



William  
Congreve  
(1670 – 1729 )

- Studied at the Trinity College in Dublin where he was one of Jonathan Swift's students

- He was libertine with a great interest in food and wine



- He gave up a career in law to concentrate on literature and drama.
- He wrote four comedies:
- **The Old Bachelor** that gave him instant fame
- **The Double Dealer**
- **Love for Love**
- **The Way of the World** (1700) his masterpiece.

- The play, however, was not well received at the time, and was criticised for being over complicated.
- After the poor reception of the opening performance, Congreve, apparently, jumped onto the stage and began to insult the audience.
- He died in London and was buried in Westminster Abbey

# The Way of the World

## the plot

- Quite complex
- The young libertine Mirabell is in love with the beautiful and witty Millamant,
- whose aunt, Lady Wishfort will not consent to their marriage...



- Mirabell's aim is to persuade Lady Wishfort in consenting to their marriage, thus supplying a dowry of 6,000 pounds





- His plan fails because of Mrs Marswood. She is helped by her lover Fainall who has married Lady Wishfort's daughter.
- He wants to gain control of his wife's property and Millamant's inheritance and to do so he blackmails Lady Wishfort



# Certificate of Marriage

\_\_\_\_\_

Were wed on \_\_\_\_\_

By \_\_\_\_\_

At \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

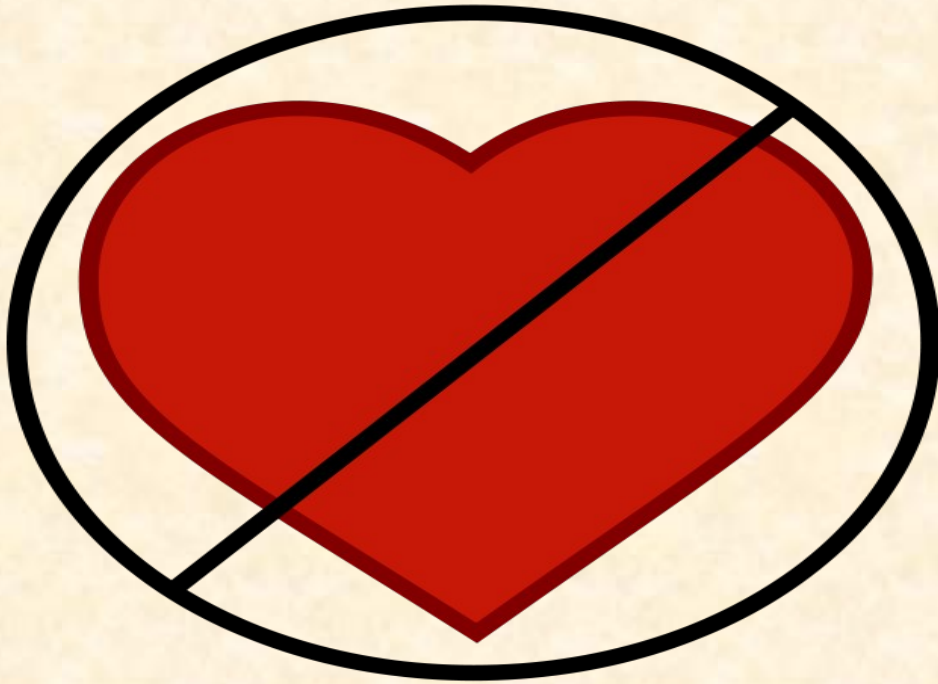
- In the end Mirabell manages to defeat Fainall and Mrs Marswood and saves Lady Wishfort from the scandal.
- In return she eventually agrees to his marriage to Millamant



# Features of the play

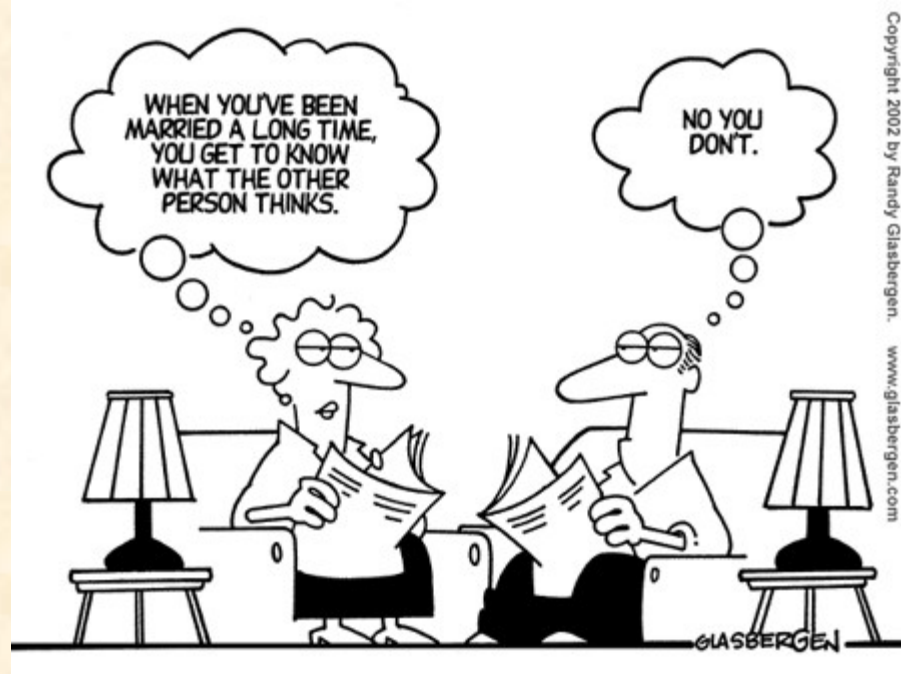
- The play is based on the parallel stories of two couples:
- 1 Mirabell and Millamant
- 2 Fainall and Mrs Marswood
- Congreve uses the two couples to compare and contrast different possible forms of human relationship

- Fainall is a cynical opportunist mainly interested in money and property.
- He had made a bad marriage with Lady Wishfort's daughter and he finds a more suitable partner in his affair with the equally mercenary Mrs Marswood.



- However they don't love each other and their relationship is poisoned by mutual resentment and disappointment.
- Both have lost the chance for true happiness that still exists for Mirabell and Millamant, and that is the reason why they wish to destroy the young couple's plan

- Mirabell and Millamant by contrast appear to be made for each other, but they are not innocent idealistic lovers, like Fainall and Mrs Marswood, they are realists and know “the way of the world” and the combination of the hypocrisy and opportunism on which the majority of marriages are based



# Themes

- The main theme of the play is marriage, its reality and appearance.
- At Congreve's time arranged marriages were the rule rather than the exception and they were based mainly on property and inheritance rather than mutual affection between the partners





# Characters

- They are realistically portrayed human beings, unconventional, frank and independent.

- Millamant embodies the features of the upper class lady of her time, economically independent, sophisticated, self-confident. Before marrying Mirabell, she imposes her conditions to defend her liberty and avoid the traditional role of wife



# Language

- Full of sophisticated verbal humour.
- Even the names of the characters are symbolic of their personality:
- Mirabell = admirer of beauty
- Millamant = a thousand of lovers
- Lady Wishfort = wish for it – wish for love
- Fainall = he who feigns all and has no real emotions