

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

Program Notes Draft

Welcome to Villanova University's production of *The Country Wife* by William Wycherley! We hope you enjoy the show.

This play contains themes of adultery, sexual innuendos, and some underlying tones of abuse towards women. It is for mature audiences only.

If you or a loved one are a victim of domestic abuse, please see the following resources.

*Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor
Free 24/7 support at your fingertips. US and Canada: text 741741 UK: text 85258 Ireland: text 50808*

SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357), (also known as the Treatment Referral Routing Service) or TTY: 1-800-487-4889 is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides 24/7 crisis intervention, safety planning and information on domestic violence (800-799-7233)

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What is the Restoration Era (AKA When *The Country Wife* was Written?)

The Restoration Era details a time in 1660s England, Scotland, and Ireland when Charles II returns as King. He was initially removed by Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans (a radical sect of protestants), who executed his father King Charles I and established the “Commonwealth of England”.

Charles I had garnered disgust by the English protestants for marrying a French Catholic princess, Henrietta Maria, and the Puritans strongly opposed this marriage and the King’s Catholic ties. A struggle broke out between Parliament and King Charles I which led to the English Civil War. After a decade of fighting, Cromwell and the Puritans got the upper hand on the King and he lost his head. Thus, the Commonwealth of England was born. Initially, Cromwell was very popular with his English subjects, however over the years his people began to see him as a military dictator who was imposing martial law on them. When Cromwell died in 1658 and power passed on to his son Richard, who lacked all political skills completely, many English people began to see another monarchy forming. Once they garnered enough support, they asked the exiled Charles II to be king again. His return is known as the Restoration.

The term “Restoration era” is often used to describe the restoration itself but also the whole reign of Charles II and his younger brother, James II. The Restoration era saw a burst of literature that centered around the celebration and reaction of Charles II being restored. The type of literature that was released during this era was far and wide, hitting every extreme, such as *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem by John Milton, John Locke’s *Treatises of Government*, and an explosion of bawdy comedies known as Restoration comedy, such as *The Country Wife*. The audiences for Restoration comedies were incredibly diverse, and included servants, aristocrats, and middle/working class members.



Brief timeline of the restoration era and beyond.

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Marriage in 17th Century England

“’Tis my maxim: he’s a fool that marries, but he’s a greater fool that does not marry a fool.

What is wit in a wife good for, but to make a man a cuckold?” – Mr. Pinchwife, Act 1 Scene 1

In 17th Century England, marriage and honor played a significantly more important role than in present day. During the Stuart dynasty, a husband’s rule and dominance over his family was seen as an analogy to the King’s reign over his subjects, and a manifestation of the hierarchy that God ordained. A woman was seen to be vastly inferior to a man, and therefore the man had a right to assert his dominance over her.

Men benefitted from the marriage not only because they would be master of a household and take control of his wife’s finances, but he would also become eligible for offices such as a jury member, constable of a Parish, or warden. For women, marriage meant immediate motherhood and losing all rights and lands in exchange for a better social stance. A married woman was also allowed to watch other married women’s births. The main purpose of marriage, after all, was to have children.

Women were allowed to marry at 12, and men were allowed to marry at 14, but they could both get engaged as early as 7. For women, marriage was the only place where women could express their sexuality, however, marriage was not meant to be passionate. Women were required to remain a virgin until marriage, otherwise she would be deemed ‘ruined’. However, as the Restoration period continued and English people distanced themselves from Puritanism, practicing adultery in secret became fashionable among the elite. This practice was particularly popular among people in cities such as London, and in the country, Puritan values still remained.



"The Marriage of Tobias and Sarah", Jan Steen

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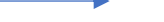






Learn Another Language: Fan Language, that is!

Fan language emerged through Europe during the Elizabethan period but became most popular in performance during the Restoration period. Fan language was used in performance, mainly by women, to represent a form of “secret language”. It is a primary tool and on occasion a weapon for them. The fan is seen as an extension of a woman, especially as their clothing was very restricted through their corsets and as they are expected to have very good posture and small gestures.

Robert Barton, a historian of the Elizabethan and Restoration era, argued that “Movement in the restoration era is like a sentence, and stopping movement is like punctuation, with each stop as different as a comma from a question mark.” (Style for Acting, Second Edition, page 183)

While you will absolutely see fan language in this performance of *The Country Wife*, take a guess on what each of the fan languages below REALLY mean. We provided some for you to start with.

Fan Language Flirtations:

- Carrying the fan in your right hand in front of your face  *Follow me.*
- Carrying the fan in your left hand  *I am desirous of your acquaintance.*
- Placing the fan on your left ear 
- Placing the fan on your right ear 
- Drawing it across your forehead 
- Twirling it in your left hand 
- Letting it rest on your left cheek 
- Opening and shutting the fan 
- Dropping the fan 
- Fanning fast 
- Fanning slow 
- Opening the fan wide 
- Snapping the fan shut 

We will be providing the answers to this puzzle at the end of the performance! The audience members with the most correct will win a prop fan and a signed program.

If you would like to practice the fan language, feel free to step into the lobby and test out your skills with our practice fans!

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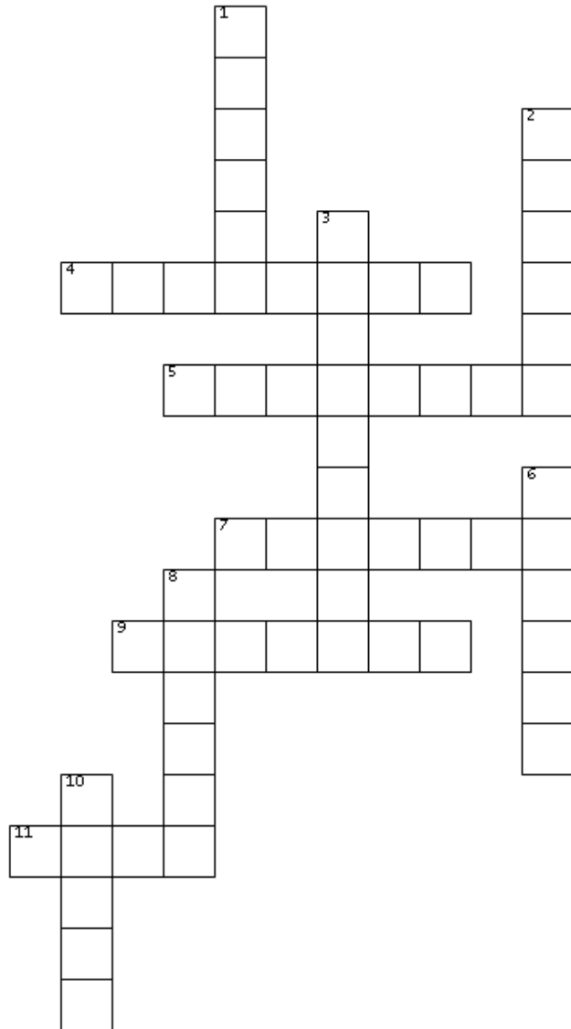
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Take Home Puzzle: Discover the Characters

Test your knowledge of *The Country Wife* characters with this take-home crossword puzzle!

Answers provided on the back of the program.



ACROSS

- 4. the French fop who loses Alithea.
- 5. wants to marry Alithea.
- 7. the sister of Pinchwife
- 9. the country wife herself!
- 11. Alithea's maid who saves the day

DOWN

- 1. notorious London rake who fakes a botched surgery
- 2. the leader of "The Honorable Ladies"
- 3. the man who is terrified of becoming a cuckold.
- 6. the husband of Lady Fidget
- 8. a member of the "honorable ladies" who sleeps with Horner
- 10. the doctor who helps spread rumors