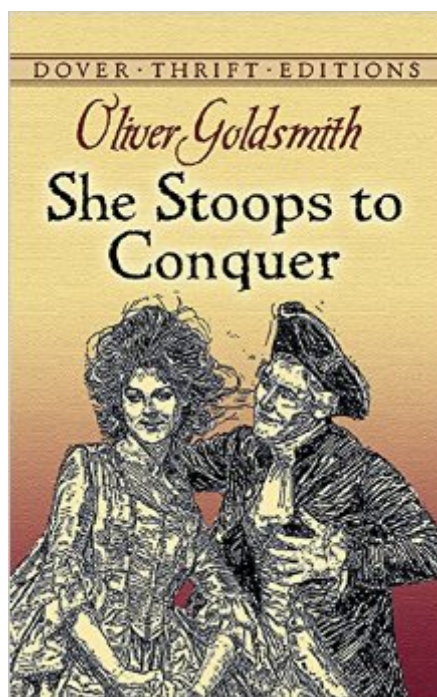


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She Stoops To Conquer (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

This charming comedy has delighted audiences for over two centuries. First performed in 1773, it concerns Kate Hardcastle, a young lady who poses as a serving girl to win the heart of a young gentleman too shy to court ladies of his own class. A number of delightful deceits and hilarious turns of plot must be played out before the mating strategies of both Kate Hardcastle and her friend Constance Neville conclude happily. Along the way, there is an abundance of merry mix-ups, racy dialogue and sly satire of the sentimental comedies of Goldsmith's day. The extraordinary humor and humanity with which Goldsmith invested this play have made it one of the most read, performed, and studied of all English comedies. It is now available in this inexpensive Dover edition, based on the text of the fourth edition, published in the year of the play's first staging.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Oliver Goldsmith may not have had the linguistic virtuosity or satiric audacity of his great contemporary, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, but 'She Stoops to Conquer' is one of the few highpoints in English drama between the Restoration and Oscar Wilde. Ironically, in view of its satirising the slavish devotion to French fashions, the play is influenced by early 18th century French comedy: the plot is very similar to Marivaux's 'The Game of love and chance': two fathers arrange a marriage for their children; this paternal decree is severely shaken by disguises, misrecognitions and counter-plots. The difference being, English comedy is always the funniest, and we get lots of marvellous words like 'obstropolous'. In effect, this drama consists of characters staging dramas to

get their way, which are spoiled by other dramas, e.g. Mr. Hardcastle decides his daughter will marry a man she never met, and arranges their meeting; Tony tells this prospective husband, Marlow, and his friend Hastings, that the gentleman's house they seek is a tavern; Kate disguises herself as a barmaid to woo the diffident Marlow. The effect of all these conflicting dramas is to take a supposedly solid, class-based system, based on paternal and aristocratic power, and reveal it as a fragile one based on illusion, a series of masks and attitudes adopted to suit the required social context, where wrong directions can as easily derail as resolve the social order. The best comedy here comes from characters mistaking the social context, as when Marlow treats his host and future father-in-law as a pesky inn-keeper. Significantly, in this over-cultured milieu, most of the spanners in the works are thrown by the illiterate Tony.

Few English plays dating from the eighteenth century appeal to modern audiences. For much of that period comedies were characterized by an exaggerated sentimentality and intense moralizing. Independently, the playwrights Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan rejected this moralizing mode, returning to the English stage a humorous, mildly satirical form of comedy. In a short period they created three plays that are still enjoyed today: *She Stoops to Conquer* (Goldsmith, 1773), *The School for Scandal* (Sheridan, 1775) and *The Rivals* (Sheridan, 1777). In recent months I have read all three plays. All are quite good, but I especially liked *She Stoops to Conquer* and *The School for Scandal*. While *The School for Scandal* is widely admired for its witty dialogue, *She Stoops to Conquer* offers the most hilarious situations. The basic theme in *She Stoops to Conquer* is familiar. The guardians, her father Mr. Hardcastle and her aunt Mrs. Hardcastle, have arranged a suitable marriage for young Miss Hardcastle. She, of course, has other plans. Oliver Goldsmith adroitly transformed this overly used situation into delightful comedy. The plot is complicated by a shy suitor, friends with their own plans of elopement, and an unruly prankster, all leading to utter confusion in the rustic Hardcastle household. I quickly became engaged with the ridiculous happenings; I read *She Stoops to Conquer* in a single sitting. Five stars.

Possible Interest - Another Comedy and Two Moralizing Plays: John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, first staged in 1728 in London, was another exception to the moralizing trend in the eighteenth century. This delightful, satirical comedy is considered the first modern musical. Five stars.

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