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- **Analyse the Proviso Scene in *The Way of the World* / Explain the Bargaining scenes in the play.**

The Proviso scene between Mirabell and Millamant in Congreve's *The Way of the World* (Act-IV, Sc-1) has been admired by almost every critic and indeed, it deserves high praise. It serves a double purpose and this is his remarkable feature. The scene provides rich comic entertainment. At the same time, it has a serious aim as it defines the basis on which two persons in love can lead a harmonious married life. It avoids those pitfalls and blunders which plague most marriages. Dramatically, the scene marks the culmination of the play. It brings the principle love affair in the story to its zenith. One more peculiarity of the scene is that it had become a commination in most Restoration comedies to use this device.

The scene begins with Millamant's observation that she would like to be followed or chased by her lover to the last moment. She expects to be 'solicited' by him to the very last. She would not like to be free from the agreeable fatigues of solicitation. These remarks are both witty and serious in meaning. Millamant says that she would hate a lover who can live independently of his mistress even for a moment. An arrogant husband would be intolerable to her. She wants to make sure of her 'will' and her pleasure' if she would have both her 'will' and her 'pleasure' before her marriage. Then Mirabell is told by Millamant that she will not give up her liberty even after her marriage. She will lie in her bed in the morning as long she pleases. To this Mirabell replies. "Then I'll get up in a morning as early as I please." Both the views of the two are amusing enough. Millamant then declares that she would not like to be called 'names' after she is married to Mirabell. Mirabell is surprised when Milamant says this Millamant wittily replies at it that she would not like to be addressed as 'wife', 'my dear', 'love', 'sweet-heart' etc. She will not endure the hypocrisy which prompts husbands to use such modes of address, nor would she like to appear to be too familiar with her husband. Then she expresses a wonderful idea: "Let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while and as well-bred as if we were not



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married at all." What she means is that a certain fission should be maintained in between the happy fusion of a couple. Thus, the hero and heroine are seen bargaining about their marriage in future.

Asked if she has any more conditions to offer, Millamant says that she will claim the right to pay and receive visits to and from whom she pleases ; to write and receive letters, without being asked any questions by her husband; to wear whatever she pleases; to be under no obligation either to converse her husband's friends if she does not like them or to be intimate his relatives if they are foolish. She would also be the 'sole of her tea-table which her husband must not approach first asking her permission. Finally, she would like him always to knock at the door when he comes in to meet her.

Then it is the turn of Mirabell to lay down conditions. What he says is a highly entertaining satire on the habits of the society women not only of the days of Congreve but of all times. Indeed, much in the 'Proviso' scene has a universal validity. Mirabell would not like his wife to be on such terms of intimacy with any female friend as to exchange personal secrets with her. He would not like her to have anything to do with a woman through whom she can pick up a gallant or a fop with whom she can go secretly to the theatre. He would not like his wife to wear masks which are generally made of oil-skins, a hog's bones, a hare's gall, pig-water and the narrow of roasted cat. She would not shape of the head of the child in the womb. His wife would not discuss on the topic of men. Finally, Mirabell forbids his wife drink any alcoholic liquors.

It is obvious that the 'Proviso' scene has great entertainment value. Mirabell ridicules the female sex of his time for many of its activities like a mutual exchange of confidences, use of cosmetics etc. The playwright makes Millamant , a woman though she be, ridicule herself and other ladies morning like herself and her when desire she to speaks remain of in her indolent till a late slumbers hour in the in the morning. Millamant's vanity in wanting wish to be remain wooed even after marriage shows a woman's in wanting to remain an object of admiration and worship always.

The scene has its serious purpose too. We find that, while it is necessary lovers to sacrifice some of their ego, harmony in marriage demands that they should not to be too suspicious of one another neither should they poke their nose into one another's affairs. It is necessary for a husband and a wife to respect each other's privacy as far as possible, to allow one another a certain amount of

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freedom, but not unlimited freedom, in the choice of friends and acquaintances. In the matter of make-up and cosmetics, a wife must show due considerations for the feelings of her husband. As Millamant is a well-bred and decent lady, she rightly describes Mirabell's conditions as 'horrid provisos', because she would not do any of those things even if Mirabell had laid down no conditions. However, there is much that Mirabell has to learn from the conditions laid down by Millamant. Millamant would certainly find herself unhappy after marriage if any of her conditions were to be violated by him. And, indeed, apart from the exaggeration which is inevitable in satire, Millamant has said nothing that is undesirable or impossible.

It is in the light of the serious purpose at the core of the proviso scene that this scene is regarded as Congreve's contribution to the philosophy of love. It would be wrong to think that Millamant in this scene shows herself to be an 'arrant coquette'. In reality, Millamant shows her awareness of the conflict in marriage, and of the need to maintain her own personality in order to be able to love wholeheartedly. Her appeal has all the earnestness of real life about it. It is expressive of all the hopes and fears of lovers when they see the bright face of happiness tarnished with the shadow of possible disillusionment. Each of them has seen the rocks which bring most marriages to ruin, and will strive to avoid them. As a woman, Millamant has the valuable power of giving, but she is rightly jealous of herself, and is not to be under-valued. Once convinced of Mirabell's love, she throws away her defences, and shows a perfect frankness.

To conclude, though Congreve is indebted to many similar scenes in earlier plays like Dryden's *Secret Love* and *Amphitryon*, he improves on which he borrows. He achieves the finest of all the proviso scenes in Restoration comedy. The prose of his scene has a poetic luminosity. The speeches are all perfect in character, rich in detail, and continuously witty. The lovers show grace both in their evasiveness and in their surrender to each other.



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