



The Country Wife (New Mermaids)

William Wycherley

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'Cuckolds like lovers should themselves deceive'

So concludes one of Wycherley's most revived and much discussed plays. It is a satirical comedy sharply focussed on the follies, vices and hypocrisies of Restoration London through its central characters: the desperate Pinchwife; his naive wife; the sex-obsessed Horner and Lady Fidget's 'virtuous gang' of town ladies.

Wycherley's strong wit informs almost every speech and his alarmingly familiar revelations of character leave us to draw our own conclusions. It remains a controversial play, admired as satire or farce, condemned as immoral and frivolous, and appreciated again as a serious work of dramatic art. Modern critics have much debated its central themes, and question marks remain: is Horner hero or villain?

This student edition contains a fully annotated version of the playtext in modern spelling. The Introduction includes an account of Wycherley's life and a detailed discussion of *The Country Wife's* interpretation and stage history.

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