

Degree – ii (English Honours)

Paper – iv

Book – She Stoops to Conquer

Lecture – 1

She Stoops to Conquer is one of the greatest comedies of the world.

She Stoops to Conquer is one of the greatest comedies of the world as it is said by Edmund Gosse, and its popularity has been both universal and enduring. Thorndike praises it for its novelty, for its humour and witticism, and for the naturalness of its dialogue. It was Horace Walpole alone who fell foul of this admirable play, called it is farce rather than a genuine comedy, criticised it for its lack for moral edification, and found a number of improbabilities, both in incidents and situations. Eminent critics like Allardyce Nichol, Thorndike and many others have ably defended goldsmith and convincingly repudiated the various charges brought against the comedy by Horace Walpole and his like.

The greatness of *She Stoops to Conquer* is fully brought out, if we view in the context of dramatic history. It represents the reaction both to the **Sentimental Comedy** of the day and to the comedy of manners which held the stage previous to the rise of the **Sentimental Comedy** or the

Comedy of Sensibility. It is entirely free from the immortality and licentiousness of the comedy of manners. Its aim also not satirical, though it has the scintillating dialogue and wit-saying of fine sparkling things—of the **Restoration Comedy** as represented by Farquhar who had influenced Goldsmith considerably.

Goldsmith had already attacked the **Sentimental Comedy** in his retaliation, and in this essay *A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy*. In this essay, he starts with the classical formula that tragedy represents the misfortune of the great and comedy the frailties of the humbler people. **Sentimental Comedy**, according to this formula, is neither the one nor the other. He points out in that species of comedy, “the virtues of the private life are exhibited rather than the vices exposed; and the distress rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the in the piece”. The function of a comedy to give a humorous exhibition of the follies and vices of the men and women, and to rectify them by exciting laughter. But the **Sentimental Comedy** does not fulfil any one of these functions. Here we have tears in place of laughter., melodramatic and distressing situations in place of fun and intrigue, and pathetic lovers, serious heroines and honest servants in place of rouges and gallants and witty girls. Sentimentalism had banished the true comic spirit from the English Theatre.

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