Themes in The country wife.

Themes are major ideas developed in the play or the concerns of the playwright he wish to share with the public.in the play the country wife, there are sevel themes that are developed and these include the following.

**Hypocrisy**

Wycherley was repelled by hypocrisy, above all by the commonplace variety—the ordinary desire of men and women to be thought more virtuous or gifted than they are. Characters such as Horner, Lady Fidget, Pinchwife and others pretend to be what they are not. The hypocrisy in the society of our characters are portrayed in the following ways;

Harry Horner, a wealthy take who spends his time pursuing women and hedonism, spreads a romour that he's contracted a veneral disease and has been made impotent. Although this destroys his reputation,he uses this to his advantage to seek out " honorable" women and conduct affairs with them because he knows that society and their husbands will not suspect him of seducing women in his new impotent state. Characters are duped into thinking that he's indeed impotent and sympathize with him. For example Harcourt says" your appearance at the play .....I hope has hardened you for future against the woman's contempt.....". Harcourt says this with total innocence thinking that Harry is indeed impotent.

Similarly, the "honorable" women are happy to take advantage of this situation as it protects their reputation in society while they pursue their own hedonistic desires. The ploy by Horner makes a large part of the hypocrisy in the play where characters are more interested in the appearance of their virtue than the practice of it. Lady Fidget, Mrs. Dainty Fidget and mrs.squeamish only pretend to be disgusted by men like Horner yet they are in fact extremely promiscuous.

Hypocrisy is particularly clear in lady Fidget's description of Horner as "...so truly a man of honour" after discovering that Harry is not impotent but as perfect as he was before going to Frace. Her previous pretence to hate Horner and referring to him as a toad and beast because of his disrespect for women is soon forgotten and at this time the viewer can obseve that lady fidget is not a honourable woman woman and only uses his her reputation to hide her many infidelities. She even goes to report to her husband sir. Jusper that Horner is a thousand times a better man.

Horner proves to us that hypocrisy exists in our society when he tells The Quack that women who show objection to his assumed personality "Love the spot". He is proved right and his methodology helps him court lady fidget, Dainty and squeamish. Therefore in the context of the play the women who pretend to be the most virtuous are the most promiscuous.

Pinchwife's extreme jealousy and protection of his wife is also hypocritical. At Horner's lodging pinchwife in act one scene one Horner is implored to tell who the pretty woman he was with the previous day was, although pinchwife tries to hide his wife's identity, his furious reaction gives him away . He would not be angry if they had seen him with another woman because he doesn't care if people believe he cheats as long as his wife doesn't cheat on him. This shows that pinchwife doesn't care only about others reputation but his. He's also a hypocrite as he expects total purity from his wife but not from himself.

**Marriage,love and Relationship**

Marriage is the union of a man and a woman to form a family. The marital bond in the play the country wife is shown to be based on a mutual distrust and coercion rather than affection and care. All marriages have n element of lies, deception, and cheating. The fidgets, pinchwife, sparkish etc are all guilty of ignoring the responsibility as a married pair.

As the play opens, we meet characters who are not interested in love but obsessed with sex. Horner,puts out a remour that is impotent in order to get close to married women. Horner understands that women are not contented with their husbands and so lays traps to be their gallant. Horner teases pinchwife during the latter's visit at his home when he talks about his wife and pinchwife reacts angrily. This is comic as we start to realize pinchwife's jealous. He is observed as a bully as Harcourt says," to beat his wife" when pinchwife storms out of the room claiming to have business at home.

In the play, marriages are viewed as transactions especially among wealthy class people and are often arranged for material and social reasons rather than love. Wycherley is critical of this model of marriage and portrays married life as unnatural, unpleasant state that puts women in danger of mistreatment by husbands. This is vividly portrayed through pinchwife who wants to give out his sister Althea to sparkish a man who does not care about the feelings of a woman as long as it gives him pleasure and respect from others. No wonder he allows Harcourt to court Alethea in front of him. Pinchwife sees this and often comments in asides.

Marriage is treated as a joke throughout much of the play. This suggests that marriage as an institution is absurd because it forces people to act against their natural inclinations. Although marriage is a symbol of love, the married characters in the play do not like or respect one another. Sir Jasper Fidget is constantly trying to get rid of lady fidget so that he can spend more time on his favorite pass time, business, while lady Fidget and other married ladies constantly try to avoid and escape their husbands to carry on love affairs with gallants like Horner.

The idea that marriage is unnatural is further reinforced by the suggestion that forbidden love is more interesting and pleasurable than marital love. This is portrayed by lady fidget who objects sleeping with honourable men saying" the pleasure will be less''.

The attitude is depicted through pinchwife who keeps Margery locked up and believes that women could be kept ignorant to avoid being cheated on. Margery describes her marriage to pinchwife as life in a cage and his abuse of her is emphasized while he forces her to write a letter to Horner. He threatens to curve the word whore into her face with a knife if she will not obey. This gives the reader and audience an insight into the real danger that wives could be placed in by jealousy husband's who believe that their wives are their property.

We further observe that too much protection, suspicion and jealous breads brutality that may lead to infidelities. Although Margery does prove unfaithful to pinchwife in her attempt to seduce Horner, the play makes it clear that she is driven to this by pinchwife himself because of his unkindness and brutality. This suggests that when marriage is undertaken for mercenary as in case of pinchwife who "couldn't keep a whore to himself" does not improve people's lives or encourage relationship.

**Immorality.**

Most of the characters in the play exhibit the vices associated with immoral conduct.

To begin with is Horner who concocts an elaborate ruse to lure innocent women into a trap of sex promiscuity and extramarital affair. He puts out a romour and Pays The quack to spread it further that he suffered a veneral disease and was castrated during the operation which rendered him a eunuch. The unsuspicious husband's trust him with their wives not knowing that he schemes to lie with them.

Married women like Margery and lady Fidget harbor affection for men other than their husbands and are willing to lie with them inorder to serve their immoral behavior. Margery is sick and can't wait to meet Horner. Upon seeing him, the urge to see Horner one more time increases and is lovesick again. She writes a letter, disguises as Alithea and tricks pinchwife into taking her to Horner's lodging. Likewise Fidget us very happy when Horner reveals to her that he's not impotent but put out a romour to save the women's honour and she too lies with Horner sevel times.

The sex innuendos used by the ladies of honour suggest that there is a lot of immorality in the society of the play. The married ladies like lady Fidget and other respectable women like Dainty and squeamish talk about and compare who is better to sleep with between the men of higher class and those of lower class. To them sex is an excitement that is served without observing fidelity.

Pinchwife is also known to have been a rake who kept a company of whores and since he "cannot keep a whore to himself" has now married Margery.

Women use "Vizard masks" when out in public to hide their real identities so as to engage in covert flirtations during plays.

**Jealousy and suspicion**

Pinchwife is extremely concerned about his beautiful wife and is jealous of every man who even looks at her. He is suspicious of onlookers and does not trust his wife to stay loyal to him.

We observe the fact that the more something is forbidden, the more titillating and attractive it becomes. As a matter of fact jealousy and suspicion is portrayed through pinchwife who keeps his wife locked up so that she will not learn deceitful behavior from corrupt influences in the outside world. He however keeps titillating Margery with information about town life. For example when he over heard Margery ask Alithea about the theatre, he tries to put her off going by suggesting that if she goes there, men might fall in love with her.

This sets Margery to fall in love with Horner when he tells her that Horner saw her the previous day and is already in love with her. The jealousy pinchwife does this to frighten her but instead makes her more curious to meet Horner. She even gets lovesick and keeps nagging him till he allows her out in men's clothes.

Sir Jasper, who believes that "it's as much as a husband's duty prudence to provide innocent diversions for a wife as to hinder her unlawful pleasures" bring his wife and sister to Horner whom he thinks is impotent and therefore cannot lead them into promiscuity. Instead however, Sir Jasper leads them to and leaves them to Horner who plans to seduce them.

**Deception / appearance vs reality/ mistaken identity**

Deception is prevalent in The Country Wife. Lady Fidget, Dainty Fidget, and Mrs. Squeamish value their reputations as respectable women, but only because reputation keeps them from being suspected. While they sleep with Horner, they maintain their appearances as virtuous women to their husbands and the rest of the world.

They trick even the audience; the first time we see these women, they are sniffish and refined, saying things like, “No, no, no! Foh, foh, foh!” in the face of incivility. Only a few scenes later do we find them conceding that “the crime [of adultery]’s the less when not known” (2.1). As the play progresses, they seem ever fouler, not caring that Horner is carrying on with all three of them at once. These pretenders to honor turn out to be the most vulgar characters in the play.

Their opposite in pretense, oddly enough, is Horner, who, in order to have access to women without suspicion, starts a rumor that he is a eunuch. He endures the mockery of Sir Jasper Fidget, but receives the praise and favors of Lady Fidget for his willingness to, “suffer [him]self the greatest shame that could fall upon a man, that none might fall upon us” which is true, even if it makes him appear more selfless than he is. Horner even risks his life later on to protect Mrs. Pinchwife, who loves him, from the wrath of her husband; he “must save [his] mistress…come what will on’t” . Horner not only deceives husbands in appearing impotent, but is in some respects morally ambiguous, a more decent person than he first seems to us.

Another character who wears disguise is mr. pinchwife. He for example, makes his wife sit with the prostitutes in the theatre, so that nobody will think her married to him, and that is precisely when Horner first sees her. Pinchwife next has Margery dress as a man when she goes out, to keep men from seducing her, but Horner sees through the disguise at once and uses it as an opportunity to kiss her without her husband’s being able to protest. This pretense soon leads to another, in which Pinchwife leads his wife, whom he takes to be his sister, to an assignation with Horner. All of Margery Pinchwife’s disguises bring her closer to an affair, and the audience cannot help but cheer her on and smile each time the tyrannical Mr. Pinchwife draws her closer to Horner.

Horner’s friend, Harcourt, his false persona is created by acting as only an admirer of his friend Sparkish’s fiancée, Alithea, when in reality, he is wooing her. In answering Sparkish’s question concerning Alithea’s beauty, Harcourt says, “I could gaze upon her till I became as blind as you are” . By this comment, Harcourt is not only saying how brilliantly beautiful he thinks Alithea is, but also calls Sparkish “blind”. This blindness refers to Sparkish’s being unable to see Harcourt’s aims to woo his fiancé. In this way, Harcourt imitates Horner in creating a deceitful façade as the means to his end of marrying Alithea.

Again Harcourt, hoping to wed Alithea, dresses up as a priest in order to marry her to Sparkish, her fiancé?. He speaks to Alithea in ostensibly religious but obviously amorous addresses, such as “With all my soul, divine, heavenly creature, when you please” (4.1) and in departure from an ancient convention of stage disguise, she sees through the costume but cannot persuade Sparkish that Harcourt is the priest. Sparkish’s obtuseness helps Alithea later, when he tells her he married her for money. The upright Alithea is shocked at his pretense, and the marriage’s invalidity allows her to wed Harcourt. The deception leads to a happy ending, but although we know Sparkish to be cowardly and stupid, we could not be sure until now that he did not love Alithea. Harcourt’s trick works because he is in a comedy, not because he knew (although he says so to Alithea) that he is saving her from a loveless marriage.

Horner uses deception to cover his tracks . This is displayed in the presence of Lord Fidget for example during Act Four, when Horner essentially tells Sir Jasper that he will become a cuckold, “…if ever you suffer your wife to trouble me/ again here, she shall carry you home a pair of/ horns,…though I cannot furnish you myself, you are sure yet I’ll find/ a way” . though jasper thinks that Horner is simply joking since he is ‘ a eunuch’ we know that Horner is telling the truth. Shortly after Horner enters in the bedroom and lays with lady fidget.

Misogyny and male chauvinism