

Rhetorical Analysis of Humor in William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*

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Abstract

Restoration authors intentionally embellished their works (particularly, those concerned with humor and comedy) with the use of rhetorical tools to expose their standpoints and opinions and to convey reasonable and rational predisposition to their cultivated audiences and readers. Furthermore, dramatists employed certain rhetorical devices in order to for achieve the prerequisite consequence. *William Wycherley* (in his *The Country Wife*) was one of those Restoration dramatists who laid more emphasis on the exploitation of rhetorical devices to achieve many literary dramatic functions, among which is providing audience with persuasive arguments (Bruegge, 2014:1). In other words, the exploitation of these devices helps *Wycherley* to make contents of his paly more effective, more understandable, more persuasive or convincing, and more emotional. That is, these elements are intended to convince, motivate, unify and drive people in the direction of certain goals.

Thus, the aim of the present paper is to investigate the use of the rhetorical devices in *Wycherley's The Country Wife* focusing on the purposes and

functions of these devices in building up and creating the humorous sense and witty and persuasive arguments.

المستخلص

استخدام مؤلفو عصر النهضة الأدوات البلاغية لتزويق أعمالهم (خاصة تلك التي تهتم بالفكاهة والكوميديا) للافصاح عن وجهات نظرهم وآرائهم، ولتهيئة استعداد معقول وعقلاني لجمهورهم وقراءهم المثقفون. وعلاوة على ذلك، استخدم الدراميون بعض الأساليب البلاغية من أجل تحقيق النتائج المتوقعة. وكان ويليام وايشرلي في مسرحيته (الزوجة الريفية) واحدا من هؤلاء الدراميين الذين ركزوا على استخدام الأساليب البلاغية لتحقيق العديد من الوظائف الأدبية الدرامية، من بينها توفير الحجج المقنعة للجمهور (بروغ، 2014: 1). وبعبارة أخرى، فإن استخدام هذه الأدوات ساعدت وايشرلي على جعل محتويات المسرحية أكثر فعالية وأكثر قابلية للفهم وأكثر إقناعا أو تقبلا، وأكثر عاطفية. أي ان الهدف من هذه استخدام هذه العناصر هو إقناع الناس وتحفيزهم وتوحيدهم وتوجيههم نحو أهداف معينة. لذا فان الهدف من هذا البحث التحقيق في استخدام الأجهزة البلاغية في مسرحية الزوجة الريفية حيث انها تركز على وظائف هذه الأدوات في بناء وخلق روح الدعابة والحجج البارعة والمقنعة.

1. Introduction

During the Restoration period (nearly at the end of the seventeenth century) a fresh type of comedy called the *Comedy of Manners* came into existence . This comedy was unique in itself and written in prose. It was vulgar and dirty, coupled with hysterical and disgraceful dialogue concentrating on sex. The plot often revolved around adulterous wives, betrayed husbands, and tricky lovers. The plays were humorous, difficult, lively and merciless as they

depicted the life and manners of the upper-class society of the day. They mocked at the fashionable society, their amusing and reasonable conversation, and their decadent behaviors. Put simply, they are intended to tease and ridicule country for their modesty and absence of sophistication (Shmoop.com, 2017).

Moreover, Restoration comedy's characters are required to manipulate words and expressions that reflect an impression with lucidity and innovation, to facilitate comprehension in a charming flash. On their part, audiences can derive delightfulness from sharing with characters a entirely new mode of understanding an idea (Bruegge, 2014: 8). Hence, the use of refined language loaded with vocabulary rich with many rhetorical devices helps Wycherley to stimulate and display sharp depictions, which are deemed as characteristic features of the Restoration upper-class society manifested by intellectuality from which the audience can gain witty yet entertaining and imaginative appearances

The following sections are devoted to the exploration of the rhetorical devices used in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* which involve various sorts of functions such as focus, beauty, reality, association, clarification, assertion disposition, arrangement; decoration , variety etc. But before embarking on exploring these devices , it is important to start with giving a brief details of Wycherley's biography, the theme , plot and context of *The Country Wife*.

2. William Wycherley: Biography

William Wycherley, lived from 1640 to 1715, was born at Clive, near Shrewsbury, Shropshire, where his father, a monarchist, owned a small estate. Because the Puritans were in power, Wycherley was sent to France for his

education. He reverted to Protestantism upon his coming back to England just before the Restoration. He gained his reputation as one of the wittiest playwrights in England. Although he entered college and had the opportunity to study law, Wycherley's main interests were the theatre and enjoying himself; interests which, fortunately for Wycherley, coincided with the interests of the literary and social climate in which he lived (Erickson,2016).

Wycherley wrote the play "*Restoration era*" in 1675, which continued from 1660 to about 1689. The period takes its title from the restoring of the traditional English monarchy, which occurred when Charles II became king in 1660. Prior to Charles's coronation, England had been ruled by various republican governments since the beheading of Charles I in 1649. These republican governments were more religiously strict than the traditionally Catholic monarchy, and the restoring of the English monarchy resulted in a variety of political and literary changes (McCarthy, 1979:17).

Wycherley fell ill in 1678, and Charles II sent him to France to recover. When he returned, the King entrusted the education of his unlawful son, the Duke of Richmond, to Wycherley, but he lost the appointment a year later because of Charles's displeasure at his absence from court. This absence was occasioned by his secret marriage to the Countess of Drogheda, who died about a year later. Litigation over her estate proved so expensive that Wycherley was imprisoned for debt. About seven years later King James II secured his freedom, paid his debts, and gave him a pension (*Encyclopedia of World Biography*, 2010, s.v. *William Wycherly*).

3. The Country Wife

As one of the best and most vibrant plays of William Wycherley's, *The Country Wife* I, a Restoration comedy, was written in 1675. A product of the easygoing early Restoration period, the play reflects an aristocratic and anti-Puritan ideology, and was debatable for its sexual explicitness even in its own time. The title itself encompasses a licentious pun. It relies on two indelicate plot strategies: a rake's trick of pretending feebleness to safely have stealthy issues with married women, and the arrival in London of an inexperienced young "country wife", with her discovery of the joys of town life, especially the fascinating London men (Bruke, 1988:227f). The original play is again a stage favourite today, and is also acclaimed by academic critics, who praise its linguistic liveliness, witty public satire, and frankness to different elucidations.

In fact, the play portrays stylish London, in which wives are expected to be ready to betray their husbands and take lovers and where gentlemen are regarded possible or real rascals. It is a world in which country demeanors and moralities are frequently ridiculed and ladylike innocence is linked to the absence of London complexity, except by Margery Pinchwife's sister, Alithea, who acts as a real heroine in the play(e notes, 2017).

The Country Wife centers on the efforts of a jealous husband named Pinchwife to keep his young and naive wife out of society because of his fear that she will prove unfaithful. Generally, women in *The Country Wife* are treated as mere objects and are described by the male characters as being inferior. For example, Sparkish views Alethea as an object that should be paraded around and is only interested in marrying her for her fortune. Sparkish says that he is resented for his wife because he thinks that allowing more men to love her and feel jealous of him for owning her will increase her price as he considers her as something that increases worth. Therefore, the play is viewed

an ironic comedy sharply relied on the stupidities, immoralities and duplicities of Restoration London people through its dominant characters: the distressed Pinchwife; his inexperienced wife; the sex-obsessed Horner and Lady Fidget's 'virtuous gang' of town ladies(GradeSaver,2017).

4. Context of *The Country Wife*

Because Charles II embraced and enjoyed the theatre and was incredibly compassionate in respect to permitting plays that didn't conform to more traditional religious morality, Restoration comedy is characterized by its sexual openness, a value invigorated by the king himself and by the stylish aristocratic philosophy of the court. One of the best-known plays of the early Restoration period is the unsentimental or "hard" comedies of William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, which reflects the atmosphere at Court, and celebrates an upper-class macho lifestyle of continuous sexual conspiracy and subjugation.

And with this freedom in place, Restoration playwrights produced plays that were satirical and distinctly sexual. These Restoration comic plays are not only salacious but amenably mock identifiable members of England's elite; these plays regularly portrayed rich husbands as fools who were continually being deceived by their wives. Moreover, these plays are characterized by their employment of wittiness and their regular and openly sexual pun (Erickson, 2016)

In the same vein, Wycherley emphasizes the view that *The Country Wife* is a comedy of manners by ridiculing the misogyny the patriarchy feels toward women in Restoration society. This is accomplished through Pinchwife's unmannerly relationship with his wife and her ability to undermine

his dominance over her through maneuver. In Act IV, Pinchwife interrogates Margery, desiring to know what has become known between his wife and Horner. Margery says:

He kissed me a hundred times and told me he fancied he kissed my fine Sister, meaning me you know, whom he said he loved with all his Soul and bid me be sure to tell her so and to desire her to be at her window by eleven of the clock this morning, and he would walk under it at that time.
(Wycherley 42) Wycherley(1997: 7)

The characters in *The Country Wife* are meant to represent social powers not so easily accomplished in Restoration life, and through the actions of these characters, Wycherley not only ridicules the patriarchy of Restoration London, but also shows that within the complete space of Restoration drama, *The Country Wife* is a decisive comedy of manners. It flirts with a number of "developing and unresolved social tensions," such as "the sexual relationships between men and women and the patriarchy's misogyny toward women" (Gill, 2006 194).

Further, Gill (ibid) argues that dramas (e.g. *The Country Wife*) bring up and struggle "to resolve serious cultural concerns, such as the definition of gender roles, the regulation of sexual behavior, the characteristics of class, and the compatibility of marriage partners in comic fashion". This the main reason behind Wycherley resorting to the exploitation of puns and word plays and other contrived rhetorical devices . For example in the china scene, Wycherley uses word play to mock at the aristocracy's longing for social prestige and their justification for their sexual abuses. Through the symbolic meaning of "china," Wycherley ridicules the stubbornness of the patriarchy in believing that it

cannot be cuckolded or destabilized by those it considers inferior. Believing in this argument, in a comedy of manners, people of the upper classes are mocked at for their pretentiousness and foolishness. And the “china” scene comes to describe the play as a comedy of manners (McNamara, 1976).

5. The Country Wife: Summary

The action of the play starts when Mr. Horner, a libertine with bad reputation for seduction, pretends that he has become sexually impotent because of a venereal disease. He allows his doctor to spread such a rumor. Men who have been afraid of his tempting their wives now agree that their wives can escort him. His friend is Pinchwife who has already married a country woman with the aim that she does not know about the town seducers, but she has been seduced by Horner when Pinchwife commits a mistake letting his wife appear as if she were a boy whom Horner immediately knows and manages to seduce her according to his witty plans. The other women are advised by their husbands to accompany Horner to the theater, but they refuse until he whispers to one of them that the rumor about his impotency is false. The play ends with a party in which the husbands and the wives are present. The husbands already know that they all have been already deceived by Horner.

6. Rhetorical Devices

As it has been noted that *The Country Wife* utilizes various types of rhetorical devices to attain the purpose behind its existence, the following sections endeavor to identify the use of these devices in this play focusing on the function and contribution of each device to the establishment of humorous and ridiculous sense.

6.1 Pun

Pun is a play on words which usually centers on a word with more than one meaning or the substitution of a homonym that changes the meaning of the sentence for humorous or rhetorical effect. It often occurs in literature and "gives rise to a fairly universal form of humor" (Cuddon, 1999: 711). In this way, this literary rhetorical device brings about a humorous effect which is produced by using a word that suggests two or more meanings.

A lot of examples of pun can be found in *The Country Wife*. Even the title of the play reflects an example of pun. It has been pointed out that this play reflects on many plays written by Molière, to which the playwright has added some features to meet the demands of the taste of the Restoration audiences. It may be suggested that the name country wife indicates a wife that is silly, unsophisticated and ignorant of the witty tricks and conversations used in towns. Thus, the name is to indicate an example of pun because Margery, the country wife, turns to be a character of intelligence, tricks and witty speech; she appears to be much cleverer than her husband who thinks that he marries such a woman, so that he would not be deceived by a town girl. But what has happened is the opposite.

Additionally, Pinchwife's name points to his weakness underlying his wish to control his wife. The dictionary meaning of 'pinch' is to restrict, limit, or to stint a person or oneself. The definitions of the term 'pinch' suggests a pun on Pinchwife's name, which heighten the dramatic irony: "This text's pun ultimately reminds readers that jealousy and repression are undesirable and ineffective traits, particularly in Restoration society" (Corrie Zimmerman's Blog, 2010). Furthermore, the name 'Horner' shows an interesting pun. His

scheme is to deceive people that he is sexually impotent, so that he can easily socialize himself with any woman he likes. The dictionary meaning (Oxford English Dictionary, 1974) of the word 'horner is 'to dishonor a husband by adultery.' Also, it means “one who cuckolds [or] a cuckold-maker.” Horner’s name is therefore is to evoke an image of him seducing the women to the point that they lead their husbands around via horns on their heads. In other words, they are now in control of their marriages and sex lives. Like Pinchwife, Horner’s name contributes to his character (Corrie Zimmerman’s Blog, 2010).

6.2 Anticlimax

Anticlimax is used by writers when they transform their situations or language from seriousness to joking. It points to the writer’s deliberate "drop from the serious and elevated to the trivial and lowly in order to achieve a comic or satiric effect" (Abrams and Harpham, 2009: 24).

An exciting scene involving cuckoldry is the one in which Horner has seduced Margery when accompanying her husband and when they become among Horner and his friends who manages to separate their victim, the young Margery, from her husband who has been very anxious about her. This scene seems to be funnier than the china scene in that it creates an image of anticlimax. For Pinchwife lets his wife pretend that she is his brother-in-law, which is a trick that can by no means deceive Horner and his men. After a little period of time, Margery returns with some precious gifts from her seducer – a hat in which there are many oranges and much dried fruit. Pinchwife suspects that he has been cuckolded, interrogating Margery about what she and Horner have done. In the following passage the attention of the spectators is naturally drawn to the

Country Wife herself; that is, to the kind of naivety and the tricks which she immediately and cunningly invents, which reflects that she is a woman in the real sense of the word; yet, the thing which much more draws the attention of spectators is the way how Pinchwife reacts to the situation in which he has discovered that he has been cuckolded:

Pinchwife: no, you take more in telling it I find, but speak how was it?

Mrs. Pinchwife: he carried me up into the house next to the Exchange.

Pinchwife: and you two were only in the room?

Mrs. Pinchwife: yes.... He kissed me a hundred times and told me he fancied he kissed my fine Sister, meaning me you know, whom he said he loved with all his Soul and bid me be sure to tell her so and to desire her to be at her window by eleven of the clock this morning, and he would walk under it at that time.

Pinchwife: (*Aside*) So—he knew her certainly, but for this confession, I am obliged to her simplicity. (*Aloud*) But you stood very still when he kissed you?

Mrs. Pinchwife: Yes I warrant you, would you have had me discovered myself?

Pinchwife: the Devil—you were satisfied with it then and would do it again?

Mrs. Pinchwife: Not unless he should force me. (IV, ii.)

This quote reveals how witty the dramatist is when creating an atmosphere of suspense and curiosity on the part of the spectators by means of irony. It also shows how Pinchwife is duped by his wife who has betrayed him in showing herself to be very naïve in the presence of Horner, for she learns as many tricks as she could from the kind of life which she has witnessed and experienced in London. Moreover, the passage shows the elements of cuckoldry, intrigue, adultery, lying and debauchery. Most importantly, Mrs. Pinchwife is torturing her husband by means of irony, behaving in such a way as if she had not known that Horner knew everything about her being a woman, and showing how much foolish her husband is when he has made her appear as if she were a man when wearing men's clothes. Mrs. Pinchwife feels happy when informed that Horner

loves her sister-in-law at the time she knows that he means that he really loves her (Mrs. Pinchwife) herself. The treatment of the character of Pinchwife to his wife shows that he is a jealous husband, a typical personality representative of an old and wealthy fool that is commonly found in the restoration period. Once, Horner told him that he did not expect a man like him, a whoremaster, to marry, for he is a person who knows the psychological behavior of women so well.

6.3 Metaphor

Metaphor occurs when "one thing is described in terms of another" (Cuddon, 1999: 507). In other words, it is a figure of speech that shows an indirect comparison between two things.

The 'china' scene discloses characters with ambiguous language which may distort the ideal values, for Horner and Lady Fidget have created a certain code to secure their sexual intercourse with Horner, and therefore they use the word 'china' metaphorically. Thus, honor becomes associated with adultery. When Horner gives Lady Fidget his promise that he is a gifted lover and immediately relates the subject matter with honor which forms an ironical situation to the audience and a metaphor quite comprehensible by the two to indicate the actual act of adultery between them both. She says: "*I have so strong a faith in your honor, dear, dear, noble sir.*" (II.i.). Because she says this in the presence of others "the code language permits secrecy, while for Lady Fidget's benefit the real fact of adultery is veiled in the in the decorous illusion of virtue and gallantry" (Morris, 1972: 7). It appears then that Mr. Jasper, Lady Fidget's husband, is the only character in the theater who does not know what is meant by the metaphor of "china," which is a veiled metaphor for Horner's powerful cheap desire of the flesh.

Another obvious occasion of metaphor is when Pinchwife tells Jasper that the former's wife "has communicate," he implies that she has committed the act of adultery, and thus the term "communication" becomes "the final charged metaphor for adultery and dishonor" (ibid: 9).

6.4 Charactonyms or Allegorical Names

Allegory (or allegorical names) indicates "the use of names that stand for abstract ideas and are often given to typical characters that show the same qualities from beginning to end". It is "a symbolism device where the meaning of a greater, often abstract, concept is conveyed with the aid of a more corporeal object or idea being used as an example" (Barney, 1989, s.v. *Allegory*).

Wycherley uses charactonyms (or what is known as allegorical names) to refer to the kind of personality the name may suggest, though considered under the heading of pun. It is a name symbolic of certain meanings suggested by the dramatist to make an association between the name of a character and its actions (Wikipedia, 2016). The names "Lady Fidget," "Mrs. Dainty," and "Mrs. Squeamish" are deliberately used to represent ironically three *honorable* women who are Horner's mistresses. Further, Mrs. Dainty's name implies a person of delicate nature, or an honorable person, while the noun "fidget" indicates restlessness, which is shown in her association with Horner as his mistress. Wycherley's aim in choosing such names is such as the country wife and those already mentioned is to indicate something contrary to what they really are: "In giving the characters names that are suitable to their true natures, Wycherley reminds the audience to be mindful of false pretenses" (Corrie Zimmerman's Blog, 2010).

6.5 Repetition

This rhetorical device involves the repetition of a word or phrases in successive clauses. It is a major rhetorical strategy for producing emphasis, clarity, amplification, or emotional effect. This occurs in songs, ballads, or oration, being intended to emphasize a particular idea or a situation (Cuddon,1999: 37).

An example of repetition is intended to emphasize the idea and unfold a particular aspect about the character Jasper whose wife has already been used by Horner. It also discloses his anxiety about the idea of cuckoldry. At the same time, he is informed by Pinchwife that both their wives have *communicated* in case Jasper's wife knows him (Horner), for communication in this context means fornication.

Sir Jasper: What's the matter? What's the matter? Pray, Pray, what's the matter, sir? I beseech you communicate, sir.

Pinchwife: Why, my wife has communicated, sir, as your wife may have done too, sir, if she knows him, sir. (V. iv.)

The Country Wife shows that the term honor and virtue are repeated many times, despite the fact that few characters have honor and virtue. For example, Lady Fidget, being an honorable woman, often refers to those terms which point to her point of view of honor. Lady Fidget's repetitive use of the word 'person' shows that she is deceitful, for she says: "*But still 'tis an arranter shame for a noble person to neglect her honor and defame her own noble person with considerable fellows, foh,*" as pointed out by Jennifer Evans It seems that her most concern is to maintain her honor at the time she enjoys the adulterous act with Horner. Besides, she believes that it is something honorable when she is seduced by an honorable person, for she adds the word *noble* to the person whom she is alluding to: "*she sees no shame in the act of cheating, as long as it*

does not interfere with her reputation, therefore allowing a person to be both noble and unfaithful to their spouse. Lady Fidget's usage of the words honor and noble reveals that she views honor to be a synonym to reputation."

Furthermore, Lady Fidget believes that a woman loses no honor when making a relationship with a private person; in a word, she is not a prostitute allowing anyone to ravish her. Then, instead of repeating the word "person" or the expression "private person" she repeats the word "purpose." The word "honor" is repeated, according to Jennifer Evans, as a way of convincing herself and the other women that she is a virtuous woman. Lady Fidget is stating that unless a woman's actions affect her honor (or reputation), then they should not affect their husband. In other words, as long as no one finds out, and an affair is with a 'private person,' then there is no harm done. (<https://jevansclosereading.wordpress.com>)

It seems that Lady Fidget tries to convince herself and other people that she is an honorable woman, but in fact, through her repetitive language, and through her insistence on repeating the words "honor and virtue", it is obvious that she is a woman without honor.

6.6 Irony

The term 'irony' gives the sense of "dissembling, or of hiding what it actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects" (Abrams, 2009: 165). In one sense, it is a statement which implies a meaning different from what it apparently means. Dramatically, irony indicates a situation in a drama in which the reader or the spectators shares with the playwright knowledge about particular circumstances of which a character is ignorant, and the character acts in a way opposite to the expectations of the

audience (ibid: 165). Put simply, irony involves the difference between the apparent meaning and the intended meaning that is aimed to be exposed by either a character or its creator.

The code already developed by Lady Fidget and Horner can be taken as an example of irony on the part of the audience that is the only group that knows what it means in the presence of other characters that only know that is the idea of 'china.' She says to Horner: "*am I not a woman of honor? You see I am as good as my word.*" (IV.iii.). In return, Lady Fidget asserts the fact that she comes to him on time as planned between them both before. Horner too expresses his 'word of honor', using the same indirect idiom, after they have mutual understanding: "*And you shall see, madam, I'll not be behindhand with you in honor, and I'll be as good as my word too, if you please but to withdraw into the next room.*" (IV.iii.). When they have ended their *job* the anteroom becomes crowded with characters, and Lady Fidget is forced to hide her true issue with Horner. Fortunately, she seizes a china vessel, pretending that she is interested in ceramics to which she expresses her passion, the kind of passion shared by the other ladies who begin to demand the china of their own.

The china scene does not only serve as a bawdy representation intended by Horner and Lady Fidget, but also Wycherley's satiric tool. As the characters understands it as a metaphor, it is ironic for the audience, for "*China traditionally signified the outward beauty and fragile virginity of woman, thus the vessel displayed by Lady Fidget is a kind of ironic icon, its traditional significance betrayed by the grossly flawed virtue of its possessor*" (Morris, 1972: 7). At the same time, the audience may find in the china vessel a symbol of honor since both of them are "*precious, attractive, and frail*" (ibid). The ironical use of the china vessel may be taken as a symbol of the outward

appearance of honor, for it reveals the discrepancy between what is real and what is pretended—between the bitter reality and the beautiful appearance—which is an atmosphere that pervades through the entire play: "*The growing awareness that we are viewing a world in which the abuses of language mirror significant corruption of civilized values is brilliantly confirmed in the play's inconclusive conclusion*" (ibid: 8). The action of the play is intensified by the ironical situation in which Margery has disguised in Althea's clothes but she is discovered by Horner in the latter's apartment and in the presence of Harcourt, Althea's Harcourt's mind, which is typically ironic on the part of the audience:

Harcourt: Horner, I must now be concerned for this lady's [Althea's] honor.

Horner: And I must be concerned for a lady's honor too.

Harcourt: This lady [Althea] has her honor, and I will protect it.

Horner: My lady has not her honor, but has given it me to keep, and I will preserve it. (V. iv.)

In the above situation, Horner seems to play with various meanings and connotations, giving the right definitions but with paradoxical connotations implying that he is anxious about the honor or virtue of a woman without honor. The use of blurred language that deceives Harcourt is shown when Harcourt says "*I understand you not*" to which Horner unfolds his real intentions, saying "*I would have you not*" (V. iv.). The dishonest behavior that is meant to deceive Harcourt "is the only power able to sustain the general structure of delusion, and significantly, Horner's misuse of language sets the pattern for general irresolution" (ibid), for the comedy ends with the suspension of disorder that is indicated by the dancing cuckolds.

Using the abuses of language, Wycherley postulates the idea that honor has been corrupted in an attempt to present satiric insights. Jasper gets puzzled when

confronting Pinchwife who becomes furious at the notion that that he suspects Margery's tricks with Horner. The ironic implications are obviously echoed by their brief exchange:

Sir Jasper: What's the matter? What's the matter? Pray, Pray, what's the matter, sir? I beseech you communicate, sir.

Pinchwife: Why, my wife has communicated, sir, as your wife may have done too, sir, if she knows him, sir. (V. iv.)

6.7 Contrast

Contrast occurs when "two images or ideas juxtapose each other for the sake of heightening or clarifying a scene, a theme, or an episode" (Cuddon, 1999: 178). For instance, Harcourt in *The Country Wife* stands in contrast with Horner, the intriguer and false lover. Other examples of contrast can be found between reality and appearances, life and death, or light and darkness.

There is a contrast between country life and town life. Pinchwife believes that country women are pure and innocent, forgetting that fact that human nature is the same everywhere, so once Margery, the country woman has been exposed to the life lived in town she has been influenced by it and becomes most intriguing. She has lost her honor in that she has already horned her husband by Horner.

It is apparent that Harcourt and Althea, two honest lovers, stand in contrast to Pinchwife and his wife, Margery. It seems that Wycherley has projected pure characters such as Harcourt and Althea on purpose; he presents such characters lest the audience is left in despair and pessimism about the Restoration society: "*Wycherley allows us to recognize in Harcourt and Althea the possibility of correcting folly and of living honestly in a world of appearance.*" (Morris,

1972: 9). Thus, the presence of Alithea and Harcourt are to represent the dramatist's moral sense, for they stand as a symbol of purity. However, Harcourt always tries to illuminate Alithea's mind as far as the differences between words, names, natures, signs and realities are concerned. When courting her, he unfolds his true passion, whereas Sparkish, another suitor for Alithea, unfolds his egoistic nature throughout his empty phrases. Therefore, it can be noted that the marriage of Harcourt and Alithea exposes *"an alternative to the sterile, unfulfilling relationships among the rest of Wycherley's characters, for whom the comic reconciliation of marriage—with its implication of folly corrected—simply does not apply"* (ibid: 10).

Further, there is a contrast between witty characters such as Horner who feigns sexual impotence and those fools to whom he has already seduced their wives. It is one of the major themes that intellectual people are to overcome those diminished ones such as Jasper and Pinchwife. Horner is supposed to be a witty character with sexual dominance which transmits him into a heroic character that achieves victory over those who proclaim that they are pure, honest and honorable. In contrast, Sparkish fragile false claim of wit has diminished not only the human intellectuality, but also the human moral values, for *"his brand of cynicism functions not to expose the failings of society but to reinforce them: his attitudes toward marriage, including his desire to feed his vanity by having 'rivals in a wife,' reveal moral idiocy rather than moral insight"* (Gradesaver.com, 2017).

Most important is the contrast between appearances and reality on the part of most of the characters of the play; that is, hypocrisy pervades through the play and becomes a commonplace variety. The ordinary characters in the play like to be thought of more honest, dignified and respectable than what they

really are. This is indicated in Horner's speech when he says Nature is powerful enough to let them be characterized by affectation which is her greatest monster. Dorilant has his word in this regard, saying that most people are the opposites of what they look like, once they come across a wit in town he appears to be a fool every night to them.

Not only do men have this kind of feeling, but also women, especially Lady Fidget and her gang, who deserve the sharpest social satire in the play, for their public personalities stand in contrast very egregiously with their private deeds. It seems that the main structural device used in the play is contrast underlying the element of hypocrisy. Lady Fidget and her gang claim honor at the time they are the epitome of pervasiveness. Besides, Horner's rumor points to the contrast between what he pretends to be and what he really is, and program would have failed, had he not been introduced to wives eager to practice the sexual intercourse freely, which points to the big disparity between their real nature and their outward appearance.

6.8 Impersonation or Prosopopoeia

Impersonation means to pretend to be another person (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2010, s.v. *Impersonation*). As a rhetorical device, it implies the pretense of a character to be another one. It is often manipulated to achieve certain dramatic purposes—ironical situations, suspense and curiosity. Put it another way, the main aim of it is to make obvious a representation of intentionally used rhetoric. Quoting Quintilian, Ben Witherington III, has his word in this regard:

This rhetorical technique involves the assumption of a role, and sometimes the role would be marked off from its surrounding discourse by a change in

tone or inflection or accent or form of delivery, or an introductory formula signaling a change in voice. (Ben Witherington III, 2009, 132)

This quote shows an situation intended to create irony. In *The Country Wife*, Horner decides to impersonate himself as another man that is sexually impotent, so that he will be socially accepted among the wives of the aristocrats:

Horner: A quack is as fit for a Pimp, as a Midwife for a Bawd; they are still but in their way, both helpers of Nature.—[aside.]—Well, my dear Doctor, hast thou done what I desired.

Quack: I have undone you for ever with the Women, and reported you throughout the whole Town as bad as an *Eunuch* , with as much trouble as if I had made you one in earnest.

Horner: But have you told all the Midwives you know, the Orange Wenches at the Playhouses, the City Husbands, and old Fumbling Keepers of this end of the Town, for they'll be the readiest to report it.

Quack: I have told all the Chamber-maids, Waiting women, Tyre women, and Old women of my acquaintance; nay, and whisper'd it as a secret to'em, and to the Whisperers of *Whitehal* ; so that you need not doubt 'twill spread, and you will be as odious to the handsome young Women, as—

Horner:As the small Pox.—Well—

Quack: And to the married Women of this end of the Town, as—

Horner: As the great ones; nay, as their own Husbands. (Act I, Scene I)

This passage shows how Horner with the aid of his doctor is going to pretend that he is sexually impotent, so that when entering into the aristocratic media the husbands will not object to making him escort their wives wherever he may accompany them for they secure the notion that they would by no means be cuckolded. That is,, Horner uses the expression "orange winces," as a metaphor for the sexually loose and immoral women who sell *oranges* (their body and soul).

At the beginning of the play, Jack Horner appears on the scene, telling his Quack of his clever scheme of conquering some upper-class ladies—to spread the rumor that he is sexually impotent. In this way, Horner impersonates himself as a person with a venereal disease that has already rendered him impotent. His new situation as a eunuch will certainly give him access to ladies whose husbands and families would regard him otherwise perilous. At the same time, it will make ladies to go through liaisons with him, and at the same time they, including Horner, preserve their reputation or what is ironically called as honor. Sir Jasper Fidget believes this rumor and allows his wife to socialize with him, being unaware of the fact that his wife will immediately discover his powerful *blessings*.

Finally, Pinchwife agrees to take his wife to London on the condition that she impersonates herself as a boy, and she agrees to do so. Pinchwife believes that he will be on the safe side when disguising his wife as a boy in London. Harcourt discusses with his friends Horner and Dorilant that he wants to marry Althea, and soon Pinchwife enters with the disguised Margery and Alithea. But Horner recognizes Margery, Mrs. Pinchwife, under her disguise and begins to move. When Pinchwife turns his back, Horner succeeds in making off with Margery. Pinchwife is now looking for his wife but in vain. After a little while, she returns to him with gifts from Horner. Pinchwife suspects that he has been cuckolded by Horner.

The two examples of impersonation—Horner and Margery’s mistaken identity or impersonation—create suspense and a sense of curiosity on the part of the audience that is made eager to know what will happen after those characters having impersonated themselves. Although impersonation is based on

false pretensions, it creates a sense of irony; that is, some of the characters do not know what the audience and other characters know about their wives.

7. Conclusion

The stylistic analysis of the rhetorical devices in *The Country Wife* has revealed that these devices are manipulated to accomplish different purposes and functions. A lot of examples of *metaphors* (*china vessels = sexual experiences, Horner's blessings = sexual experiences, fruits = a sexual experiences, price for selling her body, hot fever = adultery and dishonor, orange watches + sexually immoral women*) to create laughter, suspense and curiosity on the part of the audience and are means whereby the corrupt ladies hide their illicit relationship with Horner.

Examples of *irony* on the part of the audience and metaphors on the part of the characters are manipulated to produce laughter on the part of the audience and hypocrisy on the part of the character. Ironically, honor in this play is meant adultery. *Impersonation* occurs when Horner assumes another personality, which is the pivot of the play, creating funny ironical situations. The same thing occurs when Pinchwife makes his wife pretend that she is his brother-in-law, creating laughter and irony.

Many examples of *contrast* (e.g. *between living in the countryside and towns, innocent girl and an adulterous lady, and true and faithful love*) are significant to portray disparity mainly between reality and appearances which indirectly contribute to creating laughter and emphasizing the ironical senses in the play.

Anticlimax and *pun* also play an important role in creating humorous effect on the part of the audience and generating laughter in a more sophisticated way. *Charactonyms* indicating allegorical meanings of the characters' names are employed by Wycherley to strengthen the ridiculous and humorous meanings. Finally, *repetition* helps to emphasize a certain idea, and at the same time it functions as a means—ironical, metaphorical or cynical to excite laughter in the audience.

William Wycherley intentionally manipulates various rhetorical devices for worthy purposes that serve their dramatic experience, without which the action of their plays would not have been fully developed and their comedies would have been regarded as being dull, insipid and superficial. Being comedies, *The Country Wife* is to excite the audiences with mirth, amusement and laughter. These elements of comedy by no means can be achieved without the elements of congruity and disparity. The joke posed by the comedy should make the audience get relieved and at the same time feel that characters are not to face a tragic end. This task can only be achieved by employing particular rhetorical devices such as irony, pun, foil, contrast, etc..

Wycherley intentionally gratified this comedy of manner with the kind of rhetorical devices to display his wit and to provide the kind of pleasure and amusement to sophisticated audience who very well understand the witty expressions exposed to their intellectuality. In this way, the Restoration comedy of manners is characterized by clarity and novelty, whose understanding would create delight, mirth and amusement on the part of the audiences, for the rhetorical devices employed are to give a better comprehension of the situations and ideas presented—both effective and influential.



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