

# Women's Function in William Wycherley's Play the Country Wife as a Critical Analysis

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## Abstract

The paper analyzes the fierce moralist William Wycherley's perspective on the mistreatment of women by the Restoration era's aristocratic class. To get there, Wycherley divides the characters in *The Country Wife* into four camps: the abuser, the victim, the self-made victim, and the role model. The first category consists of rakes like Horner and company, the second of Margery and other good ladies, the third of self-made cuckolds like Pinch wife and Sir Jasper Fidget, and the fourth of Wycherley's mouthpieces like Alithea and Harcourt. The dramatist sees parallels between these two sorts in the female characters' flaws. In contrast, Wycherley shows extraordinary compassion for all female victims. Margery is portrayed as a helpless victim of her obsessive and overprotective husband and of the corrupt culture in which they live. This also applies to the lovely girls out there. They were entirely ignored by their husbands, leading them to adultery and extramarital affairs. Despite his compassion for the victims, Wycherley supports exemplary characters' behavior over the victims' flirtation.

**Keywords:** Wycherley, the country wife, the rake, the self-made cuckolds, the virtuous gang.

## Introduction

Puritan and "ferocious moralist," as described by Wilson (1969), Wycherley was also noted for being "overly critical of the established societal norms and mores" (Wilson, 1969). Although his work initially resembled Etherege's, his later satire became more severe and dark (Stone, 1975, p. 197). Although his play *The Country Wife* was a smash hit when it premiered, moralists quickly pulled it from the stage because of its offensive language and double meanings (Macaulay, 2005). Long centuries passed, but eventually, it was replaced by a slightly modified version of David Garrick's. The original is now more widely performed and is a favorite among liberal theater audiences. Modern academic reviewers are captivated by the text's kinetic language, biting social satire, and interpretive flexibility (Ogden, 2003). A philosophical critique of the aristocracy's machismo, possessiveness, dishonesty, and affectation may be found in *The Country Wife*. Women and men alike (with a few notable exceptions) are portrayed as morally bankrupt throughout the play, although the author's sympathies lie with the women who are the play's victims. Male protagonists are typically either pathetic victims of their weaknesses or cruel cynics who relish in the misery of others. The self-defeating individuals and the vicious rakes are not the only ones that victimize women in the story.

## Literary Sources

Several critics have suggested readings from other works that Wycherley may have used to inspire his play. Wycherley, as promised, used the concept of a rake who poses as emasculated to attract beautiful women from Terence's play *Eunuch*. The two plays share only the presence of humorous servants who serve distinct purposes. Moliere's dramas *The School for Wives* and *The School for Husbands* comprise the second set of sources. There are many things that Margery, the country wife, owes to Agnes, the French play's protagonist, but Agnes never offends Margery's naiveté. Wycherley used additional materials from *The School for Husbands*. Mr. Pinchwife is portrayed in a manner not dissimilar to that of Moliere's tyrant Sganarelle. They are both overconfident, sexist (they think women should be tightly monitored), and easily duped by the captive females. In addition, Isabel, Sganarelle's fiancée, arranges an assignment with a lover by letter, just like Margery does. The play *Every Man in His Humor* by Ben Jonson has also been recognized as an inspiration for *The Country Wife* by several critics. Kitley, like Pinchwife, is irrationally envious of his beautiful wife.

In contrast, Pinchwife is paralyzed by his humor and constantly worries that his wife and pals are trying to trick him. (For references, see Miles (1910), Sedgwick (1985), Dixon (2002), and Ogden (2003)). Finally, it is possible to speculate that Wycherley's primary source was not playing but rather his life experience.

When it comes to the moral degradation of the aristocracy during the Restoration era, Wycherley sounds the alarm in *The Country Wife*. Jack Pinchwife and Sir Jasper Fidget are two of the playwright's self-defeating or self-made cuckolds; Margery and the fine ladies Lady Fidget, Lady Dainty, and Lady Squeamish are among the play's victims; Alithea and Harcourt are two of the play's exemplary characters; and Horner, Sparkish, Dolirant, Quack, and other rakes are among the play's victimizers.

### **Self-defeating Self-Made Cuckolds**

Wycherley's scathing parody and mocking of archetypes begins with the fully realized cuckold in *The Country Wife*. Wycherley believes that people of this mold contribute to the success of rakes by corrupting respectable wives. A man whose honor is tarnished because his wife has been having sexual relations with other men, is known as a cuckold (I. i. 86). This category includes characters like Mr. Pinchwife and Sir Jasper Fidget. Both are presented as the source of their wealth (III. ii. 55–60), which they use to improve their lives and many wives. For the same reason that Sir Jasper and other cuckolds do it, a cuckold's wife will engage in intrigues right before her husband. Possibly fooled by Horner's pretended impotence, the cuckold husbands frequently encourage their wives to accompany the bawdy rake to the theater. The irony is not lost on their sexually restrained wives, who are overwhelmed by such encouragement. Wives who have been abused see their husbands' abuse as an opportunity for vengeance. They are thrilled, especially after Horner tells Lady Fidget in a secret conversation that the rumors about his impotence are false. Horner provides an outlet for suppressed desire, but the women place the guilt for flirting on their husbands. Who for business from his wife will run/ Takes the best care to get her business done (II. i. 619-620), Lady Fidget unfairly places the responsibility on the indifference and neglect of husbands. When a husband entirely ignores his marital responsibilities, it is only natural that his wife will seek solace elsewhere. Great kindness to you, indeed, is what Pinchwife, a cuckold himself, has to say about Sparkish's apathy on another occasion. Let a guy have sexual relations with his wife in front of him, you insensitive prick (II. i.194–195).

Another cuckold, Jack Pinchwife, can take credit for creating his wealth. He is pathologically possessive of his wife, leading to unintended consequences, as his jealousy ultimately leads his wife to the rakes' traps. Pinchwife is so worried about being exposed as a married man that he hides the fact from his friends and family. He married a rural girl because he figured she would not be hip enough to consider having an affair with anybody besides him. He believes irrationally that a woman with a rural residence is superior to those who live in the city because "at least we are a little surer of the breed there" (I. i.402-403). A country woman is expected to be dedicated to her husband and frugal (she will not waste money excessively like a London baggage would) (I. i. 435-436). Pinchwife is so afraid of being cuckolded that he keeps his wife locked up, away from the city gallants. Worse, Pinchwife thinks a wife should be kept in the dark at all costs. By his response to Harcourt's assumption that Margery was brought to the city to be taught breeding, it is clear that he views knowledge as a corrupting influence on the wife. Protesting Pinchwife, In order to learn? No, Sir. Good spouses and private soldiers benefit from ignorance, so thank you. we will hide her from your instructions is an aside that perfectly encapsulates his fear of knowledge (I. i. 415–418). Sparkish, the dandy, makes fun of Pinchwife's fear and threatens her with dire repercussions.

*Lord, how shy you are of your wife; but let me tell you, brother, we are men of wit have amongst us saying that cuckolding, like small pox comes with fear.* (IV. iv. 71-74)

Sparkish's words of wisdom do prove accurate in the long run. Pinchwife's precautions do nothing to stop a curious wife from exploring the fashion world, and she soon finds ways to annoy her authoritarian and overbearing husband. Margery keeps her husband, Pinchwife, in constant dread with her unrefined sexual vigor and naturalness. She also develops a taste for the macho handsomeness of the town's gallants, rakes, and players. Pinchwife's efforts to avoid being cuckolded ironically bring him closer to it. He once took Margery to Horner's lodge dressed as a boy, pretending she was his wife's sibling. When Horner saw through her disguise, he kissed the young man and teased the jealous husband by saying he was kissing his sister. Pinchwife goes against Horner's desires at every turn, even having Margery write a farewell letter to

him. Inadvertently, it prompts Margery to pen an affectionate letter to Horner. In order to foil her husband's naive pranks and secretly meet her lover, Margery learns the art of masquerade from Pinchwife. Critics have pointed out that Wycherley is mocking all mistrustful spouses in his portrayal of Pinchwife and that, as a result, cuckolding becomes an appropriate recompense for them.

*The Country Wife has a moral, and a sound one, that the Husband who mistrusts his wife and tries to keep her from other men will merely stimulate her desire and teach her to deceive him, however ill-equipped she is with natural cunning. This is in accord with the Rationalism of the period. (Pott. 55).*

The playwright portrays both Jasper and Pinchwife as helpless victims of their actions. Because of his possessiveness, animosity, distrust, and despotism, Pinchwife has put himself in this challenging position. His fear of being cuckolded makes him suspicious of his wife and all married women in general: "that love instructs her how to deceive me,...all idiots as she is Love, 'twas he gave women first their craft, their art of deceiving." (IV. ii. 54-57) His wife's infidelity directly results from his animosity and intolerable watchfulness. If you do not deceive women, they will defraud us; and deceit may be justly used with secret adversaries, of which a wife is the most dangerous (IV. iii. 213-215), he says to Margery after locking her in her chamber and making her compose a rebuking letter to Horner. When he draws his wife and threatens to flay her face with a penknife, his insane hostility reaches a crescendo. However, as noted by Holland, his threats to Margery accomplish nothing positive and lead to more circumstances that feed his anxiety and set him up for failure.

*Pinchwife-his name is significant- fears and distrusts women; these fears create a hostility that tends to make him inadequate lover; unconsciously he satisfies his aggressive instincts by frustrating and disappointing women he makes love to. Disappointing women, in turn, create further situations that increase his fears. Thus he falls into the typical self-defending spiral of neurosis. As Pinchwife himself puts it, free of the cumbersome jargon of psychology, 'The jades would fit me, I could never keep a whore to myself. (Holland. 84)*

Pinchwife frequently treats Margery with contempt and abuse. His offensive language toward his wife includes calling her a fool, a whore, and an idiot. He thinks if he keeps her in the dark and mistreats her, she will remain loyal to him. In order to learn? In response to Harcourt's suggestion that decent wives and private soldiers should be oblivious, he replies, "No, sir, I thank you" (I. i. 416-417). He also cautions his sister Alithea against introducing Margery to eligible men.

*Hold, hold, do not teach my wife where the men to be found; I believe she's the worst for your town documents already. I ask you keep her in ignorance, as I do. (II. i. 58-60)*

His insane obsession with controlling his wife by keeping her in the dark and utterly subservient to his every whim has only backfired. The path to Horner's bed is paved with lies, schemes, and the carrying of letters after he corrupts his wife and piques her interest in other men. Unwittingly, he does the opposite of keeping her in check, arousing her yearning and curiosity to explore the world beyond her domestic confinement.

Pinchwife, who is "part country booby or country gentleman" (I. i. 385), is a suitable butt since he has several characteristics distinguishing him from city dwellers. Sparkish observes, "Why do ye' think I will seem to be jealous like a country bumpkin?" (II. i. 226-227), implying that urbanites look down on any rural booby for being too jealous. He is not only envious but also naïve and easily convinced. For instance, Pinchwife is easily duped by his ostensibly naive wife and some cunning rakes. Margery pretends to be Alithea by dressing in her clothes. Without Alithea's knowledge, Pinchwife brings the disguised woman to Horner's lodging and then searches for a minister to sanctify their marriage. Horner is perplexed by Pinchwife's gullibility and asks, "What means the fool?" (V. ii. 76). Also, as shown by Horner's words, urbanites believe that rural areas only give rise to loners who are wild, unsociable, and frugal like Pinchwife.

*What, I see a little time in the country makes a man turn wild and unsociable, and only fit to converse with his horses, dogs, and his herds (III. ii. 394-396).*

In reality, the rural booby is only taken as a source of occasional fun by the beau mode, who quickly forgets about him. Having been put to work, he has become a friend that is drab and boring, as Horner tells Quack:

*A pox, keeping a cuckold company after you have had his wife is as tiresome as the company of a country squire to a witty fellow of the town when he has got all his money. (V. ii. 10-14)*

Sir Jasper, the cuckold, goes through the same agony as Pinchwife did because he had another incorrect attitude toward his wife, and therefore cuckolding is a suitable reward for him. In contrast to Pinchwife's oppressive watchfulness, Sir Jasper pays zero attention to his wife. The effect of Sir Jasper's apathy is similar to that of Pinchwife's active lookout. Sir Jasper constantly travels for work, leaving his wife at home to feel sexually repressed and unsatisfied. He ignores Lady Fidget's every move, even when she flirts with other men. In front of Horner, he bluntly tells him, "Business must always be performed before love and ceremony with the wife, Master Horner" (I. i. 125-126). These lines are reminiscent of a remark made by Lady Fidget in Henry IV, Part I, Scene I, Lines 619-620: "Who for business from his wife run/ Takes the best care to have her business done." She joins other classy women in bitterly denouncing male apathy. Lady Fidget tells Squeamish (II. i. 360-365) that she is surprised there is not more jealousy in the world because marriages are ignored. She strongly objects to her husband's infidelity and blames him for her sexual behavior. Sir Jasper is relatively unconcerned by her apparent advances. He avoids her companionship whenever possible, disappearing to Whitehall while she goes shopping for pleasure with other men. Her complaints about her husband's coldness and neglect may be interpreted as a cause for her flirtatious behavior. She may be avenging her husband's insensitivity by hurting him emotionally. While still holding hands with another guy, she tells Sir Jasper that being neglected by her spouse is a cause for adultery.

*'tis I have more reason to be angry, who I am left by you to go abroad indecently alone, or, what is more indecent, to pin myself upon such ill-bred people of your acquaintance as this is.* (IV. iii. 102-105)

### Victimized: Margery and fine Ladies

Margery comes first among the victims, followed by the "fine ladies," also known as Lady Fidget, Lady Dainty, and Lady Squeamish. Margery Pinchwife was a young rural wife who was abused by her husband, eventually leading to adultery. She is typically naive and clueless about urban existence, social strata, marriage, and seduction in the libertine upper class. Margery's conversation with her sister-in-law, the urbanite Alithea, illustrates her naivete.

Mrs. Pinchwife: Pray, sister, tell me why my husband looks so grim here in town, and keep me up so close, and will not let me go a walking, not let me wear my best gown yesterday.

Alithea: O, he is jealous, sister. Mrs. Pinchwife: Jealous? What is that? (II. i. 5-10)

When she questions why he would ruin me if he loves her, her naiveté shines through once again. Please respond to that. It seems that he should not and that I should not hurt him (II. i. 128-130). Worse, worse, her naivete has the potential to endanger her life. She is about to spill the beans about Horner's secret when Pinchwife, Alithea, Harcourt, and the fiance show up there to explain away the disguised Alithea. Margery stands up to defend Horner when Pinchwife raises the sword to accuse him of double-dealing, but her naive comment that "Tis false, Sir, You shall not disparage poor Master Horner; for my certain knowledge..." is a huge mistake. This would make the roaring husband even angrier, making it more difficult for Lucy and Squeamish to avoid his wrath (V. iv. 392-403).

She arrives in town naive to deceit until Pinchwife compels her to succumb to the city's infectious culture. I liked the actors a lot; they are the goodliest properest men, she tells Alithea freely (II. i. 21-23). She acknowledges her stronger love for the actors than her husband, saying, "I like the actors better than I like him; actors are finer people" (II. i. 77). Her lack of deception and naiveté shines through in her message to Horner.

*And I say, for the letter, 'tis the first love-letter that ever was without flames, darts, fates, destinies, lying, and dissembling in it.* (IV. i. 36-37)

She loses her naiveté and innocence due to her husband's hatred, and she eventually becomes capable of plotting plots. She learns to put up a front for her husband and tell him lies to keep him from becoming too vindictive. Margery is forced to lie after being tipped off by Lucy's instructions.

*Lucy: Indeed, she is innocent, Sir; I am her witness; and her end of coming out was but to see her sister's wedding and what she has said to your face of her love to Master Horner was but the usual innocent revenge on a husband's jealousy, was it not, madam? Speak.*

In a side conversation, Mrs. Pinchwife says, "Since you will have me tell more lies," addressing Lucy and Horner. (V. iv. 434-440)

Contrary to what moralists would have you believe, Margery is a victim of her husband and society. She is a sad figure because Horner, a gloomy, nightmarish figure, is destined to take advantage of her naivete (Bonamy, 94). See Holland (1959) and Zimbardo (1965) for more on how Horner's libertarianism and Pinchwife's possessiveness have harmed Margery.

Husbands and rakes are not the only ones that victimize the three lovely ladies, also known as the virtuous gang: Lady Fidget, Dainty, and Lady Squeamish. They are embarrassed by their spouses' lack of attention. They are so offended that they start behaving as freely as their husbands. When wives finally have enough of their husbands' indifference, they resort to false pride and pretense. They act prim and proper in social situations, but behind closed doors, they are flirting with Horner and others to satisfy their suppressed desires. They are torn between the pressure to conform to social norms and the need to relieve their physical discomfort. For instance, Lady Fidget would say something like, "How, you saucy fellow!" after having a racy experience with Horner. Are you willing to dishonor me? She then insists that he vow to look after her honor (IV. iii.43-44). She also begs Horner to hide her immoral behavior, especially around ladies.

*if you should ever let other women know the dear secret, it would come out; nay you must have a great care of your conduct, for my acquaintances are so censorious—O, 'tis a wicked, censorious world, Master Horner—I say, are so censorious, and detracting, that perhaps they'll talk to the prejudice of my honor, though you should not let them know the dear secret.* (IV. iii. 62-67)

She has to put on a new persona when she is out in public so that she can conform to the expectations of others. She puts up a front to protect her honor at any cost (II. i. 417). She acts outraged and humiliated when Sir Jasper uses the word "naked" in front of her at one point. When some guests arrive at Horner's lodging, she demands her mask and is met with such a strong demand that not even her cuckold husband can resist saying, "What, not when I am with you" (IV. iii. 245-248). Lady Fidget, Lady Squeamish, and Lady Dainty know that honor is a myth that individuals protect solely in public; they care more about the appearance of honor than true honor. They fake it until they make it in order to protect their reputation. The rule of thumb that the crime is less when 'tis not known is so pervasive in their crooked culture that people must obey it. As Squeamish puts it, They know that extramarital affairs would only be a scandal when exposed.

*It is not an injury to a husband till it be an injury to our honors so that a woman of honor loses no honor with a private person.* (II. i. 411-413)

Lady Fidget, the group's spokesperson, states that the good guys conduct honorably in front of others. What they do is something that the vast majority of decent people do every day:

Our standing? Lord! You are mistaken if you think we ladies utilize your good name as a man to deceive the world. Our virtue is to deceive people who put their faith in us, just as the religion of politicians is like the word of Quakers, the oath of gamblers, and the honor of great men. (V. iv. 105-110)

In sum, the husbands' unfaithfulness is a natural result of the virtuous gang's and Margery's flirting. Lady Fidget, Dainty, and Squamish all saw flirting as a kind of retaliation and a necessary outlet for their frustrations as married women. For Margery, it is also about getting even. She takes her husband's relentless debasement and cruel lockout out on Horner through her flirtatious behavior with him. They have been beaten down and are at their wit's end, making them ideal prey for Horner and his gang.

### **The Victimizer Horner and Rakes**

Among the court intellectuals, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, is the most infamous and repugnantly obscene; Horner, the principal victimizer, is introduced as another copy of him. When it came to literature and mischief, Rochester was unrivaled (Wilson 9). The townspeople constantly spread rumors that the Earl had a string of mistresses, frequented prostitutes, and was even accused of rape (Johnson, 2004). He passed away at 33 from what author Graham Green humorously labels old age in his book *Lord Rochester's Monkey* (Green, 1989). After years of hedonism, sexual illnesses, and excessive drinking, the Earl finally hit rock bottom (Davis: 2013). Horner is made to mirror the Earl in appearance and personality, and Wycherley

predicts that he will share his demise. Both are stunning to look at and quick on their feet, yet they prey relentlessly on unsuspecting victims in the name of sexual gratification.

Horner is a savage who is cruel, annoying, and lustful. He has a sharp mind, but his sexual behavior is the most wicked wit. He has no qualms about lying, disguising himself as someone else, or taking advantage of abused wives and cuckolding husbands. Horner starts his pursuit with the lie that he has become impotent due to a venereal ailment, which he and his closest supporters propagate. He blames a venereal disease he picked up in France from interacting with regular women for his inability to have sexual relations with them. He claims that a surgeon significantly diminished his manliness during treatment, making him utterly harmless to any man's wife. Horner hopes to gain unwarranted access to as many respectable women as possible to cuckold or "put horns on" their husbands, a show of wrath and disgrace, by seducing them. Horner's ploy winds up being highly effective. Many fools and self-made cuckolds believe the allegations about his being impotent and give their neglected wives over to him. They think he is weakened to the point where he is no longer a threat. Soon after, he takes revenge on society by cuckolding naive husbands and seducing obedient wives, all while openly bragging and boasting about his success in luring women from all walks of life into his bed. He does not spare even the most naive woman who appears in his play after victimizing Lady Fidget, Lady Squeamish, and Lady Dainty. Turning his attention to Margery, a newcomer to London from the country, he takes advantage of her naiveté and desire to explore London's fashion scene while betting on the idiocy of her exceedingly jealous husband, Mr. Pinchwife.

Horner's intentions with Margery and attractive women are dual. The primary reason is to satisfy his insatiable appetite for sexual gratification. Second, it is to make an example of women by having their husbands be oblivious or overprotective. He takes advantage of the need for extramarital affairs of attractive women, knowing full well that he is playing on their irritation and affectation. When he finds a woman whose thirst for physical passion exceeds the bounds of female propriety, he uses his charisma, physical attractiveness, and wit to draw her legs into his bedroom (Cohen, 1983). Worse, Horner never shows any sign of affection or sympathy for the people who share his bawdy games. Your virtue is your most excellent affectation, madam (I. i. 111–112), he says to Lady Fidget early in the play, mocking her conceit that her carnal need is stronger than the dignity she professes. Horner tells Quack about his hatred and disgust for Sir Jasper after Lady Fidget and her husband had left. What, this grave is not apparent from the report and my carriage? A businessman who leaves his wife at my hotel then asks me to his home and introduces me to his jealous wife. In addition, he mocks Lady Fidget and her friends, the so-called virtuous gang, arguing that your women of honor, as you call them, are only wary of their reputations, not their personalities and that it is a scandal, not men, that they wish to avoid (I. i. 177–180). In reality, these women are pretty protective of their public image, but whether or not they are prepared for a lecherous scandal is anyone's guess. Ironically, they may be aware that any rake or gallant will do what he can to protect a lady's reputation while he is infatuated with her.

Horner is overconfident, yet he makes a mistake by going to extremes with his beliefs. He goes to extraordinary measures in his licentious campaign, failing to account for the many obstacles he will face from the elements and society. Horner first dominates compliant females, exploiting their sexual inhibition and willingness to commit adultery. Horner's influence would naturally decline over time. After the infamous China Scene, in which Horner uses up his sexual resources and is revealed to the world as an impotent and useless object (Cohen, 1983), this prophecy comes true. In Act V, Scene 4, Horner's chutzpah wears thin, and the sophisticated ladies regard him as a familiar eunuch. His female peers call him names like "beast," "toad," "eunuch," "filthy," "notoriously lewd," "childish," and "eunuch" as if he were not there. In a pivotal moment, after Horner collapses from exhaustion, the three women feel emboldened and confidently expose with disdain the hypocrisy and duplicity of men, which drives them to affectation and dissembling: Our Reputation, Lord! There is no reason we ladies would not leverage our reputations just like you guys do. Lady Fidget claims that she is only trying to fool others into believing her so that she will be treated with less scrutiny.

Moreover, to answer Horner's question, yes, you wickedly duped me. How come you are making such a big show for Honor? Lady Fidget responds plainly, "We have told you." "Twas for the same reason you men often pretend business, to avoid ill company, to enjoy the better and more privately those you love," she says. At this pivotal juncture, the ladies are feeling victorious, and Horner has been transformed

into a villainous Rogue, Wretch, and false to no avail. As she leaves, Lady Fidget (Claps him on the back) (V. iv. 3-65) to celebrate their victory over Horner and other oppressors like him. Cohen observes that "as women gain assertiveness, the new sociosexual roles they are being asked to play become more apparent" (1983).

In a nutshell, Horner will resort to cuckolding men and assaulting women's honor if it helps him get what he wants. He has no compunction about revealing stylish women's identities and personal lives. He is a vicious sex machine who uses his power and control over others for his sexual gain, but in the final moment, he succumbs to his hedonistic excesses just as his Rochester idol did. By the play's conclusion, Horner has failed in his mission to victimize others and has become a laughingstock, at least among the more refined female species.

### Exemplary Characters

Harcourt and Alithea are introduced as antitheses to the other characters and as models for future growth in Sentimental Comedy. They do not have the flaws that other rakes and good guys do, like lying, cheating, or acting pretentiously. Alithea continuously condemns the libertine manners of high society women and fights against her brother Pinchwife's abuse of his wife, Margery. Pinchwife has arranged for Alithea to wed Sparkish, a vain and naive playboy who thinks he is a wit. She feels obligated to her brother Pinchwife to marry Sparkish. She rejects the thought of breaking her match with him because of his vanity, possessiveness, and genuine motivation for his upcoming marriage. She will not break her word since it would be dishonorable. She says, "I must marry him (Sparkish), my reputation in the world else would suffer" (II. i. 246-247), despite her strong distaste for Sparkish. Lucy is rooting for Harcourt, but Anne continues to argue with her: "I was engaged to marry, you see, another man, whom my justice will not suffer me to deceive or injure" (IV. i. 17-18). However, Lucy's question, "Can there be a greater cheat or wrong done to a man than give him your person without your heart?" shows that such idealistic thoughts of honor have no place in the Beau Monde community. I need to be more self-aware about this. Lucy also mocks Alithea's obsession with protecting the concept of honor at any cost.

*But what a devil is this honor? 'tis sure a disease in the head like the megrim or falling sickness, that always hurries people away to themselves mischief; men lose their lives by it; women, what is dearer to them—their love, the life of life.* (IV. i. 31-36)

Early in the play, Frank Harcourt meets Alithea and immediately falls for her. His loyalty to the honorable Alithea is indicative of his inherent goodness. After starting as a rake, he eventually wins Alithea's hand by presenting a vision of marriage based on mutual love and respect. In contrast to Horner, who is a violent rake who manipulates both men and women with his deceit, Harcourt is the proper lover, the embodiment of reciprocal faith in marriage (Holland, 1959). Righter argues that Alithea and Harcourt are the play's most important characters, and he adds that Wycherley wants all of the other characters, including Horner, to be measured against them (111).

### Conclusion

Wycherley's harsh criticism of the brutality and sexism in Beau Monde's savage male culture is reflected in *The Country Wife*. That morally bankrupt culture is to blame for wiping out Margery and other innocent, good-natured women like her. Ann Righter observes that, unlike Etherege, Wycherley could be more enthusiastic about young couples. What fascinates him is the horrific picture of a society gradually revealed on the play's periphery through the actions of a central renegade: Harcourt's friend Horner (Righter 111). Wycherley used the concept of a rake who poses as emasculated to attract beautiful women from Terence's play *Eunuch*. The two plays share only the presence of humorous servants who serve distinct purposes. Moliere's dramas *The School for Wives* and *The School for Husbands* comprise the second set of sources. There are many things that Margery, the country wife, owes to Agnes, the French play's protagonist, but Agnes never offends Margery's naiveté. Wycherley used additional materials from *The School for Husbands*. Mr. Pinchwife is portrayed in a manner not dissimilar to that of Moliere's tyrant Sganarelle.

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