

Mirabell - Millamant relationship

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Edward Mirabell is one of the most admirable characters in *The Way of the World*. In the comedy of humours the characters were named according to their prominent qualities. A person's name was an index to his character. The name Mirabell is an adaptation of 'admirable'. Congreve really admired him and it comes closest to his self-portrait. The ladies in the play all admire him. The daughter of Lady Wishfort when she was a widow was full of love and admiration for him. Their intimacy went to such limits that she felt that she was in the family way. Instead of insisting on Mirabell marrying her immediately, she allowed herself to be persuaded to marry Fainall. When she found that Mirabell was in love with her cousin, Millamant, she did not feel jealous. She remained friendly with him and actively helped him to win the hand of Millamant. Even when she came to know that he was trying to make a fool of her own mother, she continued to help him.

Millamant is a young and beautiful widow. She is rich but is dependent on her aunt. She appears rather late in the play, but when she comes every one is impressed by her personality and manners. She loves Mirabell but since she has seen unhappy marriages all around her, so she is afraid to take the risk. She has faith in Mirabell but she wants to make sure that she will have full liberty even after marriage. This being assured, she confesses that she is violently in love

with Mirabell. In spite of it Millamant is unable to marry Mirabell without the consent of her aunt, Lady Wishfort. If she marries without her consent, she would lose half of her property. That is why Fairall wants that she should secretly marry Mirabell, because in this way her property will go to Lady Wishfort and he would be able to take this money from her by blackmail.

As a lover, Mirabell may be said to be a 'designing lover'. In order to be close to Millamant he pretends to love Lady Wishfort. When he is betrayed by Mrs Marwood, he thinks of another plot. His servant Waitwell would make love to her in the disguise of Sir Rowland and a situation would be reached where in order to unravel the tangle she would have to agree to his marriage with Millamant. All this is intrigue. But all is fair in love and war.

In the beginning of the play Mirabell appears to be no better than Fairall. He has been flirting with Mrs Fairall and intriguing against Lady Wishfort. But as the play proceeds we find that he is a very sincere lover and a generous gentleman. Then the love of Millamant converted him from a rake into a serious gentleman. Whatever he might have been in the past, he is now a noble person and fully deserves to marry his noble lady.