

A large, ornate decorative frame made of dark brown and gold-colored scrollwork, surrounding the central text. The frame has a rectangular shape with rounded corners and intricate, swirling patterns.

## **English Drama and the Fundamentals of Healthy Marriage**

**Dr/Ahmed Shehata Sayed Semida**  
**Cairo Higher Institute for Languages, Simultaneous  
Interpretation  
and Administrative Science, Egypt**  
[ashehata1978@gmail.com](mailto:ashehata1978@gmail.com)



## Abstract

This paper investigates rules of marriage in the plays of *King Lear*, *The Way of The World*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, and *The Browning Version*. Analysis is devoted to thirteen dialogues comprising seven dialogues whose illumination reveals principles of marital sustainability in addition to six dialogues whose scrutiny shows causes of marital disruption. Thus, an overall frame of healthy marriage can be drawn based on the adoption of the principles and the obviation of the causes. The analytical, descriptive and comparative methods are applied. The researcher has found that couples intending marriage should apprehend that virtue transcends wealth and authority, courtship encompasses a rational and passionate formula, matchmaking foundations should tackle worries expected after marriage. A married couple should understand that marital sustainability is based on preservation of morality, celebration of sincerity, firm faithfulness, tolerance, and concealment of marital disruption. Marital sustainability could be also endangered due to hatred and boredom, recurrent reprimand, false appetite and fading lust, thirst for sexual gratification, undervaluation of a partner, superficial dutifulness, and spoiling a partner's moments of happiness.

**Keywords:** courtship; love; marriage; partnership

## المستخلص

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية الى عقد دراسة تحليلية لثلاثة عشر حوارا مسرحيا متضمنا في أربع مسرحيات انجليزية مختارة هي الملك لير، هذه هي الدنيا، مروحة السيدة ونديمير، نسخة برلونغ . تسلط الدراسة الضوء على سبعة حوارات يمكن من خلال تحليلها استنباط أسباب استمرارية الزواج الناجح بالإضافة الى ستة حوارات يمكن من خلال إعادة تأويلها استنتاج أسباب الإضرابات الزوجية، بحيث يمكن في النهاية رسم إطار عام للأسس الجوهرية للزواج الصحي المبني على محاولة تبني أسباب النجاح وتجنب أسباب الإضرابات. تستعين الدراسة بالأساليب التحليلية والوصفية والمقارنة لبيان مقومات الزواج الواعد وكذلك أسباب الإضرابات الزوجية. وقد خلصت الدراسة الى أهمية إدراك المقبلين على الزواج لعدد من المفاهيم منها: سمو المفاضلة على الأسس الأخلاقية مقارنة بأسس الثراء والسلطة، شمول فترة الخطوبة على تقييمات عقلانية وعاطفية معا، الشراكة في مواجهة التحديات التي تلوح في الأفق بعد الزواج والنتيجة عن الإصطدام بأعراف اجتماعية زائفة. وأكدت الدراسة على أهمية حث الأزواج والزوجات على المحافظة على تحقيق مبدأ الاستدامة من خلال: الحفاظ على الأسس الأخلاقية، الاحتفال بالصدق والمودة بين الطرفين، الإخلاص المتبادل والراسخ، التسامح، عدم إفشاء أسباب الإضرابات الزوجية. يجب على الزوجين أيضا التغلب على أسباب الإضرابات الزوجية في مهدها ومنها: الكراهية والاحتقار والملل، التوبيخ المتكرر، الإنسياق وراء رغبة زائفة وشهوة ذابلة، عدم الإشباع الجنسي المتبادل، قيام طرف بالتقليل من شأن الطرف الآخر، التظاهر بتنفيذ الواجبات دون الرغبة في تقديم عناية حقيقية، إفساد لحظات السعادة النادرة لدى الطرف الآخر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطوبة، الحب، الزواج، الشراكة



## Introduction

Marital disruption is “one of the most stressful life events” (Kiecolt-Glaser et al. 13) that causes profound threat to marital stability that affects “markedly the life course of individuals, the nature of family life, and the household composition of population” (Martin and Bumpass 37). Bearing in mind that “no institution has more universal and personal significance to each of us than the family” (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2), the inevitability of tackling marital disruption transcends its mere theoretical framework. Varied experiences should be collected, compared and scrutinized so that the attempt to achieve sustainable marriage is consolidated. Therefore, this paper analyzes selected dramatic dialogues, character portrayals and technical devices as far as they all explicitly or implicitly highlight principles of sustainable love and marriage. Analysis is devoted to William Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (1606), William Congreve’s *The Way of the World* (1700), Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), and Terence Rattigan’s *The Browning Version* (1948). The four English plays shed light on the private and public realms of marriage as dramatized in the Elizabethan, Restoration, Victorian, and Modern eras respectively.

Whereas *King Lear* depicts the King of France’s proposal to Cordelia whom he has not met before, *The Way of the World* highlights the love game ending in marriage between the well-acquainted Mirabell and Millamant. Both plays can be associated with the depiction of the principles of sustainable courtship. Comparatively, *Lady Windermere’s Fan* can be linked to the fundamentals of sustainable marriage especially in its earliest stage as Lady Windermere is a wife who is married for love and who is celebrating her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. She is also a mother to a six-month baby. In *The Browning Version*, the long-term relationship between the henpecked Andrew Crocker-Harris and the adulterous Millie Crocker-Harris is an instance of a fragile marital life.



Thus, love and marriage experiences dramatized in the four plays are diverse.

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness among newly engaged couples and married ones on the principles of building up a perpetual marriage that can withstand the vociferous sounds of marital hardship. Wider perspectives of solutions to contemporary marital disruption are also provided based on the apprehension of their artistic representations. Methodologically, the analytical, descriptive and comparative approaches are applied. The paper focuses on analyzing two major subject matters: principles of marital sustainability, and causes of marital breakdown.

### **1. Principles of Marital Sustainability**

The good qualities of marriage are factors that contribute to its sustainability. These qualities are investigated in seven dialogues dramatized in the four selected plays. In *King Lear*, the conversation among Cordelia, the King of France and the Duke of Burgundy in the opening scene is analyzed with the aim of shedding light on the foundations of a good marriage proposal and acceptance. In *The Way of the World*, the dialogue between Mirabell and Mr. Fainall in the opening scene is examined in view of their respective attitudes to rational love. Additionally, Mirabell-Millamant negotiation of marriage in the Proviso Scene is scrutinized to highlight principles of matchmaking. In *Lady Windermere's Fan* four dialogues are discussed. Lady Windermere's dialogue with Lord Darlington in the opening scene is deconstructed with the aim of tracing the reaction of the virtuous Lady to the gentleman's vicious perspective of woman-man relationship. Lady Windermere's dialogue with the Duchess of Berwick at Lord Windermere's house is brought under the microscope to investigate the reaction of the lady towards the rumour of her husband's infidelity. The confrontation between Lord Windermere and Lady Windermere that ends Act One is explored with the aim of showing the two partners' management of their moments of fury.



Finally, the dialogue between Lady Windermere and Lord Darlington in Act Two is studied with the aim of showing the lady's reaction towards the lord's organized process of seduction.

### **1.1.Beauty and Virtue Transcend Wealth and Authority**

In *King Lear*, the only marriage that is founded throughout the course of the play is the one between Cordelia and the King of France. The circumstances surrounding this marriage are unusual as Shakespeare dramatizes Lear's fury after Cordelia has failed to express her love for him in the way he expects. Consequently, Lear decides to disown her and associates her with disrepute before a number of attendees including the Duke of Burgundy and the King of France, who have come to propose to Cordelia. Lear's reaction results in the astonishment of the King of France who wonders about Lear's cause. At that particular moment, Cordelia intervenes in the dispute and beseeches her father to clear her reputation. She asks Lear to affirm that his wrath against her is not due to her 'vicious blot murder', 'foulness', 'unchaste action', or 'dishonour'd step' (I.i.227-28). Though Cordelia's words do not cease Lear's outrage, they enable the King of France to apprehend Cordelia's 'tardiness in nature' (I.i.235). Whereas Cordelia's words reflect four basic requirements for gaining respect, France's words show his potentiality to penetrate both Cordelia's naivety and Lear's exasperation. He mentally and psychologically accepts Cordelia's character regardless of the smearing campaign Lear wages against her. He appreciates her insistence on speaking her heart honestly. France's appreciation turns into admiration when he realizes Cordelia's dealing with marriage as a sacrament while he is listening to her talk to the Duke of Burgundy. When the Duke of Burgundy expresses his readiness to accept Cordelia as his wife on condition that Lear gives Cordelia her share in property and land, Lear refuses his request. On her behalf, Cordelia emphasizes that she will never be the duke's wife because he prioritizes 'respects of fortune' as his love (I.i.248-49). Consequently, her



attitude incarnates her rejection of being a mere attachment to a husband who is preoccupied with obtaining economic and political privileges.

The whole dispute comes to an end as soon as the King of France addresses Cordelia as he says, “Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor; Most choice, forsaken; and most loved, despised! Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon: Be it lawful I take up what's cast away” (I.i.250-253). Thus, unlike the Duke of Burgundy who prefers profiteering marriage, the King of France recognizes that beauty and virtue are invaluable when they combine within the character of a young lady. France, who has not known Cordelia for long, is able to give proper judgment contrary to the king who acts like ‘an anarchist’ (Harmon 420) and the duke who pays no attention to good human traits. France’s last words are also reflective of his appreciation for Cordelia’s belief in what Fernée refers to as “sincerity rather than convention” (8). Fernée adds that France, symbolically, seems to celebrate Cordelia’s virtues (9). Cordelia’s image as a faithful daughter could be one of the causes of France’s confidence that she is going to be a faithful wife. On her behalf, Cordelia’s acceptance of France’s proposal signifies her trust in his proper judgment too.

## 1.2. Rational Courtship and Love

*The Way of the World* opens with Mirabell’s talk to Mr. Fainall about his love for Millamant. After they have finished playing cards in a chocolate house, Mr. Fainall pokes fun at Mirabell’s love story and describes him as ‘a passionate lover’ who likes ‘the failings’ of his mistress. In response, Mirabell seriously admits that he rationally admires Millamant’s manners after he had studied them. Mirabell says,

And for a discerning man somewhat too passionate a lover,  
for I like her with all her faults; nay, like her for her faults.  
Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become  
her, and those affectations which in another woman would



be odious serve but to make her more agreeable. I'll tell thee, Fainall, she once used me with that insolence that in revenge I took her to pieces, sifted her, and separated her failings: I studied 'em and got 'em by rote. The catalogue was so large that I was not without hopes, one day or other, to hate her heartily. To which end I so used myself to think of 'em, that at length, contrary to my design and expectation, they gave me every hour less and less disturbance, till in a few days it became habitual to me to remember 'em without being displeas'd. They are now grown as familiar to me as my own frailties, and in all probability in a little time longer I shall like 'em as well. (I.i.16)

Analytically, Mirabell starts with describing himself as 'a discerning' man who is always guided by his sense of reason, though he allows his passions to flood temporarily. He even thinks of what he says and corrects himself at once. This is indicated by his use of 'nay' which is usually inserted into a sentence either to correct it or make it more precise. Additionally, Mirabell uses the verb 'like' rather than 'love', though he is in deep love with Millamant. Thus, the character portrayal of Mirabell is associated with cautious love. This kind of love is an outcome of a process that comprises several steps. First, Mirabell admits that he loves Millamant and that her moral weaknesses are not unusual. Then, he emphasizes that these weaknesses have become a reason for his love for her. Mirabell's attitude is shown in his shift from using the preposition 'with' to the use of the preposition 'for'. The whole image becomes one of acceptability that leads Mirabell not only to describe Millamant's 'follies' as 'so natural' but also as 'so artful'. He justifies his viewpoint on the basis of his personal preference of Millamant's character rather than his acceptance of a general standard for a woman. The repetition of 'so' conveys Mirabell's deep satisfaction with his evaluation of Millamant as well.



Second, Mirabell explains that Millamant addressed him once in an improper manner that incited him to take revenge. But, his revenge was uncommon. His revenge manifested itself in his deep analysis of her character. Mirabell tells Mr. Fainall that he carefully took Millamant into pieces which he divided into two groups: proper manners and failings. He studied every piece in detail and found out that her failings are numerous. He studied each and every failing and, to his own surprise, he got accustomed to each. His ability to adapt with these failings resulted in his sense that they bring him, day after day, ‘less disturbance’ and that they became ‘habitual’. Mirabell assures that when he remembers them he is not ‘displeased’ because they appear as familiar to him as his own weaknesses.

Third, Mirabell uses the verb ‘like’ again but this time in reference to Millamant’s failings. Because the failings are parts of Millamant’s character, Mirabell finds himself in no position but to be attracted to them as well. Fourth, the power of Mirabell’s love for Millamant is mainly based on his confidence in his personal experience. His frequent use of the pronoun ‘I’ is often followed by action verbs like ‘took’, ‘sifted’, ‘separated’, and ‘studied’. Mirabell’s futuristic vision that he will like Millamant’s frailties in a short time reflects that his judgment of her character is based on reason, and consequently, the probability of their success as a married couple expects consolidation.

In conclusion, this part of Mirabell- Mr. Fainall dialogue represents the concepts of: (1) rationally-guided love that does not exclude passion; (2) possible adaptation with a partner’s failings; (3) tolerance with a partner’s temporary violation of proper manners; (4) hope of achieving marital sustainability based on confidence in one’s own judgment.

### 1.3.Matchmaking Foundations

Though the Proviso Scene in *The Way of the World* is ironical and witty, it initiates the rational negotiation between the two





amorous protagonists. It embodies the serious conditions for the sustainability of marriage based on the two partners' awareness of the real fears that may threaten their marital stability afterwards.

Millamant wishes to guarantee her independence that consists of 'will' and 'pleasure'. She is afraid that her attachment, as a wife, to her husband will replace her 'real identity' by 'superficial subordination' to that husband. She denies that Mirabell's love for her is reduced to mere 'names' like wife, spouse, joy, jewel, love and sweetheart. She is willing that Mirabell gives her equal love. She emphasizes the necessity of their appearance in public gatherings all the time, not just at the early stage of their marriage and then each one is ashamed of being seen with the other. After marriage, she wants to maintain her privacy that her closet is inviolate. She wants to establish connection with others according to her own taste without bothering herself with talking to 'fools' who are Mirabell's relations. She likes to be the 'empress' of her dining table (IV.i.74-75). Millamant's conditions show her insistence that "even in marriage she has a right to her own private life" because she recognizes that 'mutual respect' is 'necessary even in marriage', which is "the most intimate of human relationships" (Putnis 206). The conditions which represent Millmanat's "worries about life after marriage" (Gill 167) are in fact 'personal boundaries' (Rosowski 403) she is willing to adopt to allow herself to be 'dwindled into a wife' (IV.i.75). Millamant is also intelligent enough to understand that she lives in a patriarchal society and, consequently, she is reasonable in the sense that her conditions "do not challenge the male order" (Gill 168).

On his behalf, Mirabell's dictations include that Millamant should get acquainted with people 'in general' and that she should not: (1) allow an intimate 'she-friend' to stimulate her to hide her friend's secret relationships, and then tempt her to share a similar experience so that they can enjoy 'mutual secrecy'; (2) accompany a fop to the theatre with a mask on her face; (3)



change her facial features as long as Mirabell likes them; (4) wear all kinds of masks whether during daylight or at night; (5) be acquainted with sellers of cosmetics or all commerce with street vendors in general; (6) wear tightly laced corset when she is pregnant in a way that harms the embryo's normal formation (IV.i.75-76). According to Rosowski, Mirabell's conditions are brought closer to his wish to protect his relationship with Millamant against society: people, female intimates and customs such as "painting, masking, strait-lacing while pregnant, and drinking strong water" (403). His fears are not concerned with "Millamant's most private chamber but [with] her more public familial and social activities" (Gill 167). He tries to secure his expected wife against the illusionary fashion of his contemporary upper class society.

The Proviso Scene seems to suggest that a husband and a wife should enjoy a certain degree of freedom provided that devotion and loyalty are maintained. Mirabell's apprehension of the social codes of his society enables him to appreciate Millamant's chastity and sense of reason. Consequently, he shows self-control and rationality throughout the witty scene.

The compromise Mirabell and Millamant manage to achieve is solid enough that it stands against the counter-plot developed by Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Marwood whose shared goal is to break down Mirabell-Millamant relationship. Furthermore, whereas the Proviso Scene represents "a mutual guarantee of individual dignity and worth in a world where these qualities are always threatened" (Kaufman 421), it is also one of a bargain of honour and identity rather than a bargain of materialistic profit. It is a framework of the life deal between a patriarch and a matriarch, the two pillars of a family. The whole scene also criticizes the societal obsession with appearance and it dramatizes in detail the requirements of a life companion. The scene does not simply portray the characters of the two lovers but, more importantly, reveals the lovers' awareness of the surrounding social illusions which may spoil



their marital relationship. Thus, new foundations of matchmaking are presented based on understanding the surrounding culture. Moreover, the scene leads to the only marriage that is based on true love among the diverse relationships mentioned in the play. Mirabell-Millamant promising love contributes to Mirabell's success in securing the financial and social standing of the Wishforts against Mr. Fainall's plan of blackmail and disputation as well. Thus, the effectiveness of a solid marriage is proved even before the ceremonial celebrity is performed since it enhances the sustainable existence of the Wishforts family

#### 1.4.Preservation of Virtue

Lady Windermere's extended dialogue with Lord Darlington at Lord Windermere's house in Act One of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* incarnates the lady's virtuous perception of woman-man relationship. First, the dialogue shows that Lady Windermere does not positively respond to Lord Darlington's exaggerated compliments on two main occasions. She informs him that she got annoyed because he 'kept paying' her 'elaborate compliments the whole evening' at the Foreign Office the night before the play opens. She expresses her annoyance once again after he had glorified her birthday (I.24). She is able to put their relationship on the proper track as she reveals to him that she would not have been sincere to him if she had believed his intention is vicious like 'most other men' (I.25). She emphasizes that Lord Darlington and she are 'very good friends' and that he can spoil their friendship by 'saying extravagant silly things' to her (I.26). Thus, the portrayal of Lady Windermere signifies the psychological firmness of a Puritan wife against a dandy's tempting praises of her character and manner. The lady's response seems to temporarily uproot her possible attraction to the lord that may develop in future into an adulterous relation.

Second, Lady Windermere denies the concept of 'reciprocal betrayal' under the fashionable slogan of 'consolation'. When Lord Darlington proposes that consolation is the only way a newly



married wife should follow when she discovers that her husband betrays her, Lady Windermere replies through raising a rhetorical question, “Because the husband is vile –should the wife be vile also?” (I.27). Hence, she believes that a wife should be faithful regardless of her husband’s suspicious relations.

Third, Lady Windermere denies the public perception of life as a ‘speculation’ or a bargain of investment. She assures that life is ‘a sacrament’ whose ideal is love and its purification is sacrifice (I.27). The lady’s reference to the ‘hard and fast rules’ by which people should be guided and judged by ‘with no exception’ (I.29) also signifies that truth has certain facets which facilitate the better organization of a person’s social relationships including the marital relationship.

Fourth, upon the entrance of the Duchess of Berwick and her intervention in the dialogue between Lady Windermere and Lord Darlington, the lord stresses that the lady’s birthday party is expected to be “very small, very early, and very select” and Lady Windermere emphasizes that she “will have no one in [her] house about whom there is any scandal” (I.30). The lady’s perception of welcoming guests necessitates that she must receive a mix of eclectic invitees. Such a perception can be changed into a trend across society, not just among upper-middle families.

### **1.5.Firm Faithfulness during Rumors of Infidelity**

Lady Windermere’s dialogue with the Duchess of Berwick at Lord Windermere’s house dramatizes a number of concepts that show the difference between the faithful lady and the superficial aristocratic duchess. The duchess has come to inform the lady about Lord Windermere’s possible infidelity. She starts with the exposure of Mrs. Erlynne’s disputation since the latter has got acquainted with Lord Augustus, the duchess’s ‘disreputable brother’. The duchess adds that Mrs. Erlynne has ‘at least a dozen of pasts’. Then, the duchess tells about Lord Windermere’s visits to Mrs. Erlynne which are characterized by frequency and



longer duration. She discloses that the presence of Mrs. Erlynne at her house is denied for visitors as long as Lord Windermere is in the house. She mentions that her nieces, the Saville girls, are witnesses to the lord's visits to Mrs. Erlynne. She affirms that the lord spends 'great deal of money' to secure Mrs. Erlynne's living in a 'charming house in Mayfair' as well. She recalls the spread of a rumor among the aristocratic families of London about a possible relation between Lord Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne (I.32-34). The duchess also proposes that men 'never grow any better' and that "men become old, but they never become good" (I.35). Her words target the consolation of Lady Windermere through revealing the nature of men. She implies that the lord's betrayal is not an odd because he is a man. On her behalf, Lady Windermere denies that Lord Windermere is unfaithful to her. She emphasizes, "Windermere and I married for love" (I.35). For the lady, true love is the principal constituent of marriage and betrayal becomes farfetched at the presence of love.

The goodness and faithfulness of Lord Windermere are proved at the end of the play and they raise a number of implications. They uncover that marital relationship could be endangered because of a suspicion raised by an intruder who is not well acquainted with the family as the duchess does not know whether the Windermers have a baby boy or a baby girl. They also prove that marriage can sustain due to the stability of mutual faithfulness between a husband and a wife regardless of some moments of tides.

### **1.6.Patriarchal Tolerance during Matriarchal Fury**

Upon the first appearance of Lord Windermere and his discovery that Lady Windermere has 'cut open' his private bank book and his expression that she has 'no right to do such a thing', she replies that he is angry because he is 'found out'. Then, they exchange a number of blaming words and their dialogue has multiple implications which should be brought closer. First, Lady Windermere has violated Lord Windermere's bureau with-



out his permission. Consequently, he accuses her of spying on him. Second, the lady's anger increases after she is sure that her husband has given Mrs. Erlynne good sums of money. The anger turns into fury after the lord has tried to defend Mrs. Erlynne's reputation regardless of his emphasis that the lady's 'honour is untouched' (I.37). Third, the lady's outrage leads her to confusingly accuse Lord Windermere that he passes from "the love that is given to the love that is bought" (I.38), although she has emphasized a few minutes earlier that the Lord has taught her to love him.

Lord Windermere's rationality during his wife's fury leads him to skip arguing with her (I.40). He even requests that their dispute is contained. He directly tells her, "Don't make chasm after chasm between us. God knows the last few minutes have thrust us wide enough apart" (I.41). The lord intrusion of the pronoun 'us' reveals his recognition of his wife and himself as one identity. His reference to 'God' reflects his sense of goodness and his sincere dealing with his wife. His words also indicate that a 'few' moments of an argument between a husband and a wife can bring them 'wide apart'. Consequently, the lord's attempt to contain the furious lady signifies his reasonable handling of the dispute. By the end of the scene, the lord repeats his use of the pronoun 'us' when he tells the lady, "Margaret, you'll ruin us!" (I.43) after she had dared to warn him not to invite Mrs. Erlynne to her birthday ball. The verb 'ruin' signifies the lord's apprehension of a possible breakdown of his family if the lady does not change her attitude. At the end of the scene, Lord Windermere expresses that he dares not to tell her who this woman really is (I.43). He stands up with his wife's flaming anger because he is doing his best to enable her to avoid a sense of shame or a possible social scandal if she knows who Mrs. Erlynne really is. Moreover, immediately before the appearance of Mrs. Erlynne in Lord Windermere's house, the lord reasonably reminds Lady Windermere that she should trust him so that they both can avoid



‘sorrow’. He emphasizes that “a wife should trust her husband” (II.50).

To conclude, during moments of a good wife’s suspicion of her husband’s infidelity, she should not: (1) violate his privacy by spying on him; (2) raise a rain of accusations unless she is sure of his adultery; (3) allow her mind to temporarily forget the husband’s numerous stances of goodness; (4) close her mind before possible explanations; (5) grow all powerful in anger that leads to expression of indignation and disrespect. In parallel, the husband should rationally try to contain his wife through: (1) skipping arguing with her; (2) emphasizing their mutual destiny; (3) asking her directly to stop raising false claims; (4) clarifying the impact of their dispute on the whole family life; (5) showing tolerance in case he has a noble cause and her ignorance of the cause leads to her outrage; (6) ensuring the inevitability of mutual trust.

### **1.7. Concealment of Conveying Martial Disruption**

When a wife suspects the fidelity of her husband, she should not show her lack of courage or convey her sense of degradation before a gentleman even if she believes he is a good friend. The wife’s inability to conceal her anxiety may open the gate for a wicked gentleman to seduce her. In Wilde’s play, after Lady Windermere’s first meeting with Mrs. Erlynne and her subsequent sense of shame reflected in her words, “I am degraded in my own eyes and I lack courage – I am a coward! (II.55), Lord Darlington finds it optimum to start a seduction process whose target is the lady. Wilde dramatizes this process as a series of cause and effect. First, Lord Darlington initiates that he knows the lady better than she knows herself. Second, he pushes her to lose confidence in Lord Windermere who treats her improperly. Third, he implants in her mind that she cannot continue living with her husband because such a life becomes a sort of humiliation. He insists that she can’t endure her husband’s ‘lying’ to her every moment of the day. Darlington goes on to frequently associate Lord Windermere with false look, voice, touch and passion.



He affirms that Lord Windermere would come to his wife only when he is 'weary of others' for the sake of his own 'comfort' and 'charm'. Fourth, Darlington establishes connection between Lord Windermere's manipulation of his wife and the social degradation of Lady Windermere's role in her husband's life. Darlington claims that Lady Windermere will be Lord Windermere's "mask of his life, the cloak to hide his secret" (II.55).

Fifth, when Lady Windermere asks for Lord Darlington's help on the basis of their friendship, he directly tells her, "Between men and women there is no friendship possible. there is passion, enmity, worship, love but no friendship" (II.55-56). Then, he states it openly, "I love you" (II.56). Sixth, Lord Darlington draws a comparison between Lord Windermere and himself to show his own superiority. Darlington affirms that he can offer the lady his 'life' in comparison to her husband who has offered her 'nothing'. Moreover, Darlington expresses that he loves Lady Windermere more than "anything in the whole world" (II.56). He adds that he has loved her as he has never loved 'any living thing'. Because of his predomination with seducing Lady Windermere at a time of her weakness, Darlington does not pay attention to the terms he uses which signify his real undervaluation of Lady Windermere. She is a mere 'thing' for him. Seventh, Darlington invites Lady Windermere to 'leave' her house without paying attention to the response of her society because "one has to choose between one's own life, fully, entirely, completely – or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence that the world in its hypocrisy demands" (II.56). Darlington goes on to associate Lord Windermere's house with pain and disgrace and asserts that Lady Windermere has 'the courage' to leave her house which Mrs. Erlynne dared to visit and which might be hers one day. He assures the lady that all her pain will come to an end once she becomes his 'wife' (II.56). Eighth, Darlington persuades Lady Windermere that her leaving her house is justifiable because 'all London know' why she has left it. He hints at Lord





Windermere's welcome of Mrs. Erlynne to his house and the subsequent blamelessness on Lady Windermere's behalf. Ninth, Darlington stresses that "It is wrong for a wife to remain with a man who dishonours her" (II.57) and he reminds Lady Windermere of her rejection of making 'compromise with things' and he pushes her psychologically by telling her, "Make none now. Be brave! Be yourself" (II.57). Tenth, Darlington renounces Lady Windermere's willingness to wait so that her husband 'may return' to her on the basis that if she waits she becomes similar to all other women and, consequently, she is not the person he thought of (II.57). Finally, Lady Windermere's realization of her weakness and broken heart at the moment motivates her to ask for time to think. When Lord Darlington tries to empower her by giving her no chance to escape when he says, "It must be now or not at all", she immediately replies, "Then, not at all" (II.57). Thus, the seduction process temporarily fails.

## 2. Causes of Marital Breakdown

The traditional structure of a husband-wife relationship is depicted as cracked in Congreve's *The Way of the World* and Rattigan's *The Browning Version*. Whereas Mr. Fainall-Mrs. Fainall relationship is brought closer to be 'offensive', Andrew Crocker-Harris-Millie Crocker-Harris relation is 'indifferent'. Therefore, these two relationships are mainly examined through the analysis of six selected dialogues. In the first play, Mrs. Fainall's feelings towards her husband are followed throughout her dialogue with Mirabell in Act Two. Mr. Fainall's attitude towards his wife is kept track of throughout his talk to Mrs. Marwood in Act Three. The discussion of the real causes of fading love is at the core of Mirabell-Millamant extended dialogue about man-woman proper relationship in Act Two. The danger of late marriage is the subject matter that is elaborated by Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall while they are exchanging their views of Lady Wishfort's false appetite for marriage. In the second play, the psychological motivation for enjoying a physical rela-



tion is analyzed in Millie Crocker-Harris's words and actions with Frank Hunter in their dialogue in the opening scene. The last dialogue between Andrew Crocker-Harris and Frank Hunter is examined to identify Andrew's assessment of his marital life. Finally, miscellaneous words exchanged among the main characters are studied as long as they reveal hidden aspects of marital breakdown.

### **2.1. Hatred, Scorn and Boredom**

Mr. Fainall and Mrs. Fainall are the only married couple in *The Way of the World*. Though they belong to the upper middle class and enjoy social recognition and economic prosperity, they suffer marital breakdown. In one of her dialogues with Mirabell, Mrs. Fainall discloses to him that her relationship with her husband has come gradually to an end due to two main reasons: hatred and scorn. She tells Mirabell, "While I only hated my husband, I could bear to see him; but since I have despised him, he's too offensive" (II.i.37). Thus, a wife's contempt for her husband is conveyed and her use of the adjective 'offensive' signifies that reconciliation is farfetched. Additionally, Mirabell asks her to hate 'with prudence' and her immediate response is her agreement with him because she loved 'with indiscretion' (II.i.37). Mrs. Fainall's words constitute the direct consequence of seeking a 'shelter' in the form of a husband. In other words, Mrs. Fainall's past relation with Mirabell and her subsequent pregnancy have motivated both to accept her getting married to Mr. Fainall with neither love nor respect. In this sense, unquestioned marriage is depicted as paving the way for its breakdown. Comparatively, when Mrs. Marwood inquires about Mr. Fainall's feelings towards his wife, Mr. Fainall clarifies that he has never loved his wife and that if he has loved her once, this love has come to an end. He asserts that his sense of jealousy has faded away and that only boredom he feels at the moment (III.i.67). As a result, the domination of hatred, scorn and boredom as well as the absence of jealousy are dramatized as



major causes that make a husband and a wife physically and psychologically apart.

## 2.2. Recurrent Reprimand and Advice

Though Mirabell-Millamant extended dialogue in Act Two of *The Way of the World* is ironical as it reflects their love-game, it sheds light on the real causes of a fading love between a husband and a wife. For instance, Millamant foresees the possibility of her getting bored because of Mirabell's clichés as a husband. She conveys her intolerance of being 'reprimanded' or 'instructed' all the time. She believes that it is "so dull to act always by advice" (II.i.43) and emphasizes she cannot endure that someone frequently pays her attention to her faults (II.i.43). On his behalf, Mirabell asserts that a man's ability to win a woman is not based on what Milamant suggests; it is rather based on "plain dealing and sincerity" (II.i.43-44). Mirabell's viewpoint can be partially related to his earlier elaboration to Millamant that 'beauty is the lover's gift' because love makes a woman more charming. Mirabell also undervalues that a woman's sense of her physical beauty can be traced through a mirror (II.i.41). Thus, he points out that maintaining real love is a major source of happiness and psychological stability.

## 2.3. False Appetite and Fading Lust

In Congreve's drama, the widowed Lady Wishfort has endless endeavor to get a husband. Though the process of her getting married fails, it has a number of implications which are discussed in a dialogue between Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall who both believe that the lady's possible marriage is fragile and could be easily brought to failure. The lady's endeavor is perceived by Mrs. Fainall as a consequence of 'female frailty'. Mrs. Fainall believes that an old woman follows her "false appetite when the true is decayed" (II.i.39). Meanwhile, Mirabell expounds that an old lady's appetite is similar to a girl's appetite



since both lack rationality. He also associates the first with ‘a second childhood’ and ‘the faint offer of a latter spring’ that ushers “in the Fall, and faint in an affected bloom” (II.i.39). Consequently, Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall elaborate that love at a later stage in a woman’s life could not sustain because it is motivated by her reckless sense to seek an attachment to a husband rather than to enjoy a blooming marital partnership.

#### **2.4. Unsatisfied Sexual Urge**

A wife’s thirst for sexual gratification is one of the major causes of marital failure. Mille Crocker-Harris in *The Browning Version* betrays her husband due to her unsatisfied sexual urge. Millie’s longing for physical satisfaction can be traced in Rattigan’s dramatization of her first dialogue with Frank Hunter, a science master, and the inclusive stage direction. At first, Rattigan represents Millie’s first sentence to Frank, “Thank you for coming round” (I.11), to raise curiosity about the cause of such a statement. Millie is the hostess and Frank is the guest who is supposed to thank her for inviting him to Andrew Crocker-Harris’s flat in a public school in the south of England. The inquisitiveness of the reader increases as Millie talks to Frank in an intimate way and asks for a cigarette using the imperative form. She dares to ask him where he had been for a week and her reference to the possibility of his meeting a girlfriend conveys her sense of jealousy. She expresses her worry because she may not see him for six weeks due to his prearrangement to stay with his family in Devonshire (I.11-12). All Millie’s words show that Frank is more than a friend to the family. In response, Frank’s reaction is his statement that Millie can ‘survive’ during his absence. His statement conveys that he has no similar excitement in Millie at the moment.

Millie’s unsatisfied urge compelled with her sense of missing Frank motivates her to make practical use of his presence. She is the first to kiss him and utters, “Frank, darling, I love you



so much” (I.12). In response, Rattigan writes, “[Frank] kisses her, on the mouth, but a trifle perfunctorily, and then breaks quickly away, as if afraid someone had come into the room” (I.12). The use of the adverb ‘perfunctorily’ makes the kiss a dull routine activity rather than a manifestation of a passionate human desire. When Frank tries to escape she laughs and tells him that he seems ‘very nervous’ (I.12). A few minutes later, Rattigan writes in another stage direction that Millie “stretches out her arms to him. He kisses her again quickly and lightly, but she holds him hungrily. He has to free himself almost roughly” (I.13). The two adverbs ‘hungrily’ and ‘roughly’ signify that Millie needs to satisfy herself even if her partner has no similar urge. Frank’s reaction is also one of irritation and the whole dialogue “makes clear that Millie is more desperate for Frank’s affections than he is for hers” (Palaima 204). As the dialogue extends, Millie tries to talk to Frank ‘appealingly’ and admits that she does not mind if he is not in love with her (I.14). She expresses her anxiety because Frank may turn indifferent to her and insists on receiving a clear cut answer to her inquiry, “Frank, just tell me one thing. Just tell me you’re not running away from me-that’s all I want to hear” (I.15). She also mentions the possibility of her ‘killing’ herself if he runs away from her (I.15). Later on, when Franks decides to bring his relation with Millie to an end, she beseeches him to get rid of such an idea. She adds, “Frank, I don’t care what humiliations you heap on me. I know you don’t give two hoots for me as a person. I’ve always known that. I’ve never minded so long as you care for me as a woman. And you do, Frank. You do. You do, don’t you” (I.40-41). Thus, Millie’s attitude reveals her self-centered character as she is predominated by seeking her physical satisfaction explicitly stated in her emphatic repetition of ‘you do’, which means that, for her, Frank is functional rather than compassionate.

In the final dialogue between Andrew Crocker-Harris and Frank, it is noticeable that Frank is heartily touched by Crocker-



Harris's physical sickness and distraction. Frank's throbbing heart and his sympathy with Crocker-Harris leads him to advise him to 'leave' his wife. The dialogue witnesses Andrew's disclosure that he knew about Frank's adulterous relation with Millie since it started and adds that Frank is not the first to establish a relation with his wife. Frank's immediate response is his statement, "she's evil" (I.43). Frank adds that Millie has managed to arouse in him "an intense and passionate disgust" (I.44). Moreover, the dialogue conveys that Andrew Crocker-Harris is satisfied with his sexual failure with his wife. He admits his ignorance of 'the facts of life' and emphasizes that his wife and he require two different kinds of love: the physical and the passionate (I.44-45). Andrew represents the core of failure in his marital life when he mentions the incompatibility between 'an unsatisfied wife' and 'a henpecked husband' (I.45). His life of indifference as a husband is evident when he tells Millie at the end of the play, "I don't think either of us has the right to expect anything further from the other" (I.47). Andrew's statement represents the peak of a husband's surrender to marital despair due to his sexual failure.

## 2.5. Undervaluation of a Partner

Rattigan dramatizes Millie's undervaluation of her husband on the personal, marital, social and professional levels. On the personal level, Andrew Crocker-Harris and Millie do not share their interests. For instance, when Andrew asks Millie about her view of the school timetable he has drafted, she becomes 'suddenly harsh' and replies, "You know it bores me to death" (I.17). On the marital level, when Frank blames Millie for telling Andrew about Taplow's act of mimicking him, she replies that she cannot hurt her husband because her husband is already 'dead' (I.40). When Frank asks her about the reason for her hatred for her husband, she replies, "Because he keeps me from you" (I.40) and adds that Andrew "is not a man at all" (I.40). Consequently, Andrew Crocker-Harris is perceived by



Millie as dead due to his failure to act according to her perception of masculinity.

On the social level, Andrew and Millie seem to lack effective communication. Andrew's late attention to the presence of his wife is indicated by Rattigan's description that Andrew is "looking at Mille for the first time" (I.17) though his conversation with both Frank and Millie is brought to an end a few sentences later. The whole situation emphasizes that Andrew and Millie are psychologically far distanced.

On the professional level, Millie is dramatized as despising her husband's profession before guests. She is described as 'bored' once Frank mentions that Andrew uses his 'soulless tyranny' to protect himself against the lower fifth. She asserts that Andrew had never been popular whatever he did. She adds that Andrew "had a bit more gumption once" (I.13). Then, she says to Frank, "Don't let's talk any more about him- it's too depressing" (I.13). Furthermore, upon the arrival of the Gilberts to Andrew's flat, Mrs. Gilbert expresses that the living room is charming. In response, Millie believes that she could have made it nicer if she had a chance. Millie justifies her reply as she says, "- but a schoolmaster's wife has to think of so many other things besides curtains and covers. Boys with dirty boots and a husband with leaky fountain pens, for instance" (I.29).

## 2.6. Mechanism and Superficial Dutifulness

The relationship between the younger healthy Millie and the older sick Crocker-Harris is depicted as one of mechanism and indifference rather than of passion and care.

On one occasion, while Millie is saying goodbye to Frobisher after his visit to Andrew's flat, she is described as 'holding the door open. Frobisher goes out'. Then, she addresses Andrew, "Don't forget to take your medicine, dear, will you? [She goes out]" (I.27). The mechanical speech and movement suggest that the wife is not even sympathetic with her physically sick husband. On another



occasion, Millie notices that Andrew looks ‘dreadful’ and inquires whether he is going to have one of his ‘attacks’. As soon as Andrew replies that he is ‘perfectly all right’, Millie comments ‘indifferently’, “You know best. Your medicine’s there, anyway, if you want it. [She goes out....]” (I.34). Thus, Millie’s words and movement show her negligence of her husband as she pays attention to superficial dutiful words rather than her careful care of the sick husband.

### 2.7. Spoiling Partner’s Happiness

Throughout *The Browning Version*, Andrew Crocker-Harris has rare moments of real happiness. The remarkable moment is when Taplow, a student, provides him with a copy of Robert Browning’s version of Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* as a leaving present. Unfortunately, this moment is spoiled on purpose. As soon as Frank Hunter tells Millie about the present at the presence of Andrew Crocker-Harris, she immediately describes Taplow as ‘the artful little beast’. When Andrew asks for an explanation for his wife’s comment, she clarifies that Taplow mimicked him in a funny way earlier this day (I.38). Consequently, Millie’s intention can be brought closer to her implantation into Andrew’s mind that the present is nothing but a bribe whose function, according to Peacock (2007, 48), is to guarantee the boy’s graduation into another class. Millie’s attitude is criticized by Frank who is now sure that Andrew Crocker-Harris deserves better treatment.

### Conclusion

This paper has tried to use the analytical, descriptive and comparative methods to spot the principles of marital sustainability and the causes of marital breakdown whether explicitly or implicitly dramatized in thirteen dramatic dialogues in *King Lear*, *The Way of the World*, *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, and *The Browning Version*. The purpose of the study has targeted using drama as a platform to draw a framework of healthy marriage. The find-





ings of analysis include practices recommended to be undertaken either individually or collectively during courtship or after marriage.

A couple intending marriage should apprehend their need for mutual perception of matchmaking foundations. Individually, a good gentleman should understand a gentle lady's eagerness to preserve her identity and independence in addition to her rejection of mere subordination to a husband. He should also enhance his potentiality to celebrate his future wife's sincerity, honesty and multifaceted virtues. Collectively, the two partners should replace their bargain of materialistic profit with a bargain of honour. They should agree on maintaining: (1) equal love; (2) frequent appearance in public; (3) similar life attributes; (4) rational love that does not exclude passion; (5) possible adaptation with a partner's failings; (6) tolerant response towards a partner's temporary violation of proper manners; (7) reasonable confidence in one's own judgment; and (8) real love that is not reduced to mere superficial names and callings.

After marriage, a good wife should: (1) maintain her privacy; (2) establish wise connection with a husband's relatives; (3) feel superiority of her dining table; (4) view her marital life as a sacrament rather than a speculation; (5) confine her public guests to a mix of eclectic invitees; and (6) conceal marital disputes to avoid possible seduction by an intruder.

A reasonable wife should avoid: (1) challenging the male order; (2) enjoying secret relations; (3) wearing masks in public; (4) using cosmetics as long as the husband enjoys her natural beauty; (5) pressing her body to get good shape in a way that harms the normal formation of an embryo in case she is pregnant; (6) manipulating the fashion of contemporary society as long as it is illusionary; (7) responding positively to a gentleman's exaggerated compliments; (8) betraying her unfaithful husband under the slogan of 'consolation'; (9) being inflamed by ru-



mours of infidelity disclosed by an outsider; (10) raising false accusations against a husband during moments of fury; (11) violating the husband's privacy; (12) feeding the sense of hatred and scorn towards the husband; (13) showing resistance to advice; (14) showing undervaluation of the husband on the personal, marital, social and professional levels; and (16) spoiling the husband's moment of happiness amidst the tides of life.

The good husband should: (1) remain reasonable and clam during his wife's fury; (2) contain his wife by emphasizing mutual welfare amidst her irritating words; (3) maintain tolerance while he perceives that his wife is socially endangered; (4) rank the sustainability of the family structure first; (5) show his wife a sense of jealousy rather than indifference; (6) stop using clichés because they deepen the wife's sense of boredom; (7) convey that his love for his wife's sincerity surpasses her sense of physical beauty; (8) satisfy his wife sensually and passionately especially if she is younger and more active; and (9) challenge his sense of sexual failure in case he is aged.

Collectively, the married couple should exert more efforts to secure their marital sustainability through enhancing their: (1) love, respect and trust; (2) sexual gratification; (3) apprehension of social codes; (4) rational argument; (5) tolerance with reprimand and instruction; (6) shared attributes to life; (7) plain dealing and sincerity; (8) jealousy as a parameter of love; (9) joy of partnership; (10) tenderness instead of senseless mechanism of interaction.

## References

- Congreve, William. 2002. *The Way of The World*. Beirut: York Press.
- Fernée, Tadd Greham. 2017. "Every Turn of the Wheel: Circular Time and Cordelia's Revolt: From William Shakespeare to the British Enlightenment". *English Studies at NBU* 3, no. 1 (May 31): 5-25.



[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332132561\\_Every\\_Turn\\_of\\_the\\_Wheel\\_Circular\\_Time\\_and\\_Cordelia's\\_Revolt\\_from\\_William\\_Shakespeare\\_to\\_the\\_British\\_Enlightenment](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332132561_Every_Turn_of_the_Wheel_Circular_Time_and_Cordelia's_Revolt_from_William_Shakespeare_to_the_British_Enlightenment) (Accessed Feb. 15, 2023).

Gill, Pat. 1996. "The Way of the Word: Telling Differences in Congreve's *Way of the World*". In *Broken Boundaries: Women & Feminism in Restoration Drama*, ed. Katherine M. Quinsey. 164-184. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.

Harmon, A. G. 2008. "'Slender Knowledge': Sovereignty Madness, and the Self in Shakespeare's *King Lear*". *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 4: 403-423

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232606992.pdf> (accessed March 5, 2023).

Kaufman, Anthony. 1973. Language and Character in Congreve's *The Way of the World*. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 15, no.3 (Fall 1973): 411-427.

[https://gmvm.ac.in/wpcontent/themes/college/pdf/1586000773\\_language%20and%20character.pdf](https://gmvm.ac.in/wpcontent/themes/college/pdf/1586000773_language%20and%20character.pdf) (Accessed Feb.17, 2023).

Kiecolt-Glaser, et. al. 1987. "Marital Quality, Marital Disruption, and Immune Function". *Psychosomatic Medicine* 49, no.1:13-34.

Martin, Teresa Castro, and Larry L. Bumpass. 1989. "Recent Trends in Marital Disruption". *Demography* 26, no. 1 (February): 37-51.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227335869\\_Recent\\_Trends\\_in\\_Marital\\_Disruption](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227335869_Recent_Trends_in_Marital_Disruption) (Accessed March 7, 2023).

Mlambo-Ngcuka, Phumzile. 2019. *Forward to Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020: Families in A Changing World*. New York: UN Women, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

Palaima, Thomas G. 2002. "The Browning Version's and Classical Greek". In *Noctes Atticae: 34 Articles on Graeco-Roman Antiquity and its Nachleben*. Eds. Bettina Amden et al., 199-214. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.

Peacock, D. Keith. 2007. *Changing Performance: Culture and Performance in the British Theatre Since 1945*. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang AG.

Putnis, Peter. 1975. Deception and Signification in Restoration Comedy. PhD diss. Australian National University.



Rattigan, Terence. 1980. *The Browning Version & Harlequinade*. London: Heinmann Education Books Ltd.

Rosowski, Susan J. 1976. "Thematic Development in the Comedies of William Congreve: the Individual in Society". *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 16, no.3 (Summer, 1976): 387-406.

[https://ddu.colleged.edu.ac.in/Datafiles/cms/ecourse%20content/Eng%20Hon%20Sem%204%20%20\(RK\)%20Secondary%20reading%20\(Thematic%20Development%20in%20the%20Comedies%20of%20William%20Congreve\\_%20The%20Individual%20in%20Society\).pdf](https://ddu.colleged.edu.ac.in/Datafiles/cms/ecourse%20content/Eng%20Hon%20Sem%204%20%20(RK)%20Secondary%20reading%20(Thematic%20Development%20in%20the%20Comedies%20of%20William%20Congreve_%20The%20Individual%20in%20Society).pdf) (Accessed Jan. 13, 2023).

Shakespeare, William. 1978. *King Lear*. Ed. R. Awad. Cairo: The Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop.

Wilde, Oscar. n.d. *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Cairo: The Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop.