

Production History Summary and Synthesis Paper

After reading over thirty reviews on different productions of *The Country Wife* from the original production to the most recent production in 2019, I have learned of several different design and artistic revivals done on the original production, most of them from the mid-1950s to present day. Overall, very few of the productions stand out as amazing – most of the reviews of the revival plays in large theatre houses, such as Southwark Playhouse and Chichester Theatre, are incredibly lukewarm performances that only received 2 or 3 out of 5 stars. The most successful versions of the play are ones that stay true to the original location of the play, but emphasize the comedy to help illuminate the relevant themes to modern-day audiences.

One of the major struggles that several reviewers pointed out was that the production would be full of spectacle -- flashy sets, gorgeous costumes, and interesting props – but would have poor quality acting or a confusing or lazy concept. Both Southwark Playhouse and Chichester Theatre set their revivals in different locations such as the 1920s or Soho, but then did little to modernize the script with it or find reasons why characters felt limited by social conventions in a world where they had completely changed and became irrelevant. Both shows contained choreography of some form, which was beautiful, but the only part of the show that reviewers found interesting and enjoyable about the production. Other companies, such as Spicywitch Productions, went in the opposite direction – the set, costume, and props were incredibly minimal (almost high-school theatre like, very odd for an Off-Off Broadway piece) but they completely revised the language and made the show relevant to audiences through changing Horner's gender identity and giving him a new motive to deceive the people around him. That production was incredibly successful and enjoyable to audiences, and something we should consider in our version of *The Country Wife*.

Kenzie Bradley
THE 7180: Dramaturgy, Modern
D-File: *The Country Wife* by William Wycherley

One of the most crucial things that the actors need to prepare for is fully and deeply understanding the language as well as being able to move with ease and comfort in their costumes. Several productions, especially Mermaid Theatre, struggled with actors saying their lines blankly and their movements being too stiff and block-y. The more successful productions, specifically the one at American Shakespeare Center, was so well because the actors had a very strong grasp on the language and were able to fully embody the movement that their costumes allowed them to do. For our performance, it's going to be important that the cast has rehearsal corsets, shoes, and wigs in order to fully embody the movement of the characters and feel comfortable with them.

Finally, one of the most interesting things I learned about the play through the reviews is to make sure that the relationship between Pinchwife and Margery does not come off as dangerously abusive. While the relationship is incredibly toxic, and Pinchwife threatens Margery many times, it's important that Pinchwife is seen as a scared, jealous, and weak man instead of an abuser who seeks to destroy his wife. To make Pinchwife seem like an abusive bully detracts from the theme that Pinchwife is supposed to represent an "everyman" character and diminishes that Margery absolutely holds power over him. In our production, it's going to be important to place emphasis on this to the actors and make sure that we don't detract from the true theme of the play.

Our production of *The Country Wife* should avoid the pitfalls of spectacle over plot and storyline, and make sure that the artistic choices of anachronisms are done with purpose and with thought behind how it will affect the story. We should also be sure that the actors fully understand the story and what they are asked to take on, as well as the overall themes and the messages we are trying to convey.