The Oppression of Women in Congreve's *The Way of the World*

Wit is one of the main elements employed throughout the centuries in such texts as satires, novels, and plays. It is used as a means of intelligently communicating a certain message to the audience pertaining to various seemingly important concepts, such as politics, religion, education, social status, oppression, and society as a whole. Wit is defined as “the keen perception and cleverly apt expression of those connections between ideas that awaken amusement and pleasure” ("Wit"). Wit uses powers of intelligent observation, keen perception, ingenious contrivance, mental acuity, composure, and resourcefulness in order to engineer the messages it wishes to convey so that the message might through its amusing overtone to better be distilled into the desired audience's mind, such as feminist ideals ("Wit"). William Congreve's *The Way of the World* is an exemplary play that illuminates how wit conveys the status and character of women in the 18th century and they subjected women of that century to a less than satisfactory role in society which disregards feminist ideals and undermines female potential.

Congreve's play, *The Way of the World*, uses various women to illustrate wit and the oppressive state of women in the 18th century, the most significant ones being Lady Wishfort, Mrs. Fainall, Mrs. Millamant, and Mrs. Marwood. The plots of the play includes Lady Wishfort
seeking a husband and wishing for Mrs. Millamant to marry someone other than Mirabell after his having played Lady Wishfort for a fool, Mrs. Fainall supporting Mirabell’s endeavors to win Mrs. Millamant, Mrs. Millamant who is not sure if she wishes to marry at all but is not against Mirabell’s advances, and Mrs. Marwood having been scorned by Mirabell seeking revenge. All of these women in these different scenarios are in different social situations and therefore illustrate the various different situations that women of that time may find themselves and illuminate different aspects of oppression in 18th century England. To fully understand the states of oppression that these women undergo in the play, a character analysis of each must be made.

The first of these, the elderly Lady Wishfort, exhibits the characteristic illuminated in her name, a hopeful wishing for a husband. Mrs. Fainall illustrated this best when in the second act she said, “I believe her Ladyship would do anything to get a husband” (Congreve 2544). It is this hopeless romanticism that leads her to believe Mirabell’s faux advances towards her, who placed his true romantic intentions upon her niece Mrs. Millamant, for whom Lady Wishfort is guardian of half her fortune. Later in the play, she becomes enamored of Sir Rowland, who in reality is Waitwell in disguise and in truth had not long ago been married to Foible, and her fantastical ideals of obtaining a husband are revived then, having been defeated after being scorned by the villainous Mirabell. It is money that attains her people’s praises while in her presence, as when Foible said to her while in her toilet, “a little scorn becomes your ladyship” (Congreve 2251). In reality it is her very delusional idea of herself and her romantic endeavor’s that earn her the ridicule of others while away from her presence, such as when Waitwell, a cast servingman disguising himself as Sir Rowland, states that “she is the antidote to desire”
(Congreve 2271). Even Mirabell ridicules her when he is talking to Mrs. Fainall about his plans to deceive Lady Wishfort, "I think the good lady would marry anything that resembled a man, though 'twere no more than what a butler could pinch out of a napkin" (Congreve 2244). Lady Wishfort expresses this quality that Mirabell mocks when she expresses her desire to get her revenge on him through the use of "I'll marry a drawer to have him poisoned in his wine" (Congreve 2250), a man that would be far inferior in class and situation and clearly illuminates her want of a "man", not a gentleman.

Her fervent wish to obtain a husband is based on a form of society-imposed, cultural oppression that stated that women, no matter how well situated within society, must seek a husband in order to obtain worth, which drives her even to the delusion that she is worth nothing without being married. Lady Wishfort illustrates the societal pressure for woman to show their worth through marriage and not personal accomplishments. It did not matter that she was a wealthy lady of good position; all she ever cared about and entertained herself with was through the hunting of a husband, even though she is now living her life independently and quite capably with much success without the presence of a man.

Throughout the play, there are many key phrases said by Lady Wishfort that express different facets of this cultural oppression. In the third act, Lady Wishfort exclaims “Why I am arrantly flayed– I look like an old peeled wall” (Congreve 2251) when looking at the mirror and preparing to met with her beloved Sir Rowland later that day. This first statement illuminates the vanity of women of that time period as a reflection of men's expectations of artful beauty from their sex. Lady Wishfort entertained such male notions of beauty when she said, "Oh, nothing is more alluring than a leeve from a couch in some confusion. It shows the foot to
advantage and furnishes with blushes and recomposing airs beyond comparison” (Congreve 2261). Lady Wishfort imposed this male-fantasy of what is beautiful or alluring in a woman when she was preparing to meet with Sir Rowland, hoping that through such a conventional cultural concept of what is beautiful she could win his love. Mrs. Millamant correctly defined this male-motivation towards beauty when, upon speaking with Mirabell, she stated, “one’s cruelty is one’s power, and when one parts with one’s cruelty, one parts with one’s power; and when one parts with that, I fancy one’s old and ugly” (Congreve 2245). It is because men expect woman to be beautiful that a woman’s youthful beauty becomes her only power, only to be preserved through cruelty. It is through cruelty that women can retain their power and not become subservient to men, for by using their youthful beauty’s allure in their cruelty they can impose their will. But it is due to youth’s and beauty’s fading qualities that woman cannot retain control or hope through their beauty’s power to attain any lasting form of power. Men also continuously limit the good qualities of women, as is expressed by Witwoud when he said, “Now, demme, I should hate (wit), if she were as handsome as Cleopatra” (Congreve 2238). In other words, Witwoud meant to say that a beautiful woman cannot show intellectuality in order to continue to be attractive. By restricting the meaning of beauty away from intellectuality, or in this case wit, Witwoud is robbing intellectual women from their only power, which is attributed to their beauty. Witwoud is therefore using the culturally agreeable concept of beauty in order to restrict women’s education.

Though Lady Wishfort anticipates that Sir Rowland to expect advances from her, she fears to break cultural and society-approved decorums and expresses this many times while preparing for her lover’s coming, “I have a mortal terror at the apprehension of offending
against decorums” (Congreve 2251). In 18th century English society, one’s reputation was zealously safeguarded and treasured as a means for hiding their misdemeanors under their good name and so indulge in the pleasures found outside respectable society, such as adultery. Even while Lady Wishfort told Sir Rowland that he should consider her reputation, “O, consider my reputation, Sir Rowland” (Congreve 2272), in reality she did not mean that, “What’s integrity to an opportunity?” (Congreve 2249) At the same time, people of that time period were also prone to justifying their actions in order to protect their reputations, “but as I am a person, Sir Rowland, you must not attribute my yielding to any sinister appetite, or indigestion of widowhood; nor impute my yielding to any lethargy of continence. – I hope you do not think me prone to any itcenturytion of nuptials” (Congreve 2270). By stating her motive in her love for Sir Rowland, Lady Wishfort wished to assert that she was not wishing to marry him due to any erroneous reason, but for love of him and nothing more. If she was found to like him because of any of the above reasons, or even appeared to even though she didn’t, then scandal would proceed and her reputation would be marred. Their reputations were put above everything else, even their own selves, “I'll give up all, myself and my all, my niece and her all–anything, everything for composition” (Congreve 2277). They would give anything to stop the ruin of their good name, “Is there no means, no remedy, to stop my ruin?” (Congreve 2280)

It is due to these restrictive rules of decorum and endeavors towards guarding one’s reputation that peer oppression arises. Just like when upon Mirabell’s and Mrs. Fainall’s discourse in the second act, they ridicule Lady Wishfort’s obsession with obtaining a husband, there are many forms of peer oppressions that arise in that time period. This is better illuminated by the harassment of Lady Wishfort by Fainall and Mrs. Marwood with the threat of
making “[A scandal] to bring [her] daughter’s infamy to light” (Congreve 2276) in an attempt to attain half of Mrs. Millamant’s fortune as well as the better part of Mrs. Fainall’s estate. It was because of the threat to her reputation that Lady Wishfort was wiling to sacrifice everything in order to preserve her daughter’s and her own good name. It is because of reputations that women become frightened of developing their talents in manners not specifically allowed by decorum, such as in scholarly education or in any other kind of profession. When there are faced with the possible loss of their good name, women cannot but chose instead to subjugate themselves to the oppression of ignorance before such a risk.

The once widowed Mrs. Fainall is a clever lady of good reputation and high social status. Fainall, her husband, describe her best, “She might throw up her cards; but I’ll be hanged if she did not put Pam in her pocket” (Congreve 2260). By this he outlined her clever character of always being straight-faced when in the midst of deceiving some of the other characters for her own benefit, this aided in part by her sincere trust in Mirabell’s advice and logic that allows her to remain confident in what her actions should be. She is torn in the play between her past association with Mirabell and her present wish to help him get Mrs. Millamant for a wife, and her loveless marriage to Fainall. It is due to her resentment towards her husband, who is having an affair with Mrs. Marwood, that she decides to help Mirabell. Fainall wishes to divorce Mrs. Fainall and sue her, by means of a threat to her mother (Lady Wishfort) urging her to be “smart for [her] daughter’s wantonness” (Congreve 2278), for having adulterous relations with Mirabell, a claim made by him that is nothing more than an assumption, and by doing this obtain the better part of her estate so that he may accommodate his lover, “I’ll hate my wife
yet more, damn her, I'll part with her, rob her of all she's worth, and we'll retire somewhere, anywhere, to another world” (Congreve 2243).

In that time period, the only way a woman could obtain property was through legal marriage and widowhood. Even in marriage, women would have to ultimately submit to the will of the husband for English law was at that time in history on the side of the men. An example of such a situation is illustrated in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's poem “Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to her Husband” where she depicts the hypocrisy of English society through the eyes of the wronged Mrs. Yonge, whose husband used the male-favoring law to be able to condemn her behavior in relation with her adultery and fine her lover when he himself was having an affair. It is in this male favoring society that women become naturally oppressed, as if they were fated to be born into a submissive state in the response to the dominance of man. Mrs. Fainall undergoes governmental imposed oppression and a similar situation as the one depicted in Montagu's poem. Even though she knew that her husband was having an affair with Mrs. Marwood and that the claims that she was having an affair with Mirabell were false, if Fainall wished to go to court and publicly scorn her “infamy” the law would be in his side. The only thing that saved her fortune and her reputation was that, upon obeying advice she had gotten from Mirabell, she had signed the whole of her estate to Mirabell before her marriage in order to prevent Fainall getting her fortune, which destroyed Fainall’s motive as to sue her because she had nothing to give. If she had not taken such a drastic measure to guard her fortune, Fainall would have been justified by law to attain it, even though he was the only one of them having an affair.
Mrs. Fainall also undergoes marital oppression. In other words, she is married. In the second act, Mrs. Fainall tells Mrs. Marwood, “While they are lovers, if they have fire and sense, their jealousies are insupportable: and when they cease to love (we ought to think at least) they loath. They look upon us with horror and distaste; they meet us like the ghosts of what we were, and as from such, fly from us” (Congreve 2239). In his passage she talks about her relationship with Fainall, and how men change when the women they once desired become their wives. It is upon marriage that beauty is lost, and with it the women’s power. Once entered into the institution of marriage, women become subjected to the will of their husbands, in other words, men. Just as Mrs. Fainall would have lost her fortune to Fainall had she not given it to Mirabell, she lost her state of power and womanly allure when she entered the sacred bonds of marriage, even to the point that she would not have been able to protect herself from her husband’s vicious phony claims had she had the money that he was desiring. It is in this marital oppression that the woman is forced to subservience to the man, though their love for his wife fades upon the weeding day, for they are the ones that hold all the property and are the patriarchs of the state. Women are completely dependent upon their husbands in the face of the law and were not able to own property, if they were not widows whose late husband established as theirs in his will. Daniel Dofoe’s Roxana is the story of a beautiful courtesan whose “bad marriage and early poverty drive her into a career of prostitution” (Dofoe 2289). It was due to her husband, an extravagant brewer, abandoning her leaving her destitute to fend for herself. Just because this happened to Roxana, that does not mean that all women in the 18th century in the same situation had to resort to prostitution in order to survive, but it does highlight the power that the man has in a marriage. The man is able to take
the very means of survival from a woman and leave her destitute looking for charity with nothing but her virtue to barter at the highest price, which is what Fainall sought to do to Mrs. Fainall. He not only wanted to take away her estate but also taint her virtue and purity by claiming that she was an adulteress. The dominance of man over the woman in a marriage is absolute, and so is woman’s oppression.

Once, when inquired by Mrs. Marwood if she hated her husband, she decidedly stated, “Most transcendently; aye, though I say it, meritoriously” (Congreve 2239). It was because of this loss of power and unhappy marriage that Mrs. Fainall comes to hate her husband. She feels the oppression of being unloved by him and dominated by his actions. Mrs. Marwood explained it best in the second act, “’Tis an unhappy circumstance of life... that the man so often should outlive the lover” (Congreve 2239). It is the man in Fainall that oppresses Mrs. Fainall by seeking a lover, not the once lover. Fainall’s domination over Mrs. Fainall is not only a question of who is in control of the estate, but it is centered in the fact that though Fainall is having an affair she cannot do anything about it. It is this inability to get retribution by herself that makes Mrs. Fainall turn to another man (Mirabell) in order to obtain revenge. The first instance that one sees this is in her signing of the document that gives her estate to Mirabell so as to keep it from Fainall. The second is when he seeks to help Mirabell in acquiring the hand of Mrs. Millamant in marriage in order to foil Fainall’s plans to attain half her fortune. It is in these instances that Mrs. Fainall is empowered to rise above her husband, but they are nevertheless facilitated by a man. The fact that woman cannot rise above men by themselves is in itself a form of oppression. It is due to this male obstruction of female personal development that women in that time period were so oppressed.
Mrs. Millamant, as her name poses, is “loved by thousands”. It is due to this fact that the coquette has no real intention of marrying, although she is not altogether against the idea of marrying Mirabell and in the later half of the play actually accepts to become his wife. Her guardian, Lady Wishfort, is against the idea of her marrying Mirabell from the beginning, for she had once been deceived by Mirabell, who while courting Lady Wishfort had designs towards her niece (Mrs. Millamant) not Lady Wishfort. It was because of that that Lady Wishfort vehemently refused to accept him as Mrs. Millamant’s suitor and possible spouse. Without her agreement Millamant could not hope to receive half of her fortune, for the condition for her to obtain it was that her guardian had to agree, and so making it impossible for Mirabell to marry her, for he needs to marry into money.

Mrs. Millamant is a very feministic character. The manner that she addresses her wants and needs in an authoritative manner that invokes self-assurance. Her view of marriage is especially feministic, “Ah! I’ll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure” (Congreve 2264). By asserting that it is by her own will and pleasure that she would ever take into considcenturytion the idea of marriage she is asserting her own feeling above those of possible male suitors. This phrase states that she does not care about the social construct that all young women should seek husbands in order to be well situated. Mrs. Millamant goes further yet in her comment by placing a hint that she may not marry at all. Many would not want to be old maids at their preference, which really sets apart her unique form of reasoning from the other women in the play, for among the ones that are single, Lady Wishfort and Mrs. Marwood, neither is in that station out of a conviction they had as Mrs. Millamant exhibits, which is that she will not marry if it is not benefiting to her manner of life.
Mrs. Millamant does in the end accept to marry Mirabell, but her feminist ideas are enforced when, unhappy with the society-approved form of marriage, she chooses to reform the idea of marriage by adding concessions that he must make in order for her to agree. The following passage is taken from the marriage contract that Mrs. Millamant and Mirabell entered into in the fourth act and outlines the main concessions that he must allow her:

“Positively, Mirabell, I’ll lie abed in the morning as long as I please...I won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be called names... don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks... nor go to Hyde Park the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers; and then never be seen there together again, as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together, but let us be very strange and well bred... [I want] liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or wry faces on your part; to wear what I please; and chose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to convene with wits that I don’t like... Come to dinner when I please... to have my closet inviolet; to be sole empress of my tea table... [And] wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in.” (Congreve 2264-65)

Mirabell does concede and allow the items as outlined by Mrs. Millamant, but cannot let the male ego crumble under the authority of a woman and therefore employs this same device to impose his own authority upon the marriage they are to have. By his words, he seeks to undermine Mrs. Millamant’s authority by the usage of terms employed in legal documents,
such as *imprimis* and *item, I article* (Congreve 2265). It is not until he succeeds in undermining her complete authority in the marriage and exalting his own that he kisses her hand as he says, “I am all obedience” (Congreve 2266). His imposition of will upon the marriage shows the restrictions that men wish to place on women, such as the “odious endeavors” of bearing children, and so limiting our capacity through the ties of proper society while falsely professing to them that they choose such situations themselves. It is because of such manmade restrictions that women were oppressed and had such a difficult time thinking outside the bounds of decorum, such as can be seen through Lady Wishfort’s terrible fear of going against decorum and her obsession with marriage as well as Mrs. Fainall’s seeking of a man’s help in order to one up her husband. They exploited their fears in order to maintain them within the bounds of “respectable” society and, therefore, away from personal advancement.

Mrs. Millamant did not only undergo the oppression through the means of restriction, but also from detainment of progress. It was because she was so adored by her many lovers that she was permanently praised, as can be examined in the enamored Mirabell’s comment, “Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her, and those affections which in another woman might be odious, serve but to make her more agreeable” (Congreve 2232). It is due to this that she has become overtly self-confident with her present self, inhibiting further progress, “I shan’t endure to be reprimanded nor instructed, ’tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one’s faults” (Congreve 2246). If one is pleased with their present selves and will not allow learning to occur, then one is hindering their own progress and therefore oppressing their potential self. It is through their praises of her beauty that they have
lead her to believe that she is comfortable with the way she is, an odious male device that restricts the further development of the female intellectual faculties.

Lastly, there is cunning Mrs. Marwood, who acts as a double agent torn between her love for Mirabell and her quest for revenge on him through her lover Fainall for having scorned her. She is a woman that is not afraid to use her faculties in order to achieve what she wants, be it revenge upon Mirabell or Millamant’s fortune and Mrs. Fainall’s estate, “For my part, my youth may wear and waste, but it shall never rust in my possession” (Congreve 2239). Here again beauty is mentioned as a means of power and that is exactly what Mrs. Marwood most desires, power over others. Just as she uses her beauty to seduce Fainall to seek revenge on his wife and attain her estate, she influences Lady Wishfort into relying on her advice and judgment, such as when she got her to believe in her own daughter’s (Mrs. Fainall) treachery. Mrs. Marwood especially targets Mrs. Fainall, not because she is the lover of her husband, but because she believes that she is having an affair with her love, Mirabell. At the same time, she cannot forgive Maribell for having scorned her and chosen instead the love of Mrs. Millamant.

It is then that she decides to use her influence in order to match Mrs. Millamant with Lady Wishfort’s nephew Witwoud, an absurd man of little wit and who indulges in large quantities of alcohol. She further uses her influence to try and warn Lady Wishfort about the truth regarding Sir Rowland. Mrs. Marwood is a great manipulator, but it is a greater manipulator that surpasses her and destroys her plans to her absolute abhorrence, Mirabell. It is in this defeat that male intellect is elevated to be above that of woman and female intellect seen as limited, insufficiently efficient, and ignorant when compared to that of man. She oppresses herself by using her intellect on men, for men impede her intellectual faculties due to the decorums set
up by society, such as the allowance of man to indulge in adultery and woman’s conviction if they are found in the midst of such an affair. She cannot surpass man for all situations are male-favored and set for their benefit, and even if male and female intellects were to be the same, the situation would mean male victory nonetheless. It is because of these unfavorable situations that it leads her to oppress her own self and potential through the usage of men as the means to achieve her goals. Using men to accomplish your aims is not oppression in itself, but the fact that she must heavily rely upon them is in itself the oppression of the potential she could attain if she were to rely upon her own self. She may have been able to succeed in the threatening of Lady Wishfort if she had not been dependant upon Fainall, who in the crucial moment did not even know that his wife was no longer the holder of her estate since before their wedding day.

Mrs. Marwood is absolutely fearless, even challenging the devil through her words, “The devil’s an ass: If I were a painter, I would draw him like an idiot, a drivelor with a bib and bells. Man should have his head and horns, and women the rest of him” (Congreve 2252). It is this fearlessness that allows her to use men as the mediums for her to achieve her ambitions, such as is depicted through her usage of Fainall. Yet one can see that no matter how unafraid she is to challenge males, and females alike, as when she faced Mrs. Fainall and condemned her of an affair, Mrs. Marwood cannot but fall to the oppression of society. In the second act, Mrs. Marwood tells Mrs. Fainall, “And yet I am thinking sometimes of carrying my aversion further... by marrying...I should do myself the violence of undergoing the ceremony” (Congreve 2240). It is here that the topic of marriage comes up once again. Through the conversation with Mrs. Fainall, Mrs. Marwood states her utmost hatred of men and marriage, but in the above passage
she decides to undergo the “violence” of becoming a wife. The word “violence” in this passage is truly fitting, for to go into the bonds of marriage is to condemn yourself marital oppression. If Mrs. Marwood is aware of the violence in marriage, then why would she consciously give herself into such an oppressive institution? It is because of the oppression to be one with society that she decides to conscious subjugates herself in a male-dominated society. It is the oppression of unity, to try to fit into society due to the fear to be an individual, to be a woman rather than a fabricated figure of what a woman should be. This is the ultimate female imposed oppression.

In Congreve’s The Way of the World, there are various forms of oppression that are illustrated through the main women. The basic forms of oppression encountered through the text are: Cultural and peer oppression, governmental and marital oppression, restriction and oppression of her potential self, self oppression, and unity-driven and male-mediated oppression. It is through the analysis and critical observation of the different forms of oppression experienced by woman of the 18th century that we can understand the patterns of thought and their manner of life. What all of the woman analyzed had in common was that they all felt the oppression from marriage, through in diversified ways that fit their situation and mind set. Marriage in the 18th century was of monumental significance in the lives of woman of that century for it was the only decision they could make that would forever affect them, for it is through marriage that they chose who their husband is to be, the tyrant that they would be dependent upon for the rest of their lives. Back then it was not like now, women’s rights did not exist and wives were at the mercy of their husbands, as Mrs. Fainall was to Fainall. And so marriage became the pivotal thought which brought about many of that
century’s feminist thoughts that shaped the perspective of the women in that century through such mouthpieces as Defoe, Montagu, Mary Astell, and many more.

Reputation was also an item of great importance in that century, as was illustrated through the threats made to Lady Wishfort and Mrs. Fainall in the play. This obsession with reputation and decorum was one of the greatest restrictors of female development of the time, second only to marriage. It was because of such society-made rules that woman did not dare to progress in the fear that they might not be following the proper decorum, in case their reputations were to suffer. It was precisely due to this that wit and intelligence were rejected by those women in favor of the superficial and the vain, such as beauty and youth. Even the power that was granted to woman through the usage of such vain means was nothing lasting and always fading, gone with the passing of time and the coming of age. It is through such limited thinking that woman did not seek the unfading power of education in fear that their beauty would be overlook due to their wit and knowledge, a fact that was expressed by Witwoud in the first act when he elevated the aesthetic over the powerful, beauty over wit. And so it is due to this social construct that beauty was seen as the more desired quality and women consciously oppressed their own selves by this choice.

Due to the male-dominance in England in that century, women were forced to rely upon men in order to obtain any form of power over other men. Because the government favored men when it came to sexist matters, especially in the divorce court, women could not but think that men were superior. Women could not win against men in a men-driven world, but this fact was oppression in itself. The inequality between the sexes was clearly visible, as can be seen through the previously mentioned text by Montagu where the wife was convicted and not the
husband though they had both committed the same crime. Oppression is naturally produced in an unbalanced situation, but it can also be combated, as was seen through the African American Rights and Women’s Rights Movements in the United States. In the text there were traces of combat and a move towards women’s rights, as is more explicitly seen in Mrs. Millamant and Mirabell’s marital contract. It is in this contract that the desires of the soon-to-be-wife were addressed and imposed upon the other member of the marital union, even though Mirabell did impose his own items into the contract, Millamant’s needs were nevertheless met and enforced.

The last of the oppressions that must be brought into perspective once again and clarified is the unity-driven oppression. The drive towards unity in any kind of society forms a paradox, for individuals can never fully become unified one with the others. It is because unity can never be achieved, though it is sought, that the futility of seeking it becomes a form of oppression because the individuals are presented with a task that can never be achieved and therefore forced to conform to what that society considers to be unity. It is in this unity, this society, that women are forced to accept the existence of men as superior to them because of the commonsense that comes along with this unity. How can one battle against commonsense? And so this imposition of common sense upon women then becomes another means of oppression that does not let them break out of the aesthetic mold that men have set up of what women should be like, therefore trapping women within this restricting manner of thinking and hindering the advancement of their individual selves.

Women in the 18th century were in constant oppression, as I have illustrated through the course of my analysis. It was due to this fact that none of the women analyzed through the
context of this work were able to reach their true potential. Their physical and intellectual selves were limited through the bonds of society and commonsense. Because of this, and of a male-favored culture, women's perception of their world and their own selves was severely limited and exploited to be less than its true potential.
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