

She stoops to  
conquer character  
analysis



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Traditionally the pastoral genre celebrates the virtues of simple, unsophisticated life removed from the city. The rural countryside hosts a nostalgic population longing for a bucolic paradise where people live in peace, harmony and honesty, similar to the existence of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the fall. This depiction of idyllic rural life is presented by Goldsmith in *She Stoops to Conquer*, however the deception of characters throughout the play can be seen to distort this view of traditional country life.

Goldsmith uses the character of Mr Hardcastle to epitomise the honest nature of country folk. Mr Hardcastle is presented as a traditional, old country squire, who is characterised as open and direct. He confesses honestly that he 'loves everything that's old' and that he's not interested in 'vanity'. 'Vanity' suggests superficiality and that true character traits are omitted by 'jewels' and 'ornaments' in order to deceive those around and promote a dishonest appearance.

Hardcastle associates this 'vanity' with the town, which is seen traditionally in pastoral literature as nefarious and corrupt compared to the simple, pragmatic country setting. It could be interpreted that Mr Hardcastle's long life spent in the country, shown through use of the name 'squire' which has connotations of a rural existence, has resulted in his genuine personality, 'to be plain with you.' However, Goldsmith uses asides in Hardcastle's speech to show his anguish over the impudence of 'such a brazen dog', Marlow.

The asides present Hardcastle's true feelings of disgust towards the town folk which contrasts his direct speech to Marlow which remains dignified and

respectful, shown through the address of 'sir'. These asides present Hardcastle as a less direct character than originally perceived, suggesting country dwellers can be just as malicious as those from the town and subsequently, a country existence doesn't necessarily equate to an honest way of life. Despite this, it is the rudeness of Marlow and Hastings which arouses these feelings in Hardcastle through curt demands for 'warm punch'.

This reflects a primary theme in the pastoral genre of the town corrupting the country, since Hardcastle is cordial towards his servants as Goldsmith refers to each by their first name in Hardcastle's speech, 'Diggory', and Hardcastle's rude asides are presented to be spawned from the impudence of the town characters, thus suggesting that the country promotes courteous manners meanwhile the town corrupts and faults characters. Goldsmith characterises some characters as self-deceiving and deluded, which is technically a weakness.

Unlike Mr Hardcastle's love of 'old', Mrs Hardcastle contrarily speaks positively of the town, commenting on its ability to 'rub off the rust', 'rust' suggests that Mrs Hardcastle finds country life dull, contrasting the excitement of 'London' and the 'fashions'. Goldsmith uses references to places in London to suggest that Mrs Hardcastle is informed on 'every tete-a-tete', only to later reveal that ironically Mrs Hardcastle only 'enjoy(s) London at second-hand', through the 'Scandalous Magazine', which comically illuminates the fact she has never actually visited London.

To enforce this irony, Goldsmith utilises some references to sinister settings in London in Marlow's speech, 'bred' at 'Tower Wharf', which was not a fashionable area in the 18th century and was notorious for thievery which Mrs Hardcastle is ignorant to, shown by her grateful response 'pleased to say so'. This mockery of Mrs Hardcastle presents her as a pathetic woman who has deluded herself into believing she is astute to 'all the fashions', which can further be interpreted as a fault in her character which remains present at the end of the play, therefore suggesting the country isn't necessarily a utopic landscape of retribution.

Furthermore, Goldsmith characterises many of the rural characters as simple and stubborn, unwilling to change routine which is mimetic of the unyielding nature of the country, therefore any faults that they may have are irreversible. In Tony's song at the Three Pigeons pub, he toasts 'here's the Three Jolly Pigeons for ever', 'for ever' has a sense of routine which cannot be altered, reflecting that his life will never change and his tricks and mischief will continue 'for ever'. Consequently Goldsmith highlights the unyielding characteristic of the country which can nourish pre-existing traits in characters instead of correcting them.

The 'gentlemen' of the town Marlow and Hastings are initially presented by Goldsmith to be sophisticated and scholarly, which was how most men of the town were perceived in the 18th century. However, it soon becomes apparent that both characters possess faults underneath the posh urban veneer. Goldsmith reveals, through Hastings, that Marlow is 'such a trembler' when he is around women of high status, which is ironic

considering he should be able to converse easily with facets of high society to which he himself belongs.

Goldsmith then augments this fault in Marlow's character through stage directions, 'gathering courage', which reveals Marlow's 'awkward address' as he talks to Kate. Nonetheless, through Kate's deception Marlow is forced to amend his 'bashful manner'. Once Marlow 'mistook (Kate) for the barmaid' and a woman of low status, because of her attire 'that every lady wears in the country', he was able to look her 'full in the face' and speak without hesitation, shown through Goldsmith's use of stichomythia, and consequently overcome his faulted nature.

Therefore Goldsmith shows that through the simple bucolic, country and its inhabitants, Marlow could relax and correct his imperfections, developing into a more 'confident' character. Furthermore, when it's revealed to Marlow that Kate is in fact Hardcastle's daughter, Marlow's embarrassment which he describes as 'worse than death', proves to Hardcastle Marlow's earlier impudence was 'all a mistake', which resolved the tension between Hardcastle and Marlow formed from Marlow's supposed 'brazen' manner.

Despite this, Kate's deception of Marlow could be considered an unresolved fault especially considering a previous title of the play was Mistakes of the Night suggesting Kate's actions were faulted 'mistakes', which contradicts the stereotype of rural folk being welcoming and honest. However, Kate's deception was not malicious, which Goldsmith shows through interjections of laughter in Kate's speech 'ha! ha! ha!' The ruse ensured their romance, 'he

loves you', which would have gone amiss due to Marlow's 'mauvaise honte' and inability to communicate with upper class women.

Moreover, during the denouement of the play, Kate revealed to Marlow she was 'that very identical... lady' he first met. Therefore Kate's deception was eventually uncovered in total honesty and thus concluded the play in a traditionally comedic and light hearted manner, with Hardcastle giving his blessing to Marlow, 'boy, take her.' Similarly, Tony could be considered as the opposite of the simple, honest doric characters in the play, since he tricks Marlow and Hastings into believing his house is 'one of the best inns in the country. Tony's jest actually creates faults in Marlow in Hastings, since they are exploitative of Hardcastle's good will, 'he has taken possession of the easy chair... already.' The use of 'already' shows Hardcastle's disgust at the impudence of the two men, which was only uncovered because of their belief they were staying at an inn which they were paying for, 'bring me my bill', the use of the imperative in Marlow's speech highlights his insolence towards Hardcastle.

Although Tony's jest created more faults in characters and led to Marlow's lack of respect towards Hardcastle, Tony's trick; like Kate's, wasn't vicious nor did it have any lasting effects. Clive Fuller reviewed the stage performance in Birmingham and said "there is great farce as the deception unfolds" reflecting the comedy of the situation which proves no great harm is caused.

Once the ruse had been discovered, everything was settled and the characters resolved their issues, shown through the stage directions 'joining their hands' which represents unity in the household. Moreover, Tony's

deception of Marlow enabled Kate to pretend to be the ‘barmaid’ at the ‘inn’, which ultimately resulted in her romance with him, ‘he loves you’, thus Tony’s trick can be viewed as intending to amuse rather than destroy, suggesting the country does promote honest living.

Throughout *She Stoops to Conquer*, Goldsmith illuminates many faults in each character, most of which are amended at the end of the play, subsequently ending the piece in a light-hearted manner and in the style of a traditional Shakespearean comedy, with which Goldsmith’s work was associated. Therefore overall, the country and its many inhabitants do often lead a more honest life and encourage other faulted characters to do the same.