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"Our greatest glory consists not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall."~

Oliver Goldsmith (quoted in Biography of Oliver Goldsmith)

Working-Class Women's Appeal to Aristocrats in *She Stoops to Conquer*

She Stoops to Conquer, which is regarded as Oliver Goldsmith's masterpiece, was produced and published in 1773. Subtitled as *The Mistakes of a Night*, it is a lighthearted farce that gets its charm from the misunderstandings which take place among its well-drawn characters (Britannica). It tells the story of Mr. Hardcastle who plans to marry his daughter Kate to the rich son of his friend Sir Charles Marlow. Mrs. Hardcastle also wants her careless son Tony Lumpkin to marry her ward Constance Neville only for her inherited jewellery, but Constance is in love with Marlow's friend Hastings. Tony tricks Marlow and Hastings into believing that Mr. Hardcastle's home is an inn, and humour arises in that way. However, Tony manages to unite Constance with Hastings through his tricky games. Kate wins Marlow's heart by assuming the role of a servant as she finds out that he is flirtatious only with barmaids and women of low quality, but he is always shy and uncertain with women of quality. For this reason, Kate takes the decision that she must stoop -since she gets disguised as a barmaid- to conquer Marlow. Therefore, the play sheds

light on the appeal of working class-rather than high class-women to aristocratic men in the eighteenth century.

In one of his conversations with his friend Hastings, Marlow admits that he is afflicted with that "English Malady" (Goldsmith 31): he cannot encounter women of high quality. When Hastings rebukes him for lacking that sense of assurance among high class women despite his wide experience and much travel, Marlow points out that it is due to the "Englishman's malady". He claims that his entire life has been in a "college or an inn, in seclusion from that lovely part of the creation that chiefly teach men confidence"(31); he asserts that the only single modest woman he has been familiar with is his mother. That is why he feels sure that a single glance from a pair of fine eyes can totally upset his resolution; he adds, "to me, a modest woman, dressed out in all her finery, is the most tremendous object of the whole creation" (32). However, Hastings gets astonished at Marlow's opposite conduct with women of working classes and wishes Marlow would say half the fine things he heard him "lavishing on the barmaid of an inn, or even a college bed-maker" (32). In fact his interpretation of that malady could be taken into consideration as he believes he has often been placed among all-male environments. Surprisingly, one finds it a questionable reason when he turns into a daring character with low or working class women.

Like all "comedy of manners" plays, this play focuses on the humor which the gap between the expected behavior of upper-class people and their true deeds causes (Study.Com). In Marlow's first encounter with Kate Hardcastle, he proves to be that petrified person with women of reputation. He immediately exclaims, "O! the devil! How shall I support it?"(Goldsmith 47); then, he implores Hastings not to leave him in order to

assist him because he knows that he will be ridiculous. In fact, he surprises Miss. Hardcastle with his clumsy, incomplete and short answers. Miss. Hardcastle seems to be the master of the situation and keeps the conversation going on. For this reason, she takes the decision of disguising as a maid so that she can help him act more daringly. It is another aspect of the comedy of manners which stresses the pretenses of the upper class generally involving deception.

Hence, Goldsmith succeeds in casting light on the most ferocious malady of his society, which is hypocrisy. Marlow displays these characteristics of hypocrisy since he deals with women according to their social rank. Whenever he is in the company of women of his class, he assumes an air of shyness and modesty. However, he changes into a licentious person when he is among lower class people. It seems that most people around him know this fact about him as Constance tells Kate that "Among women of reputation and virtue, he is the modestest man alive; but his acquaintance gives him a very different character among creatures of another stamp"(Goldsmith15). He represents the stereotypical character that Goldsmith satirizes and "creates a new kind of English heroine, who refashions the duped hero's masculinities so that he becomes worthy of her love and esteem" (Evans 34). Thus, Goldsmith arouses laughter through the criticism of that pretentious society.

As "a comedy of manners", laughter- in *She Stoops to Conquer*- also comes out of troubles caused by "mistaken identities" and "dramatic ironies" (Study.com). Upon Tony's trickery, Marlow mistakes Hardcastle for an innkeeper and Kate for a barmaid. In this sense, Marlow treats them as his inferiors. He talks to Hardcastle in a rude manner and gives him orders as he tells him "what my, good friend, if you gave us a glass of punch, in

the meantime; it would help us to carry on the siege with vigour"(Goldsmith 36). Unlike this arrogant manner in which he treats Hardcastle, he turns into a shy and polite person when he is first introduced to Kate Hardcastle unable even to look at her in the face.

However, he assumes the role of the superior again when he mistakes Kate for the barmaid of the inn and begins to call her as his "child", "dear" and flirts with her. It seems that in such pretentious societies, people's manners and language change according to social statuses, gender, age and rank. In this regard, Goldsmith is capable of criticizing his pretentious and hypocrite society as he found that money and social status were the standards which controlled people's morals, manners, and relationships.

In this way, Goldsmith is able to subvert the belief that aristocracy is the true representative of polite society. It was commonly believed in the eighteenth century that real virtues could be found in the middle class. The aristocracy was depicted as suffering from physical and moral ills at that time (Langford 61). The bourgeoisie's morality contrasted sharply with the immorality of the nobility. Consequently, a plethora of novels such as *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by Samuel Richardson, *Joseph Andrews* (1742) by Henry Fielding and *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe were written in the eighteenth century to propagate this belief. What really defined a gentleman was politeness. 'Without renouncing the traditional criteria of gentility (such as land, pedigree, and public service),' says Klein, a true gentleman must exercise good taste, manners, and virtue in dealing with others (Klein 588). The social ladder could be climbed among most members of the English society during this century. People were able to climb it by improving their manners and imitating their social superiors (Porter 52). Improvement could take place via learning and self-help such as the 'hobby-horses' that the character of

Uncle Toby in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1767) could practice on a regular basis to expand his ‘knowledge physical, metaphysical, physiological, polemical, nautical, mathematical, enigmatical, technical, biographical, romantical, chemical, and obstetrical, with fifty other branches of it, (most of ‘em ending as these do, in *ical*)’ (Sterne 70). Uncle Toby was the stereotype of many of the bourgeoisie who wanted to improve their social status through learning. In this sense, Goldsmith unmasks the false image of the upper-class men in *She Stoops to Conquer* as he shows Tony Lumpkin a regular visitor of alehouses and Marlow, who becomes licentious with common girls.

Goldsmith (1730-1774) himself was haunted by poverty and suffered much during his lifetime. He was an Irish man of letters, poet, and playwright. He was self-reliant and did not subscribe to any school. He died when he was forty-six, and he was a true friend to many including Dr. Samuel Johnson. He was the son of farmer and Irish clergyman. He had five brothers and sisters who survived to adulthood. He started learning early at home with a relative, then at the age of seven he went to the village school which was run by an ex-soldier, Thomas Byrne. He showed an early interest in Celtic music and culture. When he was young, he was shy and reticent. Moreover, he had a small and awkward appearance and facial scarring from smallpox that made him suffer the consequences from the school bullies. However it is said that even under these hard circumstances, Goldsmith was already writing with such great skill and charm that made him produce *The Vicar of Wakefield* in such a magnificent way. He read Ovid, Horace, Livy and Tacitus. In 1774, he joined Trinity College in Dublin paying nothing towards his tuition or food but in return performing menial tasks. He did many professions including law and medicine at

Edinburgh and Leiden universities, and was refused for ordination. In 1756, he started his travels through France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland, but it's possible that he amused the locals with his flute playing in return for food and housing. He also continued his adventures among beggars and thieves. Moreover, he did short-term jobs before turning to a writing career while living, among other places, in a tiny room at the top of the 'Break-neck Steps' in London. There, he wrote articles and essays of criticism for various newspapers and magazines. The release of *The Citizen of the World* (1762), a collection of satirical essays, established him as a man of letters. He also wrote a philosophic poem called "Traveller"; or, a "Prospect of Society", which he dedicated to his brother Henry Goldsmith in 1764. He stayed off Fleet Street in London, then moved to the Temple where he wrote *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766). He was doing well with his writing, but he used to drink and gamble, and this would send him off into financial problems. His career took a remarkable turn when he wrote his much welcomed comic play *The Good-Natured Man* (1768) and the farcical *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), which were in sharp contrast to the popular sentimental dramas of the time and filled the playhouses. He led a lavish and enjoyable life beyond his means, which made him suffer in the later years of his life because of thousands of £'s worth of debt. This precipitated the deterioration of his health and spirit and he suffered from a nervous fever and a kidney infection. He died 4 April 1774, in his forty-sixth year and was buried in the burial ground of the Church of Saint Mary, London, England. Therefore, Goldsmith had ample reasons to attack the pretentious lives of aristocrats as he suffered the agonies of poverty and negligence.

Adherence to the rules of politeness can also be considered as one of the contributing factors to men's hesitation and lack of confidence in dealing with high class women.

Politeness was at the heart of the social and cultural system of the new urban culture that developed during the early eighteenth century. It was of focal importance to the fashioning of a gentleman's character; this required his softening of his manners and refining of his speech when he was in the company of women. The free communication between the two sexes was deemed the key to the polish and civilization of a nation. For this reason, it was necessary for men to imitate the French as they were considered the models of polite conversation; that's why the aristocratic English youths spent much time and money in France while going on their way to Italy on their grand tour to finish off their education (Cohen 1). Marlow- in *She Stoops to Conquer*- even lacks that sort of upbringing as he complains about his life, which "has been chiefly spent in a college or an inn, in seclusion from that lovely part of creation that chiefly teach men confidence" (Goldsmiths 31). He has never been familiar with a single modest woman except his mother; working class women were the only females he has been acquainted with. Courtship of high class women had certain procedure that should have been followed as Marlow stresses his inability to "go through all the terrors of formal courtship, together with the episodes of aunts, grandmothers, and cousins," leading finally to the question of "Madam, will you marry me?" (33). He feels that it is a strain that he cannot stand. It seems that formality stood as a hindrance for some men like Marlow.

This also reflects a very important aspect about eighteenth-century English society: polite societies were male-gendered. It was only men who exercised polite behaviour in public places such as coffee houses or clubs while women's politeness was restricted to domestic life (Vickery 52). This lack of mingling between man and woman was a sufficient reason for men's sense of shyness when dealing with high class women in public

or private spheres. The play is a proof of that close intimacy between men as they delve into the secrets of each other and provide help to other men even if they were their enemies. Tony feels more familiar with men whether they belong to upper class or low and drunk men. In this sense, he complies with his drunken friends' request in the Three Pigeons Bar when they ask him to sing (Goldsmiths 17). He also agrees to help Hastings get married to Constance though he is supposed to be his rival. He even steals the box of jewelry from his mother to insure the prospects of both Hastings and Constance after they elope. When the plan fails and is discovered by Mrs. Hardcastle, she decides to take Constance to a family member far away from her home. At this moment, Tony commits an act of heroism by driving the carriage in circles round the garden of the house tricking his mother into believing that they are taking the most dangerous journey, which is about forty miles off. In the end, Hastings calls him a "dear friend" and does not know how to express gratitude (119). Marlow and Hastings are also representatives of that close male friendship that was prevalent in the eighteenth century male-gendered societies. They are both acquainted with the secrets of each other and can offer self-sacrifice to fulfill their happiness. Marlow is careful that his friend succeeds in fulfilling his dream of getting married to Constance as he acknowledges "To be explicit, my dear Hastings, my chief inducement down was to be instrumental in forwarding your happiness, not my own."(33). In the meantime, Hastings encourages Marlow to proceed in flirting with and approaching Kate as he assures Marlow while talking to Kate that he "never spoke better in your whole life. Keep it up, and I'll insure you the victory"(48). Therefore, the play provides enough proof that males lived in realm that was separate from women in the eighteenth century.

As a compensation for the reserved behaviour towards upper class women, men enjoyed a great sense of sexual liberation with working or low class women during the eighteenth century. K. Harvey states, "One of the narratives in the eighteenth-century historiography was that England experienced a guilt-free 'high point' in sexual liberation"(899). The libertine figure that followed passionate pleasures and questioned the idea of love was characteristic of most of the plays coming after and as a reaction against the Puritan Age (Stone 153). In this sense, Marlow diagnoses his condition as says, "I am doomed to adore the sex,..This stammer in my address, and this awkward prepossessing visage of mine, can never permit me to soar above the reach of a milliner's 'prentice, or one of the duchesses of Drury-Lane" (Goldsmiths 34). His bold and licentious behaviour is practiced only on 'barmaids' and 'bed makers'. That is why; his veiled lewd character is unmasked when Kate gets disguised as a barmaid. As soon as she attracts his attention to her presence, he gets stunted and begins to shower her with his sweet words as he tells her that "you are vastly handsome", and "never saw a more malicious eye" (78). He even goes to the extent that he calls for "a taste, by way of a trial, of the nectar of your lips"(79); he also attempts to kiss her, but she begs him to keep his distance. In addition, he admits that he is called the agreeable "Rattle at the Ladies' Club in town"(81), where he plays cards, drinks wine and has fun with old women. In this instance, Marlow stands for the 'rake', which was a dominant figure in the eighteenth century. It was also the focus in a series of paintings drawn by William Hogarth and entitled *The Rake's Progress* (Porter 264). Therefore, Marlow is like all other eighteenth-century young men who lead two kinds of life: one of extreme reservedness and the other which is a symbol of complete corruption. However, this division of the mind must have a psychological basis.

Marlow's change of colour with women can be examined from the perspective of psychoanalytical theory. Marlow the rake and Marlow the reserved suitor can be studied in terms of "the extremes of the Id and Super-Ego"(Schmidt 154). Freud divides the mind into the id, which consists of man's basic instincts like his sexual desire and his other passions and the superego, which represents "every moral restriction" on man's desires (Freud 67). Marlow acts according to the dictates of the superego when he is in the company of upper class women while letting the reins to the id when he is among the lower class women. That is why; Kate tries to create a balance between the id and superego of Marlow by assuming the role of the ego. Kate is fully aware of Marlow's pretence and takes the decision to transform him into the sort of man to whom she desires to get married, for she finds in him "good sense, but so buried in his fears, that it fatigues one more than ignorance. If I could teach a little confidence, it would be doing somebody that I know of a piece of service"(Goldsmith 53). Her witty plan and character prove that she has a powerful character that could help Goldsmith achieve the goal of the play; marriage should be based on romantic love but without challenging the social norms or causing parental discontent.

In fact, this concept of marriage started to change during the 18th century. Young people began to criticise the arrangements of marriages based on the financial interests of families that took place during the first half of the 18th century especially among the members of the upper and middle classes. They were mad about the idea of romantic love promoted by the sentimental novels written at that time (Hitchcock 27). In other words, young people began to seek happiness and freedom in their search for love. In addition, the Marriage Act was issued in 1753 when the numbers of those who eloped increased in

England. This Act “stipulated that parental consent was required for couples wishing to marry under the age of 21” (Moore 8). This helped the sense of “mutual affection” between the couples in the 18th century grow as a reaction against this Act (Semiday 11). Therefore, Goldsmith exemplified the ideals of his time by limiting the bodily pleasures in love affairs and representing true love in marriages. However, this love affair must not contradict with the parents' consent. When Constance is given a chance to elope with Hastings, she does not take action and opposes her lover by saying, “Prudence once more comes to my relief, and I will obey its dictates. In the moment of passion, fortune may be despised, but it ever produces a lasting repentance. I’m resolved to apply to Mr Hardcastle’s compassion and justice for redress” (Goldsmith 126). This indicates that “Hastings and Constance underline the sentimental foundations of the play. They have already found one another, try to escape the figure of authority that keeps them separate, but finally conclude that love between two people cannot remain at its happiest when it flies in the face of social convention” (Schmidt152). They base their marital relationship on romantic love, but it must comply with the requirements of their society. When Tony has power, he proves his good nature by leading the sensible couple to unite. In the meantime, he also frees himself from the arranged marriage. As a result, *She Stoops to Conquer* laid emphasis on the institution of marriage and family by showing that marriage should be based on romantic love but on condition that it acquired familial consent.

In conclusion, it has been noted that Goldsmith's play *She Stoops to Conquer* draws attention to a very important issue, which is the appeal of working class-rather than high class-women to aristocratic men in the eighteenth century. The interpretation of this thesis can be based on various premises. First, it could be the natural outcome of the malady

caused by being placed among all-male environments as Marlow claimed. In addition, this double-faced nature of aristocratic young men enabled Goldsmith to unmask the pretentious and hypocrite society, in which he lived and suffered, as he found that money and social status were the standards which controlled people's morals, manners, and relationships. Moreover, men's insistence to adhere to rules of politeness can be also considered as one of the contributing factors to men's hesitation and lack of confidence in dealing with high-class women. To make up for the reserved behaviour towards upper-class women, men enjoyed a greater sense of sexual liberation with working or low class women. Finally, there is a psychological basis for this problem since Marlow acts according to the dictates of the superego when he is in the company of upper class women while letting the reins to the id when he is among the lower class women. This also reflects a very important characteristic about eighteenth-century English society: polite societies were male-gendered as men gathered and talked in clubs and coffee houses. Thus, it has been proved that various reasons contributed to the appeal of working or low class women to aristocratic men in the eighteenth century through the analysis of *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith.

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