She Stoops to Conquer

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Born in Ireland to Anglo-Irish parents, Oliver Goldsmith rose from obscurity to join the ranks of the most prominent literary figures of his time in London. After graduating from college in Dublin, he dropped out of medical school and travelled around Europe on foot with little money before settling in London in 1756. There he first worked as an apothecary's assistant before turning to work as a writer for the daily papers. He wrote poems, plays, short stories, and novels. His lively, readable style earned him the respect of more prominent writers, including the philosopher Edmund Burke and Samuel Johnson, the essayist who composed the English language's first high-quality dictionary. Despite his acceptance into these high circles, Goldsmith was known to be deeply envious of his friends, awkward, ashamed of his physical appearance, a drunk, a gambler, and an extremely bad manager of his own money. His friends often remarked on the contrast between his disorderly personal life and his clear, well-organized, and stylistically beautiful writing. Goldsmith died in 1774 after failing to seek medical care for a treatable kidney infection.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The play takes place during the long and relatively peaceful reign of King George III, a time of social metamorphosis for Britain. The Agricultural Revolution had and led to an unprecedented increase in agricultural production and a massive consolidation of farmland, which in turn sent many of Britain's rural-dwellers into the city looking for work. Class divisions were slowly but surely becoming more pronounced as the Industrial Revolution, in its very early years, was creating a new class of working poor in the increasingly populous cities. Simultaneously, as a new sense of cosmopolitanism began to develop among these cities' wealthy urban elite, they began to see themselves as superior—more cultured and worldly—than people of the same class who lived in the countryside (the landed gentry). This social dynamic sets the stage for many of the interactions in *She Stoops*, as Marlow and Hastings (two young "city slickers") have journeyed to the countryside to visit the Hardcastles. Marlow's condescension toward Hardcastle, for example—even though it is the result of his mistaken belief that Hardcastle is an innkeeper—draws laughs because it plays on Hardcastle's sensitivity to this newly emergent hierarchy between the cultured city-dweller and the country bumpkin.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Goldsmith's first play, *A Good-Natur'd Man*, received negative reviews from critics, who found his depiction of rude, lower-class characters vulgar. Goldsmith understood the important role critics played in ensuring the success of his next play, so he laid out his reasons for depicting characters the way he did; in the same year that he wrote *She Stoops to Conquer*, Goldsmith produced an essay, "A Comparison Between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy," in which he argued that comedies should return to focusing on humanity's follies rather than its calamities. This effort to influence the critical reception of his play by framing it conceptually was a success, and *She Stoops to Conquer* became an instant hit. It resurrected some of the conventions of Restoration Theatre, the dramatic period during which William Congreve and Aphra Behn wrote their bawdy comedies of manner. These plays poked fun at the pretentions of the upper class, showing them in funny and sometimes farcical situation. Later in the 1770s, plays like *The Rivals* and *A School for Scandal* by Richard Brinsley Sheriden would follow the example of the "laughing comedy" that Goldsmith created with *She Stoops to Conquer*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** She Stoops to Conquer
- **When Written:** 1771
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1773
- **Literary Period:** Georgian comedy; "new" Comedy of Manners; Laughing Comedy
- **Genre:** Laughing Comedy; Comedy of Manners
- **Setting:** A small town in the English countryside during the Georgian era (18th century)
- **Climax:** Sir Charles and Hardcastle burst from behind the screen during Marlow's proposal to Kate.
- **Antagonist:** Mrs. Hardcastle

EXTRA CREDIT

Writer's writer. Goldsmith was beloved and admired by fellow writers, who loved his writing style and pitied his many foibles. Samuel Johnson and Washington Irving, among others, both wrote tender biographies of Goldsmith.

Copyright Mistake. Goldsmith was often deep in debt. He signed the copyright for *She Stoops to Conquer* over to his publisher, John Newbery, to repay a debt. Sales of the book brought Newbery profits that far exceeded Goldsmith's original debt, but Goldsmith received none of this money. Other works that Newbery claimed to have written himself, like the popular children's book *The Story of Little Goody Two Shoes*, may also

have been written by Johnson to repay debts.

PLOT SUMMARY

Act I begins at the Hardcastles' home in the countryside. Mrs. Hardcastle complains to her husband that they never leave their rural home to see the new things happening in the city. Hardcastle says he loves everything old, including his old wife. Mrs. Hardcastle says she was a young woman when she had her first husband's son, Tony, and he is not yet twenty-one. Hardcastle complains about Tony's immaturity and love of pranks. Tony enters on his way to a pub, and his mother follows him offstage, begging him to stay and spend time with them.

Hardcastle's daughter Kate enters. He remarks on her fashionable clothing, which he dislikes. Kate reminds him of their deal: she wears what she likes in the morning and dresses in the old-fashioned style he prefers at night. Hardcastle reveals big news: his friend Sir Charles's son, Marlow, is coming to visit, and Hardcastle hopes Kate and Marlow will marry. Hardcastle says Marlow has a reputation for being handsome, intelligent and very modest. Kate likes all but the last part of this description and resolves to try to make a good impression on Marlow.

Hardcastle exits, leaving Kate to think over her visitor. She is joined by her cousin Constance, whom she tells about Marlow's impending visit. Constance tells her that she knows Marlow: he is the best friend of her suitor, Hastings. The odd thing about Marlow is that he is terribly shy around upper-class women, and therefore often seduces lower-class women instead. Mrs. Hardcastle wants Constance to marry her cousin, Tony, so that Constance's inherited jewels stay in the family. Constance tells Kate that she pretends to be willing to marry Tony so that Mrs. Hardcastle won't suspect she loves Hastings. Lucky for Constance, Tony doesn't want to marry Constance any more than she wants to marry him.

The scene changes to a bar, where Tony is drinking with a group of lower-class men. The bar's owner says that two fashionable-looking men have arrived who say they are looking for Mr. Hardcastle's house. Tony realizes that this must be Marlow and decides to trick Marlow into believing Hardcastle's house is an inn.

Act II begins with Hardcastle trying to teach his servants how to behave in front of his guests. Soon after, Marlow and Hastings arrive at what they believe to be an inn. Hardcastle enters and tries to engage his guests in conversation, but the two young men ignore what he says, believing him to be a lowly innkeeper. Hardcastle is shocked by their rude, presumptuous treatment of him.

Marlow insists on being shown his room, so Hardcastle accompanies him. When Hastings is left alone, Constance enters. Upon hearing that Hastings believes he is in an inn, she guesses it is a trick of Tony's. Hastings says that they should keep Marlow's mistake from him, because he will be embarrassed and leave immediately if he learns the truth. Hastings urges Constance to elope with him, but she is reluctant to lose her fortune: the jewels, which she will only inherit if she marries with her aunt's permission. She promises to run away with him once she has the jewels.

Marlow returns, complaining that Hardcastle will not leave him alone. Hastings tells Marlow that by coincidence, Constance and her cousin Kate are both at this inn. Marlow freezes in anxiety. Kate enters and tries to engage Marlow in conversation, but once Hastings and Constance leave Kate and Marlow alone, Marlow is too nervous to complete his sentences or even look at Kate's face. He ends the conversation abruptly and rushes off. Before exiting the stage, Kate reflects to herself that, if he weren't so shy, she would be interested in him.

Tony and Constance enter, followed by Hastings and Mrs. Hardcastle. Constance makes a show of flirting with Tony for Mrs. Hardcastle, while he tries to repel her advances. Hastings chats with Mrs. Hardcastle, points out Constance and Tony, saying that they are betrothed. Tony objects to this loudly. Hastings tells Mrs. Hardcastle that he will try to talk some sense into Tony, and Constance and Mrs. Hardcastle exit. Hastings reveals to Tony that he loves Constance and wants to elope with her. Tony is thrilled and promises to help the couple any way he can.

Act III begins with Hardcastle and Kate comparing their very different impressions of Marlow. He expresses shock at Marlow's boldness, while she finds him incredibly shy. Kate convinces her father that they should give Marlow another chance to see what his true character is.

Tony presents Hastings with a box containing Constance's jewels, which he stole from his mother's drawers. Constance and Mrs. Hardcastle enter, and Hastings exits. Constance tries to convince her aunt to let her try on her jewels, but Mrs. Hardcastle will not relent. Tony suggests that Mrs. Hardcastle tell Constance the jewels are missing, which she does, upsetting Constance deeply. Tony reassures Constance privately, telling her that he gave her jewels to Hastings, who is preparing for their elopement. Meanwhile, Mrs. Hardcastle has discovered the jewels are missing. Tony teases his distressed mother, and the two of them exit.

Kate enters accompanied by her maid Pimple and wearing the old-fashioned dress her father prefers. She has learned about Tony's prank and laughs at Marlow's belief that he is in an inn. Pimple says that Marlow mistook Kate for the inn's barmaid. Kate says she will take advantage of the mistake, which will enable him to talk to her without such shyness. Pimple exits, and Marlow enters. Kate, pretending to be a maid, speaks to Marlow in the accent of a lower-class woman. Marlow finds her beautiful and immediately begins to flirt with her. He tries to

kiss her, but Hardcastle walks into the room and sees them. Marlow flees the room, and Hardcastle tells Kate he is determined to throw Marlow out of his house. Kate persuades her father to give her time to prove to him that Marlow is not what he seems.

Act IV begins with Constance and Hastings planning their elopement. Constance tells Hastings that she has heard Sir Charles will soon be arriving, and Hastings tells Constance that he has entrusted her box of jewels to Marlow to keep them safe. They both exit.

Marlow enters, congratulating himself on thinking to give the box of jewels to the landlady (i.e., Mrs. Hardcastle) to keep it safe. Hastings enters, and Marlow tells him he stashed the jewels securely with the landlady. Hastings conceals his disappointment that Mrs. Hardcastle has the jewels back and leaves.

Hardcastle enters and begins to argue with Marlow, whose servants have gotten drunk. Storming away, Hardcastle says he would never have predicted such rudeness from Sir Charles's son. Marlow is confused by this remark, but at that moment, Kate enters. Marlow, beginning to understand something is amiss, asks Kate where they are, and she tells him that they are at Mr. Hardcastle's house. Marlow is horrified at his error. Kate does not yet reveal her true identity, pretending instead to be a poor relation of the family. Marlow announces his departure, and Kate weeps at the news. He is touched to see how much she cares about him.

Tony and Constance discuss her plan to elope with Hastings, even without the jewels. Mrs. Hardcastle enters and the two cousins pretend to flirt so she won't suspect the planned elopement. A letter comes from Hastings addressed to Tony, but because Tony cannot read, his mother reads it to him. The letter reveals the plan for the elopement. Mrs. Hardcastle is furious and tells Constance she is sending her far away to Aunt Pedigree's house. Hastings enters and yells at Tony for giving away the secret. Marlow enters and yells at both Tony and Hastings for deceiving him about where he is. Constance is utterly distraught and begs Hastings to stay faithful to her even if they have to wait several years to marry. After Constance leaves, Tony tells Hastings to meet him in the garden in two hours, promising to make it all up to him.

In Act V, Hardcastle and the newly arrived Sir Charles laugh over Marlow's having mistaken the home for an inn. Hardcastle says that he saw Marlow take Kate's hand and he thinks they will marry. Marlow enters and formally apologizes to Hardcastle. Hardcastle says it doesn't matter, since Marlow and Kate will soon marry, but Marlow denies having feelings for Kate. When Hardcastle refuses to believe him, Marlow storms out. Kate enters and assures the two fathers that Marlow likes her. She tells the two fathers to hide behind a screen in half an hour to see proof of Marlow's feelings.

Out in the garden, Tony arrives and tells Hastings that he has driven his mother and Constance in a circle instead of taking them to Aunt Pedigree's house. Mrs. Hardcastle is terrified, thinking they are lost in dangerous territory. Hastings rushes off to find Constance. Elsewhere in the garden, Hastings tries to convince Constance to elope with him. She says she is too exhausted from the stress of the night to run off. Instead she wants to explain their situation to Hardcastle and hope that he can influence his wife to allow their marriage.

Inside the house, Hardcastle and Sir Charles hide behind a screen and watch Marlow and Kate talk. Kate no longer pretends to be a barmaid, but speaks in her normal voice. Marlow says he wishes he could stay with her, but he does not want to disappoint his family by marrying someone of lower birth. Kate tells him she has the same background as the woman he came to see. Marlow kneels before her, and the two fathers burst out from behind the screen, asking why he lied to them about his feelings for Kate. Marlow learns Kate's true identity and is embarrassed again at having been so deceived.

Mrs. Hardcastle and Tony enter (Mrs. Hardcastle having realized where she is). Mrs. Hardcastle says that Constance and Hastings have run off together, but she is consoled by the fact that she will get to keep Constance's jewels. At that moment, however, Hastings and Constance enter. Sir Charles recognizes Hastings and tells Hardcastle that he is a good man. Hardcastle asks Tony if he is really sure that he doesn't want to marry his cousin. Tony says he is sure, but that it doesn't matter, since he cannot formally refuse to marry Constance until he is twenty-one. Hardcastle then reveals that Mrs. Hardcastle has been hiding the fact that Tony is in fact already twenty-one. At this, Tony says he will not marry Constance, freeing her to marry Hastings and keep her fortune. Everyone except Mrs. Hardcastle is thrilled that the two young couples – Hastings and Constance, and Marlow and Kate – will marry.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Charles Marlow – An aristocratic, well-educated, and handsome young man, Marlow has spent little time in polite society, instead spending much of his upbringing at school and in international travel. As a result, he lacks self-confidence in social settings and freezes up around women of his own class, who make him incredibly nervous. He often opts instead for seducing lower-class women, with whom he finds it easier to converse, as they do not intimidate him. Marlow arrives at Hardcastle's home with his best friend, Hastings, having agreed to meet Kate Hardcastle and assess the prospect of marriage. However, he arrives at the Hardcastle's home thinking that it is an inn, having been misdirected by Tony, and the process of untangling the complex mess of misunderstandings that ensues

makes up the bulk of the play's plot. Marlow falls in love with Kate over several meetings during which he feels comfortable around her because he thinks her to be of lower class, and by the end of the play they are engaged to marry. In this way, Marlow finds love with a woman of his own class despite his crippling shyness, thereby proving Tony's initial, playful deception of Marlow to have been a fateful and fortunate twist.

Kate Hardcastle – An intelligent, good-humored, sensible, and beautiful young woman, Kate is confident in her own merits and appreciative of the good in those around her. She loves and respects her father, Hardcastle, and humors him by dressing in the old-fashioned manner he prefers half the time. Although she is interested in the fashions of her day, she does not define herself by how she dresses, but takes a flexible attitude towards self-presentation. Kate is at the age when most women of her time look for a husband, and she is interested in finding someone handsome and intelligent and settling down, so she is excited when her father tells her that Marlow, the son of his oldest friend, will pay them a visit to make her acquaintance. Kate is perceptive and able to think on her feet, so when she learns that Marlow is shy around women of his own class but bold around lower-class women—and, what's more, has mistaken her in her old-fashioned dress for a servant—she quickly turns the situation to her advantage and begins impersonating a member of the lower class. Kate's decision to pretend to be a member of the lower class to win Marlow's heart is the "stooping" referred to in the play's title. This stratagem succeeds in helping Kate and Marlow to get to know one another and learn that they like each other, and enables Kate to "conquer" by winning Marlow's heart and his hand in marriage.

Constance Neville – A young woman of marriageable age, Constance is kind, affectionate, and practical. Since the death of her father, her aunt—Mrs. Hardcastle, who wants Constance to marry her son Tony—has served as her guardian. Constance is in love with Hastings but does not want to marry without her aunt's permission because this would mean forgoing the jewels she is supposed to inherit. She tries to deceive her aunt in various ways that she hopes will help her to escape her guardian's control, but to no avail. Constance is a cultured and cultivated woman and therefore unlikely to be a good match for the rascally Tony. Her name suggests an association with the city, not the countryside, because (in French) "né" means "born" and "ville" means "town." Thus, in the play's dramatized opposition between the provincial and the cosmopolitan, Constance's character is aligned with the cosmopolitan. Although Constance doesn't want to marry Tony, she appreciates his good qualities. By the end of the play, she has secured her inheritance and is engaged to marry Hastings, just as she had hoped.

George Hastings – Fashionable, well-educated, and good-natured, Hastings is Marlow's best friend and Constance's suitor. Unlike Marlow, he is unconstrained in social situations and doesn't take fashion too seriously. Hastings hopes to encourage Marlow to gain confidence so that he can build a real relationship with a woman he respects. Hastings is a romantic, willing to give up Constance's fortune to marry her immediately. Desperate to elope with Constance while he has the chance, he enlists Tony's help in deceiving Mrs. Hardcastle. Hastings name is suggestive of his character in that he wants to marry Constance with haste; he refuses to wait, even if it means that Constance forfeits her fortune.

Hardcastle – An old-fashioned gentleman who owns an old house in the countryside, Hardcastle is stuck in his ways and despises modern trends. He fought in the War of Spanish Succession and likes to tell stories of his time during the war. He is protective of his daughter, Kate, indulgent to his wife, Mrs. Hardcastle, and disapproves of his unpolished and rowdy stepson, Tony. Even though he dislikes modern society and leads a relatively isolated life, he does not wish to be thought of as an irrelevant old fogey. Hardcastle expects to be treated with respect by everyone he meets, so he is appalled by the ill-treament he receives from his friend SirCharles's son, Marlow. Hardcastle may be eccentric, but he is fair-minded. Therefore, when he sees that his wife's lies are preventing Tony, Constance, and Hastings from finding happiness, he reveals the truth they need to know to be freed to make their own ways in the world without her interference.

Mrs. Hardcastle – A vain, greedy, sentimental, and manipulative woman, Mrs. Hardcastle has lived all her life in the countryside but is obsessed with what is fashionable in the city. She has spoiled her son Tony and hopes to control him for as long as possible, even going so far as to lie to him about his age in order to keep him under her thumb. She is the guardian to her niece, Constance, whose father and mother are dead, and hopes to force her to marry Tony to keep Constance's fortune in the family.

Tony Lumpkin, Esquire – Clever but uneducated and rustic, Tony Lumpkin is sick of his mother Mrs. Hardcastle's domineering personality and eager for the time when he will inherit a substantial fortune and be able to act more independently. Tony was never sent to school as a child, because his mother considered him too sickly, although it seems that this may have only been in her imagination. He passes his time by drinking with lower-class men from the area, making up humorous songs, and playing pranks on his family members, especially his stepfather Hardcastle, who disapproves of Tony's behavior. Tony wants to marry a rustic woman from the area, Bet Bouncer, but his mother hopes to convince him to marry his cousin, Constance—which would keep Constance's fortune in the family. Even though Tony is less cultivated than the other characters, he has great stores of natural intelligence. Although his jokes are sometimes crude, he also uses pranks as an equalizer, to prove those who think they

are better than him wrong.

Aunt Pedigree – Constance's aunt who lives a two-hour drive from the Hardcastles. Mrs. Hardcastle intends to send Constance to Aunt Pedigree when she learns that Constance hopes to elope with Hastings, but Tony drives Constance and Mrs. Hardcastle in circles and they never arrive, so Aunt Pedigree never appears onstage. Aunt Pedigree's name is suggestive of her role: she is meant to protect the family pedigree from marriages that do not get family approval.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sir Charles – Marlow's father and Hardcastle's best friend from his days in the army.

Pimple – Kate's servant.

Diggory – A talkative, intelligent, opinionated servant in the Hardcastle home.

Bet Bouncer – A red-faced, large, jolly country girl whom Tony wants to marry. Bet never appears onstage.

Landlord – The owner of The Three Pigeons, a bar where Tony spends his time singing, drinking, and joking with a group of lower-class men.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MISTAKES AND DECEPTIONS

An improbable series of deceptions and misunderstandings about characters' identities propels the plot of *She Stoops to Conquer*, and at the center of these deceptions is the protagonist Marlow's mistaken belief that the Hardcastle family—an elite family he hopes to impress—are lowly innkeepers. As a comedy of manners, the play uses its deceptions to bring its most pretentious and uppity characters down to earth by stripping them of their pompous self-assurance. More than simply humiliating these characters, however, the play's deceptions prompt them to realize that they have misjudged themselves and their surroundings. Most notably, Marlow's rude and condescending treatment of the Hardcastles provides all the play's upper-class characters an opportunity to become less vain and affected. Thus, deception somewhat paradoxically enables them to see themselves and others for who they truly are.

Throughout the play, seemingly harmless tricks and trivial mistakes accumulate into a tangled mess of misunderstandings. For example, for the greater part of the play, Marlow mistakenly thinks Hardcastle is an innkeeper and treats him as an inferior. Hardcastle, who thinks that Marlow has come to his home to woo his daughter, is understandably shocked and confused by his guest's rude and inappropriate behavior. This misunderstanding is played for comedic effect, particularly as Hardcastle (who views himself as wise, venerable, and dignified) struggles to make sense of Marlow's insults. Toward the end of the play, Tony tricks his mother into believing that they are forty miles away in a dangerous neighborhood (when in fact they are in their backyard), which pokes fun at Mrs. Hardcastle's naïveté and privilege, as the prank reveals that she is unable to recognize her own backyard.

Not every act of deception in the play is lighthearted, but even tricks that are meant to manipulate others are always revealed before serious harm is done. Mrs. Hardcastle pretends that Constance's inherited jewelry has been lost because she wants to manipulate Constance into marrying Tony, thereby keeping the jewelry in her family. Tony, however, saves Constance from ruin by pulling her aside to reassure her of the jewelry's whereabouts. Mrs. Hardcastle also deceives Tony about his own age so that she can keep him under her control and continue to pressure him to marry Constance, but when Hardcastle recognizes the unfair way his wife is manipulating her son, he instantly tells Tony the truth. That none of the play's many tricks ever gets out of hand ensures that the play's tone remains lighthearted (it is a comedy, after all), and allows the moral lessons that the characters learn to resonate more, since they're not too hurt in the process of learning.

The connection between deception, mistakes, and moral lessons is made clearest through Marlow, whose social and romantic life is crippled due by his shyness and his vain fear of embarrassment. Through being tricked into believing that Sir Hardcastle's home is an inn and subsequently mistaking Kate for a barmaid, Marlow humiliates himself publicly, which paradoxically cures him of his worst flaws. Although publicly humiliating Marlow in this way is somewhat cruel (particularly since this is a deep fear of his), the play never casts judgement on those who deceive him, as their actions are lighthearted and not meant to be cruel. For example, when Tony tricks Marlow and Hastings into believing that Sir Hardcastle's home is an inn, he simply means to get the better of the men (whom he sees as uppity fops from the city) and to pull a funny prank on his stepfather in the process, not to hurt either of them. Though Hastings quickly learns of the deception, he decides to allow Marlow to persist in the misunderstanding because he fears Marlow will be too embarrassed if he learns the truth, and Marlow is unable to cope with embarrassment. This is an ambiguous moral choice, however, since Hastings—who is Marlow's closest friend—knows that Marlow has come on this visit for the sole purpose of impressing the Hardcastles and will make a fool of himself if he goes on believing they are

innkeepers. Hastings' choice is ultimately vindicated, though, because allowing Marlow to behave in an embarrassing way for so long enables him to finally overcome his own shyness and vanity. Similarly, Kate fooling Marlow into believing that she is a barmaid could be seen as a cruel and humiliating prank, but Kate's intentions are good. As Kate wants to woo Marlow, but Marlow's fear of embarrassment leaves him too intimidated by upper-class women to get to know them, she realizes that she can only get his attention by deceiving him about her class background. Unlike Tony, who deceived Marlow as a prank, Kate allows him to continue in his misconception because she believes (correctly) that this it will ultimately lead to his learning something important about himself—namely, that he has feelings for her and wants to marry her.

Ultimately, the sustained ordeal of Marlow's public embarrassment—which is itself the result of a whole host of mistakes and deceptions—makes him a better person, as he is finally able to laugh at himself and stop living in terror of embarrassment. Although he has behaved rudely to both Kate and her father, they are both willing to look past these mistakes and focus on his positive qualities, which are newly and abundantly self-evident. The family's certainty that Marlow is worthy of Kate suggests that Marlow's experiences of deception and embarrassment have benefited him by teaching him to open up to a woman he respects and enabling her to help him become a better version of himself.

CLASS AND GEOGRAPHY

She Stoops to Conquer takes place in England in the 18th century, a time when British society was still rigidly divided along traditional class lines, but was in the midst of a geographic shift that complicated class distinctions, as both poor and rich were leaving rural areas in droves and moving to the cities. Although the upper class in the city was not technically superior to the upper class living in the countryside, urban aristocrats were seen as more sophisticated, refined, and fashionable than country-dwelling gentry. The gentry (like Hardcastle and his family) were seen as more rustic, and therefore closer in outlook to the lower classes, who had little education. *She Stoops to Conquer* is an extended interaction between city and country folks as well as between masters and servants, and through this extended interaction the play suggests that those who believe that greater wealth and status make them better or wiser than others are kidding themselves.

Throughout the play, members of the upper class attempt to assert their high status by treating those with a lower social status rudely, or even abusively. This behavior was not considered unusual or inappropriate in 18th century England, but in this play such behavior often backfires, making a fool of the person who acted highhandedly rather than the lower-class person being berated. Marlow in particular treats those he believes to be beneath him with contempt. He treats Hardcastle highhandedly when he believes him to be an innkeeper, interrupting his stories, ordering him around, and generally making himself at home in his house without asking permission to do so. Marlow's eventual realization that he has been tricked by the rowdy country bumpkin Tony into thinking Hardcastle's home is an inn is a victory for the countryside over the city—for, even though he is poorly educated and boorish, Tony has gotten one over on the well-educated, cosmopolitan Marlow, which shows that living in the city does not necessarily make someone more intelligent, clever, or sophisticated.

Feeling anxious that his home and family will fail to impress Marlow, Hardcastle sets out to make his high status clear by teaching his servants to be more servile before Marlow arrives. In a haughty and domineering lesson, which he peppers with insults, Hardcastle instructs his servants on how not to act like his equal in front of his guests. However, it's clear that the relations between him and his servants are typically much more equal and collegial. When Diggory says that Hardcastle must be sure not to tell a certain particularly funny story if he wants the servants to keep from laughing, master and servants immediately share a nostalgic laugh, reflecting the warm relationship that they actually share. In this way, the play lightly mocks both Marlow and Hardcastle by showing how little a person gains by treating others as beneath them.

The play doesn't simply poke fun at people who are pompous and disrespectful—it also models more egalitarian behavior. Kate in particular (an upper-class woman who pretends to be poor) embodies an unpretentious attitude that mixes the attributes of both country and city, while treating servants with respect. Kate shows an ability to flexibly move between the high and the low when she changes from the fashionable dress of rich, young, city-dwelling women into a more modest and practical dress. She also clearly feels no need to assert her superiority by abusing her servants, as evidenced by her congenial relationship with her handmaid, Pimple, through whom Kate learns that Marlow has mistaken her for a barmaid. Kate speaks confidingly to Pimple about her plan to deceive Marlow, showing her respect for Pimple. Kate also shows a remarkable flexibility in being able to convincingly act out the roles of women with three different social statuses. First, Kate pretends to be a very proper and upright woman, then she pretends to be a poor, uneducated barmaid, and finally she pretends to be a poor relative of the family who works as a housekeeper, but is just as well-born and well-educated as Kate. In each of these roles, Kate also manages to show her wit, her modesty, her sensitivity, and her capacity to love. By shapeshifting across class lines without any loss of her own personality or dignity, Kate shows that class is more of a performance than an innate reflection of a person's worth.

She Stoops to Conquer is not advocating for a change in British class structure—if it were, Marlow would likely have had to face

some retributive justice for his poor treatment of the lower class. Instead, this behavior is considered forgivable, but misguided. Therefore, rather than presenting a full-throated critique of the British class system, the play shows that outward expressions of superiority often make a fool of a person, and that class distinctions, while they shouldn't necessarily be abolished, shouldn't be taken too seriously, either.

COURTSHIP AND LOVE

She Stoops to Conquer, like most comedies of its time, is a story about courtship and the obstacles couples overcome on their way to marriage. Unlike other plays, however, this play satirizes the exaggeratedly complex obstacles often faced by lovers in other dramas of the time, and emphasizes instead how an individual's psychology can create impediments to developing a romantic relationship. Through the character of Marlow, who is unable to interact with women of his own class because he is so afraid of embarrassing himself, the play explores the battle that goes on inside someone who is anxious about courtship and marriage. In the end, the play provides solid dating advice: don't be scared to be yourself, give new people a chance, and when trouble arises be sure to forgive and forget.

Many of the romantic comedies of the period were sentimental comedies: they often chronicled star-crossed lovers who were separated by tyrannical parents, class difference, and other dramatic obstacles. Goldsmith found these works overblown and a bit ridiculous, and made a point of deciding to write about three relatively normal couples in this play. Constance and Hastings love each other. They are of same class and were even given Constance's father's blessing before his death. However, Constance's guardian Mrs. Hardcastle seeks to impede their marriage because she wants Constance to marry her son Tony, thereby keeping Constance's inheritance in her family. In most melodramatic plays of this type, Constance would be likely to elope with Hastings, saying she would rather live in poverty with him than be rich without him. Constance undermines this convention, arguing quite practically that they will regret it later if they give up her fortune now. Even more unusual for the dramatic conventions of Goldsmith's day, the two other couples have few real obstacles to marriage. Kate and Marlow both have parents who promise not to force them to marry anyone they do not like, and they are both from the same class. Marlow has plenty of money and his family doesn't care that Kate doesn't have as much. Their path to matrimony is almost comically clear. Similarly, Tony thinks that he is unable to marry the girl of his choice, Bet Bouncer, because he is not old enough to marry without his mother's permission. When his stepfather informs him that he is actually older than he thought, all obstacles are removed.

The true obstacle to the central couple's happy union is Marlow's shyness. Marlow is afraid to court a woman he might actually like and respect because he fears rejection and humiliation. Rather than face the nerve-wracking process of pursuing a serious relationship, he turns to one-night stands with women he doesn't care about. The women Marlow chooses for his one-night stands are lower-class women, whom he hits on aggressively and often pays to sleep with him. The sexual aggression of young, wealthy men towards poor women was common in 18th century England, and while such behavior would now certainly be seen as sexual harassment, assault, or prostitution, at the time people thought that "boys will be boys" and believed that the bad behavior would end once a man was happily married. This is certainly the expectation for Marlow, who says that what he really wants is a relationship with a respectable woman, but he is too nervous and self-conscious to pursue one. In his initial conversation with Kate, Marlow is so uncomfortable that he loses his normal eloquence and can hardly speak. Although he never looks at Kate for long enough to even see her face clearly, he comforts himself that she was not attractive and there was no opportunity wasted. By presenting herself first as a lowly barmaid, then as a housekeeper, and finally as a well-bred woman, Kate gradually draws Marlow out of his shell and learns about his personality and values in the process. She likes what she sees. Once Marlow learns that Kate is not likely to sleep with him on a whim, he speaks eloquently and shows that he has values which she shares. He expresses respect for her, and then love. Once Kate reveals her true identity to Marlow, she teases him for the two very different ways he treated her when he thought she was two different women. But this is the affectionate teasing of someone who likes a person and finds their faults endearing, not the mocking rejection he always feared.

In the end, the play drives home that the obstacles to intimacy *within* an individual can be just as challenging to overcome as the dramatic, external obstacles the world puts in love's way. It shows that a courtship is often not a process of two fully formed and self-assured people finding each other and then fighting to be together. Instead, the play shows a character for whom the hardest part of falling in love is allowing someone he respects grow close enough to see who he really is.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

She Stoops to Conquer shows the effect of parenting on a child's character, even once that child becomes an adult. The play suggests that parents who smother their children, as well as parents who do not participate much in their children's upbringing, tend to raise children who are not fully prepared for adulthood, or who reject their parents' values. By allowing a child some freedom, but also remaining involved in the child's life, a parent gives a child confidence while also earning their child's gratitude and respect.

The dangers of smothering a child are on display in the relationship between Mrs. Hardcastle and her son Tony. Even though Tony is perfectly healthy, his mother has always treated him like a sick child in need of her constant care and nursing. As a result, she has kept Tony from receiving the education that would have been standard for most men of his class and he is functionally illiterate. Even though he is an intelligent person, this lack of education sharply limits Tony's opportunities, making it unlikely that he will ever be able to do anything but live on his inheritance. In addition to crippling his potential, Mrs. Hardcastle's controlling behavior leads her son to rebel against her. He often escapes to the nearby inn, avoiding his mother and spending time instead with people of a lower social status. He also wants to marry a woman who, based on his description, sounds like she is probably from a lower class background. All of Mrs. Hardcastle's efforts to control her son have made him attracted to places and people she does not approve of. In the end, once Tony becomes an adult, he is determined to entirely reject his mother's influence. Her overbearing parenting has caused her to lose her son's respect and, therefore, she has lost her ability to influence or control him.

The dangers of being a distant parent are given less attention than the dangers of coddling, but Marlow's upbringing hints at the drawbacks of hands-off parenting. Marlow has been educated at a boarding school and he spent the years of his early adulthood travelling abroad. He seems to have never had the social experiences that most young people in the upper class of the era had while living in their parents' homes: visiting neighbors, attending balls, and participating in other social activities during which young men and women got to know one another. This lack of experience is part of the reason why he feels so shy around any woman who could potentially become his wife. Having received little input from his parents, Marlow still feels that they expect him to have learned how to be a gentleman and he fears that his actual aptitudes will let them down. He follows his father Sir Charles's command to visit the Hardcastles because he feels it is his duty, but he lacks the confidence to court Kate. By ceding too much independence to their child at too young an age, Marlow's parents left him without many of the experiences that would have properly socialized him, and he has not become a confident or socially capable adult.

The relationship between Hardcastle and Kate shows how a parent can strike the right balance of influencing and allowing a child freedom. Kate and Hardcastle's relationship is distinguished by mutual respect and trust. Teenagers and parents fight bitterly over teenagers' clothes to this day, but instead of fighting, Kate and her father are able to strike a compromise: she dresses as she wants to in the morning, and as he would like her to in the evening. Kate's trust in her father is demonstrated when Hardcastle tells Kate he has found a man for her to marry. Kate does not take this as a threat to force her into a life she does not want; even before her father tells her he would not force her to marry anyone she didn't like, Kate knows and trusts her father enough to know that he would never do this. Hardcastle also shows his trust in Kate. When he sees Marlow (who believes at the time that Kate is a barmaid) grab Kate and try to kiss her, Hardcastle is tempted to throw Marlow out of his house. But Kate ultimately convinces her father to trust her that Marlow is not as bad as he seems to be. Worried, he asks her to promise that she will be open with him, and Kate replies, "I hope, sir, you have ever found that I considered your commands as my pride; for your kindness is such, that my duty as yet has been inclination." This statement epitomizes the healthy relationship between this father and daughter; Kate never wants to disobey her father, because the kindness he shows her has always made her want to do what he says. The final proof of Hardcastle's successful parenting of Kate is her maturity, self-confidence, and good character. Kate wants to marry exactly the man her father would have chosen for her, because she respects and shares his values. He has succeeded in imparting them to her while also showing trust in her own discretion and intellect.

The play shows what a delicate balance parents must strike to raise independent children who have confidence in themselves and trust in their parents, and who share the values their parents wanted to pass on. However, the play does not suggest that only a perfect person can be a good person. Hardcastle is eccentric: he only cares for old-fashioned things and hardly leaves his home in the country. He can also be brash and, in moments of anxiety, he can forget to show Kate that he trusts in her judgment. However, since he has shown Kate concern, love, and attention mixed with a deep trust in her growing capacity to make her own decisions, Hardcastle has succeeded in raising a daughter who listens to him with respect, but is capable of confidently making choices for herself as an adult.

FASHIONS AND TASTES

As is typical of a comedy of manners, *She Stoops to Conquer* satirizes its characters' rigid adherence to contemporary fashions by showing characters who exaggeratedly embody a number of different cultural trends. In the same way that people poke fun at the hipster subculture today, Goldsmith takes aim at the hipster of the 1770s through the character of Marlow the "macaroni"—a fashion-obsessed, travel-obsessed, manneristic type of young man often caricatured at the time. The play also skewers Tony Lumpkin (the country bumpkin), Hardcastle (the old-fashioned and long-winded veteran), and the status-obsessed Mrs. Hardcastle. The various characters' obsessions with trends ultimately doesn't serve them well at all, and in several instances creates hardship. Through its most well-adjusted characters (Kate and Hastings), the play suggests that individuals should intelligently weigh the

fashions and tastes of the day and flexibly adopt only those parts of the culture that truly fit their situations.

Whether a character is fixated on old-fashioned ways or newfangled styles, the play demonstrates that fixation on any kind of fashion makes people too self-obsessed to pay adequate attention to their surroundings. The play's two fashion-forward characters, Mrs. Hardcastle and Marlow, often fail to understand what is going on right in front of them. While Mrs. Hardcastle doesn't visit the cities, she tries to keep up with the fashions described in magazines and asks the advice of her better-travelled friends. A desire to travel to fashionable places outside of the countryside becomes a fixation that keeps her from taking in her surroundings, so when Mrs. Hardcastle's son Tony drives her in circles around her own house, he is able to trick her into believing she is forty miles away from home in a dangerous area. Marlow, however, has travelled far and wide and he tries to dress to impress by copying the latest fashions. But when he is actually face to face with Kate (the woman his exquisite garments are meant to impress), he is too self-conscious to even look at her face and gauge if he likes her.

However, the play's characters who adhere to old-fashioned dress and manners are equally silly and unable to handle the world as those who are obsessed with newfangled styles, which shows that any rigid focus on style can make a person seem ridiculous. Hardcastle hasn't renovated his house and he wears an old-fashioned wig. The old-fashioned style of his house is partially why Hastings and Marlow mistake the home for an inn, and the old-fashioned style of his wig allows him to be the butt of his stepson Tony's practical jokes. Mr. Hardcastle's immersion in old ways of doing things doesn't just make him mockable—it also makes him insensitive to the world around him. He is withdrawn from the political concerns that most men of his class take an interest in, and he refuses to leave his home to travel, instead burying himself in memories of the good old days when he fought in the War of Spanish Succession. He insists on telling the same stories about his experience during the war, even though his listeners are bored with them. Mr. Hardcastle's old-fashioned attitudes are eccentric for a man who could play a powerful role in the world of his day, so it is no stretch for Marlow to take him for an innkeeper suffering from delusions of grandeur.

While characters who are fixated on new and old styles are shown to be unaware of the world around them, characters who have no interest in matters of style at all are slightly more aware, but also socially dysfunctional. The rustic Tony Lumpkin is barely literate and he offends his step-father with his boorish, rude behavior, but he is able to get the best of characters like his mother and Marlow, because he has innate intelligence and is not distracted from reality by the vain concerns of the fashionable. However, the play is not advocating that everyone become ill-mannered and uneducated. Tony's provincialism and lack of awareness lead him to be kept under his mother's thumb, because he doesn't know that he has already come of age and can collect his inheritance.

Being able to balance an interest in the trends of the present day with an appreciation for the old-fashioned is the hallmark of characters who are good judges of their surroundings, which suggests that people are best-served by maintaining a more moderate relationship to the ever-changing fashions of the day. Mr. Hastings is well-dressed, but he does not take himself or his personal style so seriously that he cannot pay attention to more important things, like wooing the woman he loves. He makes light jokes about the fashion-obsessed people around him, but does not take their concerns to heart. Kate represents the play's ideal for how an individual should relate to the tastes of her time. She blends an interest in the current fashions with an awareness of the value of tradition, wearing the clothes popular among people of her own age in the morning and the clothes her father prefers at night. When she discovers that her old-fashioned clothing has led Marlow to take her for a barmaid, she turns the situation to her advantage, and, in each of their next encounters, she gradually shifts the persona she is playing until she has won Marlow's heart.

In poking fun at the ways people do or don't adhere to fashions, the play emphasizes the importance of individual judgment. It suggests that individuals should follow trends that interest them, and ignore the ones that hold no appeal. Regardless of whether people draw the image of their ideal selves from fashion magazines, they should remember that relationships are more important than being fashionable or maintaining traditions. An awareness of other people and a responsiveness to situations as they unfold should never be sacrificed in the name of trying to play a role.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CLOTHING

Clothing is a marker of class status and sophistication, but not an absolutely accurate one. Looks can be deceiving, and characters in the play who read too much into clothing can be deceived by those who see what is going on underneath the surface. Mrs. Hardcastle and Marlow are both too fixated on their clothing and the clothing of others to be able to see the truth about the characters around them. At the same time, Mr. Hardcastle's stubborn insistence on dressing himself and his family in an old-fashioned style leads Marlow to easily mistake him for an innkeeper and his daughter for barmaid. The way the characters dress signal *something* about them, but far from everything. Thus, clothing comes to symbolize the often-superficial nature of first impressions and

appearances.

INNS

Throughout *She Stoops to Conquer*, the inn is a place in which the expectation of upper-class etiquette and civility is suspended. Hardcastle's house resembles an inn because he has not redecorated it (often, large houses like his were turned into inns if their owners went bankrupt and had to sell them). So the Hardcastles' house seems—to Marlow at least—like a place where social conventions were once observed, but have since faded away with the sale of the house to members of a lower class. Thus, Marlow and Hastings feel entitled to do whatever they want in Hardcastle's home, as long as they pay "the innkeeper" (i.e., Hardcastle himself). Marlow sits in the best chair, demands alcohol, and takes his boots off in the living room to demand that they be shined. He also grabs Kate in an aggressive attempt at seducing her because he believes she is a barmaid—another thing to which he can help himself as long as he pays. Because Marlow has spent so much time in inns, breaking the rules of polite society by drinking and seducing maids, he is uncomfortable in polite society. A normal social situation like meeting the Hardcastles makes him so nervous that he tries too hard and ends up seeming shy and formal. Thus, the inn becomes a symbol not only for indecorous behavior, but for the falseness of the veneer of upper-class refinement and civility.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Thrift Editions edition of *She Stoops to Conquer* published in 1991.

Prologue Quotes

MRS. HARDCASTLE. I vow, Mr. Hardcastle, you're very particular. Is there a creature in the whole country but ourselves, that does not take a trip to town now and then, to rub off the rust a little? There's the two Miss Hoggs, and our neighbour Mrs. Grigsby, go to take a month's polishing every winter.

HARDCASTLE. Ay, and bring back vanity and affectation to last them the whole year. I wonder why London cannot keep its own fools at home! In my time, the follies of the town crept slowly among us, but now they travel faster than a stage-coach. Its fopperies come down not only as inside passengers, but in the very basket.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Ay, your times were fine times indeed; you have been telling us of them for many a long year. Here we live in an old rumbling mansion, that looks for all the world like an inn, but that we never see company. Our best visitors are old Mrs. Oddfish, the curate's wife, and little Cripplegate, the lame dancing-master; and all our entertainment your old stories of Prince Eugene and the Duke of Marlborough. I hate such old-fashioned trumpery.

HARDCASTLE. And I love it. I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine; and I believe, Dorothy (taking her hand), you'll own I have been pretty fond of an old wife.

Related Characters: Hardcastle , Mrs. Hardcastle (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

The first lines of the play set the scene for the audience. The Hardcastles live in an old-fashioned house in a rural area, and Mr. Hardcastle dislikes taking trips away from home to the city. His wife, on the other hand, is eager to travel in more fashionable circles and visit the city. This desire was likely familiar to everyone seeing the play at the time of its first stagings, when large numbers of people were moving to the cities to find work, and members of the rural gentry had started travelling to cities like London and Bath to enjoy the cities' cultural offerings, meet people from other parts of England, and adapt their manners to the fashions of the time.

Hardcastle believes that frequent trips to the city have given rise to pretentious attitudes in all those who visit,

including members of the servant class like coach drivers. Mrs. Hardcastle feels bored by her husband's interests in his old war stories from the War of Spanish Succession. Even though the couple is at odds over where they spend their time, they are not fighting in earnest. This conversation seems to be one that they have had many times without either spouse changing their position at all. Indeed, as it turns out, Mrs. Hardcastle's thwarted desire to see the city turns out to seem like a posture she assumes so that she will not feel out of step with those in her acquaintance who do travel, rather than a sincere desire to venture into unfamiliar territory far from home.

HARDCASTLE. Diggory, you are too talkative.—Then, if I happen to say a good thing, or tell a good story at table, you must not all burst out a-laughing, as if you made part of the company.

DIGGORY. Then, ecod, your worship must not tell the story of Ould Grouse in the gun-room: I can't help laughing at that—he! he! he!—for the soul of me. We have laughed at that these twenty years—ha! ha! ha!

HARDCASTLE. Ha! ha! ha! The story is a good one. Well, honest Diggory, you may laugh at that—but still remember to be attentive. Suppose one of the company should call for a glass of wine, how will you behave? A glass of wine, sir, if you please (to DIGGORY).—Eh, why don't you move?

Related Characters: Diggory, Hardcastle (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Hardcastle is preparing for Marlow's visit by drilling his servants in proper table manners. These servants usually work in the barn and on the field, so they do not know the proper etiquette for serving a formal dinner. Hardcastle hopes to teach them how to perform these tasks because he is worried about the impression his home will make on Marlow. Although he is not really inferior to Marlow and Sir Charles by birth, Marlow worries that his guests will look down on the informality and lack of refinement that usually characterize his family's lifestyle at their country home. Hardcastle has been taking his nerves out on his servants, calling them names because they do not immediately understand the complicated code of behavior he is trying to teach them. Part of the code of behavior is for the servants waiting table to give no sign that they hear or understand the conversation the guests are having. But, as the talkative and intelligent servant Diggory shows, there is actually a much closer personal relationship between Hardcastle and his servants. They share jokes and memories accumulated over long years spent together in a sparsely inhabited part of the country. The warm human connections between master and servants show that class is not such a rigid divider as Hardcastle would like to pretend in front of his sophisticated guests from the city.

Act 1 Quotes

LANDLORD. There be two gentlemen in a post-chaise at the door. They have lost their way upo' the forest; and they are talking something about Mr. Hardcastle.

TONY. As sure as can be, one of them must be the gentleman that's coming down to court my sister. Do they seem to be Londoners?

LANDLORD. I believe they may. They look woundily like Frenchmen.

TONY. Then desire them to step this way, and I'll set them right in a twinkling. (*Exit* Landlord.) Gentlemen, as they mayn't be good enough company for you, step down for a moment, and I'll be with you in the squeezing of a lemon. [*Exeunt* MOB.]

Related Characters: Landlord, Tony Lumpkin, Esquire (speaker), Charles Marlow, Hardcastle

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7-8

Explanation and Analysis

Tony has been drinking and singing with a group of lower-class tradesmen at the bar when the landlord enters and tells him that two strangers have just arrived and are looking for Hardcastle's home. Tony confirms that these men are Marlow and Hastings by asking how they look and carry themselves. When the Landlord says that they look French, this confirms for Tony that they are two fashionable young men from London. (Imitating French fashions was popular among fashionable Londoners.) Tony realizes that the two men from London may think they are superior to him because of his rustic background and way of carrying himself, and he knows that they will be even more likely to look down on him if they see him socializing with local men from a different class background. In asking his lower-class

friends to leave the room, however, Tony is perhaps maknig a joke that the opposite is the case: that the sophisticated Londoners are inferior to the rural tradesmen. Tony's odd status as a man of the upper class who is unrefined in comparison to other men of his class and spends time with lower-class people has led him to a belief that class divisions are artificial.

TONY. No offence; but question for question is all fair, you know. Pray, gentlemen, is not this same Hardcastle a cross-grained, old-fashioned, whimsical fellow, with an ugly face, a daughter, and a pretty son?

HASTINGS. We have not seen the gentleman; but he has the family you mention.

TONY. The daughter, a tall, trapesing, trolloping, talkative maypole; the son, a pretty, well-bred, agreeable youth, that everybody is fond of.

MARLOW. Our information differs in this. The daughter is said to be well-bred and beautiful; the son an awkward booby, reared up and spoiled at his mother's apron-string.

TONY. He-he-hem!—Then, gentlemen, all I have to tell you is, that you won't reach Mr. Hardcastle's house this night, I believe.

HASTINGS. Unfortunate!

TONY. It's a damn'd long, dark, boggy, dirty, dangerous way. Stingo, tell the gentlemen the way to Mr. Hardcastle's! (*Winking upon the Landlord.*) Mr. Hardcastle's, of Quagmire Marsh, you understand me.

Related Characters: George Hastings , Charles Marlow, Tony Lumpkin, Esquire (speaker), Kate Hardcastle, Hardcastle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8-9

Explanation and Analysis

Marlow and Hastings have gotten lost on their way to Hardcastle's home and stopped into The Three Pigeons. Tony sees an opportunity to get back at his stepfather (Hardcastle) through them. Hardcastle often complains to Tony about the pranks he plays, how much he drinks, and his rude, uncouth demeanor. Tony resents these comments, but before he decides to play a prank on his stepfather, he confirms that Hardcastle has described him negatively in letters to the two strangers. Tony knows that the two men will be quick to speak up and correct him in the negative things he says about Kate, because Marlow is going to court her. To elicit the information he is looking for, Tony cleverly frames the question by asking if Kate was described in a negative light and he in a positive one. In this way, he discovers that his stepfather has described him as uncultivated and a mama's boy. Satisfied that Hardcastle deserves the punishment he hopes to mete out, Tony decides to carry out his prank and send Marlow and Hastings to Hardcastle's home under the mistaken impression that it is an inn. Thus, he lies that the two men are nowhere near Hardcastle's home.

HASTINGS. You have lived very much among them. In truth, I have been often surprised, that you who have seen so much of the world, with your natural good sense, and your many opportunities, could never yet acquire a requisite share of assurance.

MARLOW. The Englishman's malady. But tell me, George, where could I have learned that assurance you talk of? My life has been chiefly spent in a college or an inn, in seclusion from that lovely part of the creation that chiefly teach men confidence. I don't know that I was ever familiarly acquainted with a single modest woman—except my mother—But among females of another class, you know—

HASTINGS. Ay, among them you are impudent enough of all conscience.

MARLOW. They are of *us*, you know.

Related Characters: Charles Marlow, George Hastings (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Marlow and Hastings have arrived at Hardcastle's house, which Tony has tricked them into believing is an inn. They are discussing inns in general, and Hastings remarks that he finds it surprising that Marlow suffers so much from shyness since he is so widely travelled. However, Marlow explains that it is precisely *because* he is so widely travelled and has spent so little time in normal social gatherings that he feels so uncomfortable around women. It seems likely that Marlow's parents sent him on so much travel because

they had grand ambitions for his development into a man of the world, but did not consider how much socialization usually takes place at home.

Marlow feels especially nervous around women of his own class because he has had so few interactions with them. But, in keeping with the stereotypes of the day, Marlow believes that poorer women are promiscuous and more interested in sex than richer women. Many interactions between lower-class women and upper-class men that would now be considered harassment or assault were commonplace, especially if the poor woman accepted money afterwards. Marlow subscribes to these beliefs. When he says that these women are "of us" he means that lower-class women, like men, have a high sex drive.

HASTINGS. But in the company of women of reputation I never saw such an idiot, such a trembler; you look for all the world as if you wanted an opportunity of stealing out of the room.

MARLOW. Why, man, that's because I do want to steal out of the room. Faith, I have often formed a resolution to break the ice, and rattle away at any rate. But I don't know how, a single glance from a pair of fine eyes has totally overset my resolution. An impudent fellow may counterfeit modesty; but I'll be hanged if a modest man can ever counterfeit impudence.

HASTINGS. If you could but say half the fine things to them that I have heard you lavish upon the bar-maid of an inn, or even a college bed-maker—

MARLOW. Why, George, I can't say fine things to them; they freeze, they petrify me. They may talk of a comet, or a burning mountain, or some such bagatelle; but, to me, a modest woman, drest out in all her finery, is the most tremendous object of the whole creation.

Related Characters: George Hastings , Charles Marlow (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Marlow and Hastings have just arrived at Hardcastle's home, where Marlow has come to meet Kate and see if he would like to marry her. Marlow is pessimistic about the meeting because of his intense shyness around women of his class. Although he is normally eloquent and charming, when around a woman of his class he becomes terrified of saying the wrong thing and cannot force himself to speak. In giving Marlow's description of these interactions, Goldsmith pokes fun at the way people socialize. Marlow characterizes a "comet" or "burning mountain" as a "bagatelle," which means an insignificant trifle. Marlow may be referring to Halley's comet, which Osmond Halley accurately predicted would appear in 1758, creating a great deal of excitement about his masterful astronomical calculations. Of course, comets and volcanoes are actually awe-inspiring geological and cosmic phenomenon, not bagatelles, but Marlow refers to them as if they exist only as topics for small talk among young men and young women. For him, the awe-inspiring phenomenon is not the comet, but the sight of a young woman dressed beautifully in fashionable clothing. Here, Marlow's obsession with fashion is shown to get in his way of seeing what is in front of him. A woman's beautiful clothing not only strikes him by its chicness, but also makes him self-conscious about how he looks and whether his clothing is impressive too.

MARLOW. Yet, George, if we open the campaign too fiercely at first, we may want ammunition before it is over. I think to reserve the embroidery to secure a retreat.

HARDCASTLE. Your talking of a retreat, Mr. Marlow, puts me in mind of the Duke of Marlborough, when we went to besiege Denain. He first summoned the garrison——

MARLOW. Don't you think the *ventre d'or* waistcoat will do with the plain brown?

HARDCASTLE. He first summoned the garrison, which might consist of about five thousand men——

HASTINGS. I think not: brown and yellow mix but very poorly.

HARDCASTLE. I say, gentlemen, as I was telling you, be summoned the garrison, which might consist of about five thousand men——

MARLOW. The girls like finery.

HARDCASTLE. Which might consist of about five thousand men, well appointed with stores, ammunition, and other implements of war. Now, says the Duke of Marlborough to George Brooks, that stood next to him—you must have heard of George Brooks—I'll pawn my dukedom, says he, but I take that garrison without spilling a drop of blood. So——

MARLOW. What, my good friend, if you gave us a glass of punch in the mean time; it would help us to carry on the siege with vigour.

HARDCASTLE. Punch, sir! (Aside.) This is the most unaccountable kind of modesty I ever met with.

Related Characters: Hardcastle , George Hastings , Charles Marlow (speaker), Kate Hardcastle, Constance Neville

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

Marlow and Hastings have arrived at Hardcastle's home, but they are under the mistaken impression that they are at an inn. While Hardcastle tries to engage them in conversation, they believe him to be a pushy innkeeper who doesn't respect class boundaries—which would dictate that he leave his two customers alone so that they can talk in private. The two young men discuss what they should wear for their first meeting with Constance and Kate, employing the language of a military campaign (or conquest) as they describe how they should dress to make a strong impression on the women. Coincidentally, military campaigns are Hardcastle's favorite topic, so he is even more eager to draw their attention to his story about his war career. As the two young men talk over their host, their obsession with being up-to-date and fashionable clashes with his obsession with long-ago events.

MARLOW. Perhaps so, madam. But I love to converse only with the more grave and sensible part of the sex. But I'm afraid I grow tiresome.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Not at all, sir; there is nothing I like so much as grave conversation myself; I could hear it for ever. Indeed, I have often been surprised how a man of sentiment could ever admire those light airy pleasures, where nothing reaches the heart.

MARLOW. It's——a disease——of the mind, madam. In the variety of tastes there must be some who, wanting a relish——for——um—a—um.

MISS HARDCASTLE. I understand you, sir. There must be some, who, wanting a relish for refined pleasures, pretend to despise what they are incapable of tasting.

MARLOW. My meaning, madam, but infinitely better expressed.

Related Characters: George Hastings , Kate Hardcastle, Charles Marlow (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

Kate and Marlow have just met for the first time, and Marlow is intensely nervous. Hastings has been whispering encouragement in his ear during the first few moments of the conversation, but now he says he will leave Kate and Marlow alone because he wants to spend some time alone with Constance. Marlow is in a state of panic and says nothing at all after his friend leaves him alone. Eventually Kate fills the silence, asking about his experience with women. She tries her best to engage him, trying to imitate his formal attitude as she expresses her opinions. Kate believes it is less important what they talk about than that they are able to talk at all. She does all she can to develop a rapport with Marlow, but he is too intimidated to meet her half way. Marlow, untruthfully, tells Kate that he only enjoys talking to serious women when in fact he only enjoys carefree flirtations with barmaids.

HARDCASTLE. If he be what he has shown himself, I'm determined he shall never have my consent.

MISS HARDCASTLE. And if he be the sullen thing I take him, he shall never have mine.

HARDCASTLE. In one thing then we are agreed—to reject him.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Yes: but upon conditions. For if you should find him less impudent, and I more presuming—if you find him more respectful, and I more importunate—I don't know—the fellow is well enough for a man—Certainly, we don't meet many such at a horse-race in the country.

HARDCASTLE. If we should find him so——But that's impossible. The first appearance has done my business. I'm seldom deceived in that.

MISS HARDCASTLE. And yet there may be many good qualities under that first appearance.

HARDCASTLE. Ay, when a girl finds a fellow's outside to her taste, she then sets about guessing the rest of his furniture. With her, a smooth face stands for good sense, and a genteel figure for every virtue.

MISS HARDCASTLE. I hope, sir, a conversation begun with a compliment to my good sense, won't end with a sneer at my understanding?

HARDCASTLE. Pardon me, Kate. But if young Mr. Brazen can find the art of reconciling contradictions, he may please us both, perhaps.

Related Characters: Hardcastle , Kate Hardcastle (speaker), Charles Marlow

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28-29

Explanation and Analysis

Kate and her father are exchanging impressions of Marlow. While Kate found him impossible to talk to because of his shyness, Hardcastle was shocked by Marlow's impudence. Hardcastle has no idea that Marlow believes him to be an innkeeper, as Tony tricked Marlow into believing, so he has no way to explain Marlow's rudeness. These behaviors may be two sides of the same coin, however. While Marlow is terrified of women of his own class, he is rude to those he considers inferior to him—perhaps as a way of making himself feel superior despite his insecurities. If this is the case, by becoming more confident with women, Marlow might also become more civil to those of other class backgrounds.

While Hardcastle is determined to give up on the idea of Marlow and Kate's marriage after his initial meeting with his friend's son, Kate still has some hope that Marlow may turn out to be a good man. She recognizes that he is intelligent, well-educated, and handsome. Given her father's dislike for trips into the city and their relative isolation in the countryside, she is unlikely to find another suitor like Marlow soon. Kate makes this case to her father, but, perhaps because he was so insulted by Marlow's treatment of him, Hardcastle mocks Kate for wanting to give Marlow another chance, suggesting Kate cares only that Marlow is handsome. Kate does not lose her temper, however, but reminds her father that he actually has much greater respect for her than his comment suggests. He quickly apologizes, in one of several interactions in the play that speak to the strong mutual respect between father and daughter.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Did he? Then as I live, I'm resolved to keep up the delusion. Tell me, Pimple, how do you like my present dress? Don't you think I look something like Cherry in the Beaux Stratagem?

MAID. It's the dress, madam, that every lady wears in the country, but when she visits or receives company.

MISS HARDCASTLE. And are you sure he does not remember my face or person?

MAID. Certain of it.

MISS HARDCASTLE. I vow, I thought so; for, though we spoke for some time together, yet his fears were such, that he never once looked up during the interview. Indeed, if he had, my bonnet would have kept him from seeing me.

MAID. But what do you hope from keeping him in his mistake?

MISS HARDCASTLE. In the first place I shall be seen, and that is no small advantage to a girl who brings her face to market. Then I shall perhaps make an acquaintance, and that's no small victory gained over one who never addresses any but the wildest of her sex. But my chief aim is, to take my gentleman off his guard, and, like an invisible champion of romance, examine the giant's force before I offer to combat.

Related Characters: Pimple, Kate Hardcastle (speaker), Charles Marlow

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 32-33

Explanation and Analysis

Kate's maid, Pimple, has told her mistress that Marlow believes that he is in an inn, not in the Hardcastle home, and that he has mistaken Kate for a barmaid. This mistake was made possible because Kate has changed into the old-fashioned dress she wears in the evenings as a compromise to her old-fashioned father. It was also made possible by Marlow's extreme shyness, which left him too flustered to really take in Kate's appearance during their conversation.

Kate plans to let Marlow continue to believe that she is actually a member of the lower-class. She compares herself to a character in George Farquhar's 1707 play *The Beaux Stratagem*: a pretty innkeeper's daughter who falls in love with a guest. Her maid may not have seen this play, but she confirms that the dress is typical of the less formal clothing that even upper-class women wear when they are at home in the countryside. Marlow, of course, is clothing-obsessed and assumes that he can judge what class a person comes from by their clothing. He does not recognize that the way people dress may be different in the countryside.

Having heard from Constance that Marlow only ever approaches women from the lower classes, Kate feels that his mistake provides her with a unique opportunity to get to know him. Even though she will be pretending to be someone else, she believes that if she and Marlow can establish a good rapport, their relationship may have a chance to develop further.

HARDCASTLE. I tell you, sir, I'm serious! and now that my passions are roused, I say this house is mine, sir; this house is mine, and I command you to leave it directly.

MARLOW. Ha! ha! ha! A puddle in a storm. I shan't stir a step, I assure you. (*In a serious tone.*) This your house, fellow! It's my house. This is my house. Mine, while I choose to stay. What right have you to bid me leave this house, sir? I never met with such impudence, curse me; never in my whole life before.

HARDCASTLE. Nor I, confound me if ever I did. To come to my house, to call for what he likes, to turn me out of my own chair, to insult the family, to order his servants to get drunk, and then to tell me, *This house is mine, sir*. By all that's impudent, it makes me laugh. Ha! ha! ha! Pray, sir (*bantering*), as you take the house, what think you of taking the rest of the furniture? There's a pair of silver candlesticks, and there's a fire-screen, and here's a pair of brazen-nosed bellows; perhaps you may take a fancy to them?

MARLOW. Bring me your bill, sir; bring me your bill, and let's make no more words about it.

HARDCASTLE. There are a set of prints, too. What think you of the Rake's Progress, for your own apartment?

[*Exit.*]

Related Characters: Charles Marlow, Kate Hardcastle (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 40-41

Explanation and Analysis

Hardcastle is at his wit's end, after Marlow's servants have gotten drunk. Marlow, believing himself to be in an inn, has encouraged his servants to drink as much as they can, thinking it the polite thing to do (since the innkeeper will be able to charge more). Pushed to his breaking point, Hardcastle orders Marlow to leave. Marlow doesn't understand why the innkeeper is insulted and compares his attitude to "a puddle in a storm," or a big fuss over nothing. Even if Marlow had been behaving very badly in an inn, he believes that the money he will pay the innkeeper, coupled with his superior social standing, gives him every right to stay in the house.

Hardcastle is astounded that Marlow could be so entitled as to say that the house is his. With biting sarcasm, he begins to offer Marlow objects in the house, starting with a set of prints based on William Hogarth's set of eight paintings, *The*

Rake's Progress. These eight prints, produced in 1735, were very popular. They depicted the rise and fall of a rich, spoiled young man who cares little for the consequences of his actions. The young man impregnates a young woman but does not marry her, takes lessons in how to be elegant from French teachers, gambles away all his money, and, eventually, ends up in debtors' prison and then an insane asylum. Hardcastle is suggesting that Marlow's arrogant behavior and his obsession with fashion and signs of wealth will lead him down a path to ruin.

MARLOW. So then, all's out, and I have been damnably imposed on. O, confound my stupid head, I shall be laughed at over the whole town. I shall be stuck up in caricatura in all the print-shops. The Dullissimo Macaroni. To mistake this house of all others for an inn, and my father's old friend for an innkeeper! What a swaggering puppy must he take me for! What a silly puppy do I find myself! There again, may I be hanged, my dear, but I mistook you for the bar-maid!

Related Characters: Charles Marlow (speaker), Sir Charles, Kate Hardcastle, Hardcastle

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Marlow has just discovered that he has mistaken Hardcastle's house for an inn and Hardcastle for an innkeeper. He is terribly embarrassed at his behavior and worries that he will be mocked everywhere. Just as Hardcastle referred to Hogarth's decades-old prints of *The Rake's Progress*, Marlow now imagines a new print being created expressly to mock him for his vanity, impudence, and foolishness. In the 1770s, there was, in fact, a craze for prints mocking "macaronis," the name given to manneristic young men who had spent time abroad and cared too much about fashion.

To Marlow's credit, he does not place all the blame on Tony now that he knows his mistake. He recognizes that only someone oblivious and full of himself could fail to pick up on the many hints that he was mistaken about his whereabouts. At this time, Marlow wants nothing more than to get away from the Hardcastle home where he has humiliated himself. Instead, he will go through even deeper humiliation before finally emerging more mature than the shallow, young macaroni he was when the play began.

MISS HARDCASTLE. I hope, sir, I have done nothing to disoblige you. I'm sure I should be sorry to affront any gentleman who has been so polite, and said so many civil things to me. I'm sure I should be sorry (*pretending to cry*) if he left the family upon my account. I'm sure I should be sorry if people said anything amiss, since I have no fortune but my character.

MARLOW. (Aside.) By Heaven! she weeps. This is the first mark of tenderness I ever had from a modest woman, and it touches me. (*To her.*) Excuse me, my lovely girl; you are the only part of the family I leave with reluctance. But to be plain with you, the difference of our birth, fortune, and education, makes an honourable connexion impossible; and I can never harbour a thought of seducing simplicity that trusted in my honour, of bringing ruin upon one whose only fault was being too lovely.

MISS HARDCASTLE. (*Aside*). Generous man! I now begin to admire him.

Related Characters: Kate Hardcastle, Charles Marlow (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42-43

Explanation and Analysis

Having discovered that he has made a humiliating mistake in believing Hardcastle's house to be an inn, Marlow is determined to depart as quickly as possible. He says this to Kate, whom he still believes to be a servant in the home, and she responds with sadness and worry. She says that she is a poor girl and, if he has left because of her, people may suspect that something happened between them, which would ruin her reputation. At the same time, she expresses how much she has appreciated the attention he has given her. This statement expresses both her "modesty" (her virginity and her attitude that it is important to keep it until she is married) and her affection for Marlow, and it elicits a keen emotional response from Marlow. It also elicits a statement from him that means a great deal to Kate. He swears that he would never pressure a virgin who wanted to stay a virgin until marriage into having a casual sexual encounter with him. Even if such coercive actions were often tolerated at the time, Kate feels real admiration for Marlow's declaration that he respects her as a modest woman and will not try to seduce her any longer.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Then go, sir: I'll urge nothing more to detain you. Though my family be as good as hers you came down to visit, and my education, I hope, not inferior, what are these advantages without equal affluence? I must remain contented with the slight approbation of imputed merit; I must have only the mockery of your addresses, while all your serious aims are fixed on fortune.

Enter HARDCASTLE and SIR CHARLES from behind.

SIR CHARLES. Here, behind this screen.

HARDCASTLE. Ay, ay; make no noise. I'll engage my Kate covers him with confusion at last.

MARLOW. By heavens, madam, fortune was ever my smallest consideration. Your beauty at first caught my eye; for who could see that without emotion? But every moment that I converse with you, steals in some new grace, heightens the picture, and gives it stronger expression. What at first seemed rustic plainness, now appears refined simplicity. What seemed forward assurance, now strikes me as the result of courageous innocence, and conscious virtue.

Related Characters: Charles Marlow (speaker), Kate Hardcastle

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Marlow is trying to bid the woman he believes to be a poor relation of the Hardcastles goodbye. He assumes that this woman is also of lower birth than Kate. This, of course, *is* Kate, in the last phase of her disguise. She pretends to be of the same level of education and social status as Kate and speaks with her normal eloquence, forthrightness, and intelligence. Marlow has only continued to resist the idea of marrying this striking woman because he believes her to be of a different class than he is. He at first thought her simple dress meant that she was a barmaid, but now begins to understand that such appearances can be deceiving. Of course, Kate has been adjusting the character she pretends to be all along, gradually becoming more and more like herself as she sees that Marlow is growing more comfortable with her. Now, he seems to be learning something much more profound from the experience of meeting her. He sees that he misunderstood her identity at first, writing her off as a pretty barmaid who would make an easy conquest. But instead of being embarrassed at his mistake, he now merely feels fascinated and attracted to the more complex figure he is getting to know.

MISS HARDCASTLE. Yes, sir, that very identical tall squinting lady you were pleased to take me for. (*Curtseying.*) She that you addressed as the mild, modest, sentimental man of gravity, and the bold, forward, agreeable Rattle of the Ladies' Club. Ha! ha! ha!

MARLOW. Zounds! there's no bearing this; it's worse than death!

MISS HARDCASTLE. In which of your characters, sir, will you give us leave to address you? As the faltering gentleman, with looks on the ground, that speaks just to be heard, and hates hypocrisy; or the loud confident creature, that keeps it up with Mrs. Mantrap, and old Miss Biddy Buckskin, till three in the morning? Ha! ha! ha!

MARLOW. O, curse on my noisy head. I never attempted to be impudent yet, that I was not taken down. I must be gone.

HARDCASTLE. By the hand of my body, but you shall not. I see it was all a mistake, and I am rejoiced to find it. You shall not, sir, I tell you. I know she'll forgive you. Won't you forgive him, Kate? We'll all forgive you. Take courage, man. (*They retire, she tormenting him, to the back scene.*)

Related Characters: Kate Hardcastle, Charles Marlow, Hardcastle (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

Kate has finally revealed her true identity to Marlow, and now she laughs at the contrast between the two very different ways he treated her. When he believed she was a prospective wife and a woman of his own class, Marlow could hardly speak in her presence. Once he thought she was a barmaid, however, he bragged about his many conquests of other lower-class women to her. Marlow's humiliation is made even worse, as both his father (whom he hopes to impress) and Hardcastle are there to witness it. However, even though his first instinct is to run away, he does not. Hardcastle urges him to overcome his embarrassment, and Kate's teasing is clearly affectionate. Even though she was deceiving him about her identity, she was not deceiving him about her growing respect for him. Knowing the trick she played on him, Marlow feels he can only be even more impressed by her ingenuity in getting him to move past his own limitations and open up to her.

HASTINGS. (To HARDCASTLE.) For my late attempt to fly off with your niece let my present confusion be my punishment. We are now come back, to appeal from your justice to your humanity. By her father's consent, I first paid her my addresses, and our passions were first founded in duty.

MISS NEVILLE. Since his death, I have been obliged to stoop to dissimulation to avoid oppression. In an hour of levity, I was ready to give up my fortune to secure my choice. But I am now recovered from the delusion, and hope from your tenderness what is denied me from a nearer connection.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Pshaw, pshaw! this is all but the whining end of a modern novel.

Related Characters: Mrs. Hardcastle, Constance Neville, George Hastings (speaker), George Hastings

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Constance and Hastings have returned to the house instead of eloping because Constance needs her aunt's permission to marry if she wants to keep her fortune. Even though she loves Hastings, Constance does not want to sacrifice her fortune in order to marry him. At this point, Hastings and Constance appeal to Hardcastle, explaining how honorable their passion is. Although they attempted to elope, they feel that their love should not be treated as illicit, because they had Constance's father's permission before he died. Instead of allowing Constance's father's permission to carry weight, however, Mrs. Hardcastle has selfishly tried to force Constance to marry Tony, all because she wants to keep Constance's fortune in the family. It is also at this point that the Goldsmith makes explicit the contrast between Constance and Hasting's romance and the many melodramatic romances portrayed on the stage and in novels of the day; Mrs. Hardcastle scoffs at Constance's account of the obstacles that have kept her apart from Hastings, calling it the stuff of novels.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

David Garrick, a famous actor and theatrical producer, wrote the Prologue, which was originally recited by an actor who refused to play the part of Tony. In it, he tells the audience that Goldsmith's play is meant to rescue comedy, which he argues is no longer well-represented among theatrical productions of the day. Personifying Comedy as a sick woman, the prologue suggests that the play that follows is the cure prescribed to her by a doctor, the playwright. If the audience likes the play, then the doctor's prescription can be said to have worked, and Comedy will be saved.

Garrick introduces the play as a comedy whose playwright intended to create something that differed meaningfully from other comedies of the day. Goldsmith (who wrote the play) published an essay prior to authoring She Stoops *in which he lamented that comedies had become too sentimental and moralistic, and no longer seemed concerned with making people laugh.*

ACT 1

The play begins in a room in an old-fashioned house, where Mrs. Hardcastle is complaining to her husband, Hardcastle, about never going to London on a holiday. Hardcastle says he has no interest in going to experience the pretentious society of London. Mrs. Hardcastle replies that they never get to meet anyone interesting and that they live in a house that anyone could mistake for an **inn**, while he bores everyone with his stories of the good old days in the war. Affectionately, Hardcastle says that he does like old things, including his old wife. Mrs. Hardcastle responds that she is not very old: she is only forty. Hardcastle counters that she is fifty-seven. Mrs. Hardcastle argues that she was only twenty when she had Tony, her son from her first husband, who has not yet reached the age of discretion (that is, twenty-one years old).

The play begins by showing a happily married older couple who nevertheless disagree about many things. Although she is from the countryside, Mrs. Hardcastle is obsessed with the fashionable goings-on in town, while Hardcastle thinks that fashionable society offers no worthwhile culture, only pretention and affectation. This love of all things old-fashioned means that Hardcastle refuses to change anything about his house, while most members of his class – even those living in the country – redecorate their homes to keep them looking current. (This will later contribute to the play's central mix-up, in which Marlow mistakes the Hardcastles' home for an inn.) However, to be obsessed with newness is also foolish: Mrs. Hardcastle lies about her age, even to her husband who knows very well how old she is.

Hardcastle says that Tony will never have any discretion: she has spoiled her son and he is badly behaved and badly educated. Mrs. Hardcastle says her son doesn't need an education because he will have a fortune of fifteen-hundred pounds per year, but at least he has a good sense of humor. Hardcastle denies this and complains about the pranks Tony plays. Mrs. Hardcastle argues that she could not have given her son a better education because he was always ill as a child, but Hardcastle disputes this, saying that Tony only shows signs of sickness after drinking too much.

Even though Mrs. Hardcastle is interested in the cultivated, fashionable world, she has done nothing to cultivate her son so that he can rise in that world. She has kept Tony from getting any education, believing that money is all he will need in life, or perhaps fearing that an education will cause him to leave her behind. She has always treated him as if he were sick, but according to Hardcastle, he is not sickly at all. Without an education or occupation, Tony is left with nothing to do but drink and cause trouble.

Tony enters the room on his way out of the house, and his mother asks him to spend time with her and Hardcastle. Tony tells Mrs. Hardcastle that he is on his way to the alehouse to meet his friends and cannot stay. Mrs. Hardcastle remarks that his friends are beneath him and pleads that he stay with her. When he refuses, she grabs him and tries to stop him, and he leaves anyway, pulling her along with him. Left alone, Hardcastle says aloud that the two of them spoil each other.

Not only does Tony spend his time drinking and playing pranks, he spends it with people from a different class background. The play's audience would have found it unusual or even inappropriate for Tony to fraternize with members of the lower class. This, along with Tony's disrespect for his mother's command, provides further proof that Hardcastle is right about his wife spoiling her son.

Still ruminating, Hardcastle says that modern times are making everyone foolish. He sees his daughter Kate and remarks to himself that even she is interested in fashion and wears fancy French **clothing** after living in London for a time. Kate enters and Hardcastle comments on her extravagant outfit. She reminds him that they have made an agreement: she wears the clothes she likes in the morning and the clothes he prefers for her in the evening.

Unlike Tony, who has been kept at home by his mother, Kate has been exposed to London society and has received a good education. Unlike her mother, Kate has adopted fashionable dress without becoming fixated on always dressing fashionably. Instead of fighting with her father as Tony fights with his mother, Kate and her father strike a compromise.

Hardcastle says he will require Kate's obedience soon, because the man he wants her to marry is coming from London to visit that night. Kate is surprised, wonders how she should act when she meets this guest, and feels doubtful that they will get along after meeting each other in such a formal, arranged way. Her father tells her that he will never force her to marry anyone, but that the man coming to visit, Mr. Marlow (the son of Hardcastle's best friend Sir Charles Marlow) is intelligent, generous, young, brave, and very handsome. Kate is reassured that she will like Marlow, until her father says that Marlow is also bashful and reserved. Kate doesn't like the sound of this, while her father thinks a modest character is a good sign.

Even though Hardcastle says that he will demand Kate's obedience, she intuits that he would never force her into a marriage she didn't want. Even though they disagree, both on what she should wear and on the value of modesty in a man, their conversation shows mutual respect and flexibility. However, even though she trusts her father and likes the idea of pleasing him by marrying his friend's son, Kate thinks this formal introduction will not be conducive to falling in love. She is likely influenced by the romantic or sentimental notions of the day, which celebrated star-crossed lovers, not comfortable arranged marriages.

Kate tells her father that she will accept Marlow as a husband if he has all the other qualities her father described. Hardcastle reminds her that Marlow will also have to like her if they are to get engaged. Kate says that, if Marlow doesn't like her, she will blame her mirror for deceiving her, change the fashion of her clothing, and find someone less picky to love. Hardcastle approves of her attitude, then exits to prepare the servants to greet their visitor.

If it's true that you have to love yourself before you can love somebody else, the self-assured and easygoing Kate is ready for love. She knows her own merits and sees fashion as a way of highlighting her beauty, instead of as a way of defining herself. Her father respects this sensible attitude, and it seems likely that he is partially responsible for instilling it in her.

Alone, Kate ruminates aloud about Marlow, wondering whether she will like him and whether it is possible to cure a man of shyness by making him proud of his wife. She laughs at how far her mind has skipped ahead, past their courtship to their eventual marriage.

Kate sees modesty and reserve as a sign of insecurity, and she knows that she doesn't want an insecure husband. She believes that if Marlow has the good qualities her father described, then his insecurity is likely curable.

Kate's cousin, Constance Neville, enters, and Kate asks her how she thinks she looks today. Constance asks why Kate is so concerned about how she looks, and Kate explains that Marlow is coming to meet her. Constance tells Kate that she knows Marlow, as he is the best friend of Mr. Hastings, Constance's admirer. She says that Marlow is odd: he is very shy around modest, respectable women of his own class background, but is very forward among women without this upbringing and often seduces lower-class women. Kate wonders how she will manage, then says she can do nothing but wait and see what happens.

Constance sheds new light on Marlow's "modesty." Unlike the description of him given by Sir Charles in his letter to Hardcastle, Constance believes that Marlow's modesty is actually just shyness around women of his own class. He is not shy around all women, however, but instead uses his greater power and stature to seduce lower-class women, who were often assumed to be promiscuous.

Kate asks Constance whether her mother is still trying to convince her to marry Tony, and Constance says that Mrs. Hardcastle continues to try to force the courtship to work. Kate says Mrs. Hardcastle is naturally eager for her son to marry his cousin Constance because she wants to keep Constance's fortune in the family. Constance says that the fortune is mainly made up of jewels, which is not as tempting as money.

Mrs. Hardcastle is Constance's guardian, so Constance needs her approval to marry, but Mrs. Hardcastle doesn't truly have her niece's best interest at heart. Instead, Mrs. Hardcastle is hoping to marry the two first cousins (a common practice at the time) in order to add to her son's already significant fortune.

Constance continues, telling Kate she hopes that her true love, Hastings, will not give up on marrying her and eventually she will escape the pressure she faces from her guardian to marry Tony. In the meantime, she pretends that she loves Tony so that Mrs. Hardcastle will not suspect her of loving someone else. Kate says that they're lucky that Tony is on their side: he doesn't want to marry Constance either. Constance hears Mrs. Hardcastle's bell ring, summoning her. The two young women wish each other luck in their affairs, and Constance exits.

Constance and Tony both know themselves and know that they are badly matched. This is also clear to the audience based on their two characters: Constance seems refined, while Tony is rustic. Constance's self-knowledge also makes her more confident in her love for Hastings. She deceives Mrs. Hardcastle about the true nature of her feelings to keep her controlling guardian from exerting even more pressure on her to marry someone she doesn't love.

At the alehouse (called The Three Pigeons), Tony sits at the head of the table and sings a song he made up about the bar. His friends, who are from lower-class backgrounds, praise his performance and thank him for bringing them such a culturally elevated performance. They say how wonderful it will be once he has access to his fortune, since he will buy everyone drinks, just like his own father once did. Tony agrees, saying he will buy a new horse and marry Bet Bouncer once he comes of age.

Socializing with members of a lower class was looked down upon by members of the stratified English society of the late 18th century. Tony's choice of friends reflects an openness and lack of prejudice, but also his restricted upbringing, which kept him in his home, with neither a traditional education or the traditional opportunities to interact socially with other people of his class.

The landlord enters and tells Tony that two gentlemen who are fancily dressed in the latest French fashions have driven up to the alehouse. They are lost and looking for Hardcastle's house. Tony, realizing that this must be Marlow, asks his friends to leave him for a moment because the travelers will "not be good enough company" for Marlow. Left alone, Tony decides to play a joke on his stepfather to avenge himself for all the bad things Hardcastle says about him.

Tony's joke about his lower-class friends being too good for the visiting gentleman shows that he is acutely aware of the way other members of his class view his association with members of the lower class. Tony's stepfather Hardcastle looks down on Tony for not being a refined gentleman, and Tony seeks to get back at him by playing a trick on the refined gentleman Hardcastle hopes to have as a son-in-law.

Marlow and Hastings enter the room with the landlord. Marlow complains about the difficult journey. Hastings counters that it might have been easier if Marlow had allowed them to stop and ask for directions, but Marlow replies that that would risk being insulted by a stranger.

This scene uncovers another dimension of Marlow's "modesty:" he feels too nervous at the idea of being mocked even to ask directions of a stranger. This same fearfulness hinders him from opening himself up to love.

Tony intercedes in Marlow's and Hastings's conversation, asking if they know where they are. When they tell him they are looking for Hardcastle's house, he tells them that they have lost their way. He asks if the Hardcastle they are looking for has a charming son and an annoying daughter, and they say that they heard the opposite report. Tony tells them that they are far from Hardcastle's house. He asks the landlord to give them directions, and the landlord, who is in on the joke, invents a complicated-sounding route. Discouraged, Hastings and Marlow ask if they can spend the night at the alehouse. Tony says that there are no spare beds, but they can sleep in armchairs by the fireside. Hastings and Marlow say they hate this idea.

Before he goes through with his idea to play a trick on Hastings, Marlow, and his stepfather, Tony makes sure to confirm that his stepfather has, in fact, spoken of him poorly to other people. He also makes sure that Hastings and Marlow are snobs by telling them that they can sleep in armchairs and watching them stiffly refuse such an undignified sleeping arrangement. Once he has ascertained that his stepfather has bad-mouthed him and that the two gentlemen are snobs, Tony sees all three characters as in need of some humbling.

Tony pretends to think for a moment, then tells Marlow and Hastings that they are only a mile away from one of the best **inns** in the area. The landlord asks him privately if he really means to send them to his stepfather's house believing it to be an inn, and Tony silences him. He offers to escort them partway and warns them that the innkeeper (Hardcastle) is rich and has pretentions to being a nobleman. He says that this innkeeper will try to talk to them and convince them of his status in society. The three men leave, and the landlord of the Three Pigeons chuckles approvingly to himself that Tony is a "damned mischievous son of a whore."

Tony hopes to get revenge on his stepfather, who disapproves of him, by taking advantage of the fact that their old-fashioned house could easily be taken for an inn (especially by Marlow and Hastings who are used to everything being done in the latest fashions). Tony is aware of the dynamics around him and is clever enough to manipulate people who think themselves superior to him. The landlord of The Three Pigeons, who would never dare to play such a trick on members of the upper class, finds Tony's joke especially hilarious.

ACT 2

At Hardcastle's house, Hardcastle is teaching his servants how to behave around his guests. Calling them blockheads, he instructs them not to interact with the guests. A servant named Diggory says that it will be difficult not to laugh if Hardcastle tells the story about Ould Grouse. Hardcastle laughs with Diggory, then resumes giving his lesson. He asks who will pour wine if one of the guests asks for his glass to be refilled, but none of the servants move. Hardcastle hears a horse and coach driving up and leaves to greet his guests. The servants scatter, uncertain of what they are supposed to do.

More formal relationships exist between servants and masters in the city than in the countryside, so Hardcastle worries that Marlow will look down on him if he sees the friendly relationship he has with his servants. Diggory is uneducated and uncultured, but he shows his intelligence and personality, reminding Hardcastle of their real human relationship by mentioning an old story that makes them all laugh.

A servant shows Marlow and Hardcastle into the room. They look around them approvingly, but remark sadly that fine old houses often end up as **inns** when the owners lose their fortunes. They compare good and bad inns and the cost of staying in them.

Hardcastle's house is full of old-fashioned but high-quality furniture and decorations that fit with Marlow and Hasting's ideas of what an inn should look like. Tony seems to hae anticipated this and took advantage of it to play his prank.

Hastings says that Marlow has spent so much time travelling that it is surprising he lacks confidence. Marlow says that his life has been spent at college and in **inns**, so he has never spent time with women of his own class and only knows how to get along with lower-class women. Among "women of reputation," Marlow is so scared he wants to get away as quickly as possible. Hastings says that Marlow would be very popular with women of his own class if he spoke to them as eloquently as he does to barmaids and housemaids, but Marlow remarks that he is much too scared to do so.

Because Marlow has attended excellent educational institutions and travelled abroad, he is expected to exude confidence and mastery in social situations. Marlow clearly fears he will fail to measure up to these expectations, especially around women of his own class. This lack of confidence may come from having grown up without many social interactions in his family circle.

Hastings ask Marlow how he plans to court and marry a woman if he cannot bring himself to talk to one. Marlow says he could not possibly go through the formal courtship process. He says he has come to see the Hardcastles because his father asked him to and he is a dutiful son, but he will not try to overcome his shyness with Kate.

Even though Marlow wants to have a relationship, he feels that his shyness and insecurity will be impossible to overcome. He has resigned himself to his fate, but knowing that this will disappoint his father, he pretends that he is looking for a wife.

Marlow says that his other motive in visiting the Hardcastles was to facilitate Hastings's courtship of Constance. Marlow knows that the Hardcastles will welcome Hastings because he is his friend, and, in that way, they will get to know Hastings and see that they should approve of his marriage to Constance. Hastings is touched by Marlow's generosity. He says that he would never ask for Marlow's help if he didn't have the purest intentions with Constance: he wants her because of who she is and does not care about her fortune. He also secured her deceased father's permission to marry her and knows she wants to marry him. Marlow says that Hastings is lucky to be able to attract women. He is unable to conquer his nervousness, can only hope to date women who are below him in social status, and will never find a wife.

The courtship between Constance and Hastings seems to have been interrupted by her father's death. Without an introduction by a respected acquaintance of her guardian's family, Constance and Hastings will not be able to get permission to marry. While Marlow is afraid of all women of his social stature, Hastings worries that he will be seen as a fortune-hunter because he is pursuing a woman with an inheritance. Class, along with permission from guardians or parents, is an important consideration for any courtship in England at this time.

Hardcastle enters the room and greets them warmly, saying he is a generous and welcoming host. Ignoring Hardcastle, whom he believes is the innkeeper, Marlow talks to Hastings about what they ought to wear when they meet Constance and Kate. Hardcastle continually tries to redirect their attention by telling a story about his career in the army, but they continue to talk about which waistcoats to wear. Finally, cutting Hardcastle off, Marlow asks for a glass of punch. Hardcastle is taken aback at his guest's rudeness, but he gives them punch and offers a toast to their getting to know one another. Marlow thinks this is very inappropriate behavior for an innkeeper.

This interaction points out just how out of order Marlow's priorities are. Marlow fixates on making a good impression superficially with his clothing, even though he has resigned himself to never really getting to know Kate. At the same time, nervous about being judged by Kate and Hardcastle, he seems to try to reassure himself of his own superior stature by treating the man he believes is the innkeeper with particular rudeness and entitlement. The audience can see that Tony's trick is already making a fool of those who think that they are better than him.

Feeling that there is no way to get Hardcastle to leave them alone, Marlow engages him in conversation, but his attitude is mocking. He says that Hardcastle must have a lot of business, especially during political campaigns, because he makes such good punch. Hardcastle says he has given up engaging in politics, but he does handle most of his business in his house.

Hardcastle assumes that Marlow is asking if he participates in electing parliamentary representatives, as most prominent country landowners would have, but Marlow is actually asking whether the inn gets a lot of business during campaign season. Hardcastle's eccentricity is on display: his dislike for all things modern has led him to give up fulfilling his civic duty.

Hardcastle tries to begin telling one of his war stories, but Marlow interrupts him, asking what is on the dinner menu. Hardcastle is shocked at this rude demand, but he reads off the list of fancy dishes he planned to feed his guests. Marlow and Hastings scoff at this list, saying they like plain foods when travelling. Finally, the two young men say that they suppose they will just have to eat his food. Marlow demands to see their rooms and check that the beds are freshly made. Shocked at this impudence, Hardcastle insists on showing Marlow the rooms himself, and the two men exit.

As shown by his earlier drilling of his servants, Hardcastle had hoped to prove his sophistication to his guests with an elegant meal. The two young men find the idea of eating such delicacies at an inn ridiculous, but they might have found Hardcastle's menu pretentious even if they knew who he was. Hardcastle's fixation on serving a fine meal is shown to have been out of touch with his guests' supposedly more refined tastes.

Hastings is left alone, and Constance enters the room. Hastings is overjoyed to see her but asks what she is doing at an **inn**. Constance says that they are in Hardcastle's house, not an inn. When she hears that a young man told Hastings and Marlow the house was an inn, she laughs, quickly surmising that this was a trick of her cousin Tony's. Hastings asks if this is the same cousin that her aunt, Mrs. Hardcastle, wants her to marry. Constance answers that it is, but that Tony himself has no desire to marry her. Her aunt has taken over trying to persuade Constance to marry Tony and Constance allows her to believe that she is succeeding.

The play's original audience would perhaps have expected the love triangle between Tony, Constance, and Hastings to cause jealousy, misunderstandings, and drama, but in this more straightforward "laughing comedy," Hastings trusts Constance and doesn't feel threatened by her relationship with Tony. Instead, Constance and Hastings are happy to see each other and easily fall into an unconstrained and honest conversation.

Hastings says that Marlow's visit has given them a great opportunity. Once the horses have rested a bit, he wants to elope with her. Constance says she is reluctant to leave behind the jewels she inherited from her uncle, but she has been trying to convince Mrs. Hardcastle to let her wear them and thinks that she is making some progress in persuading her. Once she gets her hands on the jewels, she says, she will be ready to run away with him. Hastings says he cares nothing about the jewels, only about her.

Once again, Constance and Hastings's relationship defies the usual dramatic conventions of Goldsmith's time. Instead of romantically throwing all practical concerns to the wind at the opportunity to elope with Hastings, Constance insists that she doesn't want to give up her inheritance when she marries. According to more conventional plot structures, Hastings might take this as a sign that Constance doesn't love him enough, but Goldsmith was more interested in encouraging his audience to laugh at the follies of human nature than he was in dramatizing such follies.

Hastings tells Constance that if Marlow learns that he is in Hardcastle's house and not an **inn**, he will be so mortified by his mistake that he will leave immediately and ruin their plan. They decide not to tell him about his mistake. Marlow reenters and says that he is losing his patience with the way the innkeeper continually follows him around.

Hastings and Constance decide not to spare Marlow further embarrassment in front of the Hardcastles by revealing Tony's trick to him. They know that if they tell him about his mistake, he will ruin his own chances of making a happy match with Kate, and their own chance at marriage.

Marlow notices Constance, and Hastings tells Marlow that, by a lucky accident, Constance and Kate are both at the **inn** now. Becoming nervous about meeting the women, Marlow says that his **clothing** looks bad after a day spent travelling and he wants to wait until the next day to meet Kate at her own house. Constance intercedes, saying that Kate will take any signs of travelling in his appearance as a sign that he cannot wait to meet her. Very nervous, Marlow begs Hastings not to leave him alone with Kate. Hastings says that Kate is only a woman, but Marlow replies that she is the one woman he is most terrified to meet.

All of Marlow's arrogance instantly fades away when he sees Constance and understands that the time has come for him to meet Kate. Panicstricken, Marlow hopes to put off meeting Kate by fixating on appearances, perhaps because he knows that this is something he can control, while he can't control whether Kate likes him.


Kate enters. She has just returned from a walk and is wearing a bonnet. She says to herself that she will act very restrained and modest, just as she imagines Marlow expects her to. Hastings introduces Kate and Marlow, but Marlow looks uncomfortable and says nothing. Finally, Kate speaks, saying she is glad Marlow arrived safely. Stammering, Marlow says they had only a few problems on the road, then reverses himself, saying they had many accidents on the road. As Marlow nervously struggles to make small talk, Hastings whispers words of encouragement in his ear, telling him he has never been so eloquent in his life and he is impressing Kate. Finally, Hastings says that he and Constance will let Kate and Marlow talk alone. Marlow panics and begs Hastings to stay, but Hastings says he wants to speak with Constance alone.

Kate wants to make a good impression on Marlow, so she acts like a very proper young lady. Marlow, however, is so uncomfortable he can hardly speak, let alone get a sense of what he thinks of Kate. Hastings hopes to help Marlow overcome his insecurity, but just as he would like to spend time alone with Constance, he recognizes that Kate and Marlow will need to spend time together alone to get to know one another. Marlow has no hope that he will be able to overcome his insecurity and get to know Kate, so he sees no point in spending time alone with her.

Left alone with Kate, Marlow is silent. Kate tries to draw him out, asking him about his experience with women. He says he has no experience, then says he is sure he is boring her. She assures him she is enjoying their serious conversation. Marlow begins several sentences but cannot finish them. Kate supplies the ends of his sentences, then begins to make them up entirely when he becomes too embarrassed even to start a sentence. They discuss virtue, refinement and hypocrisy in generic terms. Kate assures Marlow that she enjoys his conversation, but Marlow can bear his embarrassment no longer and pretends to see Constance beckoning to them. He then leaves. Alone, Kate laughs to herself at his incredible shyness. She says she wishes she could teach him a little confidence, because she gets the sense she might like him, although she cannot be sure. Then she follows him to go to Constance.

Although Kate earlier experienced a little nervousness going into this blind date with the possibility to turn into an arranged marriage, she is able to let this go. Faced with his awkwardness, she doesn't feel awkward herself, but tries to draw Marlow out of his shell. Even though he cannot get over his embarrassment and even makes up an excuse to get away from her, Kate senses that there is something about him she might like. She is self-confident enough to realize that their bad conversation was not because Marlow didn't like her, but because she made him nervous. Even though their first conversation was an utter flop, Kate does not dismiss Marlow entirely.

Tony and Constance enter, followed by Hastings and Mrs. Hardcastle. Constance flirts with Tony, but he tells her to leave him alone because he has no interest in her. Mrs. Hardcastle is very interested in hearing from Hastings about all the latest fashions. She tells him that she has never been to London, but she reads about fashion in magazines and hears from her friends about trends. She asks him what he thinks of her hairstyle and he praises it lavishly, saying she must have a French stylist. She tells him she copied it from a magazine and arranged it herself.

Mrs. Hardcastle doesn't realize that Hastings is Constance's suitor, and is excited to discuss the latest fashions with someone from London. Her obsession with far away things that have little to do with her life makes her seem vain. Just as Constance flirts with Tony to deceive Mrs. Hardcastle, Hastings befriends his lover's aunt so that she will not suspect him of intending to run away with Constance.

Mrs. Hardcastle complains about Hardcastle's old-fashioned insistence on continuing to wear a wig. She also asks Hastings what the most fashionable age is. Hastings answers that forty was recently in fashion, but women are planning to make fifty the most fashionable age. Mrs. Hardcastle says she will be too young to be fashionable. Indicating Constance, Hastings says she would be considered little more than a child in fashionable society. Mrs. Hardcastle complains that her niece thinks she is old enough to wear jewels. Looking at Constance and Tony, Hastings asks if Tony is Mrs. Hardcastle's brother.

Although Mrs. Hardcastle is correct that wigs have fallen out of fashion, the idea that people's ages can make them more or less fashionable is a ridiculous one. Hastings humors her in this because he wants to keep her on his good side. Hastings senses that Mrs. Hardcastle is lying about her age when she says she is under fifty. Understanding that she is particularly vain about looking younger than she is, Hastings pretends to think that Tony is her brother, not her son.

Mrs. Hardcastle points out the way Constance and Tony flirt, telling Hastings that they will be married. She calls to Tony to ask what seductive things he is saying to Constance. Tony replies that he is asking her to leave him alone. Mrs. Hardcastle assures Constance that Tony says how much he likes her when she is not around. She asks Hastings whether he thinks Constance and Tony look alike, then orders the cousins to stand back to back to show that they are the same height. Tony takes the opportunity to headbutt Constance. Mrs. Hardcastle scolds Tony, saying he should act like a grown man.

Everyone in this scene except Tony is acting deceptively. Mrs. Hardcastle lies to Constance about what Tony says about Constance when she is absent, while Hastings pretends not to know Constance, and Constance pretends to love Tony. Constance and Hastings both understand the situation perfectly, while the foolish and controlling Mrs. Hardcastle is truly deceived.

Angry at being babied by his mother, Tony says that if he is grown, Mrs. Hardcastle should stop making a fool of him and give him his fortune. She charges him with ingratitude, saying she nursed him back from illnesses. Tony says she forced medicines on him that he didn't need. Hastings tells Mrs. Hardcastle that he will try to talk some sense into Tony about his obligations. Mrs. Hardcastle, seeming to think this is a good idea, announces that she and Constance must retire. The two women exit, Mrs. Hardcastle lamenting her son's treatment of her, leaving Hastings and Tony alone.

Tony feels that his mother seeks to control and smother him under the guise of doing things for his own good. He hungers for the freedom that he has been promised once he reaches the age of twenty-one. Meanwhile, Hastings also wants to remove Constance from Mrs. Hardcastle's control. To this end, he has convinced Mrs. Hardcastle that he is on her side and that she can trust him to reason with Tony.

Tony sings a little song to himself, then tells Hastings not to worry about Mrs. Hardcastle's distress. Hastings asks if Tony has no interest in women. Tony answers that he is not interested in a tricky, unattractive girl like Constance. He tells Hastings that his type is very different: he likes the black eyes and broad, red cheeks of Bet Bouncer. Hastings asks if Tony would be happy to see someone else marry Constance. Tony can hardly believe that there could be such a person, but Hastings explains that he wants to marry Constance himself. Tony pledges to help Hastings escape with Constance and get her jewels for them to take with them too. Happily, Tony sings a song, and the two men exit.

Tony and Constance are a terribly matched couple: she is refined, he is rustic, and they have no interest in one another. Based on his description of her, Bet Bouncer does not sound attractive according to London's standards of beauty, but Tony knows himself and what he likes. He lacks his mother's pretentions to be anything other than a country bumpkin. Tony is excited at the idea of forging an alliance with Hastings to get rid of Constance and defeat his mother's plans for him.

ACT 3

Alone on stage, Hardcastle wonders aloud why his friend Sir Charles described Marlow as a modest man. He has been shocked by Marlow's presumptuousness: Marlow has sat in his chair by the fire and asked him to have his boots cleaned.

Hardcastle planned to impress his friend's son with the elegant way his home is run, but instead Marlow has scoffed at his arrangements and made rude demands. Tony's trick is having its desired effect on his step-father.

Kate enters. She is now wearing the plain **clothing** her father prefers. He says that there was no reason for her to change because he was mistaken in thinking she might marry the modest Marlow. Both Kate and Hardcastle express astonishment at Marlow's behavior, but Hardcastle mistakenly thinks that Kate also experienced his behavior as impudent (when in fact she experienced his extreme shyness). Hardcastle says that Marlow learned it all from a French dancing master, but Kate says then he wouldn't be so timid and awkward. They compare their experiences with Marlow and discover that they are entirely different.

Hardcastle believes that Marlow's rudeness is a sign of the bad influence of the French on fashionable, rich young men (or "macaronis") of the time, turning them arrogant, rude, and entitled. Kate, on the other hand, has met the version of Marlow who is hobbled by his own shyness. Like her father, she believes that these experiences should give Marlow confidence, but she has seen how little self-assurance his broad exposure to the world has really given him.

Hardcastle says that at least they are agreed on the matter of rejecting Marlow, but Kate urges that they give him another chance. She says that he is the kind of man you seldom meet in the countryside and he might have a better character than first impressions suggest. Hardcastle scoffs, saying that Kate, like most women, thinks she can shape Marlow into a good husband because she finds him physically attractive. Kate reminds her father that he thinks more highly of her intelligence than this, and he apologizes for the insult. They agree to give Marlow another chance and see who is right, whether he is the impudent man who offended Hardcastle or the shy one who was too modest to speak to Kate. Then they both exit.

Kate shrewdly realizes that, given her geographic isolation and her father's dislike of traveling to town, she is unlikely to meet many other men who will be as good a match for her as Marlow is. While her father initially ridicules this, believing she has only shallow considerations like Marlow's appearance in mind, Kate's gentle reminder to her father is enough to draw an apology from him because of their strong and mutually respectful relationship.

Tony enters, holding a box of Constance's jewels. Hastings enters and asks Tony if he has been pretending to love Constance so that Mrs. Hardcastle will not suspect the planned elopement. Tony does not answer this question, instead telling Hastings that he has taken Constance's jewels for them. He hands Hastings the box of jewels. Hastings asks how Tony got the jewels, and Tony says that he has keys to his mother's drawers, from which he often takes money to go to the alehouse. He rationalizes that this is not stealing because the money is meant for him eventually. Hastings points out that Constance is currently trying to convince Mrs. Hardcastle to give them the jewels and that that would be a more appropriate way to procure them, but Tony predicts that his mother will not relinquish the jewels and tells Hastings to hold onto the box for now. Hastings worries about how Mrs. Hardcastle will react when she sees the jewels are gone.

Hastings had not imagined that Tony would steal the jewels for them, because this is undignified and unethical. He had only hoped that Tony would aid Constance in pullng the wool over Mrs. Hardcastle's eyes. But Tony explains that he is used to stealing from his mother, who will never be convinced to relinquish any control over him or Constance. Tony's lack of respect for his mother and for normal codes of behavior are both symptoms of her smothering upbringing and refusal to allow him independence now that he is an adult. Hastings is unused to this world and still hopes that Constance can trick her aunt into giving her the jewels.

Tony sees Mrs. Hardcastle and Constance approaching and tells Hastings to run off. Hastings exits, and Constance and Mrs. Hardcastle enter, discussing the jewels. Mrs. Hardcastle argues that Constance needs no jewels to enhance her beauty and that jewels are out of fashion. She explains that when her acquaintances go to town with their jewels, they return without them. When Constance continues to press her aunt, saying that the jewels may make Tony like her better, Mrs. Hardcastle says she is not sure that she still has the jewels.

Mrs. Hardcastle cannot be tricked into giving up the jewels because she knows that they give her leverage over Constance. Her explanation that jewels are out of fashion, however, once again reflects her vain obsession with fashion and her poor understanding of the world. Mrs. Hardcastle's acquaintances do not return from town without their valuable jewels because they are out of fashion, but because they spend or gamble away all their money.

Tony draws his mother aside and tells her that the only way to shut Constance up is to tell her the jewels are lost. Mrs. Hardcastle thinks this is a funny idea and agrees, asking Tony to back up her story. Mrs. Hardcastle tells Constance that the jewels are gone, and Tony says he can confirm this. Constance says that Mrs. Hardcastle could not possibly be so calm about such a loss, since she would have to make up for it. Mrs. Hardcastle says she hopes Constance's jewels will be found soon, but she will lend her niece garnets to wear in the meantime. Constance says she hates garnets and is very angry when Mrs. Hardcastle goes to get them for her. Tony reassures her, saying she can take the garnets on top of her jewels, which he has already given to Hastings. He tells Constance to run to Hastings. Constance is overjoyed.

Tony suggests to his mother that they deceive Constance, but only because the joke will really be on Mrs. Hardcastle. Mrs. Hardcastle, who wishes to be closer to her son, readily agrees to lie to Constance about something very serious. Constance feels almost certain that she is being lied to, because she knows that Mrs. Hardcastle would not be calm about the fortune going missing. Still, Constance is disturbed at the idea that the jewels could be missing, and Tony will not let this deception to cause trouble by going on for long. He tells her the truth as soon as he has the opportunity.

Mrs. Hardcastle rushes back in, shouting that the jewels have been stolen. Tony commends his mother's ability to act upset and promises he will bear witness that the jewels have been misplaced. No matter how many times she tells him he is not joking, Tony continues to assure her that he will bear witness to her false story. Eventually she asks if he is laughing at her, and he says he can bear witness to that, too. The mother and son exit, yelling at one another.

While Tony quickly reassured Constance of the truth about her jewels, he has no desire to reduce his mother's distress. Instead, he takes pleasure in getting back at her for her obsession with the jewels, which she holds over Constance in the same way she holds his inheritance over him.

Kate and her maid, Pimple, enter. Kate has learned about Tony's prank and laughs with Pimple at Marlow's mistaking their house for an **inn**. Pimple tells Kate that Marlow is getting even more confused. When Kate walked past Marlow in her simple **clothing**, Marlow asked Pimple if Kate was the inn's barmaid. Kate asks Pimple if she is certain that Marlow doesn't remember her face from their conversation. Pimple affirms this, and Kate says that he was too shy to try to look at her, and her bonnet also covered her face. Kate says she will not correct Marlow's mistake. Since he only speaks to lower-class women, Kate will make an impression on him by pretending to be a lower-class woman, while also judging her own interest in him as a potential husband. Kate does an impression of a lower-class woman for Pimple, who tells her it will work to trick Marlow.

The clothing-obsessed Marlow believes he can judge people accurately by what they wear. Seeing Kate in simple clothing, he assumes this corresponds to her stature in the world. Kate decides to play into Marlow's mistake, because she knows he is more comfortable around lower-class women. She feels confident that he will be attracted to her once the factors that intimidated him are removed. By placing herself in a vulnerable position, she will be able to see his true values. Even though Kate is not entirely put off by the idea of his using his superior status to seduce lower-class women, she wants to see for herself how Marlow really conducts himself.

Pimple exits, and Marlow enters, complaining to himself that there is nowhere in the house to find privacy away from the innkeeper and his wife. Pretending to be a servant, Kate asks him if he called, but he ignores her. He says to himself that Miss Hardcastle seemed much too serious for him, and he thinks she wasn't very attractive. Kate stands in front of him again, asking if he called for a servant. Still ignoring Kate, Marlow says to himself that he has met Kate as his father asked him to and can now return home. Kate asks him again, and then again, if he called for a servant. He says no over and over.

Marlow tries to reassure himself that he did not miss out on meeting a potential mate when he was too nervous to open up to Kate. He also tells himself that he has done what his father asked, which reveals his anxiety about being able to measure up to his father's expectations for him. Kate is readying to deceive him by pretending to be a maid, but this speech shows that it is Marlow's own insecurities that leave him open to being tricked.

Finally, Marlow looks at the "servant" standing in front of him. Immediately interested, he tells her she is beautiful and begins to flirt with her, asking her age and coming close to look at her face. Kate keeps up a steady banter with him, playing the role of a quick-witted, self-respecting, and spirited young woman of the servant class. Marlow tries to kiss her, and she quips that he is trying to learn her age from her mouth as people do when examining horses. Kate remarks that Marlow had been shy and not quite so excitable when he met Miss Hardcastle. Marlow admits to himself that she is right but says to her that Miss Hardcastle was such an awkward, squinting thing that he was not at all intimidated by her, he just didn't want to hurt her feelings by rejecting her.

Since Marlow was too shy even to look at Kate's face when he thought she was a member of his own class (and a potential wife), Kate has managed to turn his prejudices about class to her own advantage. While Marlow thinks he is flirting with someone of lower social standing, in fact Kate's deception has given her power over him. He now feels more at ease and eagerly talks to the "barmaid" about Kate Hardcastle. Because Marlow is attracted to her now, Kate can see that the awkwardness of their first conversation isn't conclusive proof that they won't like each other.

Kate, still playing the role of barmaid, says that it sounds like he is a real ladies' man. He says he is; the women in town call him a Rattle, and he spends time at a club with a bunch of jolly, older women. Kate laughs at this, and Marlow worries that she is laughing at him, but she explains that she can't imagine how the women have time to take care of their families when they spend time drinking with him. Marlow is reassured that Kate is not laughing at him. He asks if she works, and she says she embroidered everything in the house. He says he wants her to show him her work, and grabs her. She struggles to escape his grasp.

Marlow describes something between a brothel and an inn, where he spends a good deal of time with lower-class women in front of whom he is not self-conscious. In keeping with popular assumptions of the time, Marlow believes that most lower-class women are sexually promiscuous. Clearly, this assumption informs his interaction with the disguised Kate. Although his behavior would perhaps be frowned upon by modern audiences, to Kate it shows that he has passion and energy and is not always crippled by shyness.

Hardcastle walks into the room and is shocked to see Marlow groping Kate. Marlow curses his bad luck at being caught by the innkeeper and leaves the room. Agitated, Hardcastle asks Kate if this is the modest, shy man she described. Kate says that her father should trust her, and that she will prove Marlow to be as he was described. Hardcastle is difficult to convince, saying he wants to throw Marlow out of his house. Kate says she needs an hour to persuade her father, and he grants this, but says that Kate must promise to be transparent with him. Kate agrees, saying she has always been proud to do as he tells her, because he is so kind.

While young lower-class women of this era were assumed to be promiscuous, a high value was placed on protecting young upper-class women from any kind of sexual experience that might be seen as indiscrete. The fact that Kate is able to persuade her father not to throw Marlow out of the house after Hardcastle sees Marlow trying to force himself on Kate is a sign of Hardcastle's trust and respect for his daughter.

ACT 4

Hastings and Constance enter. Constance tells Hastings that Hardcastle has received a letter from Sir Charles saying that he is coming to visit that night. Hastings says they must leave that night, before Sir Charles can reveal his identity to the Hardcastles. He assures her that he has her jewels and has given them to Marlow for safekeeping. He also says that Tony has promised him fresh horses for the trip. Hastings exits, and Constance sets off to distract her aunt by pretending to love Tony.

Hastings has pretended to be a total stranger to Constance to keep Mrs. Hardcastle from trying to keep them apart. Meanwhile, Tony is doing all that he can to help Hastings and Constance because he hopes his mother will stop trying to force him to marry someone he doesn't love once his cousin Constance is no longer available.

Marlow enters with a servant. He says he can't imagine what Hastings was thinking, giving him a box of valuables to look after when he knows they are both travelling. He asks the servant whether he gave the box to the **inn**'s landlady for safekeeping as he had asked. (The "landlady" is in fact not a landlady at all, but Mrs. Hardcastle.) The servant says that he had done as told, and that the landlady had demanded to know how he had gotten the box and who he was. The servant exits. Marlow laughs to himself at this report, thinking that the landlord and landlady are both very eccentric. He also thinks about the barmaid he met (Kate), and vows to try again to seduce her.

Hastings's decision to allow Marlow to continue in his belief that the Hardcastles home is an inn brings a consequence he didn't anticipate. Marlow, believing he is helping Hastings elope without a hitch, has instead returned the box of jewels that Tony stole from Mrs. Hardcastle's drawers to her. Mrs. Hardcastle was suspicious that the servant who gave the box of jewels back to her was the thief, not realizing that Tony stole the jewels to give them to Constance.

Hastings enters the room, flustered by all his preparations for the elopement. He notices Marlow's good mood. Marlow tells him that, despite his shyness, he has met a woman, a beautiful barmaid. Hastings asks Marlow if he is sure that the woman wants to sleep with him and says he should not take a woman's honor. Marlow says that barmaids have no honor, and he certainly won't do anything in the **inn** without paying for it, including sleeping with the barmaid. He promises Hastings that if the girl is not as promiscuous as he assumes, he will not try to sleep with her.

Marlow assumes that, unlike women of his class (who are supposed to remain virgins until marriage), lower-class women are happy to have sex with him as long as he pays them afterwards. Marlow's belief in a fundamental difference between upper-class women and lower-class women is shown to be false by his inability to recognize that Kate, an upper-class woman, is masquerading as a barmaid.

Hastings asks Marlow if he stashed the box of jewels somewhere safe as he asked him to. Laughing, Marlow tells Hastings he was foolish to think of putting such a valuable item in a coach, and explains that he had the better idea of giving them to the landlady. Hastings is shocked and disappointed that Mrs. Hardcastle now has the jewels again. He says to himself that he has lost any hope of having a fortune, but puts on a happy face for Marlow. He tells Marlow he hopes he will have as much luck with the barmaid as he had in stashing the jewels. Laughing a bit hysterically, he leaves.

Hastings believes Marlow will be so embarrassed if he learns the truth about where they are that he will leave immediately, ruining both their chances at love. So, even though Hastings is bitterly disappointed to learn that Marlow has taken it upon himself to stash Constance's jewels more "safely" by giving them back to Mrs. Hardcastle, he does not reveal his feelings.

Hardcastle enters the room. He says to himself that he can hardly contain his anger at Marlow, whose servants have gotten very drunk. He says to Marlow that he hopes he feels that he has been made welcome, but Marlow's servants are setting a terrible example for his servants with the way they are drinking. Marlow misunderstands Mr. Hardcastle's complaint, thinking the innkeeper is upset because Marlow's servants are not drinking *enough*, thus depriving the innkeeper of income. He tells Hardcastle this and calls for his servant. The servant is extremely drunk, and Marlow points to this as proof that he is being a good guest.

Hardcastle, who has prepared his servants to be on their best behavior in front of Marlow, is shocked and appalled to hear that Marlow has effectively instructed his own servants to act as badly as possible. In the same way that Marlow assumes he can sleep with a barmaid as long as he pays her afterwards, he assumes that the innkeeper wants to sell as much alcohol as possible, even if it means rowdy, disrespectful guests.

Hardcastle loses his patience entirely and tells Marlow he is kicking him out of the house. Marlow is shocked, and says he has been doing everything he can to please Hardcastle. He initially refuses to go, saying he has a right to stay, that it is his house. Outraged, Hardcastle tells Marlow to take the silver, and the mahogany table, his Hogarth print of the Rake's Progress, and all the other valuable possessions in the house. Marlow demands the bill, but Hardcastle ignores this, continuing to berate Marlow for his bad manners. Before storming from the room, Hardcastle says that he expected a polite young man based on Sir Charles's letter, but instead he sees that Marlow is a bully. He swears that he will tell Marlow's father all about his behavior.

Hardcastle pointedly offers Marlow a popular Hogarth print depicting the downfall of a rake. The rake, like the macaroni, was a popular stereotype of a spoiled, arrogant, free-wheeling young man who thinks he is better than everyone around him. In his rage, Hardcastle gives vent to the truth about his identity as Sir Charles's friend, finally bringing Marlow's mistake out into the open. Marlow had, of course, only come to visit the Hardcastles to please his father, and will be mortified to learn that he has been mistreating Hardcastle.

Left alone, Marlow wonders what Hardcastle's last statement could have meant. Kate enters and sees that Marlow seems to be realizing he is not in an **inn**. She says to herself that she will not disclose the full truth to him yet. He stops her and asks who she is. She replies that she is a poor relation of the house. He asks if she means she serves as a barmaid in the inn, and she laughs in feigned surprise, saying that this is Mr. Hardcastle's house. Marlow feels humiliated and is sure the story of his mistake will spread far and wide.

Realizing that Marlow may become shy again, or even angry, if she reveals her true identity as a woman of his own class, Kate continues to pretend to be poor. However, she brings herself slightly closer to Marlow in status by saying she is related to the Hardcastles.

Marlow tells Kate that he mistook her for the barmaid of the **inn**. She pretends to be hurt by the idea that she could have such a low status. Marlow explains that he stupidly misunderstood everything around him and now he wants to get away from the scene of his humiliation. Pretending to cry, Kate says she hopes that she didn't do anything to drive Marlow away, especially because he has been so kind to her.

Kate understands that Marlow thought that she would sleep with him because she was a barmaid. By acting offended, she suggests to him that he is mistaken to assume that he knows what class people come from and that their class will dictate everything about their behavior and values. At the same time, Kate's show of emotion distracts Marlow from his own feelings of embarrassment.

Marlow is touched to see how sad Kate is to see him go. He tells her she is the only person in the family he will be sorry to part with. But, he explains, he could never hope for a romance between them because they come from such different backgrounds. He adds that he could never try to seduce her, since he can see that she is virtuous and trusting. To herself, Kate registers approval at his unwillingness to try to seduce a virgin.

Marlow often assumes he is better than those in the lower class, but this seems to arise from a need to escape his own insecurities about not measuring up to the role of an upper-class man. Even though he acts disrespectfully to those he believes are inferior to him, he is not willing to exploit, coerce, or harm them. Kate approves of this attitude, which gives her hope that an increase in confidence will alleviate Marlow's crippling shyness among members of his class as well as his boorish rudeness to those of lower class.

Kate tells Marlow that she comes from just as respected a family as Miss Hardcastle, and that the only difference between her and Kate is fortune. If she had money, she says, she would give it all to him. Her declaration affects Marlow. He says that he would choose her as a wife if this would not disappoint his family. Overcome by emotion, he leaves the room. Kate says to herself that she now sees Marlow's good character and she will do everything in her power to keep him from departing. She exits.

Once again, Kate has slightly elevated the class status of the character she is playing. Now that Marlow is comfortable around her, she tells him that she is of nearly the same class status as he is, only less wealthy. Without realizing it, Marlow has had a personal breakthrough: he is talking to a woman of his class without crushing anxiety. However, like Kate, he wants to marry someone who will earn his family's approval, so he rushes off before his emotions get the best of him and he proposes.

Tony and Constance enter. Tony says it's a shame that Mrs. Hardcastle has gotten Constance's jewels back, but at least she believes that they were mislaid by a servant and suspects nothing. He says that he has helped Hastings to prepare horses for the elopement. As Mrs. Hardcastle enters, he and Constance continue to pretend to be in love, flirting and touching one another, to keep her from suspecting anything. Mrs. Hardcastle is thrilled to see that Tony and Constance seem to be in love. She says that they will be married tomorrow.

Having come close to being able to elope with her jewels, Constance does not cancel the planned elopement now that her inheritance is back in Mrs. Hardcastle's hands. She knows that her aunt will be much more vigilant about holding onto the jewels now and has decided to sacrifice her fortune to escape her aunt's control and marry the man she loves.

Diggory enters with a message for Tony, but Tony tells Diggory to give it to Mrs. Hardcastle to read aloud. Constance recognizes Hastings' handwriting on the note. She tries to distract Mrs. Hardcastle, telling her a funny story to keep her from reading the letter and discovering their plot. Meanwhile, Tony looks at the letter quizzically—the only part of it he can read is his own name. Mrs. Hardcastle sees Tony struggling and offers to read the letter out loud to him. Constance snatches the letter and, pretending to read from it, says that it is about cockfighting and is unimportant. Tony, very curious about the letter's exact contents, gives it to his mother to read aloud.

Having been kept at home all his life because of fictitious illnesses, Tony is functionally illiterate and gives all his letters to his mother to read, adding to his mother's ability to control him. Constance tries to keep Tony from revealing the plot to his mother, but she makes a mistake in her choice of topic. Although the cosmopolitan Constance finds cockfighting unimportant, the rustic Tony is a fan of this unsophisticated sport and will listen to any news about it with interest.

Mrs. Hardcastle reads the letter and is shocked and furious at its contents. In it, Hastings requests Tony's help getting well-rested horses so that he and Constance can elope. He also refers to Mrs. Hardcastle as a hag. Yelling at both Tony and Constance, Mrs. Hardcastle says she will send Constance off to her Aunt Pedigree, who will keep a strict watch over her. She leaves to give orders to the servants to prepare a carriage to take Constance away.

Mrs. Hardcastle gets a cruel shock when she learns that her son, niece, and the young guest who flattered her were all trying to deceive her and ruin her plans for Tony and Constance's marriage. Aunt Pedigree's name is suggestive of her role: Mrs. Hardcastle thinks she can protect the family pedigree from a marriage that does not warrant family approval.

Left alone, Constance berates Tony for showing his mother the letter. Hastings enters and berates Tony as well. Marlow enters and begins to vent his anger at having been tricked and then allowed to keep embarrassing himself. He and the others continue to insult Tony, while Tony tries his best to defend himself against their anger. Finally Marlow says that Tony is too much beneath them to stay angry with. He continues that the person he is truly angry with is Hastings. Hastings says he is too disappointed by his failed elopement to even consider Marlow's embarrassment. Constance says that they only kept Marlow in the dark because it was too late to keep him from embarrassing himself.

The three characters who represent the sophisticated, fashionable city have found their plans ruined by the unsophisticated, rustic Tony. They are angry at him for the embarrassment and disappointment he has caused them, but also at themselves and at one another. Tony did not mean to do any harm with his tricks and truly hoped to help Constance and Hastings escape, so he does not deserve the many insults they hurl at him.

A servant enters and tells Constance that Mrs. Hardcastle wants her to come to the carriage immediately. Marlow and Hastings continue to argue. Constance begs them to stop, and they do, Marlow apologizing for his bad temper. Hearing Mrs. Hardcastle yelling for her to come, Constance asks Hastings to stay faithful to her, even if they must wait three years to marry. Hastings is devastated. Marlow turns to Tony and rebukes him for causing all this strife. Tony, who has been lost in thought, yells that he has an idea. He tells Hastings to meet him in two hours in the garden outside and promises that he will make it up to him.

Recovering from their initial anger and seeing how upset their argument is making Constance, Marlow and Hastings make up. But they still have no idea how to improve upon the terrible separation Constance and Hastings now face. The bleak prospect of a three-year separation for two lovers who were on the cusp of a happy marriage is similar to those often faced by lovers in the sentimental novels and dramas of the time.

ACT 5

Hastings hears from a servant that Constance's carriage has driven off. The servant also reports that Sir Charles has arrived, and he and Hardcastle have been laughing over Marlow's mistake. Hastings leaves to go wait in the garden for Tony, although he has little confidence that Tony will be able to do anything to help.

Hastings has little hope that Tony will be able to do anything to help him. Having seen how Tony's illiteracy ruined their first plan for Hastings's elopement, Hastings has written Tony off as incapable and unintelligent.

Hardcastle and Sir Charles laugh together at how Marlow mistook Hardcastle for an innkeeper. Hardcastle feels that Marlow ought to have been able to tell that he was well-born, and Sir Charles says that Marlow must have thought Hardcastle was a very eccentric, snobbish innkeeper.

Hardcastle is sensitive about seeming inferior to members of his class from London, so the fact that Tony was able to trick Marlow into believing Hardcastle to be an innkeeper wounds Hardcastle's pride. Sir Charles helps Hardcastle to laugh off the embarrassment.

Hardcastle tells Sir Charles that he is very excited at the prospect of a marriage between their children, although Kate's dowry will not be large. Sir Charles says Marlow has plenty of money already but asks if Hardcastle is sure that Marlow really likes Kate. Hardcastle says that Kate says that Marlow likes her, and he himself saw Marlow grasp Kate's hand.

Although Marlow is still unaware that the woman who has impressed him is in fact Kate, his father and Hardcastle are already rejoicing that their children will marry. Marlow, who wants to please his father, is set up for another embarrassment.

Marlow enters and apologizes to Hardcastle, saying how embarrassed he is. Hardcastle tells Marlow that they will soon all laugh over it, once he and Kate decide to marry. Marlow denies any intention of marrying Kate. Hardcastle says that he saw them together, and Marlow denies that there was anything to see. Hardcastle thinks Marlow is embarrassed and tries to reassure him that he can express his true feelings about Kate. Sir Charles asks Marlow if he grabbed Kate's hand, and Marlow denies this, to Hardcastle's surprise. Very embarrassed, Marlow leaves the room.

While Hardcastle takes a friendly, informal tone with Marlow, Marlow is stiff and awkward. He is embarrassed by his mistake and wants only to get away from the Hardcastle home without further disappointing his father. This makes it even more awkward and painful for him to face this new misunderstanding, caused by Hardcastle having seen him grab Kate's hand.

Hastings is still waiting for Tony in the garden. Hastings doubts that Tony would show up and is overjoyed to see him when he arrives. Hastings asks Tony where he left Constance and Mrs. Hardcastle. Tony jokes with him that he left them where he found them, but Hastings doesn't understand. Tony explains that he took them in a large circle and brought them back to the house. He says that his mother is very scared and believes she is lost somewhere far from home. Hastings thanks Tony and goes to find Constance and elope with her, while Tony promises to keep Mrs. Hardcastle occupied. Hastings exits.

Although Tony does not have knowledge of the wider, more sophisticated world that Hastings and Constance know, he does know his own surroundings well. He has used this knowledge to cleverly come up with another plan to trick his mother and help Constance and Hastings. Although Hastings belittled Tony, Tony has once again proved that he is not inferior simply because he is less refined.

Mrs. Hardcastle enters. She is afraid, covered in mud, and under the impression that they are lost far from home in a land full of bandits. Tony stokes her fear. When he sees Hardcastle out for a stroll in the garden, he tells his mother that a highwayman is approaching. He instructs her to hide in a bush while he manages the stranger, promising to cough if the man seems dangerous to warn his mother to stay hidden.

Tony once again deceives his mother to keep her from interrupting Constance and Hardcastle's elopement. Considering her desire to travel far and wide, it is ironic that Mrs. Hardcastle is so petrified of danger and cannot even recognize her own backyard.

Hardcastle approaches Tony and asks if he left Mrs. Hardcastle at Aunt Pedigree's. Tony answers that the women are safe at his aunt's, and coughs loudly so that his mother will stay in place. Hardcastle is suspicious because Tony has returned too quickly from the trip. He says he is sure that he heard Tony speaking to another person and approaches the bushes to see who else is there. Mrs. Hardcastle bursts from the bushes and begs for the bandit to spare her son's life. Her husband asks if she really doesn't recognize him and their garden. He quickly surmises that Mrs. Hardcastle's distress and confusion are the result of one of Tony's tricks.

Of all the instances of mistaken identity in the play, Mrs. Hardcastle's mistaking her own husband for a bandit is the most ridiculous. But at the same time, this moment shows that even Mrs. Hardcastle, the play's least sympathetic character, has a sympathetic side. Even though Mrs. Hardcastle has not done Tony any good by smothering and seeking to control him, it is clear from her attempt to sacrifice her own life for her son's that her love is sincere, if misguided.

Realizing that she has been tricked, Mrs. Hardcastle turns angrily on Tony. Tony tells her that everyone says she spoiled him, and this is the result. Mrs. Hardcastle continues to yell at him as she follows him offstage, while Hardcastle remarks to himself that Tony is right about this, then follows them offstage.

Mrs. Hardcastle's smothering parenting style means that, even when she is terrified, she gets no sympathy from Tony, who only can feel resentment for the limits she has placed on him.

Constance and Hastings enter. Hastings encourages Constance to run off with him immediately, but Constance says she is too tired and stressed after the ordeal with Mrs. Hardcastle to elope that night. Hastings tries to convince her, saying they will never regret leaving behind her fortune because they love each other. Constance says that they should tell Hardcastle about their situation and hope that he can influence his wife to give them her permission to marry, which they need if Constance is going to keep her inheritance. They exit.

Instead of having to endure a years-long separation from her lover, Constance is returned to Hastings the same night she leaves him. Likewise, instead of readily promising to do anything to be with him, Constance's practical side reasserts itself, leading her to insist that they do what they can to avoid forgoing her inheritance. In this way, Goldsmith's comedy avoids some of the more overused plot devices of his time.

Back inside the house, Marlow comes to bid Kate goodbye, saying he did not know how sad he would be to leave her until this moment. Speaking in her own voice, Kate says he would not leave so quickly, if he really wanted to stay. Marlow is impressed by Kate's eloquence, but says that even though he wants to give up everything for her, he knows he would regret angering his father by marrying someone from a lower social class with less of an education. Kate says that she is not of lower birth than the woman he came to visit, but she is not wealthy, and she understands that what he is really interested in is marrying a rich woman.

Although she does not reveal that she is Kate Hardcastle, Kate now stops acting like she is someone else. Kate's gradual transformation of her behavior towards Marlow shows him that prejudging people based on the class they appear to come from is a mistake. Marlow is too captivated by Kate to become nervous about the fact that she is a woman of his class, but still wants to marry only with his father's blessing.

At this moment, Sir Charles and Hardcastle get in position behind a screen to eavesdrop and discover if Kate is telling the truth about Marlow's love for her. They hear Marlow tell Kate that he cares nothing for fortune, and that he first noticed her beauty but has become more and more impressed by the way she carries herself. Behind the screen, Sir Charles is shocked that his son lied to him about his feelings for Kate. Marlow tells Kate that he is determined to stay. He says he is sure his father will approve of her. Kate, meanwhile, continues to tell Marlow that she does not want to pressure him into marrying someone he thinks beneath him, and that she has too much self-respect to marry someone who thinks he is better than her. Marlow kneels before her, asking if he looks like he thinks he is better than her.

Kate's deception has worked: it has allowed Marlow to be comfortable enough to get to know her and fall in love. He now sees past her simple clothing, which he had assumed meant that she was his inferior, and recognizes a woman with values he respects. Kate's refusal to accept a proposal given to her by someone who believes himself to be her superior only increases his respect for her. Meanwhile, the two parents are at a loss as to why Marlow would lie to them about his feelings for Kate, if in fact he only wants to marry her with his father's permission.

Sir Charles and Hardcastle burst out from behind the screen and demands to know why Marlow has been lying to them. Marlow is completely confused, until it is revealed that the woman he has been speaking to is Kate Hardcastle herself. She laughs, saying that she is the tall, unattractive woman he met earlier as a very shy, modest man, and then again later while acting like a flirtatious lady's man. Marlow is extremely embarrassed, but Hardcastle tells him that everyone will forgive him for making a mistake and everything will be alright.

Although Marlow is plunged into his usual state of embarrassment upon learning how Kate deceived him, he is also being taught that mistakes can be forgiven. Kate laughs at his change of attitude towards her, but she does so in a way that makes clear to him that her love for him was not feigned. Hardcastle and Sir Charles laughingly give their support, giving Marlow the parental approval he has craved.

Mrs. Hardcastle and Tony enter the room. Mrs. Hardcastle says that Constance and Hastings have run off. Sir Charles exclaims that he knows Hastings to be an honorable man, and Hardcastle says that, in that case, he is glad Constance is going to marry him. Mrs. Hardcastle says that she is glad that they will get to keep Constance's fortune. If Constance had waited for Tony to be twenty-one and officially refuse to marry her, she would have gotten to keep her fortune, but she has run off without waiting for her cousin to come of age and reject her. Hardcastle disapproves of his wife's greediness.

Mrs. Hardcastle is fine with the news that her niece has eloped, because this means that Constance will forgo her fortune. Once Hardcastle hears that Hastings is a respectable man, however, he disapproves of his wife's attempts to force Constance to marry Tony just to keep money in the family. He may feel concerned that Sir Charles and Marlow will see his wife's greed and worry that Kate is similarly interested in Marlow for his money.

To Mrs. Hardcastle's displeasure, Constance and Hastings enter at that moment. They approach Hardcastle and lay their case before him, saying that Constance's deceased father wanted their marriage and now they hope that he will sympathize with them, even though his wife will not.

Once Hardcastle sees that Hastings not only has Sir Charles's stamp of approval, but also had Constance's father's approval, it is clear that there is no valid reason for his wife to block his marriage to Constance.

Mrs. Hardcastle scoffs at Constance and Tony, but Hardcastle asks Tony whether he in fact refuses to marry his cousin. Tony says that it doesn't matter if he refuses, because he is not of age. Hardcastle discloses that Tony is actually twenty-one years old, and that he has kept his stepson's age a secret because he had hoped Tony would mature more before inheriting his fortune. Now, however, he sees that the lie is causing more harm than good.

In a desperate attempt to keep control of her son for as long as possible, Mrs. Hardcastle has deceived Tony about how old he is. Hardastle sees that this is not serving Tony, but is causing harm to everyone. He can also see that Mrs. Hardcastle is not being a good guardian to Constance. Eager to do the right thing—and perhaps to be seen doing the right thing in front of Marlow and Sir Charles—Hardcastle reveals the truth.

Tony is shocked and happy. He says that he will not marry his cousin, which frees Constance to marry Hastings and keep her fortune. Mrs. Hardcastle is discontented, but all the other characters rejoice and look forward to the two couples' coming marriages. Hardcastle says that Kate is a wonderful daughter and he believes she will be a very good wife.

Mrs. Hardcastle, the only character who did not want the best for others, has been disappointed, with her son now free from her controlling influence. Marlow has been transformed from a man terrified of embarrassment to a man who has been completely humiliated—and who, through his humiliation, has found happiness.

EPILOGUE 1

Goldsmith likely wrote this Epilogue to be spoken by the actress playing Kate. It compares life to a five-act play and describes a play about the barmaid whom Kate was pretending to be. The barmaid begins her life shy and nervous and hoping to be hired to work at a country **inn**. In the second act, she gains confidence as she presides over a bar in the countryside. In the third, she moves to town, where she begins to have lovers and enjoy a busy social life while working. In the fourth act, she marries someone with money and begins to aspire to be fashionable and sophisticated. Finally, she grows old and passes her time playing cards. The first Epilogue concludes that, since the play is over, all that is left is for the Barmaid to plead that the audience reward the playwright by approving of the play they have just watched.

Just as prologues were often used to prepare audiences for the kind of performance they were about to see, epilogues were used as a final attempt to win the audience's favorable impression of a play. In this instance, a play which may have made the audience nervous through its bending of the normal rigid boundaries between the classes ends with a more conventional satirical portrayal of a flirtatious, social-climbing barmaid. By having the actor who played the upper-class Kate deliver this description of the fictitious barmaid, the play also continues to hint that class is more of a performance than an inborn quality that naturally separates or defines people.

EPILOGUE 2

The second Epilogue was written by Joseph Cradock to be spoken by the actor playing Tony. It provides an account of Tony's life after the main action of the play ends. Tony, the Epilogue reports, marries Bet Bouncer and decides to move to the town. There, they live a rowdy existence and throw their money around buying art and **clothing**, eager to prove that they are just as good as those who live in the city.

This second epilogue also takes up the issue of class and geography. It describes a time after the main action of the play when Tony and his new wife Bet go to London and live a boisterous life that would earn disapproval from snobbish city-dwellers. As in the first epilogue, the second epilogue presents a conventional satire of social-climbers and country bumpkins in the city, instead of the more subtle message the play itself delivered about class.

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