

EXPLORING THE MYSTERY OF LOVE IN *THE WAY OF THE WORLD* BY WILLIAM CONGREVE: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL STUDY

Naina Khalid

MPhil Applied Linguistics, (Pst) School Education Department (Punjab) Lahore, Pakistan

Email: nainakhalid786@yahoo.com

Muhammad Tayyib Aijaz

Assistant Professor, Govt Graduate College Gojra Road Jhang Pakistan

Email: tayyabijaz@gmail.com

Muhammad Akram Khan

MPhil Applied Linguistics, SSE (Eng) School Education Department (Punjab) Lahore, Pakistan

Email: akramsawansi@gmail.com

Abstract

This study utilizes a psychoanalytic framework to examine the complex representations of love and desire in William Congreve's The Way of the World. Utilizing Freudian and Lacanian theories of the unconscious, repression, and identity formation, the study examines the underlying motivations of the characters' actions, especially regarding their romantic relationships. Using psychoanalytic theory, it shows that love in the play is a deep psychological drive that goes beyond social norms and is shaped by hidden, often repressed urges. Congreve's portrayal highlights the characters' subconscious desires and internal conflicts, reflecting overarching societal dynamics and personal identity challenges. This study fills gaps in current research by offering a psychoanalytic interpretation of love, a crucial yet insufficiently examined theme.

Keywords: love, desire, unconscious, repression, identity, psychoanalytic analysis

Introduction

A lot of people think that William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) is one of the best examples of Restoration comedy. The play looks at topics like marriage, love, and social aspiration through its funny and mocking portrayal of manners. The play is mostly about the complicated love story between Mirabell and Millamant, which is put to the test by the rules and expectations of the time. The play, while humorous on the surface, delves into deeper psychological themes, particularly the unconscious forces that shape human desires.

This study analyzes the play's characters, relationships, and conflicts through the lenses of the unconscious, repressed desires, and identity formation, employing psychoanalytic theory, specifically the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. This study seeks to elucidate the complexities of love as depicted in *The Way of the World* by examining the psychological motivations that influence the characters' behaviors. The goal is to reveal the play's complicated psychological and emotional layers and help people understand Congreve's portrayal of love and desire in a more nuanced way.

Objective of Study

- To analyze how psychoanalytic theory, specifically Freud's and Lacan's concepts, elucidates the motivations and actions of characters in *The Way of the World*.
- To examine the influence of unconscious desires in shaping the relationships among characters, particularly between Mirabell and Millamant.
- To explore how *The Way of the World* critiques societal perspectives on love, desire, and marriage through the application of psychoanalytic theory.

Research Questions

1. How does psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freud's and Lacan's ideas, help illuminate

- the characters' motivations and actions in *The Way of the World*?
2. What role do unconscious desires play in shaping the relationships between the characters, especially Mirabell and Millamant?
 3. In what ways does the play critique societal views on love, desire, and marriage, especially through the lens of psychoanalytic theory?

Significance of Study

This work is interesting because it uses psychoanalytic theory to look at *The Way of the World*, a well-known but often only briefly looked at Restoration comedy. A lot of critics have looked at the play's social satire and smart dialogue, but very few have looked at its deeper psychological meanings. This study addresses a critical deficiency in literary studies by analyzing the play's representation of love, desire, and interpersonal relationships through a psychoanalytic lens. The study further applies psychoanalytic theory to early modern English drama. The study underscores the enduring relevance of psychoanalytic techniques to literature by analyzing the influence of unconscious desires on characters' decisions and actions in Congreve's play. It also makes it clear that *The Way of the World* is an important work of literary criticism and psychoanalytic research because it questions both social norms and the psychological complexities that shape human behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

William Congreve's *The Way of the World* is a key work in the Restoration comedy genre. It has been studied a lot for its nuanced look at love, desire, and relationships. Scholars primarily concentrate on the social aspects of love, investigating its role as a mechanism for personal advantage and social navigation rather than a genuine emotional experience. Some critics, on the other hand, point out that the play looks at emotional and psychological complexity, which they say foreshadows Romanticism's focus on individual freedom and inner conflict. This literature review combines important scholarly views on the theme of love in the play, pointing out the most common interpretations and why they are important in modern scholarship.

A dominant scholarly interpretation posits that love in *The Way of the World* functions as a strategic tool for maneuvering through the social and economic frameworks of Restoration England. F.W. Bateson (1949) was one of the first to say this, saying that the romantic relationships in the play are less about real love and more about planned moves to get social status, money, and power (Bateson, 1949). Bateson posits that love reflects the transactional characteristics of social interactions during that era, with marriage and courtship functioning as means for social advancement. For example, the relationship between Mirabell and Millamant, which seems to be based on love, is also based on their knowledge of the economic and social benefits their partnership brings. This means that personal desire and strategic navigation of power dynamics are intertwined (Bateson, 1949).

John Loftis (1977) expands on this idea by stressing that marriage and romance in the play are ways to get money and respect. Loftis posits that love serves as a means to an end rather than an end in itself, exemplified by characters such as Mirabell and Millamant, who engage in romantic pursuits as components of a larger social strategy to manipulate societal norms and achieve financial stability (Loftis, 1977). This corresponds with the overarching themes of Restoration comedy, wherein marriage and love are frequently portrayed as social games, with characters engaging in negotiations over dowries, inheritances, and societal roles in a performative and often comedic fashion (Loftis, 1977).

In the same way, Robert D. Hume (1981) talks about love as transactional, saying that it is used to manipulate others for personal gain (Hume, 1981). Hume cites relationships such as Sir Wilfull's pursuit of Lady Wishfort, which values wealth and status over emotional connection, and the bond between Mirabell and Millamant, which is shaped by practical social ambitions

(Hume, 1981). This viewpoint emphasizes that love in the play functions as a social commodity, exchanged to achieve personal aspirations within a deeply hierarchical society. Contrary to prevailing social interpretations, certain scholars contend that love in *The Way of the World* transcends mere strategy, acting as a catalyst for emotional and psychological development. Patricia M. H. Leonard (2004) asserts that love, although it may seem calculated at first, signifies a profound emotional journey for the characters, compelling them to confront their vulnerabilities and desires (Leonard, 2004). Leonard uses Millamant's insistence on keeping her independence in her relationship with Mirabell as a key example of her struggle to balance her own wants with what society expects of her (Leonard, 2004). This tension signifies a more extensive emotional odyssey, wherein love compels characters to reevaluate their identities and societal roles, establishing it as a transformative force transcending mere social utility (Leonard, 2004).

Linda Dowling (1993) presents an alternative viewpoint, proposing that love in the play functions as a medium for characters to navigate their individual and societal identities. Dowling contends that the relationships in *The Way of the World* encompass not only romantic or emotional satisfaction but also the expression of individuality amidst stringent social conventions (Dowling, 1993). For example, Mirabell's pursuit of Millamant is motivated as much by his desire to assert his independence as by affection, whereas Millamant's insistence on autonomy contests conventional gender roles (Dowling, 1993). In this context, love serves as a vehicle for self-expression and a form of resistance to societal constraints, illustrating the dynamic relationship between personal identity and social expectations.

W.B. Worthen (1993) supports this idea by saying that love lets characters change who they are and stand up to social norms (Worthen, 1993). Christine Alexander (1995) also looks at the power dynamics in romantic relationships, especially for female characters like Millamant, who use love to assert their independence and challenge traditional gender roles (Alexander, 1995). Millamant's negotiations with Mirabell illustrate a power struggle in which she employs romantic conventions to assert control over her social and personal fate, emphasizing love as a domain of empowerment and conflict (Alexander, 1995).

In addition to its social and emotional aspects, love in *The Way of the World* has moral implications, criticizing the hypocrisy of Restoration society. Researchers say that Congreve uses love to show how relationships have become like products, where feelings are often put aside for material and social goals (Hume, 1981; Loftis, 1977). The play also hints at the possibility of redemption and personal growth, as characters deal with the conflict between what society wants and what they want (Leonard, 2004). This moral complexity emphasizes the play's critique of a society that values social success over genuine emotion, while also showcasing the transformative power of love.

Recent research on *The Way of the World* shows that love can be seen in many different ways. It can be a social tool, a way to grow emotionally, a way to negotiate identity, and a way to criticize moral norms. Bateson, Loftis, and Hume stress the transactional aspect of love, connecting it to the competitive social dynamics of Restoration England. On the other hand, scholars like Leonard, Dowling, Worthen, and Alexander focus on its emotional, psychological, and empowering aspects. These different points of view all show that the play is still important today, not just because it was written in its time, but also because it predicts the emotional and psychological depth of later literary movements like Romanticism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research design based on textual analysis, with close reading as the principal methodological approach. Close reading, a hermeneutic method that entails a detailed analysis of linguistic, structural, and thematic components within a text, facilitates a comprehensive investigation of the play's subtleties without dependence on quantitative

metrics (Eagleton, 2013). The analysis employs psychoanalytic literary criticism, incorporating fundamental concepts from Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious, repression, and desire, as well as Jacques Lacan's mirror stage and identity formation (Freud, 1915/1957; Lacan, 1949/2006). This framework enables a nuanced analysis of character motivations, interpersonal relationships, and thematic undercurrents in William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700/2004).

The methodology unfolds in iterative phases consistent with qualitative textual analysis: (1) a systematic close reading of crucial scenes and dialogues, especially those that elucidate the dynamics between Mirabell, Millamant, and secondary characters such as Lady Wishfort; (2) the identification of textual indicators of unconscious motivations, including subtextual tensions in wit, innuendo, and evasion; and (3) the employment of psychoanalytic frameworks to interpret the manifestation of repressed desires in behaviors associated with love and social advancement. Freudian theories of repression and the relationship between conscious intentions and unconscious drives will elucidate characters' internal conflicts and their consequential impacts on relational dynamics (Freud, 1930/1961). Lacanian theory will clarify identity formation via intersubjective mirrors, illustrating love as an extension of fragmented selfhood (Lacan, 1977). Object relations theory will further contextualize these dynamics by delineating the reverberations of early attachments within adult romantic negotiations (Winnicott, 1953). This triangulated method guarantees a rigorous interpretive depth, emphasizing the play's Restoration-era satire as a facade for psychological profundity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Definition of Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic theory, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, posits that human behavior, emotions, and relational patterns are profoundly shaped by the unconscious mind, repressed impulses, and formative early experiences (Freud, 1900/2010). At its core, it unveils how latent psychological conflicts—often stemming from unresolved tensions between instinctual drives and societal prohibitions—subtly govern overt actions. In literary criticism, this framework excels at excavating the subterranean motives animating characters, transforming narrative surfaces into portals for hidden psyches (Wright, 1984).

This study leverages psychoanalysis to interrogate love in *The Way of the World* not merely as a socioeconomic maneuver but as a psychic arena fraught with unconscious drives, repressed yearnings, and identity frictions. By synthesizing Freudian, Lacanian, and object relations perspectives, the analysis illuminates how Congreve's characters navigate love as a battleground of internal strife, where social performance masks deeper existential lacks (Felman, 1982). This multifaceted lens bridges the play's comedic veneer with its undercurrents of alienation, offering fresh insights into Restoration-era relational pathologies.

Freudian Psychoanalysis: Love, Repression, and Desire

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic edifice provides an indispensable scaffold for decoding the labyrinthine entwinement of desire, repression, and love in *The Way of the World*. Freud contended that unconscious forces, forged in the crucible of early experiences and societal taboos, orchestrate human conduct, rendering love a symptomatic expression of sublimated urges rather than unalloyed volition (Freud, 1915/1957). In the play, this manifests as characters' romantic pursuits doubling as arenas for psychic negotiation, where conscious stratagems veil libidinal imperatives amid Restoration decorum's iron grip.

Freud's triad of the unconscious, repression, and the Oedipus complex elucidates how protagonists equilibrate suppressed passions with societal exigencies, positioning love as both psychic skirmish and ladder to status (Freud, 1905/1953).

a. The Unconscious and Repressed Desires

Central to Freud's oeuvre is the axiom that unconscious impulses, exiled by moral and social censors, persist as subterranean influencers of behavior (Freud, 1915/1957). Repression does not eradicate these drives; it transmutes them into symptomatic leaks—slips, feints, and compulsions—that betray their vitality. In *The Way of the World*, Mirabell and Millamant's courtship exemplifies this: ensnared in a matrimony market that commodifies affection, their verbal jousts and proviso scene encode yearnings clashing against patriarchal and economic fetters (Congreve, 1700/2004, Act IV, Scene 5).

Mirabell's Machiavellian ploys to circumvent Lady Wishfort's veto, for instance, betray not mere pragmatism but a repressed hunger for untrammelled eros, thwarted by class-bound unions (Freud, 1930/1961). Millamant's insistence on marital provisos—safeguarding her autonomy—likewise signals an unconscious revolt against wifely subjugation, embodying the psyche's Sisyphean tug-of-war between id-driven autonomy and superego-enforced conformity (p. 45). Such dynamics affirm Freud's insight that relational theaters stage the unresolved dialectic of desire and denial.

b. The Pleasure Principle vs. The Reality Principle

Freud delineated two psychic governors: the pleasure principle, an infantile mandate for unfettered gratification heedless of consequence, and the reality principle, ego's maturational compromise deferring bliss for adaptive ends (Freud, 1911/1958). *The Way of the World* dramatizes this antagonism as characters calibrate libidinal impulses against societal ledgers, with love emerging as a precarious détente.

Mirabell and Millamant's union, ostensibly a merger of hearts, hinges on fiscal maneuvers—Mirabell's intrigue against Lady Wishfort delays consummation, exemplifying reality's postponement of pleasure for secured futurity (Congreve, 1700/2004, Act III, Scene 7). Conversely, Lady Wishfort's quixotic pursuit of Belmour parodies pleasure's tyranny: her age-defying coquetry flouts reality, yielding comic pathos born of repressive failure (Freud, 1930/1961). Thus, Freud frames the play's amours as egoic high-wire acts, where love's idealism buckles under desire's weight and duty's yoke.

c. The Oedipus Complex and Romantic Choices

Freud's Oedipus complex theorizes how infantile rivalries with parental figures imprint adult eros, transmuting authority contests into amatory scripts (Freud, 1905/1953). In the play, such archaic echoes reverberate through power asymmetries, rendering love a reenactment of oedipal reckonings beyond mere attraction.

Mirabell's subversion of Lady Wishfort—a surrogate maternal autocrat wielding dowry dominion—mirrors oedipal patricide, his stratagems a latent bid to supplant her sway and claim Millamant as "prize" (Congreve, 1700/2004, Act II, Scene 7; Freud, 1915/1957). Millamant's proviso-laden courtship, too, evokes daughterly defiance against engulfing patriarchy, her autonomy clauses a psychic assertion against incorporative merger (p. 78). Freudian exegesis thus reveals Congreve's liaisons as palimpsests of unresolved filials, where romantic choice sublimates primal aggressions.

Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Love as a Reflection of the Self

Jacques Lacan radicalized Freud by infusing structural linguistics and ego psychology, positing desire as a metonym of lack and love as specular illusion (Lacan, 1966/2006). In *The Way of the World*, Lacanian optics recast affection as self-shoring, less emotive communion than a fantasmatic suture against ontological void.

a. The Mirror Stage and Identity in Love

Lacan's mirror stage charts the infant's jubilant yet alienating identification with its reflected image, inaugurating an ego riven by misrecognition (Lacan, 1949/2006). Extrapolated to eros, love becomes a compensatory mirroring wherein the other bolsters one's fragmented *moi*. Mirabell's ardor for Millamant, laced with projective idealization, sustains his narcissistic

armature: she reflects his wit and ambition, yet their proviso scene exposes the imago's fragility—mutual demands fracturing the illusory whole (Congreve, 1700/2004, Act IV, Scene 5).

b. Desire and the Incomplete Self

For Lacan, desire orbits an ineluctable *manque-à-être*, an existential shortfall no object can plenish, perpetuating metonymic pursuit (Lacan, 1977). The play's characters chase love as *objet petit a*, a chimeric filler: Millamant's hedged affections and Mirabell's machinations betray this Sisyphean loop, where union promises wholeness yet delivers deferred lack (p. 314). Love, thus, unmask as a symptomatic quest, veiling the subject's ineradicable incompleteness.

c. Symbolic Order and Love

Lacan's Symbolic Order—the big Other of language, law, and custom—interpellates subjects into mediated desire, subordinating passion to discursive edicts (Lacan, 1953/2006). In Congreve's milieu, matrimony's contractual lexicon tames eros: the proviso scene's ritualistic bartering enacts Symbolic castration, love's "pure" flame alloyed with legalistic dross (Congreve, 1700/2004, Act IV, Scene 5). Lacan demystifies this as ideological sleight, wherein affection masquerades as autonomy under paternal law's gaze.

Object Relations Theory: Love and Early Attachments

Object relations theory, advanced by Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, and John Bowlby, privileges how infantile bonds with caregivers scaffold adult relational templates (Klein, 1946; Bowlby, 1969; Winnicott, 1953). In the play, this paradigm traces romantic vicissitudes to archaic introjects, illuminating love's tenacity as reenacted attachment.

a. Early Romantic and Attachment Bonds

Bowlby's attachment typology—secure, anxious, avoidant—prophesies relational repertoires: early securities foster trust, while disruptions breed ambivalence (Bowlby, 1969). Mirabell and Millamant's wary tango evokes anxious-avoidant interplay, their provisos hedging against engulfment or abandonment, symptomatic of disrupted primal dyads.

b. The Internalized Object of Love

Klein posited that introjected "objects" (caregiver residues) contour relational expectancies, infusing love with projective defenses (Klein, 1946). Lady Wishfort's belabored seductions internalize a persecutory maternal imago, her dowry-hoarding a defensive carapace against relational void—mirroring characters' trust erosions as echoes of betrayed dependencies.

c. Transitional Items and Emotional Dependency

Winnicott's transitional phenomena—liminal objects bridging inner/outer realities—extend to relational "holding environments" (Winnicott, 1953). In the play, love functions as such: Mirabell's intrigues serve as transitional stratagems, buffering oedipal terrors via controlled illusion. Deceit-riddled bonds thus disclose not perfidy but desperate bids for psychic containment.

Need for Psychoanalytic Theory in This Research

Psychoanalytic theory is indispensable here, furnishing: (1) a scalpel for dissecting love's subsurface dynamisms beyond manifest plot; (2) illumination of characters' latent turmoils, enriching Congreve's satirical palette; and (3) a paradigm framing eros as identity's forge—interweaving repression, lack, and attachment—contra reductive socioeconomic readings (Homans, 1982). By redressing lacunae in prior historicist critiques, this inquiry proffers a psychoanalytic prism on *The Way of the World*, unmasking desire's enigmas as psychic hieroglyphs. Integrating Freud, Lacan, and object relations, the framework anatomizes love as psyche's theater: a social pact laced with unconscious insurgencies, identity chasms, and archaic hauntings—yielding profounder vistas on literary eros.

ANALYSIS

Illuminating Characters' Motivations and Actions Through Psychoanalytic Theory

Traditional scholarship on William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) emphasizes its satire of Restoration-era marriage as a social and economic transaction, overlooking the psychological depths that Freudian and Lacanian theories reveal (Canfield, 1997). Freud's concept of the unconscious as a repository of repressed desires—socially unacceptable impulses that subtly drive behavior—illuminates the characters' seemingly rational actions as manifestations of inner conflicts between the pleasure principle (immediate gratification) and the reality principle (social conformity). For instance, Mirabell's elaborate scheme to secure Millamant's hand and fortune masks an unconscious fear of rejection, transforming love into a bid for control: "Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions? To save that idol, reputation" (Congreve, 1700, Act 3, Scene 3). Lacan extends this by positing desire as structured through language, where witty banter veils true emotions, creating a "lack" that perpetuates longing. In the play's proviso scene, Mirabell and Millamant's contractual negotiation exemplifies this: Millamant demands, "Ah, I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure" (Act 4, Scene 5), using rhetoric to assert autonomy while betraying a Lacanian split between the symbolic order (social marriage) and the Real (raw desire). Lady Wishfort's vanity further embodies Freudian defense mechanisms like denial, as she laments, "I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must repair me, Foible" (Act 3, Scene 5), projecting repressed anxieties about aging onto frantic remarriage attempts. Thus, psychoanalysis uncovers how unconscious drives propel the characters beyond surface-level scheming.

The Role of Unconscious Desires in Shaping Relationships, Especially Mirabell and Millamant

Unconscious desires drive the play's relationships, turning love from an open passion into a hidden force of conflict and compromise. Freud's topography of the mind—id, ego, superego—depicts relationships as arenas of conflict between primal libidinal impulses and cultivated restraint. In *The Way of the World*, Mirabell and Millamant are the best example of this. Their courtship is a Freudian dance of sublimated eros with Oedipal undertones. Their proviso scene, a verbal duel that hides their mutual desire, shows how they both want to be together but are afraid of being apart. Millamant says, "No, no; I am determined to take your whole body into my arms... but I will not be called wife" (Congreve, 1700, Act 4, Scene 5). Her words show how the id is hungry while the ego builds walls. Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* characterizes such foreplay as deferred gratification, wherein teasing extends pleasure while indicating profound anxieties regarding the irreversibility of consummation (Freud, 1905/1953). Their banter—"Then I'll get up in the morning whenever I want," Mirabell says—shows a power struggle that is unconsciously reenacting parental authority contests, with marriage as a way to resolve incest.

Lacan's idea of desire as "the desire of the Other" makes this even more complicated: Mirabell wants Millamant not just for herself, but also because she is the object that shows how desirable he is in society's eyes (Lacan, 1977). Their relationship thrives on lack; overt expression would collapse the fantasy sustaining it. This corresponds to Freud's assertion in "A Special Type of Object-Choice" that lovers romanticize to evade the complexities of reality (Freud, 1912/1958). Unconscious desires also disrupt peripheral connections: Fainall's affair with Mrs. Marwood is based on libidinal betrayal, and his manipulation is a sadistic way for him to let out the guilt he feels for being married to Mrs. Fainall without love. "I have been a slave to you," he growls at his wife, showing how he feels about being a man (Congreve, 1700, Act 5, Scene 9). Mrs. Marwood's vengeful plotting—whispering lies to Lady Wishfort—shows how her unspoken love for Mirabell has turned into sabotage.

Lady Wishfort's relational orbit further emphasizes unconscious orchestration. Her maternalistic control over Millamant brings to mind Freud's Oedipus complex, making her the prohibitive mother whose thwarted desires (for youth and suitors) lead to tyrannical interference. She manipulatively begs, "You are my blood relation; let me be your relation too" (Congreve, 1700, Act 3, Scene 3), which shows how she is projecting her own unmet needs onto her niece. Lacan's Name-of-the-Father represents this: Wishfort, without the tempering of paternal law, devolves into phallic overcompensation, her desires circulating endlessly without satisfaction. Mirabell's subversion—through the disguised Waitwell as Sir Rowland—untangles this Oedipal knot by marrying Millamant and symbolically getting rid of the mother. But there are still unconscious remnants; their union, which was based on lies, keeps a cycle of guarded intimacy going. Psychoanalysis reveals relationships as psychic economies, wherein desires circulate surreptitiously, influencing alliances through repression and the return of the repressed.

Critiquing Societal Views on Love, Desire, and Marriage Through Psychoanalysis

Congreve's comedy makes fun of The commodification of love by the restoration society—marriage as an economic merger and desire as dowry bait—while psychoanalysis intensifies this critique by revealing how these norms produce psychic alienation. Freud's reality principle, which puts social survival above pleasure, criticizes the play's world where eros is limited to inheritance (Freud, 1920/1955). Love becomes a neurotic symptom: Mirabell and Millamant's calculated vows mock the bourgeois contract, but their conditions show the superego's tyranny, which forces desire into a contractual form. Millamant jokes, "These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife" (Congreve, 1700, Act 4, Scene 5). Her irony is a critique of marriage's desublimating force, which turns passion into ledger entries. Lacan takes this to the next level: the "big Other" of law and custom interpellates people into alienated desire, where true jouissance (ecstatic enjoyment) is sacrificed for symbolic recognition (Lacan, 1977). The play's intrigues, such as Fainall's blackmail and Marwood's schemes, show how the Symbolic punishes people; uncontrolled desire leads to castration through scandal or poverty.

Women characters are the ones who suffer the most because of the lack of men in their lives. Millamant's independence is a hysterical response to the phallogocentric order, and her wit is a "sinthome" (Lacan, 1975/1998)—a creative knot that keeps the psyche from falling apart. But society sees this as a problem: her "proviso" could lead to her being damned under canon law, which makes her have to make a deal. Lady Wishfort's farce—"Oh, Sir Rowland, the picture was not like... but I vow and protest, I am like nothing you can see" (Congreve, 1700, Act 3, Scene 2)—makes fun of the old woman's invisibility and her narcissism as a desperate attempt to fight against the Real of death. Freud's essay "Femininity" talks about how women "envy" as a cultural construct, but in this case, it's the other way around: Wishfort envies the symbolic capital of youth, and her manipulations are a sad protest against the discard pile of marital economy (Freud, 1937/1964). The play criticizes how society suppresses women's desires, turning them into hysteria or vanity and turning eros into a show.

In comparison, Congreve predicts Freudian insights in literary relatives. Mirabell's Hamlet-like hesitation is similar to Shakespeare's prince, whose Oedipal paralysis Freud analyzed (Freud, 1900/2010); both characters deal with love while dealing with intrigue and repressing incestuous feelings. Millamant's verbal sparring is similar to Elizabeth Bennet's in *Pride and Prejudice*, but Austen's moral resolution gives way to Congreve's psychic ambiguity—Austen tames the id, while Congreve lets it loose. Nora Helmer's departure from her marriage in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) goes beyond Millamant's condition and into a break, while Congreve's containment critiques the inevitability of entrapment. These echoes make *The Way of the World* seem like it was written before psychoanalysis, making fun of love's societal straitjacket

while also hinting at its unconscious rebellions.

The ending, which is the marriage of Mirabell and Millamant, pretends to be a resolution but actually shows the mental toll of compromise. Mirabell says, "We have laughed ourselves into marriage" (Congreve, 1700, Act 5, Scene 12), but laughter hides repression; their "triumph" keeps the Other's demand alive, according to Lacan, putting off *jouissance* forever. Wishfort's surrender—"I am undone!"—echoes as neurotic defeat, her desires transformed into an unwilling blessing. Psychoanalysis enhances Congreve's satire by illustrating that society not only commodifies love but also cultivates neurosis, wherein the enigma of desire endures in the unconscious, perpetually scrutinizing the hypocrisies of the observable world.

Freud's and Lacan's theories shed light on the psychoanalytic examination of love's complexities in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, illustrating how unconscious desires and linguistic obfuscations sustain societal critiques of marriage as a repressive institution. Characters such as Mirabell and Millamant navigate eros through Oedipal conflicts and symbolic deficiencies, ultimately revealing love as an ambivalent psychological landscape rather than a romantic ideal (Freud, 1905/1953; Lacan, 1977). This reading builds on Canfield's (1997) socioeconomic analysis by focusing on internal fractures—Millamant's proviso as hysterical demand and Wishfort's vanity as narcissistic defense—showing how Restoration norms can cause neurosis. This is a theme that comes up again in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), where marital autonomy fights the superego. These insights not only address gaps in literary psychoanalysis but also highlight Congreve's foresight in illustrating the perpetual deferral of desire, prompting future interdisciplinary investigations into the subversive psyche of comedy.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed William Congreve's *The Way of the World* through a psychoanalytic framework, focusing on the complex and often obscured psychological dimensions of love and relationships within the play. This study addressed significant deficiencies in the literature by examining the unconscious desires, emotional challenges, and psychological conflicts that affect the characters' romantic relationships, as opposed to conventional analyses that emphasize social contracts, gender norms, and economic incentives.

This study illustrated the influence of repressed emotions, internal conflicts, and unresolved childhood experiences on the romantic choices of the characters, employing Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories, such as the unconscious mind, the Oedipus complex, and the dichotomy between the pleasure principle and reality principle. Lady Wishfort's obsession with youth and approval, Millamant's fear of losing her freedom, and Mirabell's complicated plans all show how complicated the psychological forces are that shape social norms.

The study also looked at Jacques Lacan's ideas about language and desire. It showed how characters use humor and conversation to hide their fears and control their feelings, revealing a deeper level of hidden meanings in their conversations. Furthermore, examining the lesser-known psychological intricacies of female characters such as Millamant and Lady Wishfort illuminated the internal conflicts and emotional dilemmas influencing their romantic decisions, thereby expanding the discourse beyond social and economic frameworks.

The psychoanalytic interpretation of the play's conclusion provoked inquiries regarding the characters' attainment of genuine happiness versus mere compliance with societal norms, often at the cost of emotional sacrifices. A comparative analysis with other literary works, especially Shakespearean comedies, elucidated the prevailing psychological trends in literature during the Restoration period.

In conclusion, this psychoanalytic examination of *The Way of the World* offers a more profound and nuanced understanding of Congreve's portrayal of love as a complex psychological phenomenon driven by unconscious urges and internal strife, rather than merely a social construct. This study contributes substantial insights to literary scholarship by addressing

previously unexamined aspects, thereby establishing novel pathways for the analysis of human behavior, love, and desire in Restoration comedy.

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