncle in order to dupe Lady Wishfort into marriage.

FOIBLE: Lady Wishfort's cunning, clever handmaiden.

PEG: Nervous new maid to Lady Wishfort; easily overwhelmed.

MISS MINCING: Millamant's young maid.

BETTY: Narrator and owner of Betty's Tavern; has godlike power to control the play's action.

MESSENGER BOY: Male, but can be played by a female dressed as a male.

YOUNG WOMAN: Non-speaking.

The Way of the World

6

SUITOR: Non-speaking.

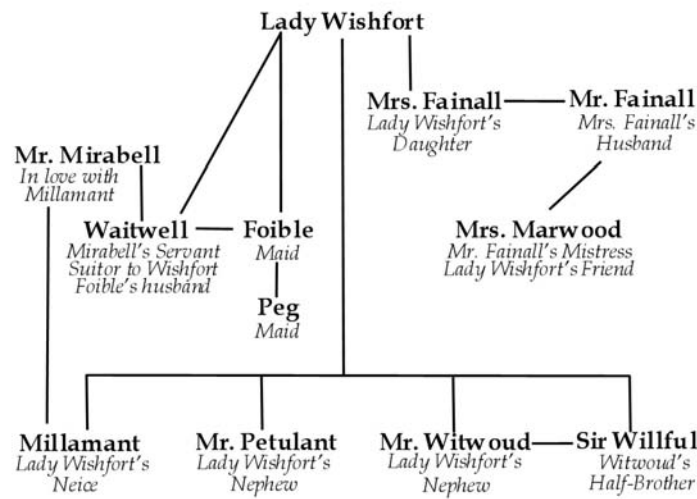
PLAYWRIGHT: Non-speaking, flexible.

SERVANT: Male, but can be played by a female dressed as a male.

FLOWER SELLER: Sells flowers; non-speaking; female.

STREET VENDOR: Sells produce from a pushcart; non-speaking; flexible.

EXTRAS (optional): As Londoners.



Setting

1700, London.

Sets

On a Busy Street: Betty's Tavern sits SR and a chocolate shop sits SL. There is an alley between the two businesses. Small café tables sit in front of the chocolate shop and Betty's Tavern.

Garden Park: There is a park bench SL.

Parlor in Lady Wishfort's Home: There is a fainting sofa SL and a dressing table SR. Up SL is Lady Wishfort's closet. Up SR is a door leading to the private or back staircase.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I: On a busy street outside Betty's Tavern and a chocolate shop.

ACT II: A garden park.

ACT III: A parlor in Lady Wishfort's house.

ACT IV: A parlor in Lady Wishfort's house.

ACT V: A parlor in Lady Wishfort's house.

Props

Vegetable cart	Certificate
Misc. fruit, vegetables	Newspaper
Script	Park bench
Small café tables with chairs	Necklace
Deck of cards	Bag of money
Wicker basket	Dressing table
Watch	Hand mirror
Apron, for Betty	Small box with lock
Shopping list	Makeup
Packages	Very small wineglass
Apples	Wine bottle
Grapes	Key with ribbon
Large rose	2 Hand fans
Coin	Travel bags
Small flower	Overcoat, for Sir Wilfull
Parasol	Tricorn hat, for Sir Wilfull
Broom	2 Letters
Assorted flowers	Women's handkerchief
Flower basket	Documents
Bouquet	

Sound Effects

Music for opening sequence

*"The way of the world
is not always benevolent."*

-Betty

Act i

Scene 1

(AT RISE: On a busy street, London, 1700. The following is underscored by music. A Vendor with a vegetable cart enters from SR while a Playwright working on his script enters from SL. The Playwright moves to sit at a small café table in front of the chocolate shop SL. Mr. Mirabell and Mr. Fainall enter from Betty's Tavern SR and sit at a small café table in front of the tavern. They begin to play cards. Peg enters SL with a basket. She is looking at a long shopping list and is carrying many packages. She crosses down SR to the Vendor. A Flower Seller enters from upstage center, carrying a basket of flowers. She crosses down the alley between the two businesses to the Playwright. He is not interested in buying any flowers. Peg, looking at her list, moves to buy flowers from the Flower Seller. The vegetable Vendor crosses to SL to sell an apple to the playwright. Peg exits into the chocolate shop. Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Fainall stroll in SL. They stop and buy grapes from the Vendor and flowers from the Flower Seller. They exit up the alley. The Vendor exits SL. A Young Woman angry at her Suitor enters SR. The Suitor follows behind her, looking apologetic. She will not listen to his silent pleas. The Suitor crosses to buy a flower. The Flower Seller offers him a large rose. He presents her with one coin. She gives him a very small flower instead. He presents the flower to his girlfriend. She snaps the flower in two and gives it back to him. She exits SL and he follows. Waitwell, carrying Foible, enters upstage center between the two businesses. They have just been wed. They pass the Flower Seller standing SR. Foible wants a flower. She motions for Waitwell to back up. He buys the large rose for her. They exit SR. Miss Mincing enters SR carrying her parasol. She stops to look at the flowers. From offstage she hears Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant's obnoxious laughter. She hides behind her parasol and makes a hasty exit SL. Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant enter SR gossiping and giggling and go into Betty's Tavern. Betty steps out to sweep with her back to the audience. When Betty is down stage center, she turns around and signals for the lights to change.

The Way of the World

11

The music stops. Everyone on stage freezes. Betty, acknowledging her "power" non-verbally to the audience, begins to talk. Betty crosses to the Playwright.)

BETTY: *(To audience.)* Of those few fools, who with ill stars are curst, the scribbling fools, called playwrights, fare the worst. For they are a sort of fool, which fortune makes, and after she has made them fools, forsakes. And with Nature's oafs... *(Crossing to the card players.)* ...'tis quite a different case, for fortune favors all her idiot race. *(Playwright gets up frustrated and exits SL. He has left his work crumpled on the table. Betty crosses and examines the work. She comments to the audience.)* Some plot I think he has and some new thought. Some humor too, no farce...that's a fault. Satire, I think, you ought...not expect. For so refined an audience, who dares correct? He'll not instruct, lest it should give offense. To please, this time, has been his sole pretense. In short, his play shall... *(Bows.)* ...with your leave to show it, give you one work of a passive poet. The way of the world is not always benevolent. When it comes to love...everything's relevant.

(With a wave of her arm, the lights return to full and Mr. Fainall and Mr. Mirabell unfreeze. Betty exits into her tavern. Mr. Fainall and Mr. Mirabell begin to play a verbal cat-and-mouse game. They do not particularly like each other; however, they are polite and their conversation is full of double meanings. Mr. Fainall has won the card game. He is a smug winner. Mr. Mirabell gets up and pushes in his chair.)

MIRABELL: You are a fortunate man, Mr. Fainall.

(He crosses SL. He is obviously distracted.)

FAINALL: Have we done playing?

(Mr. Mirabell crosses to sit down again.)

MIRABELL: I'll play on only to entertain you.

FAINALL: No, I'll give you your revenge another time, when you are not so indifferent. *(The verbal game begins.)* Why are you so reserved? Has something put you out of humor?

MIRABELL: Not at all. I happen to be thoughtful today and you are not.

FAINALL: Confess. Miss Millamant and you quarreled last night after I left you. Let me guess, some idiot, or two, came in and was well received by her.

MIRABELL: Witwoud and Petulant. And what was worse, her aunt, your mother-in-law, Lady Wishfort came in.

FAINALL: *(Laughing.)* She has a lasting hate for you...and with good reason. *(He begins to deal another hand.)* Was my wife there?

MIRABELL: Yes, and Mrs. Marwood. Upon seeing me, they put on their grave faces and whispered to one another.

FAINALL: They had a mind to be rid of you.

MIRABELL: But Millamant joined the argument!

FAINALL: She only spoke to please her aunt.

MIRABELL: She is mistress enough of herself not to have to please anyone.

FAINALL: Half of her fortune depends upon her marrying with her aunt's approval.

MIRABELL: I would have been happier if she had sought out her own approval.

FAINALL: Last night was one of their group nights. They come together to discuss the murdered reputations of the week. Witwoud and Petulant are the only males allowed.

MIRABELL: And who is the foundress of this group? Lady Wishfort, I warrant, who publishes her detestation of mankind for all to know.

FAINALL: *(Laughing.)* Her detestation of you! You did pretend to be in love with her just to gain access to your

beloved Millamant. Had you handled things better, they would not be as they are!

MIRABELL: And for my discovery, I am indebted to your "friend" Mrs. Marwood.

(Mr. Fainall tries to gain information on the suspected relationship between Mr. Mirabell and Mrs. Marwood.)

FAINALL: What should provoke Mrs. Marwood to be your enemy? Unless, she made advances toward you which you dismissed...

MIRABELL: *(Making a jab at Mr. Fainall for having an affair with Mrs. Marwood and cheating on his wife.)* I confess. I am not one to interpret every woman's intention as she desires...especially, if the woman is not my wife.

FAINALL: *(Controlling his temper.)* Friend, if you grow censorious, I must leave you. I'll join the gamesters in the next room. I believe you know them...Witwoud and Petulant.

(Mr. Fainall exits into the tavern. Betty comes out to clean their table.)

Scene 2

(Mr. Mirabell crosses SL. He is looking down the street for someone.)

MIRABELL: Betty, what says your clock?

(Betty looks at the watch hanging from the waistband of her apron.)

BETTY: Almost one o'clock, sir.

MIRABELL: Almost one o'clock?

(Mr. Mirabell crosses to sit where Mr. Fainall had been sitting. Betty crosses to the SL table. A Servant enters SL, carrying a bouquet of flowers. He crosses to Betty. He has been running and is out of breath.)

SERVANT: Sir Edward Mirabell?

BETTY: *(To Mr. Mirabell.)* A messenger for you, sir.

(Betty exits inside the tavern. Mr. Mirabell crosses to meet the Servant.)

MIRABELL: Well, is the grand affair over?

SERVANT: Yes, sir.

MIRABELL: You are sure they were married?

SERVANT: Yes, sir. Your servant Waitwell has wed Lady Wishfort's handmaid, Foible. I am a witness. *(He produces the bouquet.)*

MIRABELL: Have you the certificate?

SERVANT: Here it is, sir.

(The Servant hands Mr. Mirabell the certificate from his waistcoat.)

MIRABELL: Has the tailor brought Waitwell's costume?

SERVANT: Yes, sir.

The Way of the World

15

MIRABELL: Excellent! Go and tell my good servant and his new bride, Mistress Foible, to return to town. The honeymoon is over. Tell the young wife to meet me at two o'clock by Rosamond's pond. I wish to see her before she returns to Lady Wishfort. And as you go, be discrete!

(Mr. Mirabell gives the Servant a coin or two. The Servant exits SL. Mr. Mirabell looks at the certificate.)

Scene 3

(Mr. Fainall enters from the tavern with a newspaper. He sees Mr. Mirabell smiling and looking at the paper. Mr. Fainall is curious as to what is contained in the document.)

FAINALL: You looked pleased.

MIRABELL: I am. *(Putting paper away from prying eyes.)* I am engaged in a matter, which is not yet ripe for discovery. I will say that I am eager to see Millamant this evening. I'm glad it is not group night. I wonder, Fainall, why you would allow your wife to be of such a party.

FAINALL: *(Reading the paper.)* Faith, I am not jealous. Most who are involved are women. And as for the two men, they are idiots and harmless. Not the type to give scandal.

MIRABELL: I am of another opinion. I feel the greater the idiot, the more the scandal. A woman who is not a fool can have but one reason for associating with a man who is one.

FAINALL: *(Laughing.)* Are you jealous of Millamant and Witwoud?

MIRABELL: Not as jealous as I am curious as to what she is up to.

FAINALL: For a passionate lover, I think you are somewhat too sensitive in the failings of your mistress.

(The Flower Seller enters SL. Mr. Mirabell hails her, crosses to her, and buys a flower from her. She exits SR. He looks upon the flower as if it is his love.)

MIRABELL: You are wrong. I like her with all her faults. Nay, I like her for her faults. Her follies are so artful they become her.

(Mr. Fainall is disgusted with Mr. Mirabell's talk of love. He stands and tucks the newspaper under his arm.)

FAINALL: Marry her. *(He crosses to Mr. Mirabell.)* Then you will be your own man again.

MIRABELL: Say you so?

FAINALL: Aye... *(He takes the flower from Mr. Mirabell.)* ...I have experience. I have a wife.

(Mr. Fainall puts his arm around Mr. Mirabell and leads him back to the table to play more cards. A Messenger Boy enters, running from SL. Betty comes out to bring Mr. Fainall and Mr. Mirabell drinks. The Messenger Boy nearly knocks her over.)

BETTY: *(To Messenger Boy.)* Aye! What is your business!

BOY: Is one... *(He looks at the message for the name.)* ...Squire Witwoud here?

BETTY: He is, and what would you be needing with him?

BOY: I have a letter for him from... *(Looks at the message again for a name.)* ...his brother, Sir Wilfull, which I am charged to deliver into his own hands.

(She snatches the message away from him.)

BETTY: He is inside. Now you be on your way and watch your manners!

(The Messenger Boy scowls at her and exits SL. She crosses over to the table. Mr. Mirabell, having overheard that Squire Mr. Witwoud is arriving, stops Betty to confirm.)

MIRABELL: Is Sir Wilfull Witwoud in town?

BETTY: Aye. He is expected today. *(She puts the drink down and goes inside to deliver the message.)*

MIRABELL: *(To Mr. Fainall. Sarcastically, since Wilfull is an idiot.)* I think you have the honor of being related to the Squire.

FAINALL: Yes, he is half-brother to that fool, Witwoud, nephew to my mother-in-law, Lady Wishfort. If you marry Millamant you will be related, too.

MIRABELL: I would rather be his relation than his acquaintance.

FAINALL: He comes to town in order to equip himself for travel.

MIRABELL: Travel! I wonder why there is not a law to ban the export of fools.

FAINALL: Better they are away than here.

MIRABELL: What is your traveling fool like?

(Mr. Fainall stands.)

FAINALL: Well, when he is drunk, which is often, he is as loving as the monster in *The Tempest*. And when he is not drunk—he is the same. *(Mr. Witwoud comes out from the tavern. To Mr. Mirabell, indicating Mr. Witwoud.)* Ah, here is our traveling fool's half-witted half-brother.

Scene 4

(Mr. Witwoud is holding the message brought to him by Betty.)

WITWOUD: Pity me! Pity me!

FAINALL: (*Laughing.*) What is the matter, Witwoud?

WITWOUD: A messenger has brought me a letter from my fool of a half-brother. (*He sees the drink on the table and is drawn to it.*) Hang him! Let's not talk of him. (*Aware of Mr. Fainall's infidelities, he decides to have some fun with him.*) Fainall, how is your wife? Gad! How dare I ask a man of pleasure a question so domestique! But, I dare say that no man lives well with a wife but Fainall. Would you agree, Mirabell?

MIRABELL: You had better ask his wife.

WITWOUD: (*Snorting.*) Oh, Mirabell, what wit you have.

FAINALL: (*Not seeing the humor. He moves to change the subject.*) What have you done with your dear friend, Petulant?

WITWOUD: (*Pouting.*) He is counting his money...my money it was...I have no luck today!

FAINALL: Well, since you have all the wit, I suppose the fortune must be his.

WITWOUD: (*Defensively.*) Come now, Petulant is my friend and I will do him no wrong. (*Gossiping.*) The rogue, however, has no manners at all. He will contradict anyone. He does not always think before he speaks. And he lies like a chambermaid. But I will not speak ill of him!

(Betty comes out to check on the table. The same Messenger Boy enters, running.)

BETTY: (*To Messenger Boy.*) Slow down! What now?

BOY: (*Keeping the message far away from her.*) Is Master Petulant here, madame?

BETTY: Yes. Why do you need him?

BOY: Three women in a carriage would like to speak with him.

BETTY: I'll tell him. Now off with you!

(The Messenger Boy walks off disappointed.)

FAINALL: Three women!

(Mr. Witwoud begins to laugh.)

MIRABELL: *(To Mr. Witwoud.)* You know about your friend's acquaintances?

WITWOUD: Aye, aye. They are women he hires to call on him once a day at a public place. You shall see he won't go to them because there are too few around to take notice of him.

(Mr. Petulant makes a grand entrance from the tavern.)

PETULANT: A man must be desired indeed to be called on all hours and all places! *(He realizes there are no people around.)* Pox on them. I won't come. Let them snivel and cry their hearts out!

FAINALL: *(Amused.)* You are very cruel, Petulant.

PETULANT: I am of a humor to be cruel!

MIRABELL: Won't they be angry?

PETULANT: Anger helps the complexion. It saves paint. *(He and Mr. Witwoud laugh/snort at this. They are well entertained by their own humor. Mr. Mirabell finds their humor annoying. He moves SR to get away from them. Mr. Petulant recognizes Mr. Mirabell. He attempts to have a little fun at Mr. Mirabell's expense. To Mr. Mirabell.)* Why, you sir, have an uncle, have you not, lately come to town, and lodges by my Aunt Wishfort's?

MIRABELL: (*Secretly pleased that the rumors of his pretend uncle are spreading.*) True.

PETULANT: (*Smug in his knowledge.*) You and he are not friends. And if he should marry and have a child, you would be disinherited, ha?

(*Mr. Petulant and Mr. Witwoud laugh at this.*)

MIRABELL: (*Pretending to be angry.*) What hast thou heard of my uncle? I know that you hear the women's secrets. Tell me...was there any mention of my uncle or me?

PETULANT: (*Cowardly.*) I couldn't say.

(*Mr. Witwoud rushes to them, eager to share what he knows.*)

WITWOUD: I could! Lady Wishfort has heard of Mirabell's uncle—and you know she hates Mirabell. Whether this uncle has seen Millamant or not, I cannot say, but there was talk of an arrangement of marriage between the two.

FAINALL: It is impossible that Millamant would agree to it.

(*Mr. Witwoud shrugs and makes a silly "I wouldn't be so sure" face.*)

WITWOUD: Petulant, let us walk in the park. The ladies talked of being there.

(*Mr. Petulant and Mr. Witwoud start to walk SL.*)

MIRABELL: Witwoud, I thought you were obliged to watch for your brother?

WITWOUD: Pox on him! What shall I do with the fool?

PETULANT: Beg him for his estate, that I may beg you afterwards!

The Way of the World

22

WITWOUND: (*Snorting.*) Oh, Petulant! Thou art as quick as fire in a frosty morning! To the park with us and we shall be very severe.

PETULANT: I am in a humor to be severe.

(Mr. Petulant and Mr. Witwoud exit SL. Mr. Fainall and Mr. Mirabell move to exit SR. Betty emerges from her tavern and crosses down stage center. With a wave of her hand, she signals for the lights to change. Mr. Fainall and Mr. Mirabell freeze. Betty enjoys her power. She signals for Mr. Fainall and Mr. Mirabell to exit. As she delivers the following speech the set is changed for Act II.)

BETTY: I do admit that from the start I was a doubting Thomas. How could a play lacking in farce warrant any promise? But now...will Mirabell win the hand of his love's heart, and what manner of woman is this Millamant? (*She notices the set change. The set has changed from a street scene to one of a park.*) Ah! Our play changes location to a pastoral scene, where lovers... (*The Young Woman and her Suitor enter and freeze SL.*) ...and ladies... (*Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Fainall enter and freeze SR.*) ...stroll on the green.

(Betty waves her hand to restore the lights. All unfreeze. Betty moves up center to observe. The Suitor is still begging forgiveness from the Young Woman. He persuades the Young Woman to sit on the park bench SL with him. He again presents her with the flower. She hesitates but accepts. She kisses him on the cheek. Betty, seeing that all is well, waves goodbye to the audience and exits SR. Betty's exit catches the Suitor's eye. He runs CS and stops. He looks at the Young Woman and then back to Betty. He waves goodbye to the Young Woman and exits SR. Furious, the Young Woman exits SL. Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood have observed all of this.)

Act ii

Scene 1

(AT RISE: A garden park. Mrs. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood cross to the park bench.)

MRS. FAINALL: (Referring to the scene they have just witnessed between the Young Woman and her Suitor.) My dear Mrs. Marwood, if we are to be happy, we must find the means in ourselves. Men are ever in extremes...either doting or indifferent. (Sits on the bench.) While they are lovers, their jealousies are unbearable, and when they cease to love, they look upon us with horror and distaste and fly from us!

(Mrs. Marwood crosses to CS.)

MRS. MARWOOD: Say what you will, 'tis better to be left than never loved. For my part... (Turns to Mrs. Fainall.) ...my youth may wear and waste, but it shall never rust in my possession.

MRS. FAINALL: It seems that you only pretend to hate mankind to please my mother.

MRS. MARWOOD: Certainly. To be free! (Crosses to pass behind the bench.) I have no taste of those insipid dry discourses, with which women must entertain themselves apart from men. Come, be as sincere, and acknowledge that your sentiments agree with mine.

MRS. FAINALL: Never.

MRS. MARWOOD: You hate mankind?

MRS. FAINALL: Heartily.

MRS. MARWOOD: Your husband?

MRS. FAINALL: Most transcendently. Aye, meritoriously.

MRS. MARWOOD: (Realizing Mrs. Fainall is not playing her game.) Give me your hand upon it! (Sits on the bench SR of

The Way of the World

24

Mrs. Fainall.) I join with you; what I have said has been to test you.

MRS. FAINALL: Is it possible? Dost thou too hate those vipers men?

MRS. MARWOOD: I have done hating them. The next thing I have to do is eternally forget them.

MRS. FAINALL: Spoken like a true Amazon.

(Mrs. Marwood rises and crosses toward CS.)

MRS. MARWOOD: I am thinking of carrying my aversion even farther by marrying...if I could find one that loved me well enough.

MRS. FAINALL: Would you make him a cuckold and take a lover?

MRS. MARWOOD: No, but I would make him believe I did, and that is as bad.

MRS. FAINALL: Why not do it?

MRS. MARWOOD: O if he should ever discover it, he would then know the worst, and be out of his pain; but I would have him ever continue upon the rack of jealousy.

(Mrs. Fainall stands and crosses to her. She is playing a game of cat-and-mouse.)

MRS. FAINALL: Ingenious mischief! Would you were married to Mirabell?

MRS. MARWOOD: Would I were.

MRS. FAINALL: You blush.

MRS. MARWOOD: *(Lying.)* Because I hate him.

MRS. FAINALL: *(Trying to get more information.)* So do I; but I can bear to hear him named. But what reasons have you to hate him in particular?

MRS. MARWOOD: He is and always was insufferably proud. It seems that you are one of his favorite enemies. Now you blush.

The Way of the World
25

(Mrs. Fainall sees Mr. Fainall and Mr. Mirabell approaching SR.)

MRS. FAINALL: Do I? I think I am sick all of a sudden.

MRS. MARWOOD: What ails you?

MRS. FAINALL: My husband. He arrives unexpectedly.
(Crosses to sit on the bench.) And for you he brings Mirabell.

Scene 2

(Mr. Fainall bows to his wife.)

FAINALL: *(Insincerely.)* My dear.

MRS. FAINALL: *(Insincerely.)* My soul.

FAINALL: *(Smugly.)* You don't look well today.

(With contempt, Mrs. Fainall stands.)

MRS. FAINALL: You think so?

(Mr. Mirabell kisses Mrs. Fainall's hand.)

MIRABELL: He is the only man that thinks so, madam.

MRS. FAINALL: The only man that would tell me so. *(Trying to hint that she would know more of Mr. Mirabell's plans to win Millamant.)* Mr. Mirabell, my mother interrupted your story last night. I would love to hear it out.

MIRABELL: *(Hinting that Mrs. Marwood is listening and they need to talk privately.)* It is a scandalous story, madam. I am afraid that Mr. Fainall would not approve.

MRS. FAINALL: He would rather hear a scandalous story than walk with his wife. If you take a walk with me, I dare say you would please us both.

(Mrs. Fainall and Mr. Mirabell exit. Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood wait a moment, and then Mrs. Marwood crosses to Mr. Fainall and kisses him.)

Scene 3

(Mr. Fainall admires Mrs. Marwood.)

FAINALL: Excellent creature!

MRS. MARWOOD: *(Motioning in the direction where Mr. Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall exited.)* Will you not follow them?

(Mr. Fainall sits on the bench and reads his paper.)

FAINALL: I think not.

(Mrs. Marwood sits next to him. She wants to follow them.)

MRS. MARWOOD: Pray, let us follow them. I have a reason.

FAINALL: *(Reading his paper.)* Are you jealous?

MRS. MARWOOD: *(Playing innocent.)* It is you I love. But I think your wife does not hate Mirabell to the degree you think she does.

FAINALL: But he, I fear, is too anesthetized by his love for Millamant.

MRS. MARWOOD: It may be that you are deceived.

FAINALL: *(Folding paper.)* I have been deceived, madam. And you are my deceiver.

(Mrs. Marwood stands and crosses to CS. She is guilty. She stands with her back to him.)

MRS. MARWOOD: I? What do you mean?

(Mr. Fainall crosses to stand behind her.)

FAINALL: I see through all your little arts. You both love him. *(She reacts. He enjoys getting a reaction from her. He is*

egging her on.) I have seen the warm confession reddening on your cheeks, and the sparkling from your eyes.

MRS. MARWOOD: You do me wrong!

FAINALL: *(Laughing.)* I do not. I am willing to overlook the gross advances made to him by my wife. But do you think that just because the nodding husband would not wake, the watchful lover... *(He puts his arms around her from behind.)* ...would also remain asleep?

(Mrs. Marwood pulls away from him.)

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

FAINALL: An instance! *(He crosses back to sit on the bench.)* The injuries you have done him are proof. What cause had you to tell Lady Wishfort of his pretended passions and block his engagement to Millamant?

(Mrs. Marwood sits next to him.)

MRS. MARWOOD: My obligations to my lady. I am her friend and I could not stand to see her so abused!

FAINALL: It was conscience then? O the pious friendship of the female sex.

MRS. MARWOOD: Better than the vain empty vows of men!

FAINALL: You forget that you are my wife's friend, too.

(Mrs. Marwood stands and crosses behind the bench to stand CS.)

MRS. MARWOOD: Have you the baseness to charge me with the guilt, unmindful of the merit? You should be happy I have been vicious. *(Turns her back on him.)* Do not reflect your guilt upon me!

(Mr. Fainall realizes that his fun is getting out of hand. He crosses behind Mrs. Marwood and puts his arms around her.)

FAINALL: You misinterpret my reproof. I only meant to remind you of the sacrifices you have made for love of me.

(Mrs. Marwood turns to face him.)

MRS. MARWOOD: You urged it with deliberate malice. It was spoken in scorn, and I will never forget it!

FAINALL: *(Softening his tone.)* If you loved, you could forget my jealousy. *(She does not give. He crosses back to sit on the bench. With a sharp edge in his voice.)* But you are stung to find you are discovered.

MRS. MARWOOD: It shall be discovered. You shall be as well.

FAINALL: *(Opening paper.)* What will you do?

MRS. MARWOOD: Disclose it to your wife. Own what has passed between us.

FAINALL: *(Mocking her.)* You wouldn't.

MRS. MARWOOD: I'll publish to the world the injuries you have done me. *(With mock innocence.)* I trusted you!

(Mr. Fainall crosses to her in anger.)

FAINALL: I have done injuries to you? Do you realize the fortune I missed out on because of you! *(Grabs her arm.)* If you had not interfered with Mirabell's pursuit of Millamant they would have been married. Upon their marriage, Lady Wishfort would have denied Millamant her fortune. The money then would have gone to my wife! And why did I marry her except to gain access to her money—so I could spend it on you! *(Changes tone to mock sincerity.)* Would you yet be reconciled to truth and me?

MRS. MARWOOD: Truth and you are inconsistent. I hate you, and shall forever.

FAINALL: For loving you?

MRS. MARWOOD: I loathe the name of love after such usage.

The Way of the World

30

(Mrs. Marwood starts to exit SR. He grabs her arm hard.)

FAINALL: We must not part like this.

MRS. MARWOOD: *(He is hurting her.)* Let me go.

FAINALL: *(His actions do not match his words.)* Come, I am sorry.

MRS. MARWOOD: I care not. Let me go!

FAINALL: I would not hurt you for the world. Have I no other hold to keep you here? *(Pulls out a necklace from his pocket and dangles it for her to see.)* You know I love you.

MRS. MARWOOD: *(She relents. Hating that she is weak and easily bought.)* Well...

(He puts the necklace on her.)

FAINALL: Come, I am convinced I've done you wrong, and I will make amends. I will hate my wife all the more, I'll part with her, rob her of all she is worth, and then I will marry you.

(He has won. He leads her off SR.)

Scene 4

(Mr. Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall enter SL.)

MRS. FAINALL: *(To Mr. Mirabell, referring to Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood.)* Are they still there?

(Mr. Mirabell crosses SR to watch Mrs. Marwood and Mr. Fainall offstage.)

MIRABELL: They are turning onto the other walk.

(Mrs. Fainall sits on the bench.)

MRS. FAINALL: While I hated my husband, I could bear to see him, but since I have despised him, he is too offensive.

MIRABELL: O you should hate with discretion.

MRS. FAINALL: *(Thinking of her past love for Mr. Mirabell.)* Yes, for I have loved with indiscretion. Why did you make me marry this man?

(Mr. Mirabell crosses to the bench.)

MIRABELL: To protect your reputation after our affair. You and I both feared you had need to be wed. A better man could not have been sacrificed for the occasion.

MRS. FAINALL: I suppose I should thank you.

MIRABELL: In justice to you, I have put in your power the capability to ruin or advance my fortune. I have informed you of my whole plan.

MRS. FAINALL: Whom have you instructed to be your pretend uncle?

MIRABELL: Waitwell, my servant.

MRS. FAINALL: He is beau to Foible, my mother's maid.

MIRABELL: They were married this morning. I did not want to tempt my servant by trusting him too far. Should your mother consent to marry Waitwell thinking that he was my uncle, he might fancy the lady and her money and decide to follow through with the marriage. Then my plan would be ruined.

(Mrs. Fainall rises and crosses SL.)

MRS. FAINALL: So, if your plan works, my poor mother will officially agree to marry Waitwell, thinking him to be your rich Uncle Rowland. You will then conveniently discover the imposter and graciously release Mother from the agreement by producing the certificate of her fiancée's current marriage.

(Mr. Mirabell rises and crosses to her.)

MIRABELL: On the condition that she consent to my marriage to Millamant, her niece.

(Mrs. Fainall crosses behind the bench to CS.)

MRS. FAINALL: Well, I have an opinion of your success. I believe my mother will do anything to get a husband. And in this case, I suppose she will do anything to get rid of one. *(She spots Millamant, Miss Mincing, and Mr. Witwoud approaching SR.)* Here comes your mistress, love.

Scene 5

MIRABELL: *(To Mrs. Fainall, indicating Millamant with Mr. Witwoud and Miss Mincing in tow.)* Here she comes in full sail followed by a shoal of fools.

(Mr. Mirabell crosses to the bench. Millamant and Miss Mincing enter followed by Mr. Witwoud.)

WITWOUD: *(To Miss Mincing and Millamant.)* Wait for me!

MIRABELL: *(To Millamant.)* You seem to be unattended, madam. *(Sits on the bench.)* You usually have a throng after you.

WITWOUD: *(Fluttering around Millamant.)* Like moths about a candle. As bees to honey.

MILLAMANT: Dear Mr. Witwoud, truce with your similitudes! I am as sick of them. Miss Mincing, stand between me and his wit.

(Miss Mincing moves between them and opens her parasol to shield herself from Mr. Witwoud.)

WITWOUD: Do, Miss Mincing, like a screen before a great fire.

(Mrs. Fainall crosses to her.)

MRS. FAINALL: Dear Millamant, what has taken you so long?

MILLAMANT: Miss Mincing, why was I so long?

MINCING: Your ladyship stayed to peruse a packet of letters.

MILLAMANT: *(Pretending to be annoyed with the number of letters Mr. Mirabell sends her.)* Aye letters! I am persecuted with letters! I hate letters. I have as many letters as hairpins!

WITWOUND: Pray, madam, do you pin up your hair with your letters? I find I must keep copies.

MILLAMANT: (*She is amused at Mr. Witwoud's stupidity and carries on with the joke.*) Only with those in verse, Mr. Witwoud. I never pin up my hair with prose.

WITWOUND: (*Taking note.*) Indeed, poetry.

MILLAMANT: Mirabell, did you take exception last night? I believe I gave you some pain.

MIRABELL: Does that please you?

MILLAMANT: (*Coyly.*) Yes, I love to torture you.

MIRABELL: Cruelty is not in your nature.

MILLAMANT: One's cruelty is one's power. If you part with your cruelty, you part with your power. And when one has parted with that, one is old and ugly.

(*Mr. Mirabell crosses to her and takes her hand.*)

MIRABELL: Do not let your cruelty destroy the object of your power... (*Kisses hand.*) ...your lover. 'Tis true: you are no longer handsome when you have lost your lover. Beauty is the lover's gift.

(*Millamant takes her hand away.*)

MILLAMANT: O the vanity of men! Fainall, do you hear him? If they do not commend us, we are not handsome! "Beauty is the lover's gift." 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 if one pleases one makes more.

WITWOUND: (*Clapping.*) Very pretty.

MILLAMANT: One no more owes one's beauty to a lover, than one's wit to an echo: They can but reflect what we look and say.

MIRABELL: (*Losing his patience.*) To them you owe two of the greatest pleasures of your life.

MILLAMANT: How so?

MIRABELL: (*Annoyed by her vanity.*) To your lover you owe the pleasure of hearing yourselves praised, and to the echo, the pleasure of hearing yourselves talk.

WITWOUND: I know a lady who loves talking so much she won't give an echo fair play. The echo must wait until she dies to catch her last words. (*Snorting. He finds himself very amusing.*)

MILLAMANT: (*She has had enough of this abuse.*) Mrs. Fainall, let us leave these men.

(*Millamant starts to exit SR. Mrs. Fainall follows. Mr. Mirabell grabs Mrs. Fainall.*)

MIRABELL: (*Whispering to Mrs. Fainall.*) Draw off Witwoud.

MRS. FAINALL: (*To Mr. Witwoud.*) May I have a word or two with you, Mr. Witwoud? (*She starts to exit SL with Mr. Witwoud. She decides to take Miss Mincing with her as well. She grabs the girl's arm.*) Mincing!

(*Miss Mincing involuntarily goes with Mrs. Fainall.*)

MILLAMANT: (*Calls.*) Mincing!

(*Miss Mincing looks back apologetically and exits SL with Mrs. Fainall and Mr. Witwoud. Millamant is left alone with Mr. Mirabell.*)

Scene 6

MIRABELL: *(To Millamant.)* I would beg a private audience too. *(He motions for her to have a seat on the bench. She does so. She realizes that she is being scolded. She pretends it does not bother her.)* You had the tyranny to deny me last night even though you knew I came to impart a secret to you that concerned my love.

MILLAMANT: You saw I was engaged.

MIRABELL: How can you find delight in such society?

MILLAMANT: *(Exasperated.)* Mirabell, if you persist in this you will displease me. I shan't endure to be reprimanded, nor instructed; 'tis so dull to act always by advice. *(She is impulsive and decides to end the relationship.)* I am resolved I won't have you. You may go. *(He moves to exit SR. She does not really want him to go.)* What would you give that you could stop loving me?

MIRABELL: I would give anything for you not to know that I couldn't stop.

(He starts to exit again.)

MILLAMANT: Well, what do you say to me?

(Mr. Mirabell crosses in to her.)

MIRABELL: I say that it is easier for a man to make a friend by his wit, or a fortune by his honesty, as to win a woman with plain-dealing and sincerity.

(Mr. Mirabell moves to exit again. Millamant realizes that she has hurt him. She crosses to him and guides him back to the bench.)

MILLAMANT: Mirabell! Come, don't look so grave.

MIRABELL: You are merry, madam, but I would persuade you for a moment to be serious.

MILLAMANT: To hear you tell me Foible is married and your plot is to speed...no.

MIRABELL: *(Surprised that she knows.)* But how came you to know it?

MILLAMANT: Either with the help of the devil or Foible told me so herself. *(Rises and crosses behind the bench to exit SR.)* Which of the two it may have been, I will leave you to consider, and when you have done thinking of that... *(She stops and turns toward him. Her tone is sincere for the first time. She does love him.)* ...think of me.

(Millamant exits. Mr. Mirabell crosses to down center.)

MIRABELL: *(Aside.)* Think of her! Think of a whirlwind. A fellow that lives in a windmill does not have a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man with lodged in a woman. To know this, and yet continue in love, is to play the fool. And what a fool am I. *(He hears Foible giggle from offstage.)* O here come my pair of turtles. *(Waitwell and Foible enter. They are oblivious to anyone but each other.)* Is Valentine's Day not over with you yet?

Scene 7

WAITWELL: *(To Mr. Mirabell, embarrassed.)* Your pardon, sir.
I have instructed her as well as I could.

(Foible is embarrassed at this comment.)

MIRABELL: *(Bowing.)* Mrs. Foible.

(Foible curtsies and crosses to Mr. Mirabell.)

FOIBLE: *(To Mr. Mirabell.)* I told my lady as you instructed, sir. I told her that I had a prospect of seeing your "uncle," Sir Rowland, and that I would put her ladyship's picture in my pocket to show him. I'll be sure to say it has made him so enamored of her beauty that he burns with impatience to lie at her ladyship's feet and worship the original.

MIRABELL: Excellent, Foible! Matrimony has made you eloquent in love.

WAITWELL: I think so.

FOIBLE: *(Apologetically.)* Have you seen Mistress Millamant, sir?

MIRABELL: Yes.

FOIBLE: *(Afraid he is angry with her for telling Millamant of their plans.)* I told her, sir, because I did not know if you would find an opportunity. She had so much company last night.

MIRABELL: Your diligence would merit more...in the mean time...

(Mr. Mirabell gives Foible a bag of money.)

FOIBLE: *(Amazed at the amount.)* O dear sir, your humble servant. *(She curtseys.)*

WAITWELL: *(Waitwell motions for Foible to hand over the money.)* Spouse.

(Foible reluctantly hands over the bag to Waitwell. Mr. Mirabell takes the bag from Waitwell and returns it to Foible.)

MIRABELL: Stand off, sir, and not a penny.

FOIBLE: *(Happy with the way Mr. Mirabell has treated her.)* If you have no more commands, sir, I'll be gone. I am sure it was Mrs. Marwood I saw earlier. If she has seen me with you, I am sure she will tell my Lady Wishfort. I'll make haste home and prevent her. *(She crosses to exit SR. She stops and kisses Waitwell on the cheek.)* Goodbye, Waitwell.

(Foible exits. Waitwell, delirious with love, waves goodbye.)

MIRABELL: Come, sir, forget yourself and transform into my uncle, Sir Rowland.

(Mr. Mirabell exits SL leaving Waitwell standing CS. Betty enters from up SR and listens to Waitwell's speech.)

WAITWELL: Married, knighted, and attended all in one day! 'Tis enough to make a man forget himself. The difficulty will be how to recover myself when it is over. *(Betty crosses in front of him. She is teasing him. He begins to follow, but then remembers he is married.)* Nay, I am married and can never be my own man again. There is my grief. That is the sad change of life; to lose my title and keep my wife!

(Waitwell exits SR. Betty waves her arm. The lights change. She crosses down stage center to address the audience.)

BETTY: Lovers and fools with every turn of the page...what better to see upon the stage! We pause now for a moment of respite. Time for a break... *(She tosses an apple in the air and catches it.)* ...and a bit of refreshment.

The Way of the World
40

(She bows to the audience, as the intermission lights and music come up. She exits SL. Intermission.)

Act iii

Scene 1

(AT RISE: A parlor in Lady Wishfort's house. Lady Wishfort is primping at her dressing table. Her new maid, Peg, is nervously trying to arrange Lady Wishfort's hair. Lady Wishfort is demanding and overly dramatic.)

LADY: No news of Foible yet?

PEG: No, madam.

LADY: I have no more patience! (*Shoos Peg away and looks in a hand mirror.*) I have fretted myself pale! (*She crosses to lie down on the sofa.*) Fetch me the red...the red, do you hear? (*Confused, Peg does not know whether Lady Wishfort means the red rouge or the red wine.*) Look how this wench stirs! Why do you not fetch me a little red? Didst thou not hear me, Mopus!

PEG: Does your ladyship mean the red rouge or the red wine?

LADY: Rouge, fool. Paint, paint, paint! Dost thou understand? (*Peg crosses to the dressing table and picks up the box containing the makeup. It is locked. She is trying to open it.*) Why is thou standing there with thou hands dangling like bobbins before you? Why dost thou not stir, puppet, thou wooden thing upon wires!

PEG: Lord, madam, your ladyship is so impatient...I cannot get to the paint, madam; Mrs. Foible has locked it up and carried the key with her.

LADY: A pox take you both! Fetch me the wine! (*Peg goes to get the wine.*) I am as pale and as faint. I look like Mrs.

Qualmsick, the curate's wife. Wench! What art thou doing?

PEG: Madam, I was looking for a cup.

(*Peg presents her with a very small glass of wine.*)

The Way of the World

42

LADY: A cup, save thee, and what cup hast thou brought!
Dost thou take me for a fairy, to drink out of an acorn? Why
didst thou not bring thy thimble? Come, fill! *(She drinks it
and holds the cup out again)* Fill! *(Peg fills the cup again.)*
Again.

*(Lady Wishfort drinks it down. Betty enters, posing as a housemaid.
She winks at the audience, making them aware of her charade.)*

BETTY: Madam, there is someone here to see you.

LADY: *(To Peg.)* See who it is. Set the bottle down first. Here,
here, on the table. What wouldst thou go with the bottle in
thy hand like a barmaid? *(Betty is offended at the remark,
reacts. Peg leaves the room.)* As I am a person, this wench has
lived in an inn upon the road, before she came to me. *(Betty
exits, offended. Peg returns.)* Is Foible returned?

PEG: No, madam. Mrs. Marwood.

LADY: *(Hides the wine.)* O Mrs. Marwood! Let her come in.
Come in, Mrs. Marwood.

(Motions for Peg to leave.)

Scene 2

(Lady Wishfort crosses to greet Mrs. Marwood as she enters.)

MRS. MARWOOD: *(Kissing Lady Wishfort's cheeks.)* I am surprised not to find your ladyship dressed.

(Lady Wishfort takes the opportunity to over-dramatize the situation. She and Mrs. Marwood cross to the sofa.)

LADY: Foible is a lost thing—has been abroad since morning—and never heard of since.

MRS. MARWOOD: *(Planting the seeds of suspicion.)* I saw her but now, as I came through the park, in conference with Mirabell.

LADY: With Mirabell! You call my blood to my face, mentioning that traitor. O! I sent her to negotiate an affair, in which if I am detected I am undone. If that wheedling villain has tricked Foible to betray me, I am ruined!

MRS. MARWOOD: O, madam, you cannot suspect Foible of wrong?

LADY: O, he carries poison in his tongue that would corrupt integrity itself.

PEG: Madam, Mistress Foible has returned.

(Lady Wishfort rises and pushes Mrs. Marwood into the closet.)

LADY: *(To Mrs. Marwood.)* Dear friend, retire into my closet, that I may examine her with more freedom. *(To Peg.)* Go, you thing, and send her in! *(Lady Wishfort retreats to the sofa and pretends to work on some needlepoint.)*

Scene 3

(Foible enters. Mrs. Marwood can be seen listening in from the closet.)

LADY: Foible, where hast thou been? What hast thou been doing?

FOIBLE: I have done as you have asked. I have seen Sir Rowland and have given him your portrait. *(Lady Wishfort signals for Foible to sit next to her on the sofa.)* Well, if worshipping of pictures be a sin, poor Sir Rowland, I say. I have never seen a man so enamored...so transported.

(She is enthralled by Foible's story until Mrs. Marwood gestures for Lady Wishfort to confront Foible about her conversation with Mr. Mirabell. Lady Wishfort stands and crosses down SL.)

LADY: Hast thou betrayed me, Foible? Hast thou betrayed me to that faithless Mirabell?

FOIBLE: *(Aside.)* So the devil has been before me, what can I say? *(She gets an idea. She is a superb actress. Very dramatic. She stands and crosses down SR.)* Could I help it if I met that confident thing? Was I in fault? O, if you could have heard how he used me. And if that had been the worst I could have bore it... *(Turns toward Lady Wishfort.)* ...but he had a fling at your ladyship too, and then I could not hold my tongue. I gave him his own.

(Lady crosses to Foible.)

LADY: What did the filthy fellow say?

FOIBLE: O Madam, 'tis a shame to say what he said. With his taunts and jeers, tossing up his nose. "Humph," he says, "you are hatching some plot," he says. "You are out early,"

he says, "looking for a man, I warrant. Well, what does your lady say?" he says. "She is so very outdated," he says.

LADY: (*Angry.*) I'll have him murdered! I'll have him poisoned! Where does he eat?

FOIBLE: Poisoning is too good for him. Marry Sir Rowland and have him disinherited.

LADY: (*Pouting.*) "Outdated," indeed!

FOIBLE: "I hear you are laying designs against me," he says. "Mrs. Millamant is to marry my uncle," he says. "He does not suspect a thing about your ladyship. I'll stop your designs," he says, "and I will handle your old frippery."

LADY: "Frippery!" "Old frippery!" Was there ever such a foul-mouthed fellow? I will be married; I will be contracted tonight!

FOIBLE: The sooner the better, madam.

LADY: When will Sir Rowland be here, sayest thou? When, Foible?

(Foible guides Lady Wishfort to her dressing table.)

FOIBLE: Soon, madam. Sir Rowland burns for the dear hour of kissing your ladyship's hand after dinner.

LADY: "Outdated frippery!" I'll reduce him to rags. (*Sits at table.*) Thank you, dear Foible. I shall never recompose my features to receive Sir Rowland. This wretch has fretted me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.

FOIBLE: Your ladyship has frowned a little too much. There are some cracks in the white varnish.

LADY: Cracks, sayest thou? (*Looks in the mirror.*) I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes, or I shall never live up to my portrait.

(Foible unlocks the box with a key attached to a ribbon on her apron.)

FOIBLE: A little art once made your picture like you, and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. You sat for your portrait and now your portrait must sit for you.

(She begins to apply Lady Wishfort's makeup.)

LADY: You are sure that Sir Rowland is coming? I do hope he will be to the point. I would hate to be forward and make the first move. I shall never break decorum...I can never advance...I shall swoon if he should expect me to make the advances. But I won't be too bashful, either. I won't give him despair. But a little condescension is not amiss and a little scorn is alluring.

FOIBLE: A little scorn becomes your ladyship.

LADY: Yes, but tenderness becomes me best. A little swimmingness in the eyes...yes, I'll look so. Let my things be removed. I shall dress above. I'll receive Sir Rowland in here. Is he handsome? Don't answer me. I want to be surprised. I will be taken by surprise.

FOIBLE: By storm, madam. *(Leads Lady Wishfort to the exit by the up SL door.)* You will be taken by storm.

LADY: I will? O, I hope he is not too stormy! *(She exits.)*

Scene 4

(Foible straightens up the dressing table. Mrs. Marwood sticks her head out from the closet. Mrs. Fainall enters. Mrs. Marwood retreats back into the closet.)

MRS. FAINALL: O Foible! I hope I have not come too late. That devil, Mrs. Marwood, saw you in the park with Mirabell. I am afraid that she will tell my mother.

(Mrs. Marwood is unaware that Mrs. Fainall is in Mr. Mirabell's confidence. Foible crosses to the sofa and plays dumb.)

FOIBLE: Tell her what, madam?

(Mrs. Fainall follows Foible to sofa.)

MRS. FAINALL: Do not pretend with me, Foible. I am privy to the whole design, and I know you and Waitwell were married this morning. I know Waitwell is to impersonate Mirabell's uncle, win my mother's hand, and involve her in a scheme from which Mirabell will release her, by making his conditions to marry my cousin, Millamant.

FOIBLE: O dear, madam, I beg your pardon. Now I can safely tell your ladyship of our success. *(They sit on the sofa.)* Mrs. Marwood had told my lady, but I managed myself. I turned it all for the better. I told my lady that Mr. Mirabell railed at her. I charged him with many horrible things. My lady is so angry that she'll be contracted to Sir Rowland tonight, she says!

MRS. FAINALL: O rare, Foible!

FOIBLE: Madam, I beg you to tell Mr. Mirabell of his success. I believe Mrs. Marwood watches me. She has a month's mind, but I know Mr. Mirabell can't stand her. *(Peg enters the room. She sees Mrs. Marwood. Foible and Mrs. Fainall do not*

The Way of the World

48

see Mrs. Marwood.) Peg, remove my lady's things. Madam, your servant. My lady is so impatient, I fear she'll come for me, if I stay any longer.

MRS. FAINALL: I'll go with you up the back stairs, lest I should meet her.

(Mrs. Fainall and Foible exit by the up SL exit. Peg exits SR.)

Scene 5

(Mrs. Marwood comes out from hiding and crosses to sit on the sofa.)

MRS. MARWOOD: *(Aside.)* So, Miss Foible, you are a go-between. Yes, I shall watch you. "Mrs. Marwood has a month's mind, but he can't abide her"...it would have been better for him had you not been his confessor. He will not have any of me, and now I shall have none of him!

(Lady Wishfort enters the room followed by Peg.)

LADY: O dear Mrs. Marwood, what shall I say for this rude forgetfulness?

(Mrs. Marwood rises and crosses to meet Lady Wishfort. Peg follows with Lady Wishfort's fan.)

MRS. MARWOOD: No apologies, dear madam. I have been very well entertained.

LADY: I have so much on my mind...I am surprised I have not forgotten myself. *(Calls.)* Foible! And I expect my nephew, Sir Wilfull, at any moment, too. *(To Peg who is trying to give her the fan.)* You stupid girl, go and get Foible! *(She snatches the fan from Peg. To Mrs. Marwood.)* He is planning a trip for personal improvement.

MRS. MARWOOD: I would think that a man of his years would be thinking of marrying than of traveling.

LADY: I am against my nephew marrying too young. He is only turned 40.

MRS. MARWOOD: I think that Millamant and he would make a very fit match. He may travel afterwards. 'Tis a thing very usual with young gentlemen.

LADY: I have not thought of that, and since you think it a good idea, I shall think on it. I value your judgment extremely. (*Foible enters with Peg.*) Come, come, Foible. My nephew will be here before dinner. I must make haste.

FOIBLE: Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant have come to dine with you as well.

LADY: O dear. Mrs. Marwood, I beg you to entertain them until I am ready. I will make all imaginable haste. Dear friend, excuse me.

(Lady Wishfort, Foible, and Peg exit up SL door. Mrs. Marwood remains.)

Scene 6

(Mrs. Marwood is in the parlor when Millamant enters SR with Miss Mincing following behind.)

MILLAMANT: That odious man!

MRS. MARWOOD: What is the matter?

(Millamant sits and primps at the table.)

MILLAMANT: That horrid fellow, Petulant, has provoked me into a flame...I have broken my fan. Mincing, lend me yours.

MINCING: Yes, ma'am. Here it is.

MRS. MARWOOD: What has he done?

MILLAMANT: He has done nothing! He has only talked. He has said nothing, either! He has contradicted everything that has been said. I swear, it is a shame that one cannot choose one's acquaintances as one does one's clothes!

MRS. MARWOOD: If that were the case, one would only wear a fool for variety, or in your case, for disguise...to hide your lover. O come, Millamant, it is time the town found out. It is time for you to take off your hood and cloak—Witwoud and Petulant—and own that you are Mirabell's. The secret has grown too big and you must no longer conceal it.

MILLAMANT: I'll take my death, Mrs. Marwood; you are more contemptuous than a decayed beauty. *(Not wanting Miss Mincing to hear this conversation.)* Mincing, tell the men they may come up. *(To Mrs. Marwood.)* Their folly is less provoking than your malice. *(Miss Mincing exits.)* The fact that Mirabell loves me is no secret, nor is the fact that you exposed Mirabell to my aunt no more a secret than the reason you exposed him.

The Way of the World

52

MRS. MARWOOD: Madam, I exposed him because I detest him.

MILLAMANT: Why so do I...and yet the creature loves me. I am amazed to think what he can see in me. I mean, I think you are handsomer, and only a few years older than I.

MRS. MARWOOD: Your merry note may be changed sooner than you think.

MILLAMANT: Do you think so? Then I am resolved.

(Miss Mincing enters SR.)

MINCING: *(To Millamant.)* The gentlemen will be but a moment, madam.

MILLAMANT: Thank you, Mincing.

(Miss Mincing exits SR.)

Scene 7

(Mr. Petulant and Mr. Witwoud enter, laughing. Millamant rises and crosses to stand behind the sofa to escape them.)

MILLAMANT: And how are you, gentlemen?

PETULANT: I am in the humor to contradict.

(Mr. Witwoud sits to primp at the table.)

WITWOUD: Aye, when he has a humor to contradict, then I contradict, too. Then we may contradict one another. For contradictions beget one another like rabbits.

PETULANT: If he says black is black. I have a humor to say it is blue!

MRS. MARWOOD: Well, I see that your debates are of importance and are learnedly handled.

PETULANT: Importance is one thing and learning is another. But a debate is a debate.

WITWOUD: Petulant is an enemy to learning. He relies altogether on his wits.

PETULANT: I am no enemy to learning. It hurts not me. It only hurts people who have it.

MILLAMANT: Do you hear the creature? *(Noise of Sir Wilfull Witwoud's arrival can be heard offstage. Peg is sent to greet him.)* Lord, here is more company. I will be gone.

(She exits through the up SL door. Mr. Petulant and Mr. Witwoud cross to stand behind the sofa SL. Peg appears at the door with Sir Wilfull. He is piling his travel bags, coat, and other items on her arms. Mr. Witwoud is offended by his brother's crude dress and behavior.)

WITWOUD: *(To Sir Wilfull.)* In the name of Bartlemew and his fair, what have we here?

The Way of the World
54

MRS. MARWOOD: 'Tis your brother. Don't you know him?

WITWOUD: I have not seen him since the Revolution. I had almost forgotten him!

PEG: *(To Sir Wilfull.)* Sir, my lady is dressing. If you would please wait in here in the meantime.

(Sir Wilfull places his tricorne hat on her head.)

SIR WILFULL: My aunt is just dressing now?

PEG: Your aunt, sir?

SIR WILFULL: My aunt, yes, my aunt. Your lady is my aunt. Do you not know me? *(Peg shakes her head no.)* Well, send in someone who does! How long hast thou lived with thou lady, my aunt?

PEG: A week, sir.

SIR WILFULL: Well, tell her that her nephew, Sir Wilfull Witwoud, is in the house.

PEG: I shall, sir.

MRS. MARWOOD: *(To Mr. Witwoud.)* I say, Mr. Witwoud, I fancy your brother has forgotten you, too.

SIR WILFULL: Gentlemen. *(All men bow.)* Lady. *(He bows and Mrs. Marwood curtsies.)*

MRS. MARWOOD: *(To Mr. Witwoud.)* For Shame! Mr. Witwoud, won't you speak to him?

WITWOUD: *(Pushing Mr. Petulant toward Wilfull.)* Petulant, speak.

PETULANT: *(To Wilfull.)* It seems that you have come from a journey, sir.

SIR WILFULL: *(Not liking the looks of Mr. Petulant.)* Very likely.

PETULANT: I presumed so because you still smell like your horse.

(Mr. Petulant turns to Mr. Witwoud. They laugh. When he turns back to Wilfull, Wilfull's fist is in his face. Wilfull is not amused.)

SIR WILFULL: Would you like to enquire on my horse?

PETULANT: (*Afraid.*) Your horse, sir! Your horse is a...

(*Mr. Petulant looks to Mrs. Marwood for help. She rises and crosses to Wilfull.*)

MRS. MARWOOD: Sir! Are you not Sir Wilfull Witwoud?

SIR WILFULL: I am, my lady, Sir Witwoud, nephew to Lady Wishfort, the lady of this mansion.

MRS. MARWOOD: (*Points to Mr. Witwoud.*) Do you not know this gentleman, sir?

SIR WILFULL: (*Looking Mr. Witwoud over.*) Surely 'tis not...yea but it is! (*He crosses to Mr. Witwoud and hugs him, picking him up off his feet.*) Brother Anthony! Do you not know me? Why don't you speak? Aye, you are overjoyed. Aye, so am I!

(*Sir Wilfull kisses Mr. Witwoud's cheek.*)

WITWOUD: Where do you think you are? In the country, where great lubberly brothers slobber and kiss one another when they meet? 'Tis not the fashion here! 'Tis not indeed! (*Everyone is staring at him.*) Brother.

SIR WILFULL: (*Losing his temper.*) Well, fashion is a fool and you, sir, are an idiot!

(*Mrs. Marwood once again interrupts and pulls Sir Wilfull away from Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant.*)

MRS. MARWOOD: I am told you mean to travel, sir?

SIR WILFULL: I may, madam.

MRS. MARWOOD: I heard you would travel to France?

SIR WILFULL: I may or I may not. I have not made up my mind yet...I am somewhat hesitant about making resolutions, because when I make one...I keep it! But I do

have thoughts of learning the French language in case I do
cross the seas.

Scene 8

(Lady Wishfort enters with Mr. Fainall from the up SL door. She crosses downstage center to Sir Wilfull and curtseys.)

LADY: Nephew, you are welcome.

SIR WILFULL: *(Bowing.)* Aunt, your servant.

(Lady Wishfort crosses to Mr. Witwoud and curtseys. He bows.)

LADY: Cousin Witwoud, your servant. *(She curtseys and Mr. Petulant bows.)* Mr. Petulant, your servant. *(She cannot get up. Mr. Petulant helps her rise. She tries to curtsey again but cannot. She is exhausted by all the greetings. To Petulant.)* Nephew, you are welcome again.

PEG: Madam, I have come to notify your ladyship that dinner is impatient.

SIR WILFULL: Impatient? *(He crosses to sit in the desk chair.)* Surely it can wait until I have pulled off my shoes. *(Everyone is horrified at this.)*

LADY: Fie, Fie! Nephew, you would not pull off your shoes here! *(She pulls him up by his ear and crosses with him SR.)* Go down the hall. Dinner shall wait for you. *(He exits and she turns to the others.)* My nephew is a little unbred, you will pardon him. *(To Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant.)* Gentlemen, will you walk with me? *(They cross to exit SR. Lady Wishfort turns to Mrs. Marwood.)* Mrs. Marwood?

MRS. MARWOOD: I will follow you in just a moment, madam. *(Hides the fan behind her back.)* My fan is misplaced. *(All exit but Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood.)* You got my message?

FAINALL: Yes. To think I have been outwitted by my wife!

MRS. MARWOOD: The only thing you love about her is her money. That is why you married her. You have often wished for an opportunity to part with her and now you

have it. But first, we must prevent their plot. Millamant's fortune is too great to be given to an enemy, Mirabell. Besides, I dare say your wife was over him before you were married to her.

FAINALL: That may be—

MRS. MARWOOD: We can use this to our better! We will tell Lady Wishfort of her daughter, your wife's, appalling conduct. You will threaten to expose the cheating Mrs. Fainall to the world. My lady loves her daughter. She will do anything to save her reputation. She would even sacrifice her niece, Millamant. We will take the opportunity just after the Mirabell's fake uncle has been exposed.

FAINALL: What a plan!

MRS. MARWOOD: I am sorry I hinted to my lady a match between Millamant and Sir Wilfull. That may be an obstacle.

FAINALL: Leave that to me. I can manage Sir Wilfull. I will make sure he ruins his chances. He has been known to drink a bit after dinner. I will greatly encourage this habit tonight.

MRS. MARWOOD: I will write a letter, which shall be delivered to my Lady Wishfort at the time when that rascal who is to act like 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 advisor.

FAINALL: I will turn my wife to grass. I already have the deed to the best part of her estate. And you shall share it with me.

MRS. MARWOOD: I hope you are convinced that I hate Mirabell now. You'll no longer be jealous?

FAINALL: Jealous, no. Let husbands be jealous.

MRS. MARWOOD: But let the lover still believe.

(She guides him to exit through the up SL door.)

Act iv

Scene 1

(Foible and Lady Wishfort enter SR.)

LADY: Sir Rowland is coming, Foible? Everything is in order?

FOIBLE: Yes, madam. Everything is in order.

LADY: And, well, how do I look, Foible?

FOIBLE: Most killing, madam.

LADY: Well, how should I receive him? In what figure should I give his heart the first impression? There is a great deal in a first impression. *(She crosses to the chair behind the table.)* Shall I sit? No, I won't sit. Shall I walk? *(She crosses downstage of the sofa.)* Aye, I will walk from the door upon his entrance and then turn full upon him. No, that will be too sudden. *(She notices the sofa.)* I will lie...aye, I will lie down. *(She lies down on the sofa.)* Yes, yes, I will give him the first impression on a couch. I will loll and lean on one elbow...with one foot dangling off a little, jogging in a thoughtful way...yes...then as soon as he appears, I will be surprised and I will rise... *(She tries to rise but cannot. Foible has to help her up.)* ...to meet him in a pretty disorder...yes... nothing is more alluring than rising from a couch in confusion. It shows off your foot and furnishes you with blushes. Hark! There is a coach!

FOIBLE: 'Tis he, madam.

(Lady Wishfort crosses to sit at the table. She wants to look her best.)

LADY: O dear, has my nephew proposed to Millamant as I ordered him to?

FOIBLE: Sir Wilfull is set to drinking, madam.

LADY: Odds on my life! I'll send him to her. Call her down, Foible; bring her hither. I shall send him in as I go to meet

The Way of the World
60

my special guest. When they are together, come to me,
Foible, so that I may not be too long alone with Sir Rowland.
(*Foible exits up SL. Lady Wishfort primps some more and then exits
grandly SR.*)

Scene 2

(Foible enters up SL with Millamant and Mrs. Fainall. Millamant crosses to sit at the table. Foible follows behind her. Mrs. Fainall crosses to sit on the sofa.)

FOIBLE: Madam, Mr. Mirabell has waited a half hour to talk with you. However, my Lady Wishfort's orders were to leave you and Sir Wilfull together. Sir Wilfull is coming, madam. Shall I send Mr. Mirabell away?

(Millamant is torn between her desire to play games with Mr. Mirabell and her true desire to see him.)

MILLAMANT: Aye, Foible, send him away. No, send him hither. *(To Mrs. Fainall.)* Shall I? Aye, let the wretch come. *(Crosses to sit next to Mrs. Fainall on the sofa.)* Dear Mrs. Fainall, entertain Sir Wilfull. You have the patience to undergo a fool, thou art married.

MRS. FAINALL: I am honored that you would make me your proxy in this affair...but, I have business of my own. *(Sir Wilfull is shown in SR by Peg. Mrs. Fainall crosses to greet him.)* O Sir Wilfull, you are here just in time. There is your lady... *(Motioning to Millamant.)* ...pursue your point.

(Mrs. Fainall pushes Sir Wilfull toward the sofa.)

SIR WILFULL: Yes. My aunt has ordered it so. *(He does not have the nerve. He retreats back to Mrs. Fainall.)* I think I should be better prepared after a bottle or two...more. *(To Millamant.)* So for the present, cousin, I will take my leave. If you will be so kind as to make my excuses, I'll be leaving now.

MRS. FAINALL: (*Enjoying this quite a bit, she stops him from leaving.*) Nay! You shall not lose such a good opportunity, if I can help it. (*She pushes him toward the sofa again.*) I'll leave you together.

(*Mrs. Fainall motions for him to approach Millamant. He is scared but crosses to the sofa. Just as he is about to sit down, Millamant turns abruptly to him, intent on intimidating him.*)

MILLAMANT: Have you any business with me, sir?

(*Sir Wilfull retreats SR.*)

SIR WILFULL: Not at present. (*Mrs. Fainall stops him and turns him back toward Millamant. He tries to gather his courage.*) I was wondering if you would take a walk with me later this evening.

(*Millamant stands.*)

MILLAMANT: A walk? What then?

SIR WILFULL: Nothing! Only a walk.

MILLAMANT: I detest walking. (*Sits on the sofa.*) It is a country diversion. I loathe the country.

SIR WILFULL: (*Bowing out.*) Of course you do. (*Mrs. Fainall stops him and motions for him to continue trying.*) There are many other pastimes here in town, as plays and the like...

MILLAMANT: I hate the town, too.

SIR WILFULL: You hate them both?

MILLAMANT: Yes. Do you have anything further to say to me? No. You may leave me then.

SIR WILFULL: Yes, yes. I will. (*Bowing.*) Your servant. I will return to my company. (*He crosses to exit SR. He turns back to Millamant.*) You hate them both?

MILLAMANT: Both!

SIR WILFULL: (*To Mrs. Fainall.*) Madam.

The Way of the World
63

(Sir Wilfull exits. Mrs. Fainall follows him out.)

[End of Freeview]