

The Way Of The World Sem-IV, CC-8  
Probable Questions

- ① Discuss "The Way Of The World" as a successful "Restoration Comedy Of Manners".
- ② Discuss/Comment on "Proviso Scene" or Act IV.

Proviso - A statement in an agreement, saying that a particular thing must happen before another can.

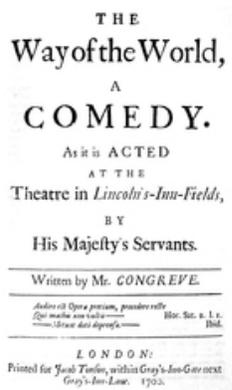
An article or clause (as in a contract) that introduces a condition.

- ③ Discuss the play as a replica of Congreve's contemporary society.
- ④ Comment on the plot of the play.
- ⑤ "In The Way Of The World Congreve's characters are realistic in their approach" - Justify.

# The Way of the World

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## Proviso Scene in The Way of the World



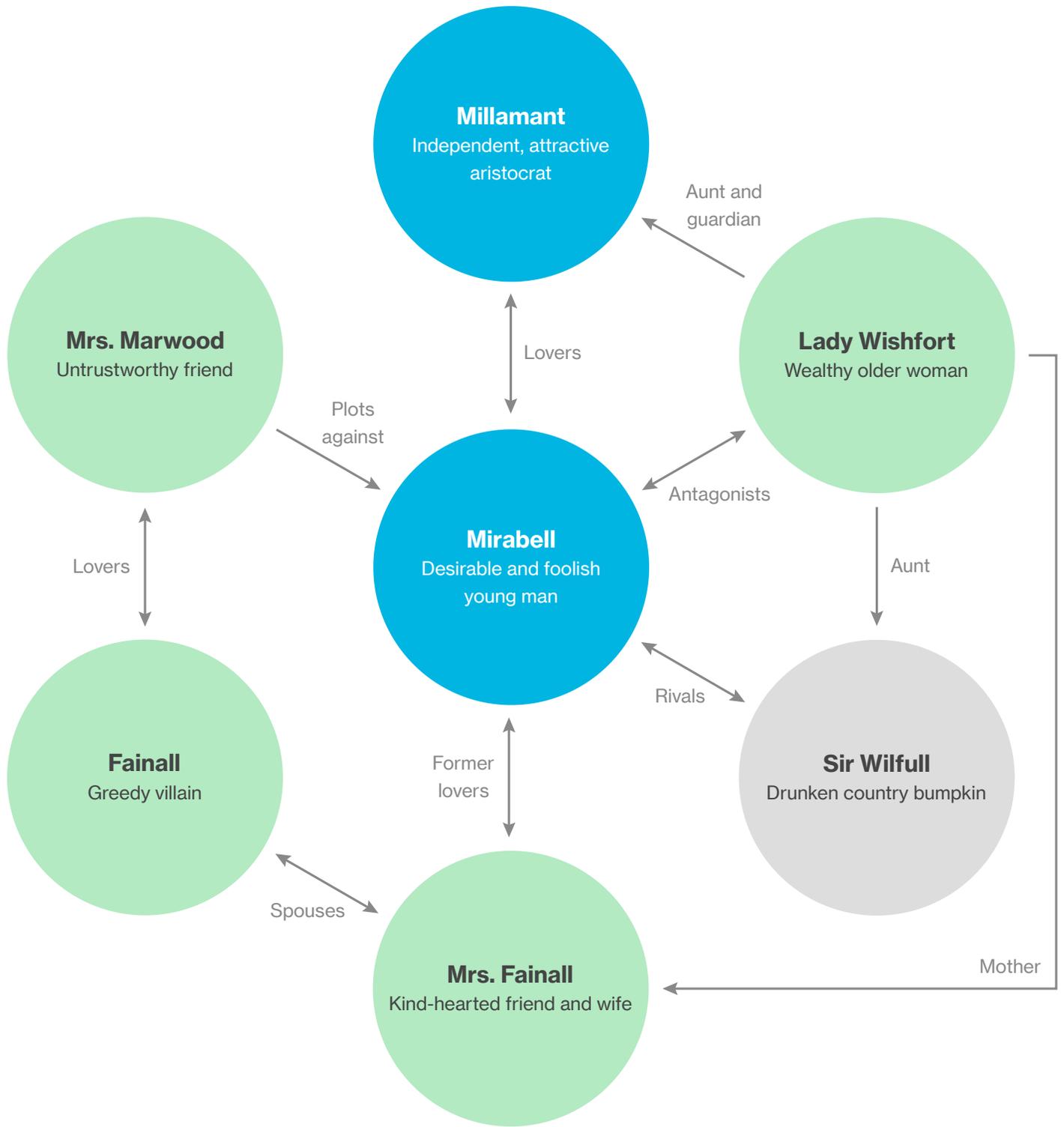
In Act 4 of The Way of the World, couple Mirabell and Millamont find themselves in a battle of wit as they discuss the terms of their marriage. This scene, called the proviso scene, gives important insight into Mirabell and Millamont's relationship. The terms of both characters illustrate their concerns and fears for their future marriage.

## Millamont's Terms

- **Allowed to stay in bed late as she wishes**  
"I'll lie abed in a morning as long as I please."
- **Mirabell cannot call her by pet names**  
"I won't be called named after I'm married; positively I won't be called names."
- **No public displays of affection allowed**  
"Don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks"
- **Allowed to have any visitors without question**  
"Liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whomever I please"
- **Allowed to write and receive any letters without question**  
"to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or wry faces"
- **Not required to spend time with Mirabell's friends or family**  
"to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance ; or to be intimate with fools, because they may be your relations."
- **Allowed to eat dinner together or alone as she wishes**  
"Come to dinner when I please, dine in my dressing room when I'm out of humor, without giving a reason."
- **Allowed to dress how she wants**  
"To have my closet inviolate"
- **Allowed to be in charge of her tea table**  
"to be sole empress of my tea table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave."
- **Mirabell must always knock before entering a room**  
"You shall always knock at the door before you come in."

## Mirabell's Terms

- **Millamont must not have friends who are women**  
"that you admit no sworn confidante or intimate of your own sex"
- **Millamont must like her own face**  
"that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall"
- **Millamont cannot wear makeup or other cosmetics**  
"I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled-skins and I know not what- hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and the marrow of a roasted cat."
- **Millamont must not wear corsets**  
"I denounce against all straight lacing, squeezing for a shape, till you mold my boy's head like a sugar loaf"
- **Allowed to restrict Millamont's drink intake**  
"Restrain yourself to native and simple tea-table drinks, as tea, chocolate, and coffee."  
"I banish all foreign forces, all auxiliaries to the tea table, as orange brandy, all aniseed, cinnamon, citron and Barbados waters..."  
"But for cowslip-wine, poppy water, and all dormatives, those I allow."



● Main Character

● Other Major Character

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Themes

Author Biography

## Plot Summary



[✔ See Plot Diagram](#)

### Summary

#### Who Loves Whom?

*The Way of the World* is a comedy about deception, greed, and love. The play opens with a scene of two fashionable young men, [Mirabell](#) and [Fainall](#), playing cards at a chocolate house. Mirabell is distracted, waiting for a particular bride and groom to return. As the play progresses, it is revealed that Mirabell loves [Millamant](#), the debutante niece of the aristocratic and eccentric [Lady Wishfort](#). Lady Wishfort controls Millamant's fortune and will not hand it over until Millamant has married a man Lady Wishfort approves of. In his eagerness to impress Lady Wishfort and earn her approval, Mirabell became overly flirtatious, leading Lady Wishfort to think he desired *her*, despite her age, instead of Millamant. When the truth was revealed, Lady Wishfort felt so embarrassed she refused to agree to Mirabell's engagement to Millamant. Now, Mirabell has hatched a plot to force Lady Wishfort to agree to the engagement.

#### Plots and Counterplots

Mirabell's plan is to put his valet, Waitwell, in costume and pretend he is Sir Rowland, Mirabell's wealthy uncle. As Sir Rowland, Waitwell will woo Lady Wishfort and propose to her. Before the actual wedding, however, Mirabell will reveal the truth and promise not to humiliate Lady Wishfort by making the facts public if she agrees to his engagement to Millamant. To prevent Waitwell from double-crossing him and actually going through with the marriage, Mirabell arranges for him to marry Foible, Lady Wishfort's maid, beforehand. This is the happy couple Mirabell awaits on the day he plays cards with Fainall.

At the same time, Fainall, who is married to Lady Wishfort's daughter, is having an affair with [Mrs. Marwood](#), Lady Wishfort's friend. They hatch their own plot to reveal Mirabell's plan and secure the inheritance money for themselves. The key detail of this plan is the information that while she was widowed and before she married Fainall, [Mrs. Fainall](#) had a romantic fling with Mirabell. Fainall believes this information would ruin Mrs. Fainall's—and by extension Lady Wishfort's—reputation, so he plans to blackmail Lady Wishfort. Their conversation further reveals that Mirabell chose Fainall to marry Lady Wishfort's daughter to protect her should she become pregnant from their romantic affair. Even after their affair ended and the Fainalls were married, Mrs. Fainall and Mirabell remain close friends, which is unusual since she is married to someone else.

#### Proposals and Revelations

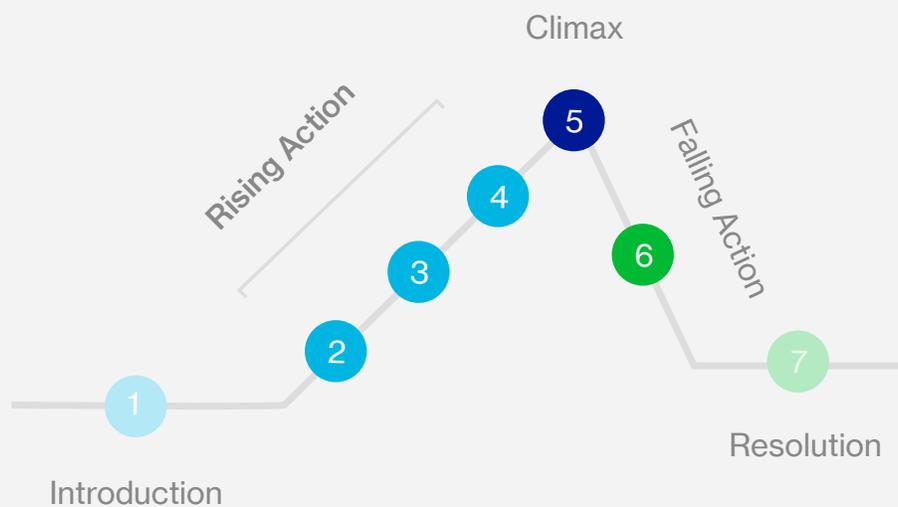
That afternoon, Mirabell visits Millamant and proposes to her. She accepts, despite the fact that Lady Wishfort has arranged for her to marry her cousin, the drunken country bumpkin Sir Wilfull. "Sir Rowland" arrives, and although she had originally planned to welcome Sir Rowland as a suitor for her niece, Lady Wishfort basically throws herself at him

once he shows the slightest interest. (Remember: Sir Rowland is actually Waitwell and has been put up to flirting with Lady Wishfort at Mirabell's request.) After overhearing the truth of Mirabell's plot while hiding in the closet and spying on Mrs. Fainall, Mrs. Marwood and Fainall set off to reveal the truth, humiliating everyone. At first, it seems their plan will work. Fainall reveals Sir Rowland's true identity, mortifying Lady Wishfort. Fainall also reveals the truth about Mrs. Fainall's previous romance with Mirabell, promising to divorce his wife and soil the family reputation unless Lady Wishfort transfers over her wealth, her daughter's fortune, and Millamant's inheritance to him.

### More Plots and Revelations

While Lady Wishfort considers her options, Millamant secretly agrees to marry Sir Wilfull to save her inheritance. Mirabell plots a new way to win Millamant, which he reveals with the help of Foible and Mincing, two maids who witnessed Fainall and Mrs. Marwood's affair. When Fainall returns to demand Lady Wishfort's agreement to his terms, Millamant and Sir Wilfull reveal their engagement. The maids also reveal Fainall and Mrs. Marwood's affair. Lady Wishfort and Mrs. Fainall kick the villains out of their house, and Lady Wishfort agrees to break the engagement between Millamant and Sir Wilfull so Millamant can marry Mirabell.

### The Way of the World Plot Diagram



#### Introduction

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- 1 Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall plot against Lady Wishfort.

#### Rising Action

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- 2 Mrs. Marwood overhears Mirabell's plan.
- 3 Mirabell and Millamant get engaged.
- 4 Mrs. Marwood's letter about Sir Rowland arrives.

## Climax

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- 5 Lady Wishfort learns that she has been deceived.

## Falling Action

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- 6 Millamant agrees to marry Wilfull to save her inheritance.

## Resolution

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- 7 Mirabell wins Millamant's hand in marriage.

[← Character Map](#)

[Chapter Summa... >](#)

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