

4. The shape of theaters: open and round-shaped Elizabethan (public) theaters had been completely destroyed. For a few years, plays were only performed in private buildings. In the early 1670s a very famous architect, C. Wren designed two very important theaters in London. These new theaters were built differently: they had the shape of a fan, opening diagonally from the two sides of the stage. On the ground there were floor benches, on higher level balconies. Initially, one part of the stage was protruding into the audience (called apron stage) so that there was great closeness to the public. Little by little this stage diminished and became rectangular;
5. Realism: great expertise in the use of sceneries. Very detailed backdrops, usually movable, were painted reconstructing the environment in which every scene was set. The theatre of words was no longer existing. The higher degree of realism is also given by the presence of women- women's roles, for the first time, could be played by real women.

THE COUNTRY WIFE

William Wycherley

ACT 1

Scene 1

There are two characters: Horner & Quack. The first thing Horner says is aside the (the end of the aside is signaled by a dash. This play is full of asides: they show the difference between what one character thinks and what he / she says. In this first scene we are given the narrative stratagem that sets the whole play in motion: Horner asked his doctor to tell everyone in London that he has become a eunuch.

In the first page there are already two social references of great importance: the city and Whitehall (the king's public rooms. Whitehall is the place where the monarchy resided. In fact, restoration theatre was about urban high classes. The heroes of these works belong to high classes because to these classes the audience belongs. People went to theaters to see themselves: there was a great identification between the public and the characters / settings.

We have immediately the first indication of the main topic of the play: social hypocrisy - women hated their husbands. We are dealing with restoration comedy which is the most important kind of restoration drama. In particular, this belongs to the London comedy (set in London), also referred to as "comedy of manners"

These plays expose with satire the hypocrisy of the manners and customs of London's high society.

"QUACK Your late journey into France has made it more credible": France was considered the place of freedom. The rumor that Horner is spreading goes that he has become impotent as a consequence of a venereal disease, and here it seems that he caught this sickness in France. France was also a place of inspiration for playwrights ex. From Molière. "The wealthiest man conceals his riches, and the cunning gamester his play. Shy husbands and keepers, like old rooks, are not to be cheated but by a new unpractised trick: false friendship will pass now no more than false dice upon 'em; no, not in the city."

He wants to seduce and have sex with these men's wives and lovers. Horner is a libertine who wants to have fun and get all the more women he can. This is a sign of the changing in morals, also because the main character is not described in a negative way. Horner is a wit (term meaning ingeniousness associated with a very keen sense of humor). This kind of person is the stock protagonist of restoration comedy, which captures the scene thanks to his linguistic ability he uses to make fun of people. He's not the only wit of the play, but surely one of the protagonists.

Horner before the entrance of sir Jasper calls him a "formal fool". Every sentence sir Jasper pronounces is concluded with the word "sir", showing much formality, so much so that Horner imitates his speech by intentionally adding "sir" to what he says in order to have fun with him. Jasper is a courtier and usually frequents Whitehall.

He is also a fool: he is the first one to be caught in Horner's trap. "Because your virtue is your greatest affectation, madam.". Horner wants to demonstrate that virtue is women's greater affectation.

Sir Jasper continues to say that Horner is harmless, this is the reason why he invites him at home to entertain his wife and to play cards.

Line 26 → Journey to France, is the place of libertine freedom.

Lines from 41 to 45 → Reference to the city

Symbolic names:

- Horner = Horn (cornificatore)
- Quack = incompetent doctor

Line 64 → “sir, sir, sir”

Line 84 → Lady F. declares she feels disgusted by such a man, H. answers that she is an hypocrite

Line 104 → Sir J. invites H. at his house by making fun of him

Line 235 → They start talking about Sparkish and say how much they despise fops

Line 310 → Enters a new character: Pinchwife.

Line 320 → Pinchwife's sister is getting married to Sparkish the following day

Line 329 → Pinchwife was just like them, but now he is completely changed

Line 371 → Horner says that wit is what makes a woman beautiful.

Pinchwife used to be a libertine and a whoremaster, but now he got married. He's been away for a long time so he hasn't heard about the rumor. He is a patriarch, he thinks about the women of his family. He is a witless character.

From line 441 is a verse and the end of act 1.

The key-words are Pox and Wenching

Women are compared to debtors.

There are 3 plot:

1. Horner's stratagem
2. Pinchwife and his country wife (Margery) (Horner wants to seduce the country wife, so he is involved in the plot)
3. Harcourt & Alithea (Pinchwife's sister) (P. came to London to settle A. marriage)

ACT 2

We have Ms. Pinchwife wants to go abroad and travel but her husband Pinchwife is so jealous that doesn't let her go out. She is asking for Alethia's help because she wants to socialize. She is so innocent about the ways of London's life.

Soon after the conversation with Alethia, Pinchwife comes in and she asks him if she can go out. He usually says no because he's afraid about her catching the pox.

When he comes in, she speaks like a child asking him why he is so angry. He is very annoyed because he has just spoken to Horner, who tried to provoke him.

So this is the relationship, she is very childish and sweet and he is hard and imposing.

He accuses Alethia for trying to corrupt Ms. Pinchwife about London's ways but she says she is just trying to help her.

Alethia answers back to Pinchwife, saying that she doesn't frequent any woman of scandalous behavior. He tells Alethia to shut up and to don't talk about London life with his wife, he doesn't want her to know because he is terrified about her cheating on him.

He tells his wife that she can't be like the naughty London women. So the more he tries to confine his wife, the more she wishes to taste London's life. The worst mistake Pinchwife does, is telling his wife about Horner, so she is even more curious to know him.

Line 19 → Mrs. P. openly admits that she found the actors handsome, without any malice

Line 58 → “I bid you keep her ignorance”

Line 79 → he's trying to convince his wife that she doesn't need a social life like other London women “Just love me, focus on me, forget about London life”

Line 87 → Alithea is very different from her brother, who is keeping his wife prisoner (Witless)

Line 96 → Pinchwife has already made the mistake of taking her to the play

Line 113 → She's now even more curious to know who is in love with her

Line 130 → As soon as his company comes to his house, he blocks her in another room calling her names.

Line 170 → he's admiring her beauty but Sparkish misunderstands and thinks he's just complimenting

The marriage is now an enemy to him because the woman she loves is marrying someone else.

Line 220 → Sparkish tells Horner to know her better

Line 400 → the woman start complaining about men's behavior

Line 464 → Jaspas keeps on asking Horner to come to his house and be "his wife's gallant" to keep her away from other types of entertainment.

Line 534 → Horner's plan is starting to work but Lady F. is starting to understand the truth.

All men of "Honour" want to be put to a test → is an euphemism.

Sparkish is visiting his wife with Harcourt because he wants to introduce Sparkish to Alethia. Harcourt falls in love immediately with Alethia and starts right away to court her, trying also to stop the marriage between her and Sparkish. Sparkish says he is not jealous but also he doesn't realize that Harcourt is literally flirting with Alethia with double meanings that he doesn't understand and get (he is not a wit, Harcourt is). Harcourt is trying to prove Alethia his love, but Sparkish. In the rest of act 2 Sparkish, Harcourt and Alethia lead the stage, leaving Pinchwife alone. Afterwards, Pinchwife is visited by Lady Fidget and Miss Squeamish but he doesn't want her wife to get visits but they insist.

End of act 2: Lady F. speaks in verse.

ACT 3

Scene 1

Ms Pinchwife is much more insistent with her husband, she really wants to taste London's life.

Line 90 → Pinchwife says she's acting as a town-woman already

Line 106 → They decide to dress her like a young man → as Margery's younger brother, so that London's womanizers won't even look at her.

He is confident in the fact that after the marriage of Alethia they will come straight back to the countryside so everything will be over.

Scene 2

Is set in a public place so the backdrop of the theatre had a painting of the new exchange. Very long scene set in a public place outdoors so there are many people on the stage, a very dynamic scene.

Harcourt with Horner and Doriland. Harcourt describes how Horner looks like: extended metaphor about sexual double meaning. They are complaining about the fact that even though he is impotent he is frequenting more women than his friends.

Harcourt reveals to his friends that he's in love with Alethia and that he is really changing in his attitudes. Enters Sparkish, and Horner says that he will be the one who will help Harcourt to conquer Alethia because he is not a wit so he won't get it.

Line 10 → metaphor of the male bee "sting" has a sexual double meaning

Line 49 → Harcourt is asking for advice (military metaphor)

Line 56 → enters Sparkish

Line 144 → Pinchwife, M. and Alethia arrive and M is dressed like a man

Line 217 → Harcourt keeps courting Alethia, but she is annoyed because she wants to be loyal to Sparkish, but at the same time she's tempted by him.

Line 259 → Lucy speaks straightforwardly and here she's astonished at S.'s behavior

Line 322 → Harcourt tells Alethia she should marry the one man who truly loves her

Line 383 → Pinchwife gets between Harcourt and Alethia

Line 416 → Horner finds Pinchwife and M. in disguise

Line 452 → "I am upon a rack!"

Line 477 → Horner tells “her brother” to tell her that he revived the love she feels for her (Horner kisses him (her))

The 3 wits keep teasing Sparking but still he doesn't realize it because he's a fop. Ms. Pinchwife wants to buy some books, in particular ballads and printed plays but Pinchwife doesn't want his wife to be tempted by such works. We can presume that Horner understands that the young man is actually Pinchwife's wife in disguise so he starts teasing.

New character: Lucy (maid).

ACT 4

Scene 1

Lucy is very little supportive in Alithea's wedding to Sparkish.

Line 17 → Alithea's sense of justice keeps her from deceiving or injuring the man she's going to marry

Line 77 → highest point of Harcourt's courtship

Scene 2

Is a letter writing scene.

Pinchwife is furious about his wife's disappearance with Horner and wants to know what really happened.

Line 95 → He's aggressively making Margery write a letter to Horner, saying that she's not going to see him again.

Line 142 → he goes to get the seal for the letter

Line 199 → Pinchwife has a spy checking on her to induce a sort of self-discipline.

Scene 3

H. receives the letter from Pinchwife → P. ends up as a love messenger without realizing.

H.'s tactics are starting to work.

Line 59 → again fear of scandal, not of cheating.

Line 120 → sir Jaspar is again fooled by Horner, who's acting like an hysterical eunuch.

Line 186 → Lady Sq. finally understood everything and says she wants some “china” too.

Machiavel → symbol of pragmatic and immoral politics → Ruthlessness.

Scene 4

Margery wants to write another longer love letter to Horner but is surprised by Pinchwife. He gets so angry that he draws his sword to kill her but is stopped by Sparkish.

(Double meaning of sword)

Scene 5

Margery becomes more and more clever and dresses up as Alithea.

“Dance of the cuckold”