

Lady Wishfort

The character of Lady Wishfort has been drawn with great creative zest displayed by Congreve in *The Way of the World*. It is of the type category and shows no tendency to become individual. She is a typical lady, her most predominant humour being hatred of man. She can be easily provoked. Congreve etches her with great interest; done by him in a most pointed manner. The other lady characters of society, like Mrs Marwood and Mrs Fainall have not been drawn with that gusto with which she has been drawn. She is responsible for most of the humorous situations. She becomes the centre of the intrigue set afoot by Mirabell. Lady Wishfort is on counts is the tragic woman character, to be fitted in a tragic frame gracefully rather than in a comedy. To a certain extent she shares the same tragic situation, though in different circumstance, as Malvolio does in *Twelfth Night*. Both these characters do not fit comfortably in a comedy.

• A. Tragic character :-

Lady Wishfort is essentially a tragic character in the sense that she cries mercy at the end of the drama. She wails to Mrs Fainall: "Is there no means, no remedy, to stop my ruin?" In fact she gets hedged in between the serious and the comic tragedies; the serious tragedy of her issues from the designs of Fainall who nettles her in a desperate situation which could spell the doom of her freedom. The comic situation of tragic nature emanates from the doings of Mirabell who could blackmail her for his own selfish end, for

gaining the hand of Millamant in marriage. In the beginning we find that she is subjected to the torture of lampooning. Much is done by Mirabell to ruin her social reputation.

As a tragic character Lady Wishfort is wronged by most of the characters in the drama. Even her own maid joins Mirabell to play a practical prank on her. She even marries Waitwell as a party to the intrigue involving Lady Wishfort. She very nearly runs the danger of marrying an impostor like Waitwell in the employ of Mirabell, her sworn enemy. Next is Mr. Fainall who hatches such designs which would let Lady Wishfort fall completely in his hand could be used as an object of blackmail.

As a humourous character: -

She is by herself is not a humorous character. It is others who enjoy her follies. This is always the tragedy of a comic figure. Mr. J.B. Priestley rightly observes that 'humour verges on tears'. It does in the case of Lady Wishfort. As a humourous character she is odd, and believes readily what is said to her. We never hate a comic character, and we do not hate her. We enjoy her follies. When she is awaiting the arrival of Sir Rowland (Waitwell, a servant of Mirabell) and thinking the manner in which she must meet him she explodes one of the best humorous squibs in the drama. In her mannerism resides the potentialities of humour of which she is at once the cause. She is a short of darling mouse who unsuspectingly enters the trap, and as such causes the effervescence of humour.

Page No.: _____
Date: / /

She could be befooled by such words of Sir Rowland (a mere servant) "You are all camphor and frankincense, all chastity and odour". And like a truly comic character she comes off unscathed through the tragic situations in the drama.

A woman with high Prejudices :-

Lady Wishfort is a woman of high prejudices. She is highly prejudiced against Mirabell, though it may be conceded that there is some basis for it.

It is because of the fact that she can not discriminate between a good person and a bad one. She trusts Mrs. Marwood very much and can not judge her intriguing nature. As a matter of fact she is a woman of strong likes and dislikes.

Of Explosive Temperament :- Lady Wishfort is of explosive temperament. Whenever she finds herself crossed or deceived she can not contain herself she bursts in to invectives which only a foul mouthed person can spout.

Hatred of man :- Hatred of man is the most prominent trait of Lady Wishfort. It may be due to the fact that has to suffer at their hands. Mirabell did not oblige her. They played all kinds of pranks on her. Even her kin, Sir Wilfull is not kind towards her. Fainall designs against her. There are circumstances to prove that she logically turns away from men. It does not seem to be ingrained in her but created on finding men such odious beasts. She is

not a misanthrope by nature. She hates man for they well deserve the hatred on her part. She hates Mirabell 'worse than a Quaker hates a parrot, or than a fish monger hates a hard frost.'

On the whole the character of Lady Wishfort has been drawn with great zest and enthusiasm by Congreve. It may be a flat one but most engaging and most intensely drawn

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