

## **She Stoops to Conquer**

The following note is designed to help you see ways in which sections of the text contribute to the play as a whole. I have chosen to focus on themes rather than character development.

### **Act 1 Scene 1**

#### **i) Deception/Disguise/Appearance and Reality**

These central ideas are introduced in this scene. Mr Hardcastle's description of Tony's behaviour prepares us for the trickster's role in the play as a whole. The reference to the house looking like an inn is another manifestation of the theme.

#### **ii) Town and Country.**

Mrs Hardcastle yearns to "take a trip to town...to rub off the rust a little" but Mr Hardcastle is sceptical. His condemnation of the "vanity and affectation" that he sees as being a product of living in the town also establishes one of the key differences between himself and his wife at an early stage. Her desire to experience the finer things in life motivates her questionable treatment of Constance Neville later in the play.

#### **iii) Good and bad parenting**

Tony Lumpkin is immediately presented as a "composition of tricks and mischief." It is clear, however, that Mrs Hardcastle's indulgence of her son is largely responsible for his being the way he is. Contrast her treatment of Tony with Hardcastle's more sensible handling of Kate. Mr Hardcastle's attempt to arrange a suitable marriage for his daughter is nothing out of the ordinary for someone of his social standing. What is unusual here is the degree of mutual respect that exists between the two and Hardcastle's willingness to compromise on certain matters.

#### **iv) Attitudes to relationships**

The differences between Kate and Hardcastle emerge during the discussion of the qualities that they will look for in Kate's future husband. Kate is more enlivened by Hardcastle's reference to Marlow being "very handsome" than she is by his descriptions of Marlow's "nobler virtues".

Of course, Kate is given an insight into Marlow's dual nature before the end of the scene. We are made aware of the fact that Marlow's modest appearance soon disappears when he is in the company of "creatures of another stamp". A serious point about the attitudes of wealthy males is perhaps touched on here. It seems

that Marlow's awareness of his social superiority encourages him to try to take advantage of the vulnerable.

#### **v) Humour**

The descriptions of Tony's outrageous behaviour and the gently ironic references made by Hardcastle to the real age of his wife put the audience in the right mood to watch this entertaining play.

### **Scene 2**

#### **i) Deception/Disguise/Appearance and Reality**

Tony's attempts to feed misinformation about the character of Hardcastle and his family humorously backfire when Marlow unwittingly condemns Tony by referring to him as "an awkward booby, reared up, and spoiled at his mother's apron-string."

However, the most significant feature of this scene is Tony's mischievous manipulation of Marlow and Hastings. He sends them to the home of Hardcastle having convinced them that they are going to stay at an inn called the Buck's Head. This deception is the first of, and the cause of many other, "Mistakes of the Night."

#### **ii) Humour**

Tony's song creates the mood that dominates this scene. The attitudes that Tony expresses in it do much to confirm Hardcastle's assessment of him. The ironic response of Tony's fellow drinkers to the content of the song is also humorous. They admire Tony "because he never gives (them) nothing that's low." Humour is also created by the contribution of the above-mentioned features.

### **Act 2**

#### **i) Deception/Disguise/Appearance and Reality**

This theme is dramatised in the following ways during this scene:

- Hardcastle's attempts to make his servants behave in an appropriate fashion. He is trying to make them appear to be something they are not, subtle and efficient.
- Marlow and Hastings' treatment of the house and Hardcastle in particular. Their damning assessment of the interior of the Hardcastle residence reflects Mrs Hardcastle's earlier description of it being "like an old inn." Of course, their misapprehensions cause much of the humour in the scene. Their treatment of Hardcastle is particularly instrumental in achieving this.

- Marlow's meeting with Kate. Throughout the interview he keeps his eyes to the floor because he is too shy to look at her directly. This lack of eye contact later enables Kate to begin the process of "stooping to conquer."
- Hastings' flattering of Mrs Hardcastle. He tells her that her manner suggests that she "had been bred all (her) life at Ranelagh, St. James's, or Tower Wharf."
- Mrs Hardcastle's attempts to appear sophisticated are undermined by our knowledge of the places that she sees as fashionable. The "Grotto Gardens" and the "Borough" were places of ill-repute and not the sorts of places where the "Nobility chiefly resort."

## **ii) Attitudes to relationships**

Hastings' desire to be with Constance whatever the cost makes us admire him. Clearly, he is more interested in her than he is in her "baubles". Marlow's shyness with women of a similar social standing is presented here. His bumbling attempts to engage in conversation with Kate add to the scene's humour. It is worth directly contrasting his meeting with Kate here with his meeting with "Kate the barmaid" in the following scene. Is there a serious point about class attitudes being made here?

## **iii) Good and bad parenting**

The full extent of Mrs Hardcastle's pampering of Tony becomes evident in this scene.

## **iv) Town and Country**

Worth noting here are the differences between Hardcastle's treatment of his servants and Marlow's treatment of Hardcastle whom he mistakenly believes is a landlord. Hardcastle enjoys a relaxed, informal relationship with his employees. Marlow, on the other hand, has manners to learn.

## **v) Humour**

The range of incidents described above are responsible for making the Act funny.

## **Act 3**

### **i) Deception/Disguise/Appearance and Reality**

Again, this theme is presented in a number of ways:

- Hardcastle's opening speech illustrates the extent to which Tony has deceived Marlow. Hardcastle is struggling to come to terms with his experiences with this "most impudent piece of brass" and is now questioning the recommendation of his old friend, Sir Charles Marlow.

- The debate between Kate and Mr Hardcastle about the character of Marlow is centred on the real nature of his character. The events of the night will prove the accuracy of Kate's claim that "there may be many good qualities under that first appearance."
- Tony's theft of the jewels and his feigned concern over their whereabouts when Mrs Hardcastle mourns their loss.
- Kate's adoption of the role as barmaid. The change that it effects in Marlow's attitude to her reveals the other side of his personality.

## **ii) Humour**

Much of this is generated by the episodes outlined above.

## **iii) Good and bad parenting**

Hardcastle's treatment of Kate once more reveals his readiness to listen to the opinions of his daughter. Their conversation has a sincerity and depth that is completely missing from the farcical exchanges between Tony and Mrs Hardcastle.

## **iv) Attitudes to relationships**

Marlow's confidence with women of a lower social class perhaps reflects the attitude of young men of his social position. Kate is treated as any barmaid would be treated. The suggestion is, perhaps, that barmaid and women like them were prey for affluent gentlemen. Of course, this is not really developed as an idea in any serious fashion and subsequent events reveal Marlow to be a sensitive individual and not a moustache twirling cad!

## **Act 4**

### **i) Deception/Disguise/Appearance and Reality**

The main examples are:

- Marlow continues to treat the house like an inn until he learns the truth about its nature from Kate to whom he has to apologise for believing that she was a barmaid. However, Kate continues to dissemble by now adopting the role of a poor relation of the family.
- Constaney's reading of the letter.

### **ii) Humour**

Once more, the instances above generate much of the humour; However, Tony's hilarious attempts to read the letter are also memorable.

### **iii) Attitudes to relationships**

It is worth noting Marlow's reaction to his discovery about the way that he has treated Kate. His change of heart is admirable because Kate is still playing the role of a social inferior but he now treats her with respect and kindness.

## **Act 5**

### **i) Deception/Disguise/Appearance and Reality**

- Tony's crafty manipulation of Mrs Hardcastle. At long last, Tony puts his powers of deception to good use. His misleading of his mother has ensured that the return of Constance.
- Kate's role playing of the poor relation allows Marlow to speak with sincerity and feeling. Of course, ultimately, the truth about Kate is revealed and he is made to reflect on another of his mistakes of the night.
- Mrs Hardcastle's deception is revealed. Tony is of age and this discovery leads to a happy resolution for Constance and Hastings. Another of the mistakes is corrected.

### **ii) Humour**

The main source of this is Tony's wickedly funny manipulation of his mother. One can not help but feel that she deserves everything that she gets a feeling that resurfaces when Mr Hardcastle reveals the truth about Tony's age. Of course, the episode in which Marlow is embarrassed is also humorous.

### **iii) Attitudes to relationships**

Hastings insistence that he and Constance should leave without the jewels provides us with further proof of the honourable nature of his intentions. Their decision to "face the music" at the end of the play is justly rewarded when Hardcastle's revelations bring to an end his wife's machinations