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In William Congreve's play *The Way of The World*, modern readers are confronted with baffling behaviors and odd meanings. Contemporary audiences discover that early-eighteenth-century English social attitudes and conventions are clear targets of Congreve's comedy. Those targets, however, can become obscured among Congreve's plot machinations, characters' motivations, and eighteenth-century diction. One strategy for improving perception is to look carefully at the details of diction—even single phrases within the text—which might be keys to understanding Congreve's intent. Look, for example, at the language in act 3 when Foible says of Mrs. Marwood, "She has a month's mind; but I know Mr. Mirabell can't abide her" (152). A footnote defines the obscure phrase "a month's mind" as "desire (for Mirabell)." That brief definition, however, fails to explain the larger implications that underscore the comedy's clever array of greed, deception, and cuckoldry.

First, consider a brief lexicographic look at the phrase. The OED records both ecclesiastical and secular definitions: "In England, before the Reformation [...] [a month's mind referred to] the commemoration of masses, etc., on a day one month from the date of [a person's] death." An example from the OED further illustrates the usage: "[From] 1466 in Somerset Medieval Wills [...] I will that there be at my dirige mass and moneth mynde noon other tapers ne candelstikkes but such as be of the same chirch." The secular definition in the OED says that "month's mind" is "[u]sed allusively as a more or less playful synonym for MIND; [...] an inclination, a fancy, a liking. Also (rarely) to be in a month's mind, to have a strong expectation." As an example of usage, the OED includes the following: "[From] 1660 PEPYS Diary 20 May 1, In another bed there was a pretty Dutch woman, but though I had a month's mind I had not the boldness to go to her." The secular view receives different treatment by Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755); Johnson defines "a month's mind" as a "longing desire" and then cites an example of valorous usage from page i of *Hudibras*, "For if a trumpet found, or drum beat, Who has not a month's mind to combat?"

Looking even further into aspects of the phrase's history, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1964) reveals the following concerning some sources of a "month's mind": *monab* (pertaining to month) serves as the root word for various forms including *monab-adl* (a disease that occurs at intervals of a month), *monabadlig* (suffering from), *monab-blod* (menstruation), *monab-seoc* (lunatic or epileptic), and *monab-bot* (penance extending over a month) (696). *Bot*, as the hyphenated suffix above in *monab-bot*, is separately defined as meaning help or remedy; it may also mean amends, satisfaction, repentance, an offering, or compensation to an injured person as damages for a wrong sustained (118).

Simply relying on a footnote, therefore, that says that Mrs. Marwood has "a desire (for Mirabell)" seriously understates the depth of her character. Congreve has given Mrs. Marwood (and, of course, the other characters) full range in the comedy to perform in the most active, covert, and disingenuous ways—all within the various definitions of "a month's mind." Witness, for example, Mrs. Marwood's highly manipulative conversation with Lady Wishfort in act 5 concerning the pitfalls of litigating relationships in court (179-80). Also consider Mrs. Marwood's probable or possible answer to Lady Wishfort's question, "What's integrity to an opportunity?" (149);

"Irrelevant" would be Mrs. Marwood's response as she moves relentlessly toward her own opportunities. By looking at the different definitions and sources of "a month's mind," the reader can understand much more about Mrs. Marwood, who embodies many if not all of the qualities in the cited definitions. Affronted and angry, she responds to the call to combat, seeking compensation or revenge. Her strong desires extend far beyond the footnoted sexual interests. Ironically, though, she—like all characters in the comedy—has no interest in penance to anyone for anything (based on either ecclesiastical or secular motives); cynically dismissed, religion plays no part in the pecuniary and lustful ways of the world as lived by Congreve's characters.

Always willful and even sometimes petulant herself, Mrs. Marwood's ultimate success or failure (like that of other characters) is not nearly as interesting as are her relentless machinations in the process. Her "month's mind," like her youth, "may wear and waste, but it shall never rust in [her] possession" (138). Congreve may satirize Mrs. Marwood's sexual desire and her gender by using the phrase "a month's mind," but in doing so he also underscores all the other characters' traits: avarice, guile, and pursuit of pleasure.

#### ADDED MATERIAL

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