Prologue in *The Way of the World*

In ancient Greek tragedy, a prologue conventionally set forth the subject of the drama to be enacted. It still refers to the introductory material of a play that serves as a sketch of the characters or themes to appear. It also can be an explanatory speech given by one of the characters, which is the case here. Spoken by "Mr. Betterton," the actor who played the role of Fainall in 1700, the Prologue takes the form of rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter meter. Congreve adapts the classic "heroic" verse both to establish this play as a serious dramatic offering but also to add to the comic effect. The Prologue also acts as both a tongue-in-cheek apology (in advance) and a taunt or challenge to the audience to find fault.

In the prologue, or the introduction to the play, Congreve categorizes poets as those who fare the worst among Nature's fools, for Fortune first grants them fame and then "forsakes" them. Congreve laments this unfair treatment meted out to the poets, who are Fortune's own offspring. Poets have to risk the fame earned from their previous work when they write a new work. If his new endeavor fails, the poet must lose his seat in Parnassus. (Parnassus was a mountain near Delphi in Greece, sacred to Apollo and the Muses. Apollo was the sun-god and patron of the arts, while the Muses were the nine goddesses of the arts. Parnassus was regarded as the seat of learning, poetry and the arts.)

Congreve states that although he has worked hard to write this play, if the audience does not like it, they should not spare him for his trouble but damn him all the more. He tells the audience not to pity him for his stupidity. He promises that he will blame the audience if they heckle any scene. He proceeds to state that his play has "some plot," "some new thought," "some humor" -- but "no farce." This is regarded as a fault by some. He comments wryly that the audience should not expect satire since they have nothing for which to be reproached. Nobody can dare to correct them. His sole aim has been to "please" and not to "instruct," since this might offend the audience. If he should accidentally expose a knave or a fool, his audience will not be hurt, as there are no knaves or fools among them. He takes the role of a passive poet who has left everything to the judgment of the audience. He bids the audience to "save or damn" him according to their own discretion.

Congreve was among the rare group of writers who possessed the ability to stand back and objectively reflect on their work. His prologue is therefore not a mere convention but expresses some important points. Although Congreve describes the unfortunate condition of poets, the prologue is not remorseful in tone. Rather, Congreve urges the audience to "save or damn" him according to their own discretion and judgment. He knows that he cannot rely on his past good fortune and that he is risking everything on this new venture. He promises that he will not resent it if the audience judges his work harshly. In truth, Congreve was extremely bitter about the poor response towards this play when it first appeared. His remark in the dedication about the poor taste of the multitudes who favor the "coarsest strokes of Plautus" to the purity of Terence's style is an indication of his resentment. Some critics have suggested that Congreve did not write any other plays after *The Way of the World* because he was so disheartened by its failure. Congreve states that plot, new thought and humor are the ingredients of his play. He emphasizes that he has not included farce (satirical comedy that usually involves farfetched plot turns). Many people in his time considered this exclusion to be a fault. He ironically tells the audience not to

expect satire, since nobody can dare to correct such a reformed society. (Satire is typically employed by an author to expose human vice.) However, satire abounds in *The Way of the World.* Congreve criticizes false wit or affectation through the characters of Fainall, Witwoud, and Petulant, exposes the knavery of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, and also condemns woman's inconstancy in general terms. He says that his sole intention is to please the audience and not to instruct. If he should accidentally expose some knave or fool, the audience will not be hurt, since it is composed of better people. He leaves his fate entirely to the judgment of the audience, but he has also gently warned the viewers that if they are offended by his depiction of a certain character, they are admitting that they may resemble that type.

Proviso Scene of "The Way of the World"

In the Proviso Scene of the play "The Way of the World", we find Mirabell and Millamant meeting together to arrange an agreement for their marriage. The scene is a pure comedy with brilliant display of wit by both of them, but, above all, provides instructions which have serious dimensions in the context of the society. Here, Congreve seems to come to realise the importance for providing an ideal pair of man and woman, ideal in the sense that the pair could be taken for models in the life-style of the period.

However, the Proviso Scene is one of the most remarkable aspects of Congreve's "The Way of the World" and this scene has been widely and simultaneously admired by the critics and the readers. In fact , it server as an excellent medium through which Congreve conveys his message to his readers.

The most noteworthy aspect of the Proviso Scene is Millamant's witty style in which she puts her condition before her lover Mirabell. According to her first condition, she wants equal amount of love and affection on the part of her would husband throughout her life. Behind her above mentioned condition we notice the pitiable condition of a wife after marriage. Just before marriage when men and women are lovers they declare full support and love for each other but things take a turn when they marry each other. So Millamant appears anxious because of this reason and that is why she puts this condition. Again, Millamant says that she hates those lovers who do not take proper care of their beloveds. She further wants that her husband must be a loyal and good natured man.

She says to Mirabell that she wants her liberty after her marriage; she informs Mirabell that she can't forgo her independence, she says, "My dear liberty, shall I leave thee? My faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you adiue?... My morning, thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye douceurs, ... Adieu -- I can't do it, 'tis more than impossible." She also adds that "I will lie a bed in a morning as long as I please"

Millamant on her part makes it clear that a lover's (Mirabell's) appeals and entreaties should not stop with the marriage ceremony. Therefore, she would like to be 'solicited' even after marriage. She next puts that "My dear liberty" should be preserved;
"I'll lye abed in a morning as long as I please…" she wants that she will have liberty "to say andrebeive visits to and from who I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or Wry faces on your part ; and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste.....come to dinner who I please, find in my dressing room who I'm out of humour, without giving reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly whenever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in."

Millamant then informs that she would not like to be addressed by such names as "wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet-heart; and the rest of that nauseous can, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar." Moreover, they will continue to present a decorous appearance in public, and she will have free communication with others. In other words, after marriage they maintain certain distance and reserve between them.

Mirabell listens to all the conditions of Millamant with patience. Although if was not very happy with some of the conditions, if doesn't raise any objection. Now he informs Millamant about some of his own conditions when we go through his conditions we observe that it is a witty satire on the affectations of women in that society. Mirabell wants that after their marriage Millamant should follow some guidelines. Millamant should not be in company of any woman who has a notorious background or who indulges in scandalous activities. He says that " you admit no sworn confidant or

intimate of your own sex; no she friend to screen her affairs under
your countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy.
No decoy-duck to wheedle you a FOP-SCRAMBLING to the play in a mask,"

The next condition is that she should not use the artificial things to cover her real appearance. If says that " 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. "

Mirabell's conditions are quite different: they are frankly sexual in content, directed to his not being cuckolded or to her bedroom manners. "Just as Millamant's are developed femininely" as Norman N. Holland points out, "Mirabell's are developed in a typically masculine way." Each of Mirabell's provisos begin with its item: first, the general principle, "that your Acquaintance be general", then specific instructions, "no she-friend to screen her affairs", no fop to take her to the theatre secretly, and an illustration of the forbidden behaviour, "to wheedle you a fop-scrambling to the play in a mask". Nevertheless, Mirabell denounces the use of tight dresses during pregnancy by women, and he forbids the use of alcoholic drinks. The conditions are stated by both parties in a spirit of fun and gaiety, but the fact remained that both are striving to arrive at some kind of mutual understanding.

Through this scene appears very funny but it is a serious comment on the degradation of conjugal relations. The conditions as set down by the two lovers, confirm the sincerity of their motives and their wish to live a married life which was different from others. Both of them accept each other's conditions. It is a guideline or memorandum of understanding between a husband and a wife, which would enable them to spend a happy married life. After following these guidelines there will have no possibility of misunderstanding.

The Way of the World: Characters and roles played by Mirabell and Millamant

In *The Way of the World*, his last comedy, Congreve seems to come to realise the importance for providing an ideal pair of man and woman, ideal in the sense that the pair could be taken for models in the life-style of the period. But this was almost impossible task, where the stage was occupied by men and women, sophisticated, immoral, regardless of the larger world around them, and preoccupied with the self-conceited rhetoric as an weapon to justify their immoral activities within a small and restricted area of social operation. Congreve could not avoid this, and for this, he had to pave his way through the society by presenting a plot which, though complicated enough for a resolution, aims at the ideal union between the hero and heroine—Mirabell and Millamant. They emerge as the triumphant culmination of the representative characters of the whole period, of course not types, for they are real enough to be human.

Congreve endowed his hero and heroine with all the qualities typical of the society, but towards the end the qualities, if negative, are employed as guards against the venoms of the society. At the beginning of the play, we find Mirabell shaping up a situation so that he can win the hands of Millamant and her estate as well from Lady Wishfort who has the rein of power over them. In this Mirabell is perfect Machiavellian: conscious of his surroundings. He is not at all a man from chivalric romance. That he is a past master in the game of love, of course, in the sense of the period, that is, sexual relationship—is evident from his past affairs with Mrs. Fainall, from Mrs. Marwood's fascination towards him and, one many suspect, from Lady Wishfort's unconscious longing for him. Moreover, Mirabell has mastered rhetoric to encounter men and women around them.

Consistent with the irresistible charm of Mirabell, Congreve built the character of Millamant. She is the perfect model of the accomplished fine lady of high life, who arrives at the height of indifference to everything from the height of satisfaction. To her pleasure is as familiar as the air she draws; elegance worn as a part of her dress; wit the habitual language which she hears and speaks. She has nothing to fear from her own caprices, being the only law to herself. As to the affairs of love, she treats them with at once seriousness and difference. For instance, she exclaims to Mirabell:

"Dear me, what is a lover that it can give? 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."

This, however, may be a case for Millamant who is "standing at the threshold of maturity from girlhood", as Norman N. Holland points out. But from her discussion of preconditions before entering into marriage with Mirabell, it is clear that she is intelligent and discrete enough to judge her situation.

In the Proviso Scene we find Mirabell and Millamant meeting together to arrange an agreement for their marriage. The scene is a pure comedy with brilliant display of wit by both of them, but, above all, provides instructions which have serious dimensions in the context of the society. On her part, Millamant makes it clear that a lover's (Mirabell's) appeals and entreaties should not stop with the marriage ceremony. Therefore, she would like to be 'solicited' even after marriage. She next puts that "My dear liberty" should be preserved;

"I'll lye abed in a morning as long as I please…"

Millamant then informs that she would not like to be addressed by such names as "wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet-heart; and the rest of that nauseous can, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar." Moreover, they will continue to present a decorous appearance in public, and she will have free communication with others. In other words, after marriage they maintain certain distance and reserve between them.

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both parties in a spirit of fun and gaiety, but the fact remained that both are striving to arrive at some kind of mutual understanding.

While the Proviso Scene ensures the marriage of true minds, the possession of dowry with Millamant remains the aim of Mirabell for the rest of the play. At the end of the play Mirabell and Millamant through their own peculiar balance of wit and generosity of spirit, reduce the bumbling Witwood and mordant Fainall to the level of false wit.
Thus Mirabell and Millamant dramatise the true wit that is so carefully and symmetrically defined through opposition. On his part, Mirabell informs that,

"…I like her with all her faults: nay, like her for her faults…They now to grown as familiar to me as my own frailties…"

And Millamant declares to Mrs. Fainall,

"Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing—for I find I love him violently."

These confidences do not prevent their own chances for honesty in marriage. The triumph of the play is in the emergence of lovers who through a balance of intense affection and cool self-knowledge achieve an equilibrium that frees them from the world's power. As the title of the play The Way of the World suggests, they have assimilated the rational lucidity of sceptical rake so that they can use the world and reject its demands.