

**The Elegy of Libertine?: Normality and Its Problems in William Wycherley's
*The Country Wife***

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine how Horner, the leading libertine character, constructs his libertine masculinity by moving from one home to another to fool other male characters in order to carry out his sexual pursuits with his female counterparts in William Wycherley's *The Country Wife: A Comedy* (1675). During the process, Horner runs the risk of becoming "homeless" due to his adoption of a precarious method to conduct his sexual adventures: pretend to be a sexually impotent man. Horner's potential "homelessness" comes as a result of other female characters' initial repulsive attitudes towards him after they are aware of his disguised impotence, a feature which is against their imagination of a "normal," sexually powerful libertine. By assuming the identity as a sexually effete libertine, Horner poses no threat to other male characters since he cannot render them cuckolds and by that other male characters welcome and desire Horner to accompany their ladies at their homes. In the end, Horner's disguise finds him a place in other male characters' home and establishes his libertine masculinity after Horner reveals his trick to other female characters and satisfies his sexual desire with them.

William Wycherley's characterization of Horner helps readers better understand the ideas of normality in three ways. First, Wycherley reveals features of libertinism, such as disguise and sexual vigor, not only by his portrayal of Horner but also by presenting the opposite responses from other male and female characters with regard to Horner's feigned sexually powerless image. These features, as I will argue, uncover the norms of libertinism at Wycherley's time. Second, these features both point out the normality of libertinism and the problems of it. By taking on the role as a sexually feeble libertine, Horner still takes the upper hand in his relationships with other male characters by fooling them and making them cuckolds. The credulity of other male characters is related to their blind faith in the normality of how a libertine should behave, a situation which indicates a problem of normality. Third, by making Horner

move from one home to another, Wycherley depicts homes as a place where ideas of normality and disability are possibly not opposite to but are intertwined with each other. Horner is not a homeless libertine owing to the fact that disguise is one of the features of libertinism. Thus, when Horner pretends to be sexually disabled, he behaves normally as a libertine. In this case, examinations of how Horner pursues sexual games will complement our understanding of relationship between normality and disability.

Key words: disability, home(less), libertinism, normality