

The Way of the World Summary

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

The Way of the World Character List

Mr. Fainall (Fainall/Fain.)

Mr. Fainall is a married man, but his closest relationship is to his mistress, Ms. Marwood. He plots to get money out of his wife's mother, Lady Wishfort, after finding out from his mistress that his wife, Mrs. Fainall, married him while in a relationship with Mirabell.

Mr. Edward Mirabell (Mirabell/Mir.)

A young man, once a womanizer, is now honestly in love with Mrs. Millamant, a young, attractive, intelligent woman. He is perhaps the closest to a protagonist in the play, and drives the plot with his scheme to get Ms. Millamant's aunt, Lady Wishfort, to approve a marriage between them.

Anthony Witwoud (Withwoud/Wit.)

Anthony Witwoud is a suitor of Ms. Millamant and half-brother to Sir Wilfull Witwoud. He serves as a supporting, comedic character.

Petulant (Pet.)

Petulant is another suitor of Ms. Millamant, and is often seen with Witwoud. He is another supporting, comedic character, especially for his ineptitude with speech and wit.

Sir Wilfull Witwoud (Sir Wil.)

Sir Wilfull is half-brother to Anthony Witwoud and nephew to Lady Wishfort. He comes to town to prepare to go abroad, but is swept up in the plot because Lady Wishfort wishes him to marry Ms. Millamant. He is a bumbling man, inept with the social fashions of the town and with attempts to pursue Ms. Millamant romantically.

Waitwell (Wait.)

Mirabell's servant. In accordance with Mirabell's directions, he marries Foible, Lady Wishfort's servant, but then pretends to be a well-bred man named Sir Rowland to trick Lady Wishfort into a fake engagement.

Lady Wishfort (Lady Wish.)

Lady Wishfort is a bitingly mean, witty, wealthy, old lady. She is the aunt of Miss Millamant and controls half, 6,000 pounds, of Millamant's inheritance. She is uncomfortable with her age and looks, and this allows Mirabell's plot with the fake Sir Rowland to succeed as far as it does.

Mrs. Millament (Miss Millament/Mrs. Mil)

Ms. Millament is the young lady whom Mr. Mirabell and many others love. She has a large inheritance of 12,000 pounds, but is attempting to secure half of it which is held by her aunt, Lady Wishfort. However, Lady Wishfort wants Ms. Millament to marry Sir Wilfull Witwoud.

Mrs. Marwood (Miss Marwood/Mrs. Mar.)

Mrs. Marwood is the mistress of Mr. Fainall, a married man. She is a nosy woman, bitter because her love for Mirabell is not returned, and this leads her to reveal his scheme to Fainall and later Lady Wishfort herself after overhearing it while in a closet.

Mrs. Arabella Fainall (Mrs. Fain.)

Mrs. Fainall had a relationship with Mirabell before marrying Fainall, and is still friends with him and an aid in his scheme. She is daughter to Lady Wishfort, so their reputations in the climax are closely tied.

Foible (Foib.)

Foible is servant to Lady Wishfort and is integral to Mirabell's plot, marrying Waitwell and then introducing the idea of Sir Rowland to Lady Wishfort.

Lampoon

To lampoon is to publicly criticize (someone or something) by using ridicule, irony, or sarcasm and a lampoon is a publication in which this kind of article is written.

Dropsy

Dropsy is an old-fashioned or less technical term for edema, a condition characterized by the collection of fluids in the body. It was generally a disease that required bed-rest.

Censorious

Censorious means severely critical of others.

Jade

While jade more commonly refers to a type of stone, in old English a jade might also refer to a disreputable or ill-tempered woman.

Pancras

The Church of St. Pancras was a church in the Fields.

Liveries

Liveries is an archaic term for clothing.

Dame Partlet

Dame Partlet was the wife of Chanticleer in Chaucer's *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.

Rosamond Pond

Rosamond's Pond was a pond and frequent meeting-place in St. James's