The Taming of the Shrew Analysis

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**Introduction**

First, let us look into the basics of the play. “The Taming of the Shrew” is a very famous play written by the legendary Shakespeare. This setting of the play is in Padua, Italy. The play revolves around a wealthy merchant named Baptista Minola who lives with his two daughters. Both the daughters are pretty and of marrying age. However, the older daughter Katharina is rather ill-mannered, while the younger Bianca is quite pleasant and sweet by nature. Regardless of Katharina’s attitude, Baptista has decided that he will find her a suitor before Bianca. Baptista knows that no one wants to marry a “shrew”, but he still sticks to the decision that he has made. The play is quite interesting and has many layers to it. However, there are certain parts of the play that carry more standing than the others. In this paper, the first meeting of Kate and Petruchio “Act 2 Scene 1” will be first described and then analyzed in detail.

**Discussion**

The background and main theme of the play is marriage. Baptista is very clear when it comes to the marriage of his daughters. The older daughter will get married before the younger one. Things take a turn when a suitable young man named Lucentio arrives in Padua with his servant Tranio. When Lucentio first lays his eyes on Bianca (the younger daughter of Baptista), he immediately falls in love and decides to marry her (Shakespeare, 2002). However, after overhearing the situation of Baptista’s condition of Katharina getting married first, Hortensio another suitor for Bianca tells his friend Petruchio. Petruchio decides to win over the ill-mannered and tenacious Katharina. Petruchio is always up for a challenge and decides to take the task as a test. He uses the most surprising way to win over Katharina that no one expected. Petruchio pursing Kate automatically clears Lucentio’s path to pursue Bianca. The act 2 scene 1 of the play describes the first meeting between Katharina and Petruchio. Let us further have a deeper look at the conversation between Kate and Petruchio. Below is a stanza that shows how Petruchio is trying to impress Kate:

*“No, not a whit: I find you passing gentle.*

*'Twas told me you were rough and coy and sullen,*

*And now I find report a very liar;*

*For thou are pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,*

*But slow in speech, yet sweet as spring-time flowers:*

*Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,*

*Nor bite the lip, as angry wenches will,*

*Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk,*

*But thou with mildness entertain'st thy wooers,*

*With gentle conference, soft and affable.*

*Why does the world report that Kate doth limp?”*

When Petruchio first meets Katharine, they have quite an unusual conversation (Gorbanev, 2004). Prior to this part Katharine says:

*“I chafe you, if I tarry. Let me go.”*

Kate is trying to make Petruchio go away. Kate is repeatedly telling him that she is not interested in him one bit, and if he stays, she will make him angry. However, Petruchio, as mentioned above, is a stubborn man. He is persistent in winning over Kate by trying to flatter her in the most unusual way. One can read in the part of the play mentioned above that he is trying to impress her by flattery. When she asks him to let her go, he tells her that he is not offended by her behavior one bit and he would like to stay. Petruchio tells her that she is very different in comparison to what people have told him about her. Petruchio tells her that he thought that Kate was violent but that is just not the case. He finds her to be beautiful and playful. Petruchio tells Kate that she seems like someone who is very sweet, and not at all arrogant and rude. He is trying his best to turn the tables for himself with the help of flattery. He also refers to her as someone who will never even frown, getting violent is quite far-fetched. He tells Kate that she is quite gentle when she talks to her suitors, then why on earth do people say that she is lame (limp)?

*“O slanderous world! Kate like the hazel-twig*

*Is straight and slender and as brown in hue*

*As hazel nuts and sweeter than the kernels.*

*O, let me see thee walk: thou dost not halt.”*

In the four lines mentioned above, Petruchio tries to impress Kate by flattering her again, but this time he talks about her beauty. In these lines before, Petruchio was trying to tell Kate that she has a very humble and gentle nature. Now, he wants to tell her how beautiful she is. He starts by saying that the world is a liar and does not know anything about beautiful Kate, she is far too lovely with a very thin body (George, 2019). He talks about the hue of her hair and talks about how they are similar to the color of chestnuts. Further, he tells her that she is sweeter than kernel and he would like to see her walk. Petruchio believes that Kate does not limp at all and she is quite graceful. To which Kate replies:

*“Go, fool, and whom thou keep’st command.”*

This line shows that the flattery is not working on Kate one bit. In fact, she asks Petruchio to leave her alone. To make things clearer and to denote her strong nature, she tells him to boss her servants around not her. However, Petruchio is not giving up, he starts with his flattery again:

*“Did ever Dian so become a grove*

*As Kate this chamber with her princely gait?*

*Oh, be thou Dian, and let her be Kate,*

*And then let Kate be chaste and Dian sportful.”*

This time, he tries to compare her to loyalty. He thinks that comparing her to someone with high standards will impress her. He tells her that even Diana did not beautify a grove the way Katharina does with her movements similar to a queen. He thinks that doing this will make Kate finally give up and give in to him. However, Kate replies:

*“Where did you study all this goodly speech?”*

Kate is not impressed by any tactics that are being used by Petruchio. In fact, she questions Petruchio by asking him where did he learn or memorize all the things that he is saying (George, 2019). However, like the determined man Petruchio is, he tells her that this is all due to his mother’s wit and he was born to be a charmer:

*“It is extempore, from my mother wit.”*

However, Kate snubs him by saying:

*“A witty mother! Witless else her son.”*

She is trying to show him down by saying that, yes, his mother might have had wit, but Petruchio has no such talents. To which Petruchio gets defensive and asks her: "Is he not wise?" To which Kate wittily replies, that you are wise enough to keep yourself warm. Finally, after all the flattery, Petruchio just tells Kate that he is marrying her whether she likes it or not:

*“Marry, so I mean, sweet Katherine, in thy bed.*

*And therefore, setting all this chat aside,*

*Thus in plain terms: your father hath consented*

*That you shall be my wife, your dowry 'greed on,*

*And, will you, nill you, I will marry you.*

*Now, Kate, I am a husband for your turn,*

*For, by this light, whereby I see thy beauty,*

*Thy beauty that doth make me like thee well,*

*Thou must be married to no man but me.*

*For I am he am born to tame you, Kate,*

*And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate*

*Conformable as other household Kates.”*

Petruchio tells Kate that his warmth will be keeping her bed warm. He gets to the point by telling Kate that her father has agreed to his marriage proposal for her (Mckague, 2018). He tells her that the dowry has been set, and whether Kate likes it or not, she will become Petruchio’s wife. In a way, he is enforcing this decision on her. Petruchio is telling her that he is enchanted by Kate’s beauty and he is the man for her. He is telling her that I was made to turn a wild Kate into a domesticated one who will be fit for the household.

**Analysis**

After reading this part of the play, it is evident that Katharina is a very strong character. The way that the character of Kate is written shows how bitter she feels about the opposite sex quite effectively. It can be said that Kate does not hate men for no reason. She feels bitter because of the way men treat women. The patriarchy and male dominance are quite prominent throughout the play and especially in the stanzas of the scene that were selected for this paper. Petruchio’s character objectifies women and treats them like nothing more than a task. Regardless of the sexist nature of the play, it is still one of the most performed scripts from Shakespeare. It was especially more popular back in the day when there was not any awareness.

Kate’s character suffers regardless of getting married. Her father decides her fate whether she likes it or not and Petruchio forces her into marriage against her will. She is someone who is very clearheaded when it comes to what she wants in her life, but Kate’s circumstances lead her in a different direction. On the other hand, Petruchio is a chauvinist. He pushes Kate to her limits by trying to flatter her in an indecent manner. The fact that Petruchio thinks that he can condition Kate to like her just by telling her that his views on her are different from what other people think shows how he thinks of her like a fool (Fawcett, 2019). When he compares her and showers her with compliments, he expects her to fall to her knees. However, Kate is not like the other women of that century. Compliments are the last thing she is fishing for.

By using the terms like sweet as flowers and putting in comparisons Shakespeare is trying to grab the attention of the reader. He is familiar with the fact that every woman likes flattery that is why he has used these elements in Petruchio’s speech repeatedly. Further, to showcase Kate’s nature, the speech shifts almost immediately as her character starts to talk. This combination of flattery leading to insults eventually frustrates Petruchio and he tries to show Kate her place. Petruchio makes use of male superiority to show Kate that she has no will whatsoever. He tells her that he will be marrying her whether she likes it or not. He has taken the consent of Kate’s father Baptista and there is nothing she can do about it.

This bit of the play shows that since compliments did not work, Petruchio used his masculine dominance. Further, he flat out tells Kate that he will be taming her so she can become a domesticated wife who listens to her. Although, Kate is a strong-minded woman, and no matter how much she lashes out the stigma surrounding the place of her gender has shackled her. However, it is clear that Kate's character does not feel the need for a man's compliment to validate the aspects of her personality. Kate knows what she is like and the fact that she saw how Petruchio was trying to lure her in, made things worse. Petruchio could not handle a woman being smart enough to talk back or reject his proposal.

This play shows how the world was in the past and how women were pushed around. However, this kind of behavior is not accepted today. In fact, women are treated on equal grounds. If I look at the play from today’s perspective Kate is someone who does not want to settle for less, and she does not want any man to tell her any differently. If this play was written today, it would be deemed quite offensive. The entire tone and idea of the play would be different if it was set today. It would be focused on how Kate is a clearheaded woman and wants to live her life on her own terms (Fawcett, 2019). The fact that towards the end of the play, both Kate’s father and husband are happy to see her as an obedient woman makes it dark. In fact, Petruchio is trying to condition his pears to treat their woman the same way he does so they become obedient makes it worse.

Shakespeare's play "The Taming of the Shrew" is more geared towards male dominance as opposed to passing on a neutral message in terms of literature. However, the play became a hit due to the cultural set up at the time of its release. Women did not have an equal standing and that is why it was such a hit back in the day. However, if the play is performed today, it will be either done hilariously or there will be changes in the script, so both the genders have equal standing. One way or the other, Kate will not be forced to marry Petruchio. There will be a more neutral standing for both the genders and the play will be rewritten in a manner that sends a positive message of gender equality.

**Conclusion**

The characters of Petruchio and Baptista are a perfect example of what male chauvinists are like and how they believe that women are like animals that need to be domesticated. In a way, Kate is not ill-mannered, she just uses this tactic so she can prolong the time period before she falls into the patriarchy. In short, Kate’s behavior is like a façade that is protecting her and stopping any suitors to pursue her. Kate does not want to give up but the social status that her gender carries has her tied. For Petruchio, asking for Kate’s hand in marriage was more like a game to satisfy his urge of taking a challenge. However, for Kate, this marriage was nothing more than the loss of what she always stood for. She felt bitter towards men because of people like Petruchio, to begin with. The name of the play itself makes things self-explanatory. Baptista himself calls his daughter Kate a shrew and believes that she needs to be tamed. In a way, this play gives the perfect look into what the world was like in the past. However, this play will not get any acceptance today because of the strong social standing that women hold in the society.

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